



Childcare Survey Report

Primary Caregiver

Audrey Rider | SDSU Extension Early Childhood Field Specialist
Kara Harders | SDSU Extension Community Vitality Field Specialist



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



Childcare Survey Report – Primary Caregiver

Audrey Rider, SDSU Extension Early Childhood Field Specialist
Kara Harders, SDSU Extension Community Vitality Field Specialist

September 2024

Introduction

The childcare crisis in South Dakota has reached critical levels, with many families struggling to find affordable, high-quality care for their children. This report aims to understand the current landscape of childcare in the state, focusing on availability, cost, quality, and impact on families and the economy. According to South Dakota Kids Count, approximately 74% of children under the age of six live in households where all available parents are working, creating a significant demand for reliable childcare services. However, many rural areas in South Dakota face severe childcare shortages, exacerbating the issue for many families. This survey report draws on data from hundreds of primary caregivers across the state to provide insights into how these issues affect South Dakota's families, their economic stability, and the broader community. By exploring these dimensions, the report seeks to identify opportunities to better the current childcare crisis facing South Dakotans.

Survey Respondents

The Survey was viewed (link opened) 2,138 times

515 responses were recorded

65 responses were only for the Childcare Provider portion of the survey, see other report.

Of the remaining 450 responses 171 indicated they would not need childcare in three years and were only asked how many children in their home currently need childcare and to answer the final open-ended question.

Of the remaining 379 responses, 223 completed enough of the survey to have a meaningful responses.

Answers in this survey range from having 428 responses down to 90 for a question that was only relevant to a portion of the respondents.

While there was a minimum amount of participation, not all questions were required. Open ended questions and demographic questions, specifically, were optional. See questions needing completion indicated in the survey instrument in the appendix of this report. Each question discussed has an associated N=#, this indicates how many people's answers the table is representing.

Key Findings

This survey, based on responses from 428 primary caregivers for children, reveals several critical insights into childcare needs and challenges. A significant portion of respondents (64.4%) have one or two children aged 0-6 years, with homes having only one child showing a higher likelihood of not needing childcare within the next three years.

Alternative childcare arrangements outside of formal centers are common, with daycare being the most popular option among respondents. Many times in this survey respondents viewed daycare as different than formal childcare, this could be due to a difference in personal definition of childcare and the way it is viewed differently amongst providers, parents/guardians, and those looking at the topic from an academic or state level view.

Responses showed parents and family members are playing a crucial role in filling childcare gaps. The need for full-day childcare is prevalent Monday through Friday, with around 70% of respondents requiring it, indicating a consistent demand throughout the workweek.

Childcare accessibility is another significant concern. The survey shows that 51.1% of respondents travel an additional 1-10 miles daily for childcare, and many families struggle with availability, particularly in rural areas and even more so for infant care. The cost of childcare is a major burden, with 66.6% of families paying between \$100 and \$199 per week per child, closely matching what they identify to be their maximum budget.

The survey highlights dissatisfaction with the quantity of childcare options, with nearly 90% of respondents disagreeing that there are plenty of choices available.

In an open-ended question many raised quality concerns, especially regarding food, activities, and staff engagement, were also raised. Additionally, the need for after school and non-traditional hours of care is evident, reflecting the diverse work schedules of many families.

Results

The following information is from a survey (included in appendix at end). Which included a maximum of 23 questions. None of the questions were force-answers, each participant could skip questions they did not wish to answer.

How many children (0-6 years old) in your home currently need childcare? Do you anticipate needing childcare or needing additional childcare in the next 3 years? N=428

Table 1: Number of children in homes and anticipated future need for childcare

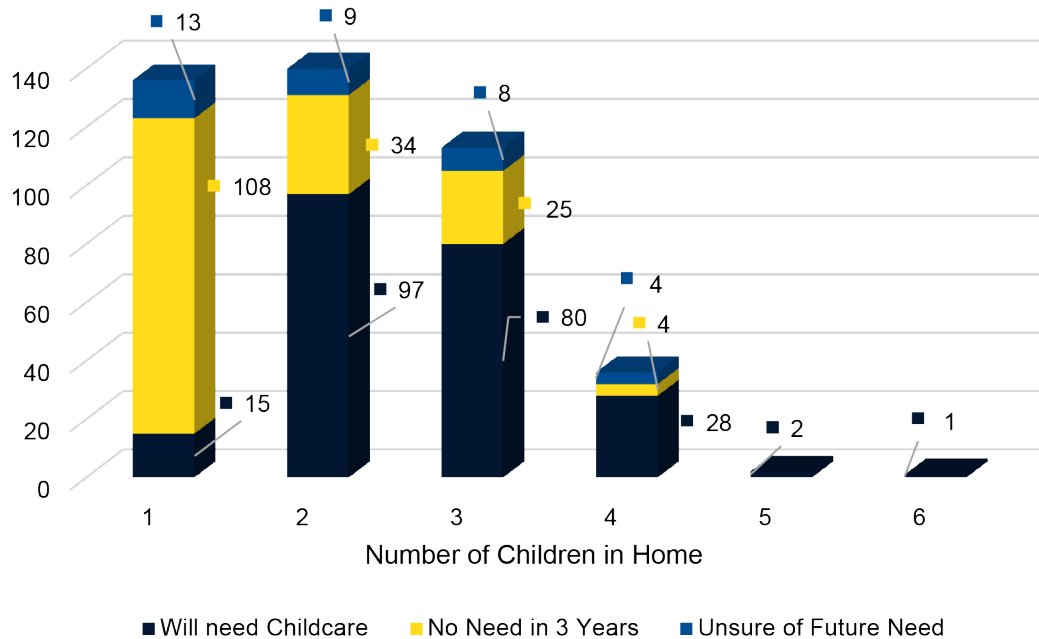


Table 1 pairs two questions, identifying how many children are in each respondent's home and if they will need childcare in three years.

Most respondents, 276 or 64.4%, reported having one or two children in the home between the ages of zero and six years old. Of those, homes with only one child needing care were significantly more likely to need childcare in the next three years.

Also, considering the large proportion of respondents with only one child in the home planning to not need childcare in three years (79.4%), this may suggest a reduced need for childcare in the future. It could suggest more families are heading toward needing less childcare, rather than planning to have more children and needing additional or continued childcare.

**If you are not using a childcare center, can you please share about the other arrangement(s) you have?
N=142**

Table 2: Qualitative responses for alternatives to childcare centers

Number of Responses	Other Arrangement
60	Daycare
32	A parent cares for the children
25	Other Family Members
10	Change work schedule to accommodate (changed hours or quit job)
7	Indicated they had no childcare
7	School Program
5	Friends (unrelated, over 18)
4	Nanny
3	Babysitter (Unrelated, under 18)

This open-ended question was voluntary and received 142 responses. Ten response themes were observed. Verbatim responses will not be shared in these sections, for example, “Family” “My Parents” and “Older siblings” would all be counted in the theme of “Other Family Members”. Those who responded were able to list multiple arrangements they use to fill childcare gaps, this resulted in 153 responses from 142 individuals.

Daycare was the most commonly reported other arrangement to a childcare center, see Table 2. Depending on interpretation of the meaning of “childcare center” this could represent unlicensed childcare centers or a center that prefers to be called a daycare. Parents or family members are the next most common answer.

Please check all the times your family may need childcare throughout the week: N=223

Table 3: Childcare needs by day of the week, N.

Day of week	6:00-9:00 a.m.	3:00-9:00 p.m.	Half Day	All Day	Other
Sunday	6	6	4	14	6
Monday	29	30	20	169	9
Tuesday	29	28	19	174	9
Wednesday	29	30	21	170	9
Thursday	31	28	22	168	9
Friday	27	27	18	159	9
Saturday	3	3	5	7	6

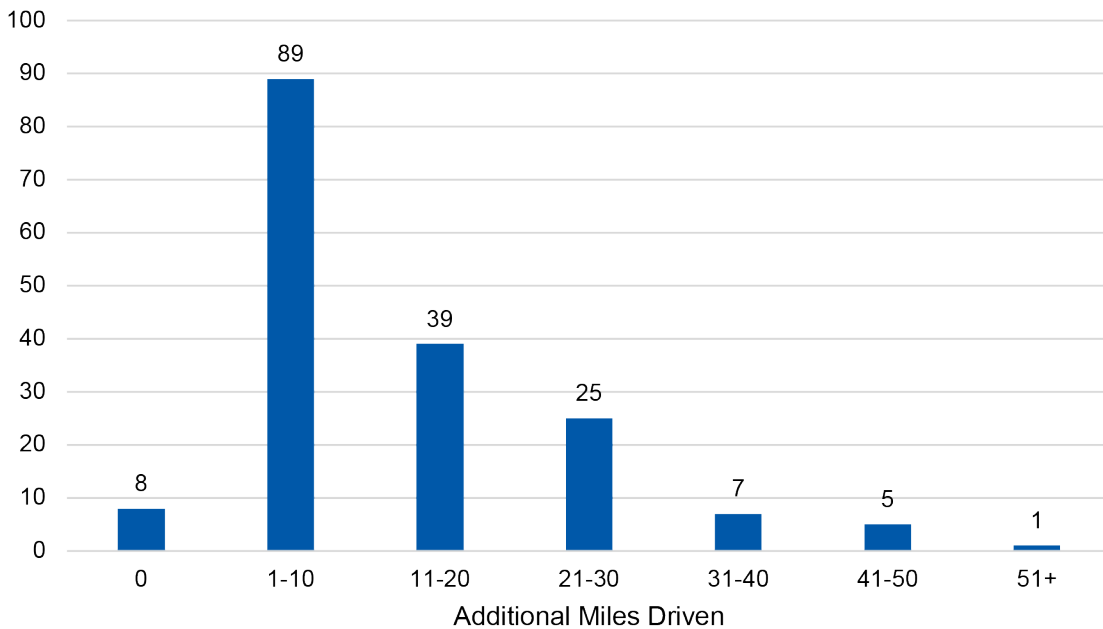
Table 4: Childcare needs by day of the week, %.

Day of week	6:00-9:00 a.m.	3:00-9:00 p.m.	Half Day	All Day	Other
	Percentage (%)				
Sunday	2.7	2.7	1.8	6.3	2.7
Monday	13.0	13.5	9.0	76.1	4.0
Tuesday	13.0	12.6	8.5	78.3	4.0
Wednesday	13.0	13.5	9.4	76.5	4.0
Thursday	13.9	12.6	9.4	75.6	4.0
Friday	12.1	12.1	8.1	71.6	4.0
Saturday	1.3	1.3	2.2	3.1	2.7

Participants were asked to share what days of the week and which parts of the day they need childcare. Individuals were able to select multiple options for each day. For example, on Table 3, 259 responses were counted on Tuesdays. Around three quarters of respondents indicated they needed full-day childcare Monday-Friday (Table 4).

How many additional miles do you drive for childcare? N=174

Table 5: Additional miles driven each day for childcare.

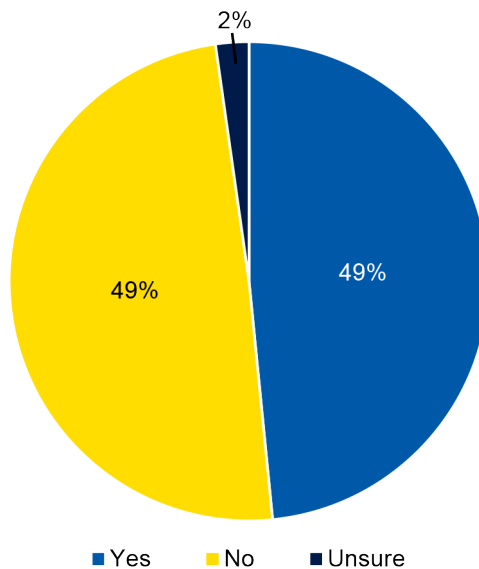


Participants were asked to share how far they travelled to attain childcare. The most common answer, making up 51.1% of answers was between 1 and 10 additional miles each day they needed childcare.

It is important to note, the survey questions both before and after this received 223 responses while this question received 174. It is possible individuals who do not drive additional miles skipped the question when they should have answered "0". As they responded, 174 individuals collectively drive 1,996 miles, or an average of 11.5 miles per day. If those who didn't respond are not driving additional miles this would pull the average number of miles driven per person down to 9 miles per person, per day.

Do your childcare needs change in the summer months? N=223

Table 6: Changing childcare needs in summer months



This question was asked because before and after school care can make a big impact on childcare. Only those who indicated their needs did change (Table 6) were asked to share what their summer childcare needs were (Tables 7 & 8).

Please check all the times your family may need childcare throughout the week in the summer. (N=107)

Table 7: Summer childcare needs by day of the week, N.

Day of week	6:00-9:00 a.m.	3:00-9:00 p.m.	Half Day	All Day	Other
Sunday	1	2	2	5	1
Monday	5	4	13	54	6
Tuesday	5	4	10	61	6
Wednesday	5	5	12	57	6
Thursday	5	4	11	56	6
Friday	5	5	12	48	6
Saturday	1	1	2	2	1

Table 8: Summer childcare needs by day of the week, %.

Day of week	6:00-9:00 a.m.	3:00-9:00 p.m.	Half Day	All Day	Other
	Percentage (%)				
Sunday	0.9	1.8	1.8	4.6	0.9
Monday	4.6	3.7	12.1	50.4	5.6
Tuesday	4.6	3.7	9.3	57.0	5.6
Wednesday	4.6	4.6	11.2	53.2	5.6
Thursday	4.6	3.7	10.2	52.3	5.6
Friday	4.6	4.6	11.2	44.8	5.6
Saturday	0.9	0.9	1.8	1.8	0.9

In comparison to the schedule of childcare needs during the year (Table 4), those who indicated a change in needs during the summer months had a less clear need pattern. About 50% needed a full day of care, and need for half day care rose from about 8.5% during a regular week to about 11% during the summer.

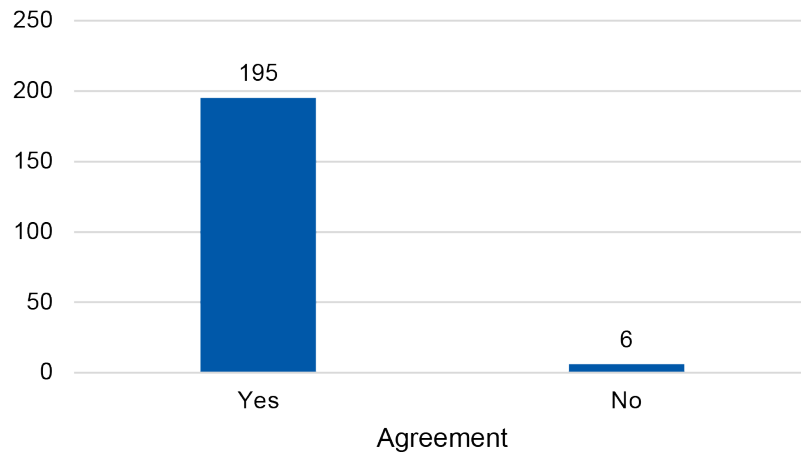
What childcare options does your family use during the summer? N=90

This open-ended question was voluntary and received 90 responses. Eight response themes were observed. Verbatim responses will not be shared in this section, for example, “Family” “My Parents” and “Older siblings” would all be counted in the theme of “Other Family Members”. Also, there was some ambiguity in what respondents classified as a childcare center, the most common response to this question was within the theme of “Daycare”. Those who responded were able to list multiple arrangements they use to fill childcare gaps, this resulted in 114 responses from 90 individuals.

Number of Responses	Other Arrangement
34	Daycare
30	A parent cares for the children
24	Other Family Member
10	Summer Program or Camp
6	School Program
5	Friends (unrelated, over 18)
5	Nanny or Teacher

Do you believe there is a need for a childcare center or more childcare options in your community? N=201

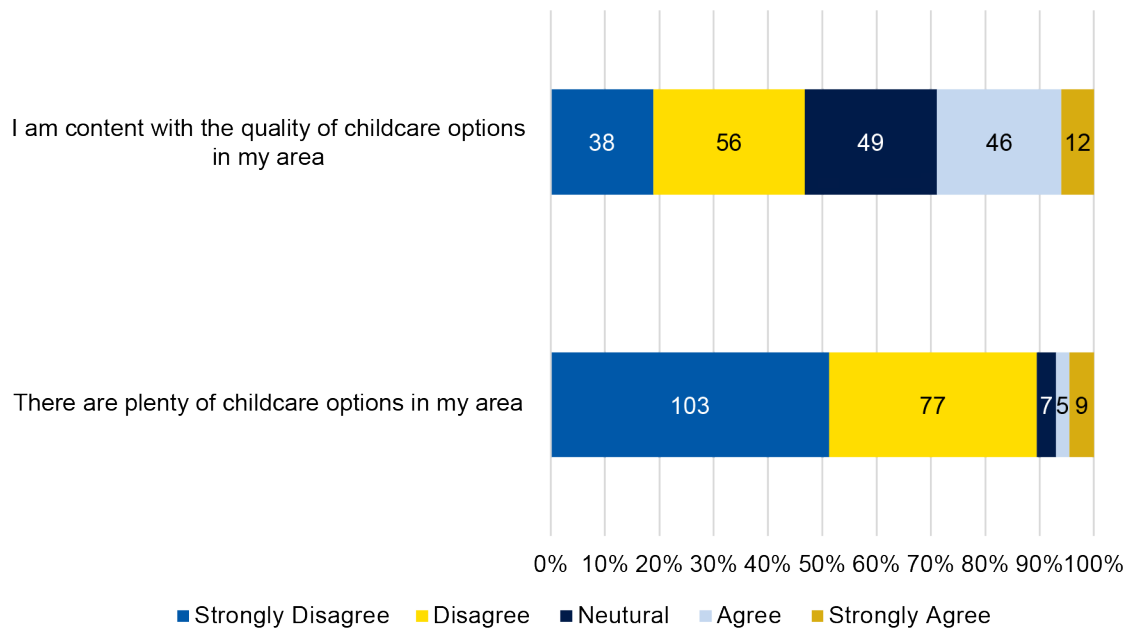
Table 9: Belief in need for more childcare in community



Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- There are plenty of childcare options in my area (N=201)
- I am content with the quality of childcare options in my area (N=201)

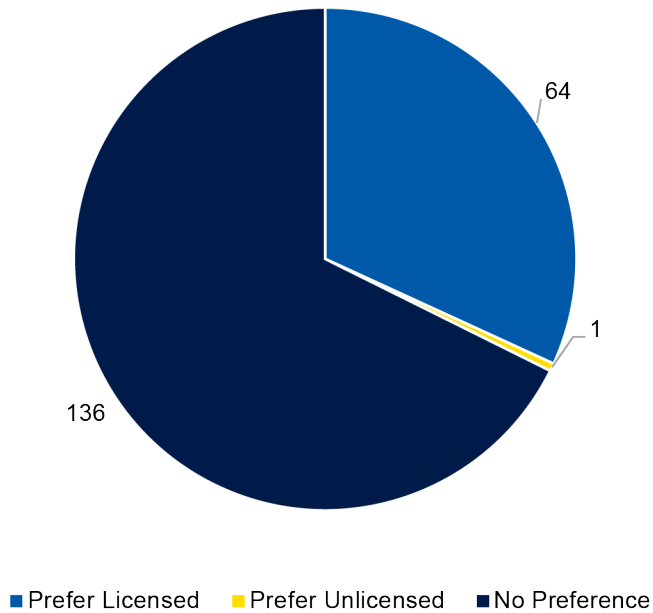
Table 10: Contentedness with quality and quantity of childcare options.



When asked about opinions of quality and quantity of childcare options respondents were more content with the quality of childcare options (Table 10), with just over 50% being at least neutral and just under 30% having positive feelings toward the quality of childcare in their area. Strong disagreement was expressed toward the quantity of available childcare, with nearly 90% indicating disagreement with the statement.

How do you feel about childcare center's licensing status? (N=201)

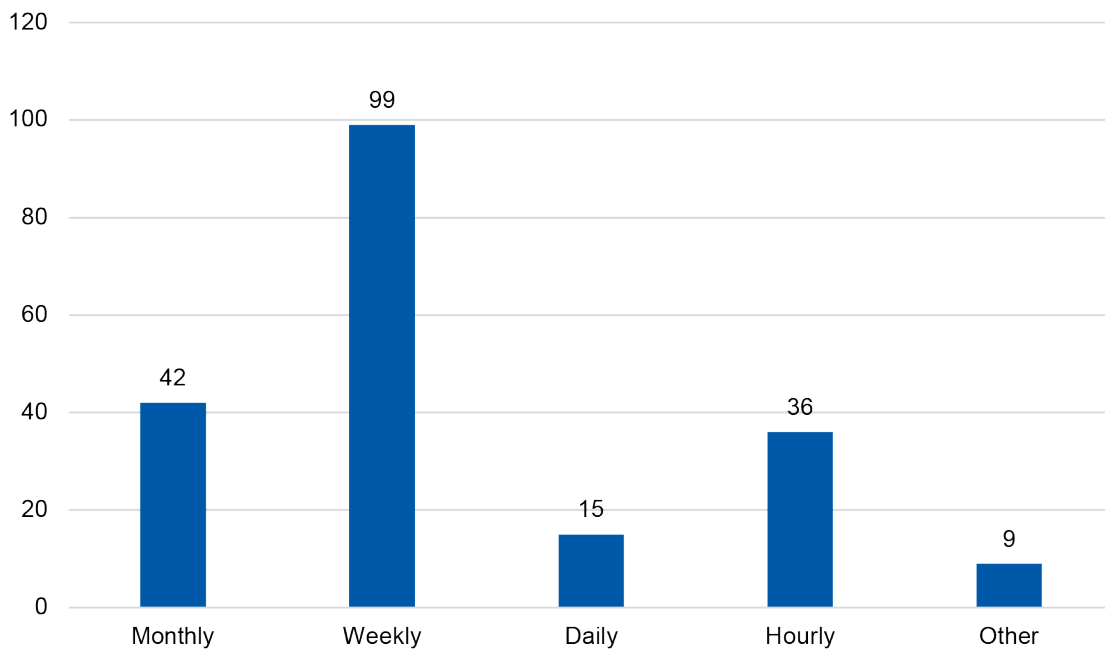
Table 11: Preference toward licensing status of childcare center



When asked how respondents felt about licensing status a majority (67.6%) shared they did not have a preference (Table 11). A smaller fraction preferred a licensed center, 31.8% and only one person preferred a center to be unlicensed. In qualitative responses from the Provider portion of the survey a couple providers who were unlicensed and were uninterested in becoming licensed shared they felt they were able to keep costs lower by not being licensed, which could also be the logic behind this preference.

How would you prefer to be charged for childcare services? (N=201)

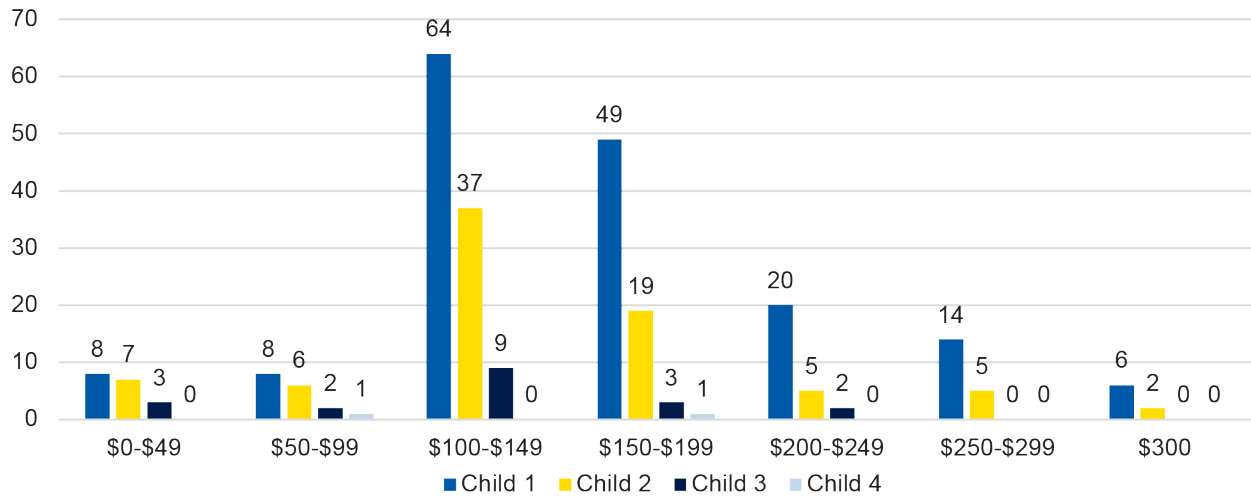
Table 12: Preference of payment style/frequency



The most commonly preferred payment type was weekly with nearly 50% of respondents selecting this option. The least popular option was daily with only 7.4% (Table 12).

How much are you paying for childcare services, per child, per week? N=169

Table 13: Cost per week, per child, by child



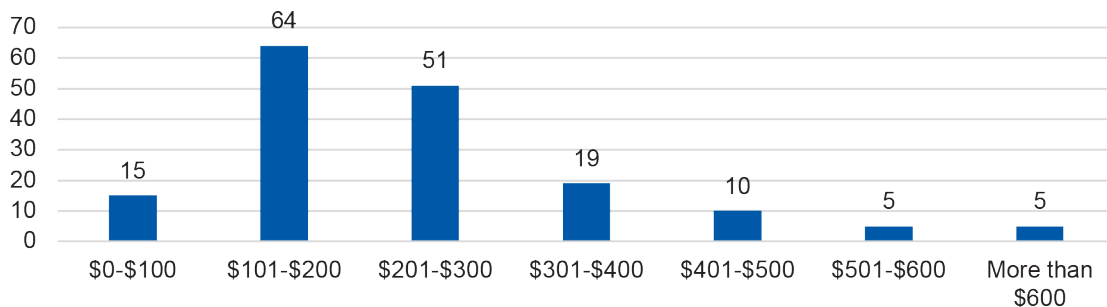
This question allowed for up to 5 children, no one entered a cost for a fifth child, so the report reflects only up to four children.

Of the 169 respondents who answered this question they entered data for 271 children. The most common amounts paid for both child one and child two were between \$100 and \$199 with 66.6% of “Child 1” and 84.1% of “Child 2” answers falling in this range.

Using the responses to this question, it was possible to calculate how much each family is paying for childcare for all children per week (Table 14).

This was not asked as a standalone question but rather, was determined by adding up each respondent’s reported cost per child, per week, for all of their children.

Table 14: Total cost per respondent



What is your maximum budget per week for childcare? (Consider costs such as additional childcare fees or having additional children in childcare) (N=163)

Table 15: Weekly Childcare Budget

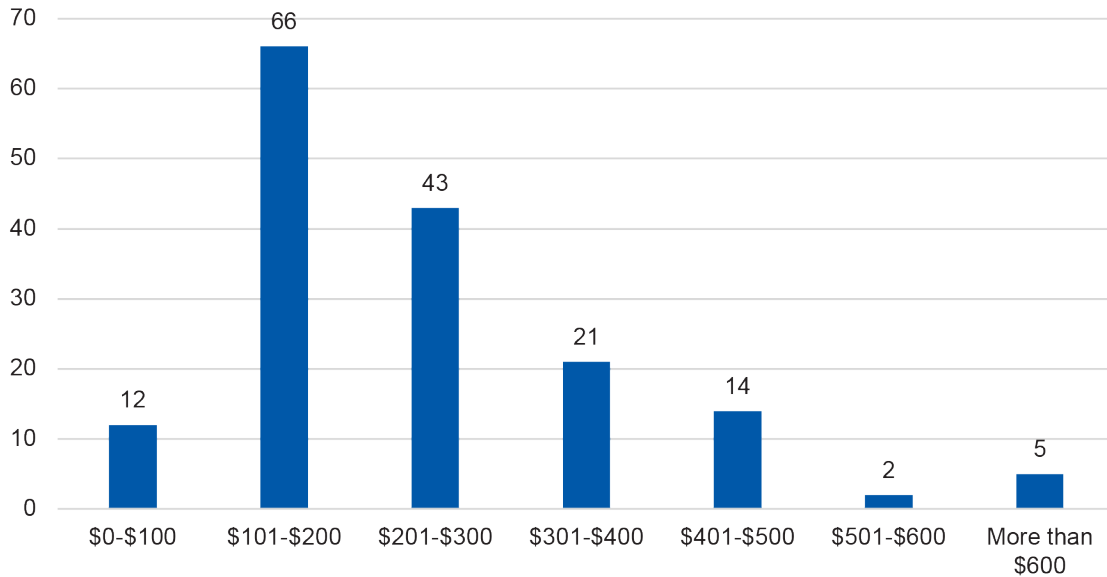
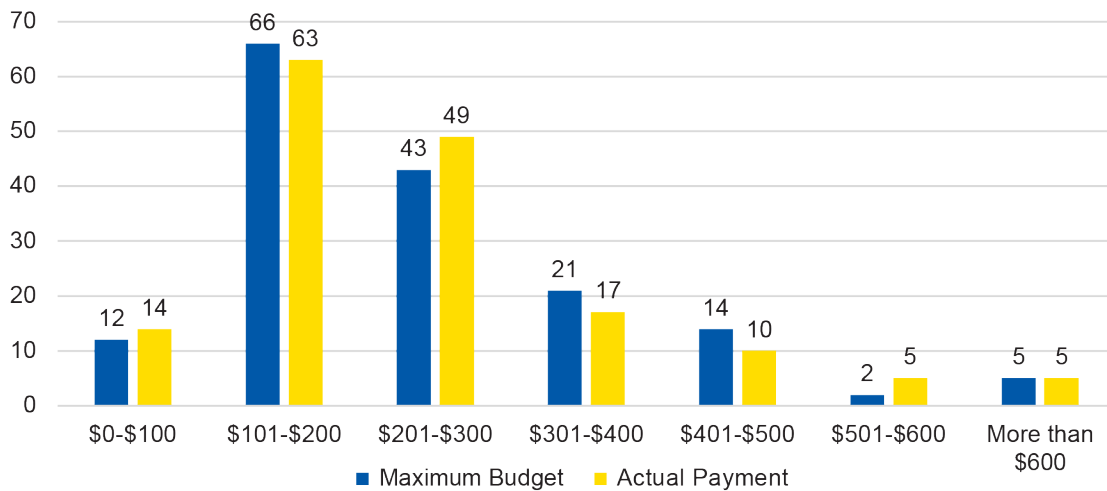


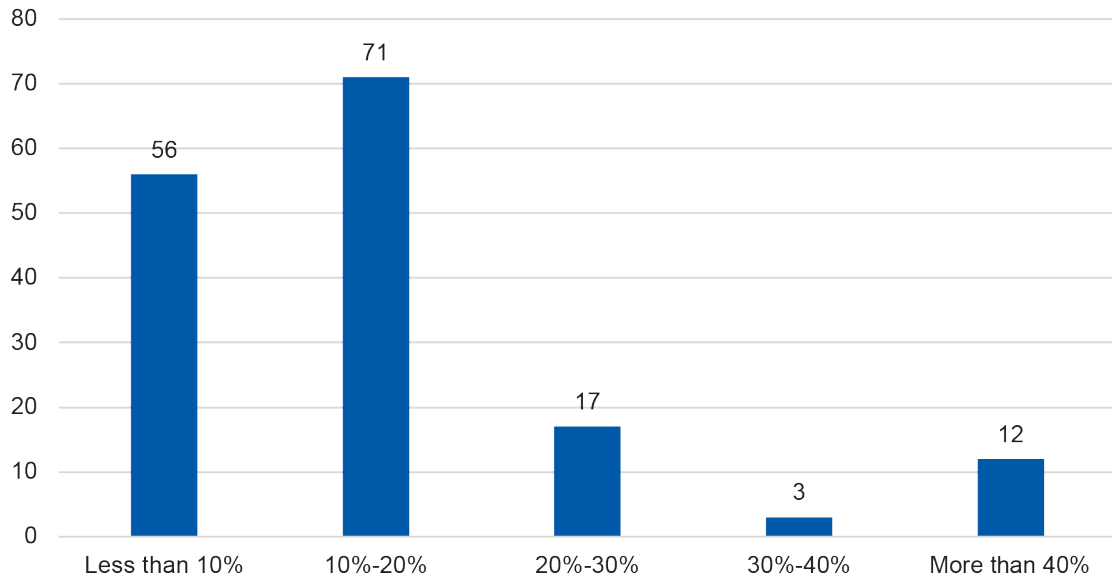
Table 16: Actual vs. verbalized childcare budget



When compared side by side, the actual payment is very close to the upper limit budget most respondents are currently identifying. Please note there were 169 responses to the actual budget question but only 163 responses to the maximum budget question, individuals who did not answer both sections were not included in Table 15.

Furthermore, if middle ground is assumed for income ranges (ie. \$0-\$24,999 = \$12,500) found on Table 21 and multiply the childcare costs people are currently paying per week by 52, a ratio of approximate amount of income being spent on childcare can be seen. N=159 (10 respondents who completed the childcare costs section did not enter income level data).

Table 17: Percent of income spent on childcare

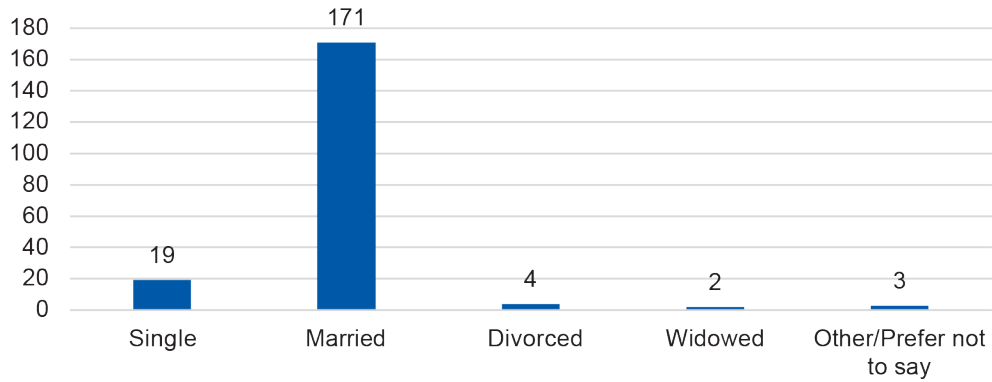


Demographics

Marital Status

When asked about marital status 199 responses were counted, the most common answer being “Married”. N=199

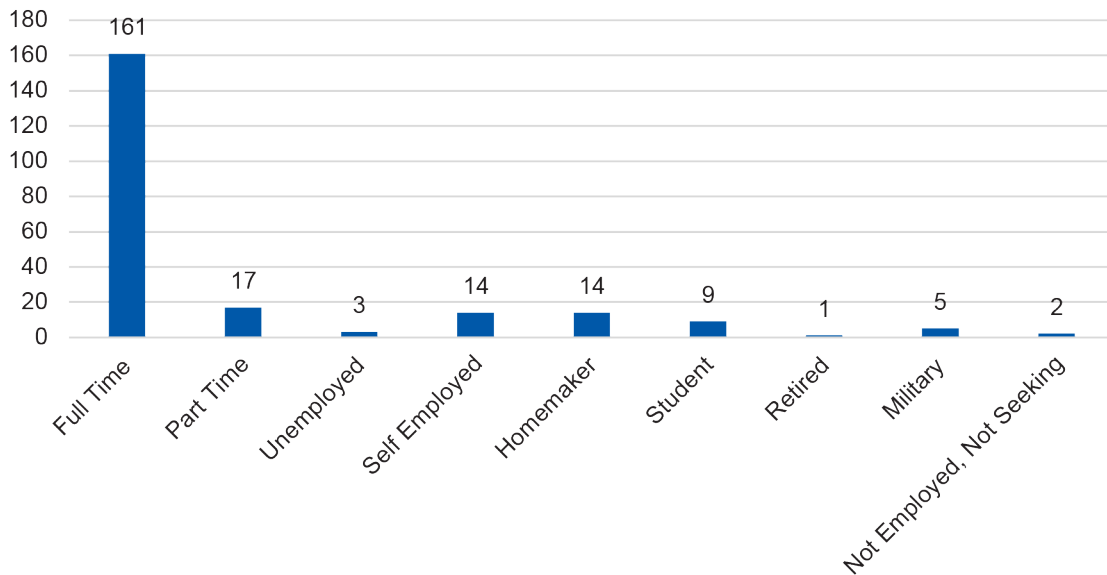
Table 18: Marital status



Employment

When asked about employment status the most common answer being “Full-time”. Participants could select more than one answer, which is why more than 199 employment options were selected. N=199

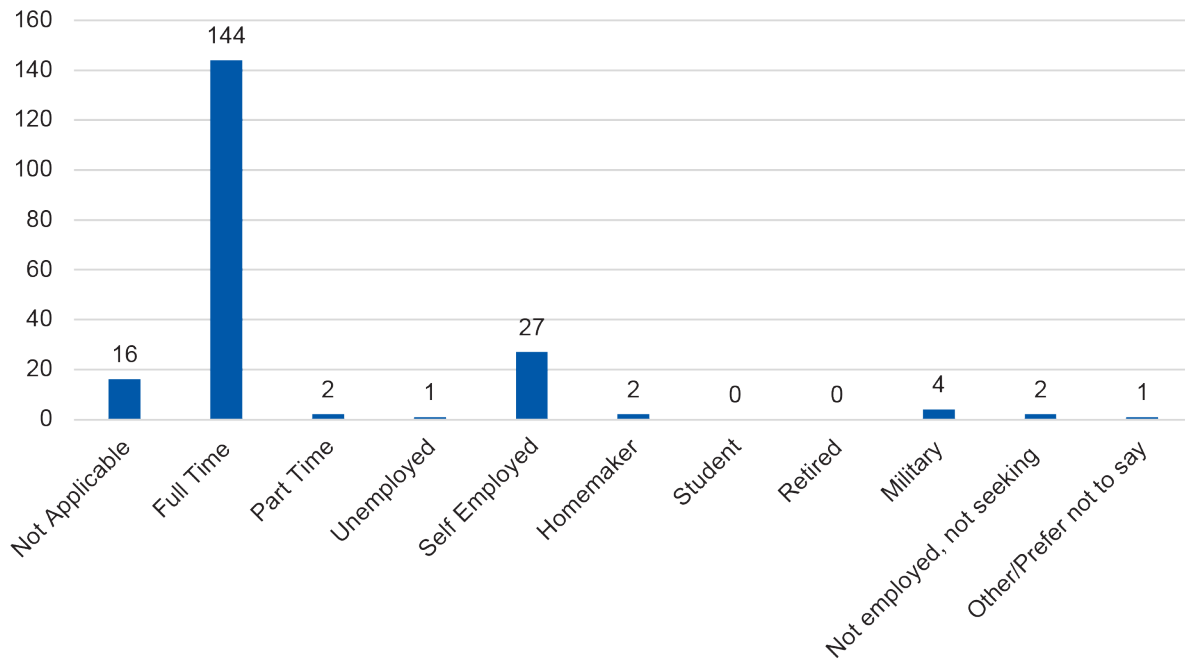
Table 19: Employment



Spouse/Partner Employment

When asked about the employment status of a Spouse/Partner 199 responses were counted, the most common answer being “Full-time”. N=199

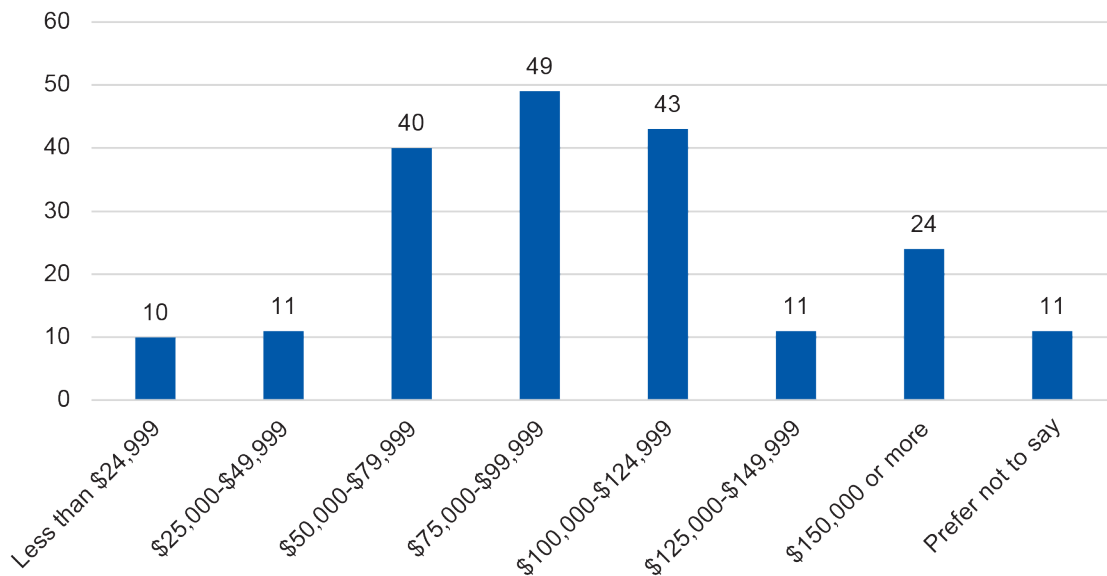
Table 20: Spouse/Partner employment status



Income

When asked about household income level 199 responses were counted, the most common answer being \$75,000-\$99,999. N=199

Table 21: Household income



Thank you for participating in this survey, please share here any additional comments you may have about childcare. N=76

Lack of Childcare Availability (34 occurrences)

- General Availability Issues
 - Childcare is hard to come by in many communities.
 - Availability in rural areas is especially limited.
 - Long waitlists are common, particularly for infants.
 - Families struggle to find any available spots, leading to significant inconvenience.
- Impact on Families
 - Families are forced to plan childbirth around daycare availability.
 - Lack of childcare leads some parents to quit their jobs.
 - Childcare shortages prevent foster families from taking in children.
- Regional Specific Issues
 - Specific communities like Brookings, Grant County, Beresford, and Webster were mentioned to have severe childcare shortages.

Cost of Childcare (12 occurrences)

- High Cost of Care
 - Childcare costs are extremely high, making it unaffordable for many families.
 - In some cases, parents have to pay for childcare even on days when they don't use it.
- Economic Impact on Families
 - High childcare costs contribute to poverty, preventing some parents from working.

Quality of Childcare (14 occurrences)

- Concerns about Quality
 - Parents express concerns about the quality of care, especially in terms of food, activities, and staff engagement.
 - The lack of quality care has led some parents to avoid having more children.
- Need for Specialized Care
 - Specialized care for children with disabilities is difficult to find.
- Impact of Staffing Issues on Quality
 - High staff turnover and insufficient staff ratios are affecting the quality of care.
 - Some parents worry about the emotional and social impact on their children due to inconsistent care.

Need for After-School and Non-Traditional Hours Care (8 occurrences)

- After-School Care
 - After-school care is crucial for working parents but is often unavailable.
 - Some communities lack before and after-school options entirely.
- Care for Non-Traditional Hours
 - There is a significant need for childcare that accommodates shift work or early morning hours.
 - Parents working non-traditional hours rely heavily on family for childcare due to a lack of other options.

Impact on Economic Development and Workforce (7 occurrences)

- Workforce Impact
 - Lack of childcare is a barrier to economic growth, particularly in rural areas.
 - Some communities are seeing families move away due to childcare shortages.
- Childcare Providers' Economic Struggles
 - High operating costs and low profits are causing providers to shut down.
 - Childcare workers are not paid a living wage, leading to high turnover and staffing shortages.

Proposed Solutions and Recommendations (6 occurrences)

- Government and Community Support
 - Suggestions include state-funded preschool, local school district involvement in childcare, and grants to support providers.
- Business and Facility Improvements
 - There are calls for more licensed centers, better funding, and improved facilities.
 - Recommendations also include creating a system for childcare workers to access health insurance and other benefits.

Appendix A – Survey Instrument

The information below represents the survey participants took to collect the data in this report. Respondents took the survey online, so this is not identical to what they saw. Participants were not forced to answer any questions, however, if they skipped certain questions their response was not counted in the reports.



This voluntary survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Answers will be held strictly confidential and used only for this study. The results will only be reported in aggregate form and cannot be identified individually. One business owner or household member aged 18 years or older should complete the survey.

What is your zip code? _____

Are you a childcare provider?

- Yes*
- No

****If “yes” was selected the participant was asked a different set of questions and then offered the rest of these questions if they had children of childcare age and wanted to take the survey***

How many children (0-6 years old) in your home currently need childcare?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

Do you anticipate needing childcare or needing additional childcare in the next 3 years?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If you are not using a childcare center, can you please share about the other arrangement(s) you have?

Please check all the times your family may need childcare throughout the week.

Day of the week	6:00 - 9:00 a.m.	3:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Half Day	All Day	Other time frame
Sunday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thursday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Saturday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How many additional miles do you drive for childcare? Daily Miles _____

Do your childcare needs change in the summer months?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

What childcare options does your family use during the summer?

Please check all the times your family may need childcare throughout the week in the summer.

Day of the week	6:00 - 9:00 a.m.	3:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Half Day	All Day	Other time frame
Sunday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thursday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Saturday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you believe there is a need for a childcare center or more child care options in your community?

- Yes
- No

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
There is plenty of childcare available in my area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am content with the quality of childcare in my area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How do you feel about childcare centers licensing status?

- I prefer an unlicensed center
- I have no preference if a center is licensed
- I prefer a licensed center

How would you prefer to be charged for childcare services?

- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily
- Hourly
- Other

How much are you paying for childcare? (Enter as many children as you pay for)

Child	Cost per week for child care
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

What is your maximum budget per week for childcare? (Consider costs such as additional childcare fees or having additional children in childcare)

If you would be interested in participating in a round table discussion in your community please share your email address below:

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Other or Prefer not to answer

What is your employment status?

- Full-time employment
- Part-time employment
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Home-maker
- Student
- Retired
- Military
- Not employed, not seeking employment
- Other or Prefer not to answer

What is your spouse/partner's employment status?

- N/A
- Full-time employment
- Part-time employment
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Home-maker
- Student
- Retired
- Military
- Not employed, not seeking employment
- Other or Prefer not to answer

What is your annual household income?

- \$0-\$24,999
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$124,999
- \$125,000-\$149,000
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to answer

Thank you for participating in this survey, please share here any additional comments you may have about childcare.



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

SDSU EXTENSION

SDSU Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer in accordance with the nondiscrimination policies of South Dakota State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Learn more at extension.sdstate.edu.

© 2024, South Dakota Board of Regents