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This Research Brief is the third in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of research and promising practices in the field of school-age child care.

The goal of NCASE is to ensure that school-age children in families of low income have increased access to quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that contribute to their overall development and academic achievement. For more information, contact us at [ncase@ecetta.info](mailto:ncase@ecetta.info).



## The Demand for Both Coverage and Quality in Out-of-School Time

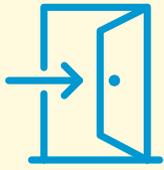
### Parents Share What They Value in School-Age Programs

**Working parents depend on out-of-school time programs for child care coverage during work hours as well as for academic and social-emotional enrichment. However, what we know about quality afterschool programming is generally viewed through the lens of enrichment alone. What do parents who seek school-age care out of necessity value most about their child's afterschool or summer program? How do they define quality?**

Last year the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) set out to hear directly from parents and other caregivers on these questions, from the perspective of supporting Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies and their designated networks. The goal was to learn more about how working parents perceive school-age care options, what they value most, and how they choose care that fits the needs of their work schedules. Overall, the parents' primary focus was on safe out-of-school care that aligned with their work needs. As Indianapolis parent Michelle put it, "I want-

ed to make sure that my kids were going to be safe with the person, that was the main thing, and then scheduling. Making sure that the times fit with my work schedule so I'm able to work, because if there was a conflict, it would be hard to have a job."

The stakes are high for so many parents who, like Michelle, need flexible, affordable school-age child care in order to work. The purpose of this brief is to illustrate how CCDF bridges the needs of low-income working families with promising practices for out-of-school time, relating the experiences of parents in their own voices.



ACCESS

## School-Age Child Care and CCDF Subsidy

Quality child care that's affordable and reliable supports workforce participation, especially for parents of low income. The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG), reauthorized in 2014, represents a critical lifeline for low-income working parents of children ages birth through 12.<sup>1</sup> The CCDBG, which authorizes CCDF, is the largest source of federal funding to states to provide child care assistance for low-income families as well as to improve the overall quality of child care. These subsidies offset the expense of child care for low-income working parents (or those in job training or education programs) by paying for a portion of those costs. In FY 2018, 1.32 million children in 813,200 families received subsidies in an average month,<sup>2</sup> and 44 percent of those children were school age (5 through 12). Most children were eligible because their parents were working.<sup>3</sup>

The 2014 reauthorization included a number of changes to the existing CCDBG Act that were designed to improve the health and safety of children in care, promote quality improvement efforts, increase families' access to care, and ensure greater continuity of care. Specifically, these changes were intended to make it easier for low-income families to access subsidies as well as make child care more affordable by lowering co-payment rates. The hope was that by reducing barriers to affordable child care, low-income parents would have less difficulty finding and maintaining employment.

As a Chattanooga parent shared, receiving the federal subsidy for child care has been a vital support for her. She explains, "It has



been a lifesaver and helped me so much. I'm almost finished with school. I just have to take my tests in a few weeks, and if it wasn't for [the subsidy], I don't know if it would ever help me move forward in life. I mean, everyone has circumstances, and this has really helped my circumstances because I have no family here whatsoever."

In addition to these changes, reauthorization included a number of consumer education provisions designed to help parents make informed choices about child care options and underscore the importance of using licensed or regulated child care for enhanced safety and quality standards.<sup>4</sup> Consumer education provisions included the development of state consumer education websites. These websites list all licensed child care providers, with quality rating information (if available) and posted reports of inspections for all providers, as well as general information on child development and the role of quality child care in promoting healthy development and growth.

Federal child care subsidies help promote access to quality care, but parents may still face challenges ensuring child care coverage during work hours. This is especially true for parents of low income who are more likely to work nontraditional hours

<sup>1</sup> Some children remain eligible to receive subsidies after turning 13, such as special-needs children.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Child Care. (2019). FY 2018 Preliminary data table 1—Average monthly adjusted number of families and children served. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occr/resource/fy-2018-preliminary-data-table-1>

<sup>3</sup> Parents can also qualify for subsidies by participating in eligible training or education programs. Children in protective services are also eligible to receive subsidies.

<sup>4</sup> Child Care and Development Fund Program. 45 C.F.R. § 98 (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/30/2016-22986/child-care-and-development-fundccdf-program>

and have unpredictable work schedules.<sup>5</sup> When coverage does not align with work schedules, parents face a range of choices, including leaving the child in self-care or in the care of an older sibling, or relying on a relative or other informal care.

The 2014 reauthorization included a number of provisions aimed at increasing access to care and helping parents make informed choices about child care. The parents we spoke with emphasized the importance of subsidies in helping them to access care.

For Amanda T., an Indianapolis parent, the subsidy enabled her workforce participation and promoted continuity of care. She said, “CCDF helps out a lot because child care is just expensive. It’s real expensive and it’s hard to pay. I would struggle if I didn’t have CCDF and the kids could only go certain days or certain times.” She explained that before receiving the subsidy, “when it was summer break or spring break, they couldn’t come here because I couldn’t afford it. So I would have to miss work, search for people to babysit, pay them . . . If I didn’t have CCDF, I don’t know what I could do. I don’t know that I could do everything I did . . . like going to school.”

## Meeting the Demand for School-Age Child Care

Most research examining child care supply and demand issues focus on very young children (birth to age 5). One of the more important efforts to measure supply and demand for school-age children is the Afterschool Alliance’s *America After 3PM* series. This research combines a nationally representative parent survey with follow-up interviews of families to learn more about their afterschool needs and experiences.<sup>6</sup>

The Alliance found that while nearly one-quarter of families have a child enrolled in an afterschool program, over 11 million children spend their afterschool hours in an unsupervised environment. This figure includes 800,000 elementary age children, and parents report difficulties accessing afterschool programming. The demand for afterschool programs is much higher among children from low-income

Low-income families report that the barriers to participation in afterschool or summer programs include cost, lack of transportation, and a general lack of available programs in their communities.

households.<sup>7</sup> Low-income families report that the barriers to participation in afterschool or summer programs include cost, lack of transportation, and a general lack of available programs in their communities.<sup>8</sup> In addition, over 80 percent of parents of children in afterschool programs agreed that those programs help working parents keep their jobs. This is an important finding for programs such as CCDF, which seeks to increase workforce participation among low-income parents.

“Without [the subsidy] I’m not sure I would’ve been able to work. I would have probably had to do something else because child care is extremely expensive.”

– Chattanooga parent

The Alliance’s research offers valuable insights into afterschool supply and demand issues, as well as insights into how parents perceive the value of afterschool generally. Questions still remain about how working parents who rely on before- and afterschool care out of necessity make choices about care, and what these parents value

5 Hepburn, P. (2018). Parental work schedules and child-care arrangements in low-income families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80, 1187–1209. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12505>; Rachidi, A. (2016). Child care assistance and nonstandard work schedules. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 65, 104–111. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.023>

6 The Afterschool Alliance conducted the latest survey in this series in 2019 and will begin releasing reports from that dataset in fall 2020.

7 Afterschool Alliance. (2014). *America after 3pm: Afterschool programs in demand*. Retrieved from [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM\\_Key\\_Findings.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM_Key_Findings.pdf)

8 Ibid.

most in the programs their children attend. In addition, it is vital to examine how families who rely on CCDF subsidies to enable their workforce participation perceive access and quality so that the agencies supporting them can better understand how to address their needs.

While the CCDF program is often associated with care for very young children, nearly half of the children served by federal subsidies are school age.<sup>9</sup> In FY 2018, over 580,000 school-age children were served through subsidies in an average month, with 75 percent of those children served through child care centers such as the programs where our family interviews took place.<sup>10</sup> School-age children, therefore, represent a critical but often-overlooked group within the CCDF population. As mentioned above, the majority of studies that examine child care access issues, including the challenges working parents face in obtaining child care that meets their work schedules, have focused on children from birth to age 5. This results in a knowledge gap regarding how parents of school-age children perceive child care options and what they value when making decisions about care that addresses their work needs. For instance, findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education reveal that parents of children birth to 60 months feel that center-based child care, in particular, helps with educational preparedness and the provision of social interaction.<sup>11</sup> While this study did not examine parents' perceptions as they relate to care for school-age children, it seems likely that parents' interests in program content and positive social interactions would continue to strengthen as children grow older.

An Indianapolis parent explained what she valued with respect to the staff at her child's center: "They help them with their

homework. They play constantly. They're very well watched. Everybody's really nice, and they bring that child up, you know. You got kids that are sitting pouting, moping, and they just get them to somehow come around. It's just a great school. I like everybody there. They're comfortable, and nobody's left behind."

## Listening to What Parents Value in School-Age Child Care

Working parents face compound challenges that involve accessing child care they can afford and finding an adequate supply of providers nearby that meet their needs. In the spring and summer of 2019, NCASE collaborated with the Office of Child Care regional administrators and school-age child care program directors to hear directly from parents of school-age children about what they value most in child care programs. We set up interviews with parents at two different school-age programs: Concord Neighborhood Center in Indianapolis, Indiana, and the Chambliss Center for Children in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



9 National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment. (2019). *National data profile of federal supports for afterschool and summer child care*. Retrieved from [https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/ncase-nationalsaccdatabrief-fullreport-2019\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/ncase-nationalsaccdatabrief-fullreport-2019_0_0.pdf)

10 National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment. (2020). *National data profile of federal supports for afterschool and summer child care* (forthcoming).

11 National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2014). *Household search for and perceptions of early care and education: Initial findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)* (OPRE Report No. 2014-55a). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/brief\\_hh\\_search\\_and\\_perceptions\\_to\\_opre\\_10022014.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/brief_hh_search_and_perceptions_to_opre_10022014.pdf)



For these conversations, NCASE sought out working parents who receive CCDF subsidy for child care. We asked parents, *What do you value in your child's school-age program?* The following key themes emerged.

- » **Safety.** Several parents responded that safety was the most important factor in their child care decisions. A number of parents shared that they felt the communities in which they lived did not offer safe outdoor play areas, and they valued having access to a child care center where their children could safely enjoy playing sports and engaging in other outdoor physical activities. Kandice J. reflected on her choice of Concord Neighborhood Center for her school-age child: “The supervision is excellent. You don’t have to worry about your child veering off or anything like that, you know. The doors stay locked. It’s a safe place and I don’t have to worry about my son. And that’s so important. When you leave your child someplace you’re going to worry, but at this place your child can be here, and you don’t have to worry because you know someone is watching out for them and being responsible.”
- » **Access.** Parents also emphasized the importance of finding an affordable program in a convenient location with transportation and operating hours compatible with their needs. These logistical considerations—cost, transportation, and hours of operation—are all critical components of access. One parent from Concord Neighborhood Center shared, “What I was looking for was something that worked with my time schedule.” The availability of care during school holidays and vacation breaks is pivotal for families. As she explained, “if I’m not able to take off work, I can count on them to be open and take the kids.” Other parents valued the fact that the center opened very early to accommodate their

early work shifts. One Concord parent noted, “The hours are good, too, for a lot of parents that don’t have anyone to watch the kids in the morning. I mean, because they open at . . . 6am.”

- » **Caring Staff.** The parents we spoke with place high value on the staff’s relationship with their children. As Kandice J. said, “What I like most about [Concord] is the staff. The staff is terrific, and they genuinely care for the children. They treat them as if they’re their own and have very good communication with the parents.” She reflected, “They just help take the strain off of you and make it possible to enrich your own child’s life.” Of Chambliss, one parent said, “The most important thing is obviously the care that they give, and the location [is important] as well, but I wouldn’t mind going out of my way if the teachers were as good as they are here, you know.” Other parents valued how staff were able to manage challenging behavior in calm, positive ways. According to Trena C. from Concord,  
*“They were willing to be patient with him, and they weren’t just so hard on him. They were just so understanding, and that to me speaks volumes. You know what I’m saying, they care. It wasn’t just, ‘Oh, he needs to get out—we can’t control him.’ It was always without exception trying to make sure he’s OK and understand him.”*
- » **Academic Support and Enrichment.** Parents value the learning opportunities and supports provided by their child’s program. Speaking of Concord, Michelle said, “My son has a learning disability, my 13-year-old, and he has struggled with stuff, and any time I mention that he’s struggling, they offer homework or tutoring to help with that.” Moreover, according to one Concord parent, the children appreciate having support for homework: “They view it as a treat when there’s people here to help them, like

‘I’m important and I matter.’ That’s a big plus.” Amanda T. noted that the programs offered activities children “would never get to do outside of Concord.” She appreciated that the afterschool program could offer so much—such as yoga, scouts, arts and crafts—that she would not have the time or resources to knit together on her own.

Other parents highlighted the value of enriching summer programming that goes beyond what the programs offer during the school year, particularly when parents would not be able to access such opportunities on their own. One parent from Chambliss reflected, “I work Monday through Friday, and we don’t get vacations like that so at least coming here [in the summer] is like a mini-vacation because they do field trips, they go to the aquarium, they go to the zoo, and they go swimming . . . I’m just glad I chose here because you know they offer so much more.” Amanda T. mentioned, “In the summer, they get help from teenagers, which is really awesome because the kids who don’t have a Big Brother/Big Sister—they hire them in for the summer and what they do is they mentor the kids.”

“They’re very proactive. They keep parents in the loop. They want to know what we want more for our children. They communicate with them. We’re not a checkbook or a subsidy for them. Our needs matter.”  
— Concord parent

- » **Family Engagement.** Reaching out and engaging with parents is highly valued, and parents appreciated when programs hosted family activities and adult discussion and support groups. They described a holistic approach to caring for children that programs adopted by attending to the needs of parents as well. “I like the support of child care, too. Like, you know they’re trying to support your family and what you’re trying to do, and understanding everything that

you’re trying to do,” says Trena C. of Concord. “I want something that feels family-oriented, like, when I come in, I’m greeted, like, ‘Hi, how you doing? How’s your day? How’s the kids?’ You know.” For several parents we spoke to, the program staff are like family, their emergency contacts or “support system,” as one Chambliss parent says.

Amanda T. mentioned that the program had been instrumental in pursuing her own educational aspirations as well as her children’s: “I heard that [the teacher] had helped a parent and some kids get into a college, and I’m like, I need help. I want to go to college. I need the help, I need the push, I need the support . . . she pushed me and was the motivation I needed. I was at school full time and I worked full time so I did both with the help of Concord . . . With their support, I got to finish school and I’m in a good job now.”

In sharing what they value most in their child’s care arrangements, parents implicitly highlighted well-recognized components of quality in school-age care. As discussed these key elements—safety, access, caring staff, academic support and enrichment, and family engagement—all figure prominently in a number of the major frameworks for promoting quality in school-age care. This suggests that while such frameworks may have been designed with voluntary enrichment-focused programs in mind, the demand for quality afterschool resonates widely among parents seeking child care during work hours as well as for their child’s enrichment.

“Everything we’re saying is good about Concord is what we think . . . quality child care should consist of.”  
— Trena C.

A couple of parents brought up quality explicitly. Kandice J. recalls how she first went about searching for a program: “I

believe I used the child care answers, and it was years ago, the help line. I spoke to a rep and they gave me information about the programs in my area that offer child care. And I initially went off what was in my neighborhood.” She said, “I believe the tool was called ‘Paths to Quality,’ and [Concord] had a very high rating . . . it’s the quality—I believe it’s important.”

For parents who are seeking a school-age program, a parent offered this advice: “Don’t just look for convenience, look for quality to help out your child . . . they can help you in the areas you don’t know. Y’all can come together and help your child out. And that’s what they do here [at Chambliss].” A parent from Concord expressed a similar sentiment: “I like when they have different people on hand [to offer] different things that the kids might need . . . qualifications in different areas.”

Participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked with positive outcomes, and CCDF subsidies help to ensure that school-age children in families of low income experience the range of developmental and learning benefits associated with quality child care.

## Mapping to Quality Standards

Research has shown that access to high-quality early care and education can help families achieve greater economic

security while simultaneously promoting children’s health and development.<sup>12</sup> In particular, young children benefit more from stable participation in formal care than they do in informal care arrangements, such as kinship or neighbor care.<sup>13</sup>

According to research into high-quality afterschool programs, participation in these programs is associated with positive developmental outcomes for children, including improved social skills with peers; increased pro-social behaviors; improved attitudes and feelings toward school; and improvements in intrinsic motivation, concentrated effort, and positive states of mind.<sup>14</sup> In addition, school-age children participating in quality afterschool programs demonstrate increased school attendance, improved school grades and academic work habits, and increased achievement test scores.<sup>15</sup>

These studies, it should be noted, focused on children’s participation in voluntary afterschool programs, rather than the broader array of school-age child care options that offer extended hours of operation to align with standard workday schedules. Research on the choices parents make about afterschool programs and what they value in such programs tends to overlook the providers that offer this kind of child care coverage, yet they are the providers on which working parents often rely to meet the needs of their work schedules. This brief represents anecdotal evidence of this important line of inquiry.

- 12 Sama-Miller, E., Ross, C., Eckrich Sommer, T., Baumgartner, S., Roberts, L., & Chase-Lansdale, P. L. (2017). *Exploration of integrated approaches to supporting child development and improving family economic security* (OPRE Report #2017-84). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/two\\_gen\\_final\\_report\\_final\\_clean\\_b508.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/two_gen_final_report_final_clean_b508.pdf); Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood programs*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- 13 Harknett, K., Schneider, D., & Luhr, S. (2019). *Who cares if parents have unpredictable work schedules? The association between just-in-time work schedules and child care arrangements*. Washington, DC: Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Retrieved from <https://equitablegrowth.org/working-papers/who-cares-if-parents-have-unpredictable-work-schedules-the-association-between-just-in-time-work-schedules-and-child-care-arrangements/>
- 14 Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Retrieved from <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/the-impact-of-after-school-programs-that-promote-personal-and-social-skills.pdf>; Shernoff, D. J., & Vandell, D. L. (2008, Fall). Youth engagement and quality of experience in afterschool programs. In J. Gallagher (Ed.) *Afterschool Matters Occasional Paper Series, No. 9*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Retrieved from [http://www.niost.org/pdf/afterschoolmatters/occasional\\_paper\\_09.pdf](http://www.niost.org/pdf/afterschoolmatters/occasional_paper_09.pdf); Vandell, D. L. (2013). Afterschool program quality and student outcomes: Reflections on positive key findings on learning and development from recent research. In T. K. Peterson (Ed.), *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*. Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group; Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R., & Pierce, K. M. (2007). *Outcomes linked to high-quality afterschool programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising afterschool practices*. Irvine, CA/Washington, DC: University of California Policy Studies Associates. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED499113.pdf>.
- 15 Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Retrieved from <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/the-impact-of-after-school-programs-that-promote-personal-and-social-skills.pdf>; Vandell, D. L. (2013). Afterschool program quality and student outcomes: Reflections on positive key findings on learning and development from recent research. In T. K. Peterson (Ed.), *Expanding minds and opportunities: Leveraging the power of afterschool and summer learning for student success*. Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group.



Afterschool program standards were primarily developed through the lens of afterschool enrichment. In other words, the frameworks on quality are based on programs seeing themselves as providing enrichment and support in afterschool hours rather than child care.

To what extent do parents' needs for school-age child care and their views on quality align with what is promoted in the research? Listening to parents, we discovered that the elements they value closely map to major frameworks for quality, such as those from the National AfterSchool Association, the Afterschool Alliance, the United Way, and others. These frameworks,

**Figure 1. Mapping Parent Themes onto Quality Frameworks**



**The NAA Standards for Quality School-Age Care<sup>17</sup>**

- ★ ★ > Human relationships
- ★ > Indoor environment
- ★ > Outdoor environment
- ★ > Activities
- ★ > Safety, health and nutrition
- ★ ★ ★ > Administration

**United Way Elements of High-Quality Programs<sup>18</sup>**

- ★ > Providing a wide array of enrichment opportunities
- ★ > Offering diverse opportunities for skill-building and mastery
- ★ > Hiring effective, experienced leaders and staff
- ★ > Engaging family members
- ★ > Making efforts to communicate and align with schools
- ★ > Fostering strong, supportive, and caring relationships between adults and youth
- ★ > Having strong administrative structures and being financially stable

**Afterschool Alliance: Taking a Deeper Dive into Afterschool: Positive Outcomes and Promising Practices<sup>19</sup>**

- ★ > Intentional programming/ Strong program design
- ★ ★ > Staff quality
- ★ ★ > Effective partnerships (school, community, and family)
- ★ > Program evaluation and improvement

<sup>16</sup> In addition to frameworks that guide the development and implementation of quality afterschool programs, there are widely used quality rating tools such as the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) and the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA).

<sup>17</sup> National AfterSchool Association. (n.d.). ARQ: Advancing & recognizing quality. Retrieved from <http://naaweb.org/images/NAAStandards.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> United Way. (n.d.). What does a high quality program look like? Retrieved from <https://www.unitedway.org/our-impact/focus/education/out-of-school-time/quality/high-quality-programs>

<sup>19</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2014, February). Taking a Deeper Dive into Afterschool: Positive Outcomes and Promising Practices. Retrieved from [http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/deeper\\_dive\\_into\\_afterschool.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/deeper_dive_into_afterschool.pdf)

along with the earlier quality assessment work of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), provide the field with a foundational understanding of the core components of quality afterschool programs.

As illustrated, the themes that emerged from our conversations with low-income working parents who use subsidies to offset the cost of school-age child care align closely with the above major frameworks for program quality. This suggests that the demand for quality resonates for parents who utilize school-age child care for work schedule needs as well as for those who view afterschool primarily as voluntary enrichment. The perspectives shared by the Concord and Chambliss parents help to affirm the dual focus of the CCDF program: increasing parents' access to child care as well as increasing the quality of care.

## Recognizing the Demand for Both Coverage and Quality

Working parents of low income face a greater number of challenges accessing child care that supports their workforce participation. Given what we know about the research and what we have heard from families, the demand for child care options (location, transportation, available slots, etc.) that align with parents' work schedules and that accept subsidies is an underappreciated factor in assessing parents' choices about care. Of the frameworks and studies about core principles of quality programs, access and coverage needs are minimally addressed and generally in reference to the unmet demand for child care slots, not from the perspective of



how parents who require care during work hours view quality. This makes the argument for further merging the way we look at child care and the way we look at afterschool quality in general.

This research brief represents an initial exploration of how parents of school-age children who rely on CCDF subsidies for child care make decisions about child care options, and of what these parents value in the programming they obtain for their children. While the parents in Indianapolis and Chattanooga placed a high priority on safety and logistics, what they value in program staffing and content aligns with the core elements of afterschool program quality elevated in nationally recognized frameworks. How low-income working parents balance logistics with programming quality when securing care for their school-age children warrants additional research.

Child care access and coverage issues confront parents of children across the age spectrum served through subsidies—birth through age 12. To effectively meet needs, it is crucial that the out-of-school time field supports parents, on their terms, in pursuit of quality care for their children.

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