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## **Former Family Child Care Provider Survey Report**

Office on the Economic Status of Women &  
Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers

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## Executive Summary

Management Analysis and Development (MAD) worked with the Office on the Economic Status of Women (OESW) and the Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers (OFCCP) to develop and administer a survey to former family child care providers to learn why they had closed their business between 2020 and 2025. Additionally, MAD conducted follow-up focus groups to learn more about specific issues brought up by survey respondents.

Overall, providers rated complying with regulations as the most impactful factor that influenced their decision to close. When asked to elaborate on this, providers shared that it was the collective impact of all regulations together making it difficult to run their business rather than any single regulation. Providers described situations that required nuance and flexibility instead of more rigid rules to operate their business. Providers spoke about relationships with county licensors becoming more contentious over time, which may also contribute to the general sense that complying with regulations had a major impact on their decision to close. Additionally, providers rated a lack of benefits and inability to take time off in an industry with long hours as an important factor in their decision to close. Providers also shared a general sentiment that the messaging they see about family child care downplays the importance of the work they do for their community. Some differences in responses existed between providers based on whether they closed earlier than expected, the age of the provider when they closed, and how long they were in business before closing.

The survey asked about any supports, payments, or assistance the providers used when their business was in operation. Providers most commonly used the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Child Care Assistance Program, and a regional Child Care Aware grant. Providers also indicated the supports that would have helped them stay in business longer, including: greater availability of substitutes, business support, and grants to fund professional development, curriculum, equipment, or home improvement expenses.

Just over half the providers indicated that they closed their businesses before they would have liked to, and one fifth of providers indicated that they would be interested in opening their business again.

Four key findings emerged from the results. Efforts to update and streamline regulatory systems are critical. Expanded opportunities for technical assistance would be beneficial. An intentional, statewide communications campaign could reinforce the professional identity of family child care providers and strengthen the pipeline of future providers. Expansion of shared services structures could address pain points related to taking time off and access to health and retirement benefits for providers.

## Introduction

The closures of child care centers and family child care providers have been an issue of increasing concern in Minnesota over the past ten years. A [fact sheet](#) created by the Office on the Economic Status of Women (OESW) highlighted that while capacity in care centers has been on the rise, capacity of family child care providers has been declining, contributing to a net loss each year that affects both the Twin Cities Metro and Greater Minnesota. The rate of closures among family child care providers is especially concerning as many are owned and operated by women and offer access to child care in areas underserved by centers. Reduced access to child care negatively impacts women's participation in the workforce. For these reasons, the OESW and the state's Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers (OFCCP) invested in a joint effort to seek insights about these closures that can inform policy and programming. The [2024 Annual Report from the OFCCP](#) noted the ongoing net decrease in the number of family child care providers in Minnesota. To learn more about why these family child care providers are closing, OESW and OFCCP engaged Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to conduct further research on the state of family child care providers in Minnesota. MAD was also tasked with exploring examples of programs and policies in other states that are designed to address family child care closures.

To achieve the goal of the project, MAD designed a multipronged approach that included a survey of all formerly licensed family child care providers who closed between 2020 and 2025 to better understand factors that may have affected their decision to close. MAD followed up with survey respondents and conducted focus groups to learn more about some of the key impact areas identified in the survey. MAD also performed desk research and document review to supplement the primary data collection.

The survey design was based on the [Former Licensed Family Child Care Provider Survey](#) conducted by the Results Management team within Minnesota Management and Budget that surveyed former family child care providers in 2020. MAD crafted survey questions to measure similarities and differences against the results of the 2020 survey.

## Methods and Results

### Desk Research

MAD's desk research provided a foundation for the development of both survey and focus group assessments. MAD reviewed reports and articles published between 2019 and 2025 that explored the decline, challenges, and future of family child care in Minnesota and nationally. The research team reviewed and analyzed 14 documents. A list of those documents is included in Appendix A: Summary of Documents Reviewed.

The sources highlight ongoing provider shortages, the challenges of the family child care business model, and the role of state and local policies in supporting or discouraging these small businesses.

Notable insights from the desk research include:

- **Motivations to enter the field:** Several studies demonstrate common reasons that individuals become family child care providers. These include the ability to care for their own children simultaneously, interest in owning a small business, and interest in a career in early childhood education.
- **Reasons for closure:** Surveys of providers across states show common reasons for closure. Primary reasons can be grouped into three categories: low pay and lack of benefits; the burdens of running a business and complying with regulations; and personal issues, such as health, family demands, or retirement.
- **Challenges for providers:** Studies have shown family child care providers face a set of unique challenges which include burdensome regulation, the inability to take time off, and the need to balance the demands of direct care with running a small business.
- **Promising practices and policies:** The research also revealed several state and local policy actions that may improve the longevity and success of family child care businesses. Practices of particular interest for Minnesota include increased investments in shared services such as pooled purchasing and mentoring, improved recognition of caregivers, strong coordination among state and local governments to align approaches and systems, and engagement of providers. Additional details are included in the insights and opportunities section of this report.
- **Existing programs:** The research cited programs that enhance compensation and benefits for providers as promising supports. Analyses from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and multi-state studies suggest that simplifying licensing, expanding access to subsidies, and supporting business management skills can stabilize the field. New Mexico recently became the first state in the nation to offer no-cost universal child care to all families at or below 400 percent of the federal poverty line. The program launched on November 1, 2025. The program is complemented by other investments to build the supply of child care in the state. Minnesota's own Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program provides monthly payments to eligible child care providers in addition to their wages and benefits. Family child care providers received \$33 million in fiscal year 2025 and 97 percent of the recipients reported that the program has helped keep their child care program open and operating. Other investments include launching a statewide campaign to recruit licensed and registered home providers, partnerships with employers and school districts to expand child care options, and establishing a low interest loan fund to construct, expand, or renovate child care facilities.

## Survey

MAD worked with members of OESW, OFCCP, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to develop a survey that aligned with questions asked by Results Management in their 2020 survey of former family child care providers. MAD's survey also contained additional questions around potential factors that either impacted closure (such as regulatory factors) or state-provided supports that helped the provider continue their business.

MAD launched the survey on August 25, 2025, and closed the survey on September 19, 2025. In total, 483 respondents took the survey out of a sample of 4,225 participants, a response rate of 11 percent. The sample contained all former family child care providers who closed between 2020 and 2025, provided by the

Department of Human Services (DHS). As a note, former family child care providers interacted with DHS in the past, but it is now DCYF that they engage with. The survey began with demographic questions. It then asked respondents to identify the top reasons for closing their business and ended by asking if the provider used any supports while they were still in business. A list of survey questions appears in Appendix B: Former family child care provider survey instrument

## Results

### Demographics

The survey first asked respondents demographic questions about themselves and their family child care license. Most respondents became licensed family child care providers to provide child care for their children or related children or to work in the early childhood education field. Most respondents had been child care providers for over ten years and just over half closed their business before they wanted to. Nearly all of the respondents were white and spoke English as a primary language. See Appendix C: Former family child care provider survey demographics for more details and figures on the demographics of the providers who responded to the survey.

### Critical Factors Impacting Closure

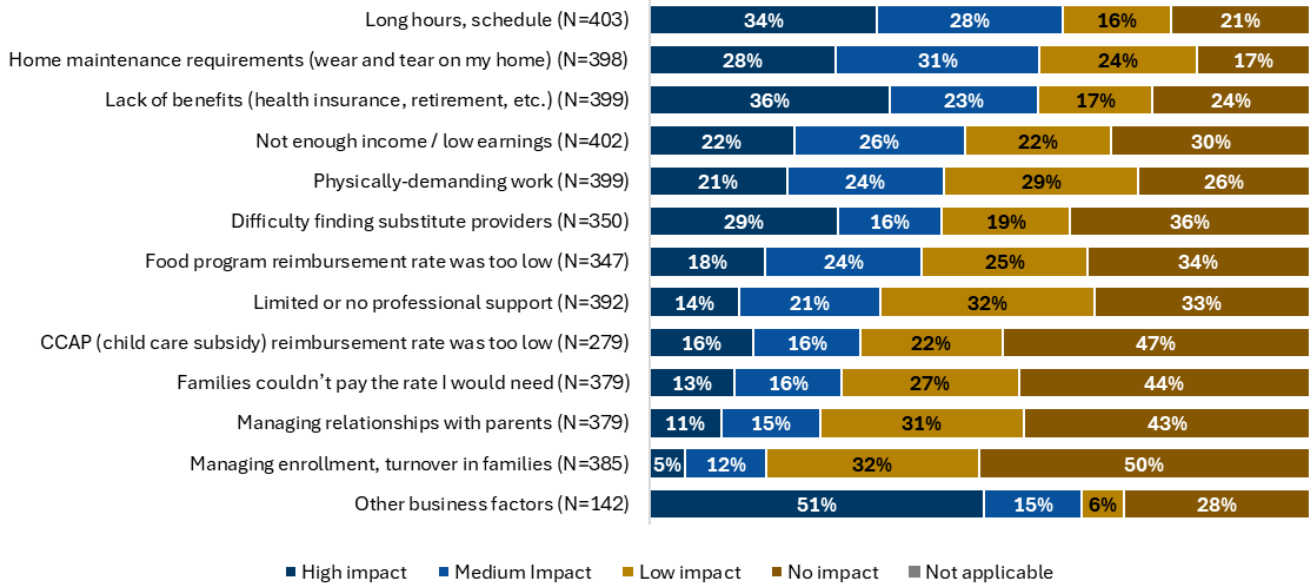
The survey then asked respondents to rank the factors that had the highest impact on their decision to close their child care business. These impacts were split into six categories: business factors, personal factors, administrative factors, documentation, training, and regulations. These categories were the same categories used in the 2020 Results Management report on former family child care providers.

#### *Business Factors*

Over half the respondents ranked long hours/schedule (62 percent), home maintenance requirements (59 percent), and lack of benefits (58 percent) as having a medium or high impact when asked about business factors that impacted their decision to close their child care businesses (Figure 1). Nearly half of the respondents (48 percent) also ranked not enough income/low earnings as having a medium or high impact which increased among providers who were in business for a shorter amount of time and/or were younger (see Demographics). Less impactful factors included families not being able to pay the rate they would need, managing relationships with parents, and managing enrollment/turnover in families. Respondents who noted “other reasons” described regulations, paperwork/administrative burdens, the COVID disruption, costs of running a business, personal health, and life circumstances as other factors that impacted their decision to close.

**Figure 1: Business factors that impacted respondents’ decision to close their child care business.**

How much impact did these business factors have on your decision to close your child care business?

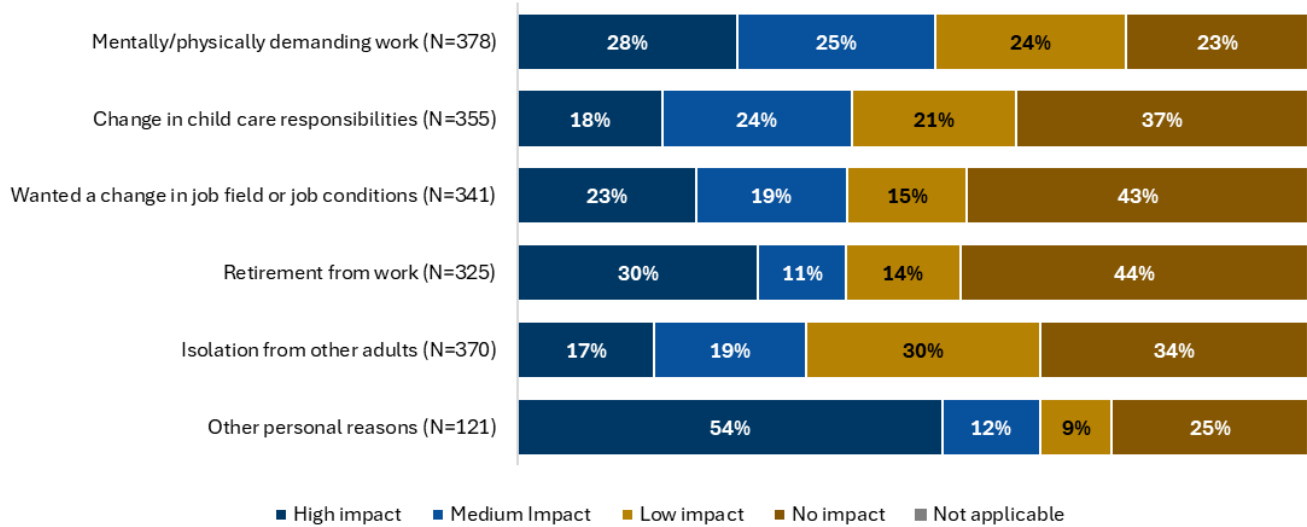


*Personal Factors*

As shown in Figure 2, over half the respondents ranked mentally/physically demanding work (53 percent) as a personal factor that had a high or medium impact on their decision to close their child care business. Other common personal factor impacts included a change in child care responsibilities (42 percent), wanting a change in job field or job conditions (42 percent), and retirement (41 percent). The factor respondents most often rated as having low or no impact on their decision to close their child care business was isolation from other adults (64 percent). Respondents selecting “other” reasons listed privacy from government regulations, family, health, and finances as other personal factors that impacted their decision to close their child care business.

**Figure 2: Personal factors that impacted respondents’ decision to close their child care business.**

How much impact did these personal factors have on your decision to close your child care business?

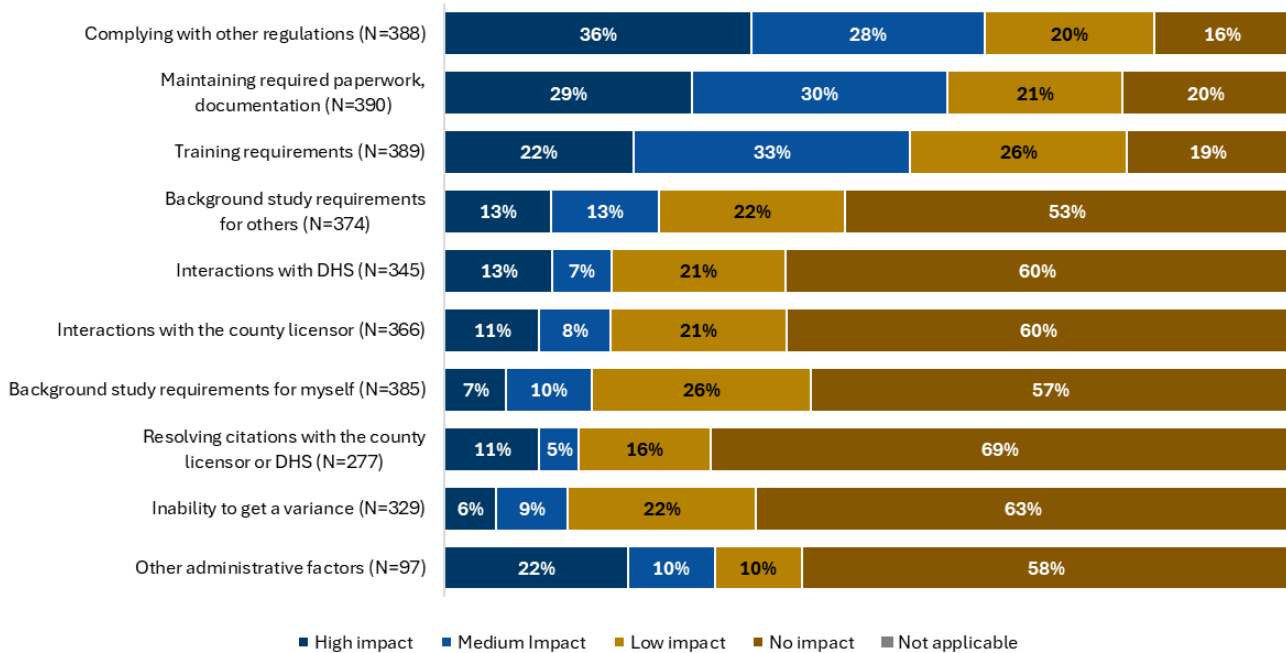


*Administrative Factors*

Respondents most often rated complying with other regulations (64 percent), maintaining required paperwork or documentation (59 percent), and training requirements (55 percent) as having a high or medium impact when asked how administrative factors influenced their decision to close their child care business (Figure 3). Across all six categories, complying with other regulations was also the most common overall factor that had a medium or high impact on closing a child care business. Most respondents (at least three quarters) reported the other six administrative factors as having low or no impact on their decision to close their child care business. Respondents selecting “other” factors listed complying with new regulations, paperwork/accounting requirements, and relationships with DHS (as marked in the survey) or their county licensor as other administrative factors that impacted their decision to close.

**Figure 3: Administrative factors that impacted respondents’ decision to close their child care business.**

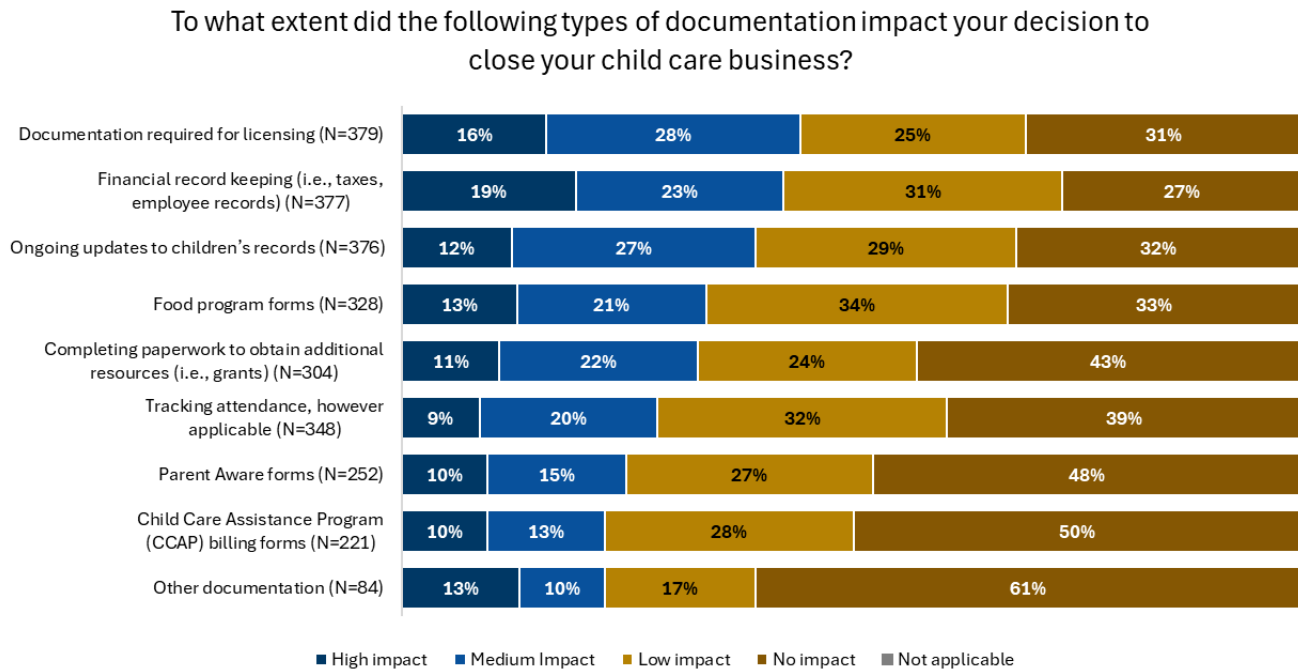
How much impact did these administrative factors have on your decision to close your child care business?



### Documentation Factors

About 40 percent of respondents rated documentation required for licensing (44 percent), financial record keeping (42 percent), and ongoing updates to children’s records (39 percent) as documentation types that had a medium to high impact on their decision to close their child care business (Figure 4). Three quarters or more of respondents rated Parent Aware forms and Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) billing forms as having had low to no impact on their decision to close. Respondents listed the extent of paperwork/documentation and training records (or lack of useful training) as “other” documentation factors that impacted their decision to close their child care business.

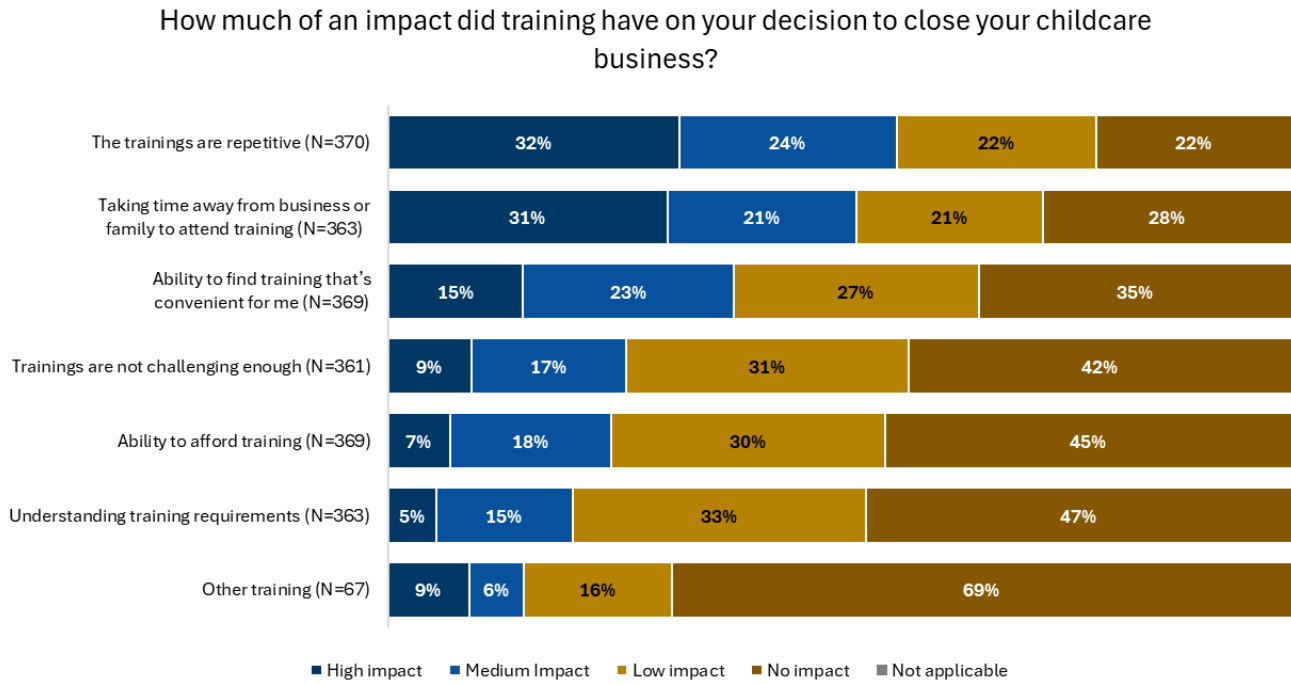
**Figure 4: Documentation factors that impacted respondents’ decision to close their child care business.**



*Training Factors*

Over half the respondents rated repetitive trainings (56 percent) and taking time away from business or family to attend training (52 percent) as training factors that had a medium to high impact on their decision to close their child care business (Figure 5). Roughly three-quarters of respondents said that trainings not being challenging enough, the ability to afford training, and understanding training requirements were three factors with little to no impact on their decision to close their child care business. Respondents noting “other” factors listed the time required, quality, and local options as other training factors that impacted their decision to close their child care business.

**Figure 5: Training factors that impacted respondents' decision to close their child care business.**

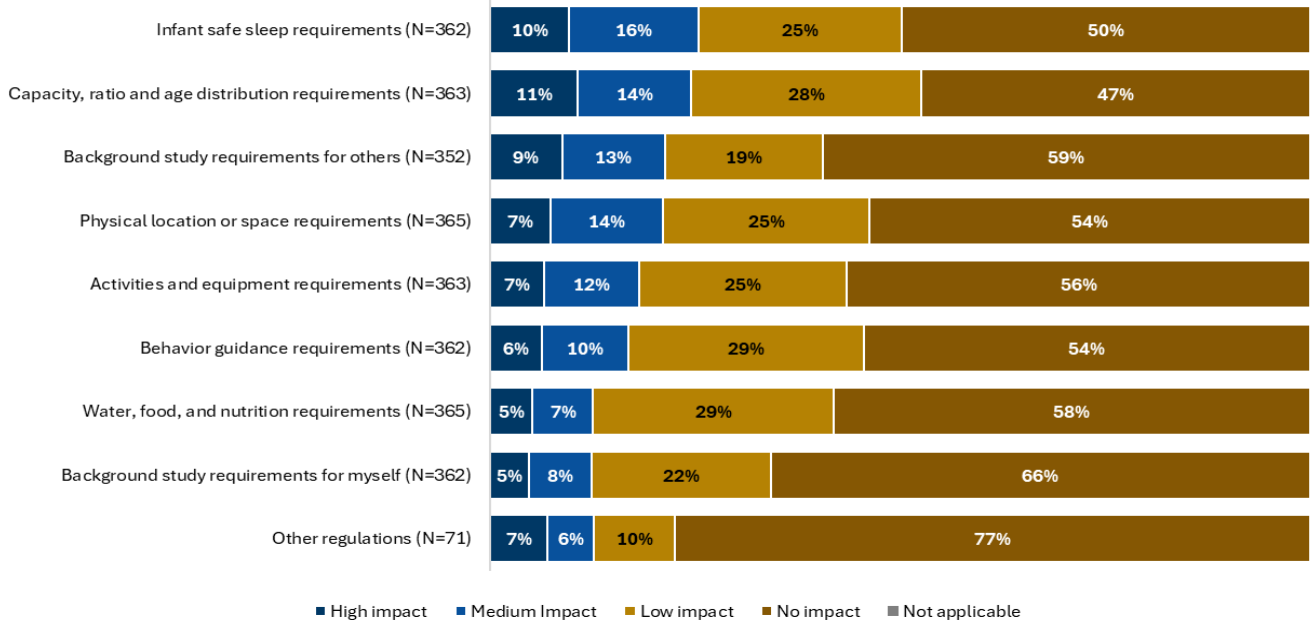


### Regulatory Factors

Although respondents frequently mentioned regulations or regulatory factors as the category most impacting their decision to close their child care business, there was no single regulation that was a clear decision factor for a majority of respondents. Most (at least three quarters or more of respondents) indicated that individual regulatory factors presented in the survey had low to no impact on their decision to close (Figure 6). Those respondents noting high or medium impact most often selected infant safe sleep requirements (26 percent) and capacity, ratio, and age distribution requirements (25 percent) as factors in their decision to close. Fewer than 15 percent of respondents reported water, food, and nutrition requirements and background study requirements for the provider as having medium to high impact on their decision to close their child care business. Five respondents left comments in the 'Other regulations' category when asked. These responses included saying all of the above, behavior guidance regulations at home versus at care placing a strain on families, infant care requirements becoming too much, or family refusing to be fingerprinted.

**Figure 6: Regulatory factors that impacted respondents’ decision to close their child care business.**

How much of an impact did regulations have on your decision to close your childcare business?



## Supports

The final section of the survey asked respondents about additional supports for their child care business as well as whether they would consider reopening their business in the future. Nearly all respondents used the Child and Adult Care Food Program (82 percent) when asked if they made use of any supports, payments, or assistance during the time their child care business was in operation (Table 1). The next most often cited supports included the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) (38 percent), a regional Child Care Aware grant (35 percent), Parent Aware quality coaching (28 percent), Parent Aware grants to improve quality (28 percent), and Great Start Compensation payments (22 percent).

**Table 1: Supports respondents used during the time their child care business was in operation.**

Support	Responses	Percentage
Child and Adult Care Food Program	271	82%
CCAP (Child Care Assistance Program)	127	38%
A regional grant through Child Care Aware	116	35%
Parent Aware Quality Coaching	94	28%
Parent Aware Grants to improve quality	94	28%
Great Start Compensation Support Payments	73	22%
Child Care Aware Professional Development Advisor support	35	11%
R.E.E.T.A.I.N. Grants	34	10%
Early Learning Scholarships	31	9%

<b>Support</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Coaching, consultation, or training through First Children’s Finance	31	9%
T.E.A.C.H or CDA Scholarships	20	6%
I was not aware of these supports	20	6%
Coaching or consultation through the Center for Inclusive Child Care	15	5%
Mentor program	6	2%
Other	17	5%

When asked what additional supports or services would have helped them keep their child care business open longer, over a third of respondents selected greater availability of substitutes (38 percent), business support such as tax information, setting rates, etc. (38 percent), and grants to fund professional development, curriculum, equipment, or home improvement expenses (35 percent) (Table 2). While several supports were selected, seventeen percent of respondents indicated that additional supports would not have made any difference.

**Table 2: Additional supports or services that would have helped child care businesses stay open longer.**

<b>Support</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Greater availability of substitutes	95	38%
Business support (tax information, setting rates, etc.)	94	38%
Grants to fund professional development, curriculum, equipment, or home improvement expenses	87	35%
Guidance on finding and applying for a grant	65	26%
Guidance on licensing requirements from licensor or DHS	50	20%
Higher CCAP (Child Care Assistance Program) rates	48	19%
Additional supports such as these would not have mattered	42	17%
Training or professional development opportunities	34	14%
Support from an association or provider group	29	12%
Mentor program	22	9%
Coaching support	19	8%
Other	33	13%

While all respondents who took the survey have closed their child care business, one fifth indicated that they have considered reopening.

### **Demographic Differences**

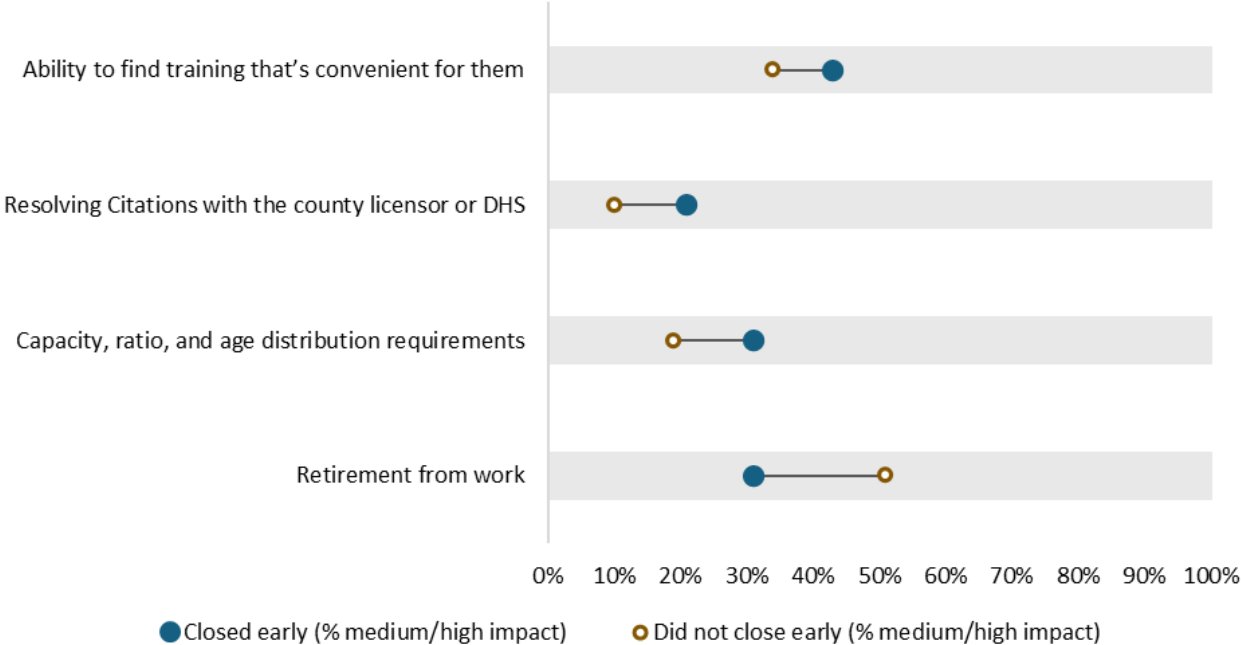
Some differences existed between respondents when filtered by demographic groups. Whether respondents closed earlier than they wanted to or not, the number of years they ran their business before closing, age of respondents when they closed, and region (Twin Cities Metro versus Greater Minnesota) all impacted responses. See Appendix B: Former family child care provider survey instrument to see all choices for demographic options. The tables with cells highlighted in blue indicate the top scoring items for each demographic group.

#### *Closed Early*

In the survey, respondents reported whether they closed their family child care business earlier than they had planned. The largest difference between those who closed earlier than planned (N=200) and those who did not

close earlier than planned (N=230) was how they rated retirement on their impact for closing. Between the groups, those that did not close earlier than planned ranked retirement as a significant factor by 20 percentage points more than those that did close early. For those closing earlier than planned, capacity, ratio, and age distribution requirements, resolving citations with the county licenser or DHS (as marked in the survey), and the ability to find training that’s convenient for them were more significant factors.

**Figure 7: Factors impacting those who closed early versus those who did not**



**Table 3: Differences between those who closed earlier than planned and those that did not**

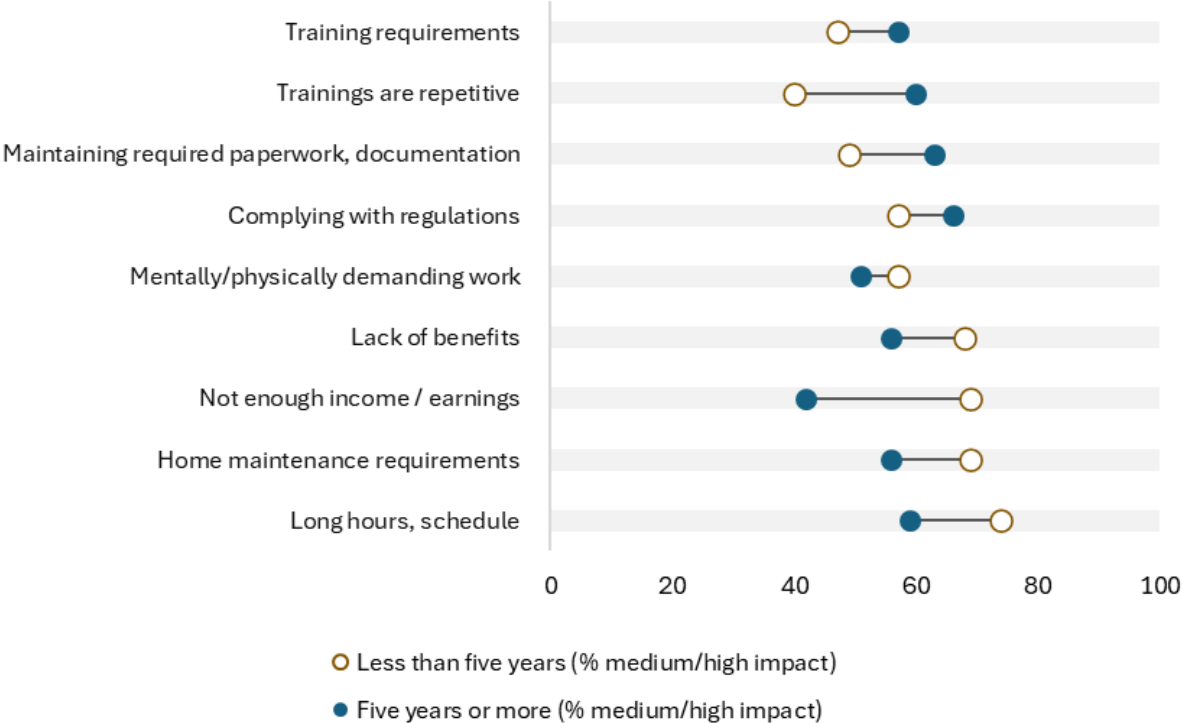
Factor	Closed early (% medium/high impact)	Did not close early (% medium/high impact)
Retirement from work	31%	51%
Capacity, ratio, and age distribution requirements	31%	19%
Resolving citations with the county licenser or DHS	21%	10%
Ability to find training that’s convenient for them	43%	34%

*Years in business*

The survey asked respondents to select how many years they operated their business before closing. The respondents who answered this question were split into two groups—those in business for less than five years (N=93) and those in business for five years or more (N=339). Both groups rated the long hours and schedule among the top five factors that impacted their decision to close. Those in business for less than five years reported more day-to-day issues and compensation as the top factors that impacted their decision to close.

Those who were in business for five years or more reported issues around compliance, training, and regulations as the top factors that impacted their decision to close.

**Figure 8: Factors impacting closure based on years in business**



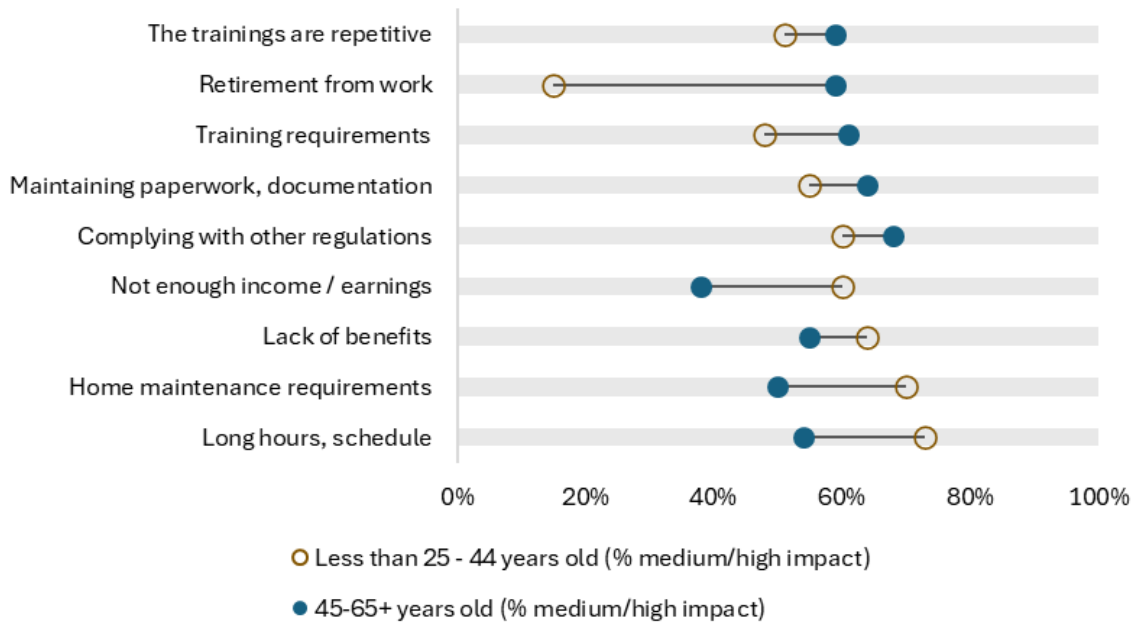
**Table 4: Differences based on years in business**

Factor	Less than five years (% medium/high impact)	Five years or more (% medium/high impact)
Long hours, schedule	74%	59%
Home maintenance requirements	69%	56%
Not enough income/earnings	69%	42%
Lack of benefits	68%	56%
Mentally/physically demanding work	57%	51%
Complying with regulations	57%	66%
Maintaining required paperwork, documentation	49%	63%
Trainings are repetitive	40%	60%
Training requirements	47%	57%

## Age

The survey asked respondents to select how old they were when they closed their business. In the analysis, respondents who answered this question were split into two groups—those 44 and under (N=188) and those 45 and over (N=238). While both groups rated complying with regulations in the top five factors impacting their decision to close, older respondents rated this more highly than younger respondents.

**Figure 9: Factors impacting closure based on age when closed**



**Table 5: Differences based on age when closed**

Factor	Less than 25 - 44 years old (% medium/high impact)	45-65+ years old (% medium/high impact)
Long hours, schedule	73%	54%
Home maintenance requirements	70%	50%
Lack of benefits	64%	55%
Not enough income/earnings	60%	38%
Complying with other regulations	60%	68%
Maintaining paperwork, documentation	55%	64%
Training requirements	48%	61%
Retirement from work	15%	59%
Trainings are repetitive	51%	59%

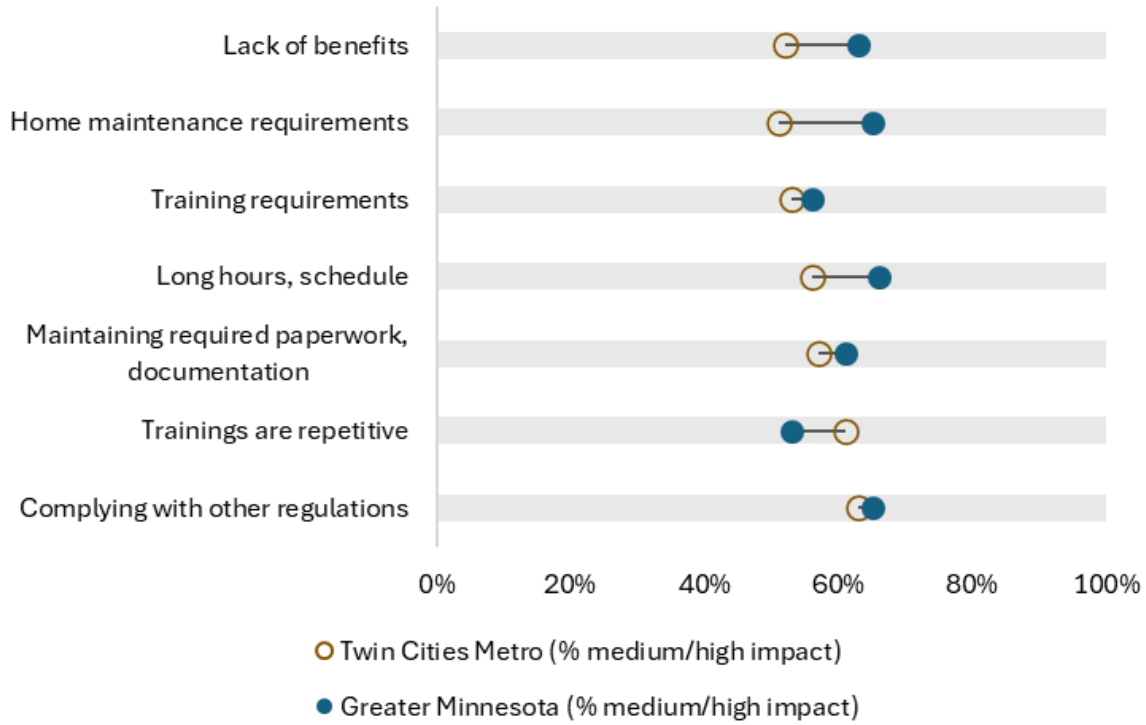
## Region

There were few regional differences in stated reasons for closure. In the analysis, respondents were sorted by the Twin Cities Metro Area (N=185) versus Greater Minnesota (N=295). Both groups rated complying with

regulations, maintaining required paperwork/documentation, and the long hours/schedule in the top five factors impacting their decision to close. In addition to these shared factors:

- Twin Cities Metro respondents rated issues of training (trainings are repetitive and training requirements) in their top five factors.
- Greater Minnesota respondents rated home maintenance requirements (wear and tear on home) and lack of benefits (health insurance, retirement, etc.) in their top five factors.

**Figure 9: Factors impacting closure based on region**



**Table 6: Differences based on region**

Factor	Twin Cities Metro (% medium/high impact)	Greater Minnesota (% medium/high impact)
Complying with other regulations	63%	65%
Trainings are repetitive	61%	53%
Maintaining required paperwork, documentation	57%	61%
Long hours, schedule	56%	66%
Training requirements	53%	56%
Home maintenance requirements	51%	65%
Lack of benefits	52%	63%

## Focus Groups

One of the survey questions asked if the respondent would be interested in participating in a follow-up conversation. Of the 146 respondents who indicated they would be interested, 33 replied to a follow-up scheduling survey and were invited to participate in focus groups to gather more details about why they closed their business between 2020 and 2025. MAD hosted four focus groups in October and November 2025, engaging a total of eight former family child care providers in deeper discussion.

The focus group conversations further explored questions asked in the survey, including gathering details on the providers' closure experiences, operational challenges, support systems (or lack thereof), thoughts on changes needed in child care, and advice for policymakers. A guide used for the focus groups appears in Appendix D: Former family child care focus group guide.

Family child care providers participating in the focus groups closed their programs primarily due to physical strain, health issues, burnout, and evolving family needs. About half found a new employment opportunity while half retired. One participant recently reopened her child care business after a few years away. Those who found new employment stayed in the education or child care services sectors. For some, the closure was a relief from the constant stress of compliance and workload, while others expressed distress about their decision to close, noting their affection for the children in their care and the guilt of causing families to find new providers in a tight market.

Focus group participants discussed operational challenges including significant and increasing paperwork, unclear or inconsistent licensing expectations, rules designed for centers being applied to homes, and the physical demands of caring for children in home settings. Providers felt licensors had shifted from supportive partners to enforcers, and difficulties finding substitutes meant little to no time off. While peer networks and associations were strong supports, many found available grant programs too burdensome to access. One participant shared, "I didn't know about many grants or how to apply for them—I mostly saw that they had a lot of rules. Grants around equipment would have been helpful, most of my things came from garage sales."

Providers emphasized that policymakers should seek to better understand the reality of family child care work by spending time in homes with providers. They also recommended that policymakers should reduce overly rigid or impractical regulations and improve recognition of the profession's value. Participants highlighted areas for improvement that would support family providers which included: reasonable rules, robust substitute systems, benefits like health insurance, and policies that respect the unique strengths of mixed-age, home-based care. In the words of one provider, "It got to be a little daunting with the laws and regulations. I understand we need to keep the kids safe, and I did, but keeping up with the paperwork and new rules was difficult. They say the legislature make the laws for us, but they should come in and see it." Another shared, "A lot of the rules for the centers don't work well for the homes when you think about the space. Uniform rules on separate entities are hard to do—I'm also a rule follower and it was hard. I didn't want to make my house look like an institution, this is my house—parents choose a home because it's a home, not a center."

Looking ahead, providers expressed concern for the future of family child care, citing fewer new entrants and increasing challenges related to operating successfully. One noted the wave of retirements that is likely coming soon from long-term providers and the lack of a robust pipeline of new providers to fill in the gaps. Participants

emphasized the need for better marketing of the field, stronger mentoring models, and clearer communication about supports. Many worried that without meaningful changes, the family child care provider roster—which families rely on for affordability and flexibility—will continue to decline, creating broader workforce and community challenges.

## Key Findings and Looking Ahead

### Finding One

**Regulatory burdens were noted as a significant factor in closing. Efforts to update and streamline regulatory systems are critical.**

Providers understand the need for regulations, but they are overwhelmed by the increasing number and extent of them. When asked in the survey, at least three quarters of respondents rated individual regulations as having low to no impact on their decision to close. However, 64 percent of respondents selected “complying with other regulations” as having a medium to high impact on their decision to close, which was the highest rated question in the survey. This indicates a general feeling that the extent and number of regulations, rather than the effect of any individual regulation, is the core issue. Focus group feedback reinforced this idea. When asked to elaborate on regulations in focus groups, providers felt the addition of new regulations overall had changed the way they viewed their child care business. Many child care providers who were nearing retirement cited this changing regulatory environment (in addition to health, life circumstances, and changing family dynamics) as one of the primary signs that it was time to close their business.

Focus group participants highlighted the need to seek balance between child safety and the customized care for children that made their family child care business distinct from the care offered at a child care center. Providers consistently mentioned that rules continue to be added, making it not only difficult to navigate but also challenging to tailor care for the children and families they serve. Many felt that applying the same rules to family child care settings and centers was inappropriate and at times excessive. Many suggested streamlining rules and regulations and considering the context of different models when developing rules. One interviewee suggested tiered licensing as a possible solution.

### Looking ahead

Work is already underway to address this concern. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families has initiated the Child Care Regulation Modernization project in partnership with the National Association for Regulatory Administration. The project addresses three areas for both family child care providers and child care centers. The areas include frameworks for abbreviated inspections, the development of a risk-based violation system, and revised licensing standards.

### Finding Two

**Due to the changing dynamic between licensors and providers, expanded opportunities for technical assistance would be beneficial.**

Providers described concerns about their relationships with county licensors. Licensors, once seen as partners in identifying and addressing issues, are now often seen as adversaries and monitors. Providers described instances in the past when their licensor would work with them to come up with solutions if they were not in compliance with rules. They contrasted these experiences with a new dynamic where the licensor would actively look for anything that would be not in compliance with rules.

In the words of one survey respondent, “I felt harassed by my licensor and overwhelmed by state regulations.” Another shared, “Very poor support from licensing. It seemed like they were always looking for how to harm daycares rather than support them. They want daycares to follow certain criteria but could not even tell us what those criteria were or answer any questions about them.”

In addition, the survey found that peer networks and local associations are a significant source of support, but providers need additional supports. These additional supports could include providing guidance for license holders which may improve dynamics between licensors and providers.

Survey prompts focused on the value of structured supports and programs for family child care providers. The survey did not ask specifically about peer networks and local associations, but these were significant themes in the focus groups. Participants described the support, encouragement, and resources they received from their local, often county or regional, child care associations. They also shared the positive impacts of appreciation events and celebrations.

In addition to the formal association structure, informal peer groups and networks contributed meaningfully to the support environment. One focus group member commented, “We had an association that would bring people in for monthly trainings. I had a good friend who did daycare, and we’d talk about themes to do to keep things interesting and keep going.” Another shared, “No programs helped, but we had friends that encouraged me to stay in who were also providers. We still spend time together.” In addition to existing support programs and systems, 38 percent of survey respondents noted additional coaching for business administration would be beneficial, as well as support for finding and applying for grants (26 percent) and guidance on licensing requirements from the licensor or Minnesota Department of Health (20 percent).

## Looking ahead

The survey highlighted an interest in supports related to business processes and resource access as well as supports for navigating relationships with local licensing officials. Family child care providers often lean into peer networks for guidance. There is an opportunity to broaden that network of support and expand the range of supports available to providers by developing a targeted technical assistance approach and expanding access to shared services such as pooled purchasing and mentoring. Technical assistance may also help guide providers to existing programs and resources that are available.

A technical assistance team, such as Child Care Wayfinder that can provide targeted support and guidance for unique instances, has the potential for providers to address challenges before they become significant factors in a closure decision. Access to shared services can lessen the burden of operating a small business.

An example of targeted technical support and shared services is EO Shared Services Alliance in Virginia. This program offers tiered memberships that include 1:1 business coaching, compliance support, professional

development, discounted supplies, and child care management software. They also offer access to telehealth services and health, dental, and vision plans. In accordance with [Minnesota Legislature](#), DCYF has partnered with local organizations to pilot this shared services model (which includes access to substitutes). Though it is currently small in scale, it may be bolstered through public dollars. Another opportunity to provide technical support would include engaging former providers as consultants, advisors, coaches or substitutes.

## Finding Three

**There is a perception that current messaging downplays the professionalism and value family child care providers provide to society and local economies. An intentional, statewide communications campaign could reinforce the professional identity of family child care providers and strengthen the pipeline of future providers.**

The perception of current messaging around the professionalism and value family child care providers provide to society and local economies emerged primarily in the focus groups. Messaging came up several times when asked about what supports would be beneficial and what policymakers should know. Providers indicated that they often felt leaders and community members see them only as babysitters, not as key partners in providing early childhood education and a vital element of the local economy. The survey highlighted that about half of all providers have a professional degree beyond high school. One focus group participant shared that, “If we couldn’t work, parents couldn’t work—we provide an important role which is continuing to shrink, it’s bad right now. It was insulting to be called a babysitter by some legislators.” Another suggested, “Better messaging. The messaging that has been brought out is that they [legislators] don’t know what we’re doing and the value of multiage cohorts in child development. [There is an] assumption that because we are working out of our home that we don’t know anything. We are partners along with the parents. We play an important role in parenting and child development. With families not living close they benefit from that kind of support. We have a lot of wisdom and experience even if it’s not from a textbook.” The audience primarily receiving this messaging would be the general public (especially parents) and the legislature.

## Looking ahead

One opportunity to better address current messaging would be the development and deployment of a statewide messaging campaign that elevates and celebrates the importance of family child care providers for children, families, and communities. This may require dedicated financial resources depending on the scale and scope. Family child care providers should also be involved with the development of messaging and the identification of ideal communication methods to ensure messaging stands out.

## Finding Four

**Inability to take time off and access to health and retirement benefits are clear pain points for providers that may be addressed through the expansion of shared services structures.**

Another factor that impacted providers was a lack of health benefits and the ability to take personal time off. Sixty-two percent of survey respondents rated long hours as having a medium to high impact on their decision to close. One of the factors that determined the ability to take personal time was the availability of substitute

providers, something many providers lacked over the course of their time in business. Thirty-eight percent of respondents rated having greater availability of substitutes as one of the top supports that would have kept them in business longer, and 45 percent of respondents rated difficulty finding substitute providers as having a medium to high impact on closing their child care business. While the availability of more substitutes may positively impact the longevity of family child care providers, steps need to be taken to help providers build trusted relationships with substitutes.

The top-rated personal factor that impacted providers' decisions to close was the mentally and physically challenging nature of the work, with 53 percent of survey respondents rating it as having a medium to high impact. Focus group participants frequently brought up the wear and tear the work had on their bodies, which was especially impactful given the lack of benefits or availability of substitutes. One focus group participant shared, "[It's a] very physical job, felt that wear on my body."

One survey respondent summarized this sentiment in an open-ended response, "Using your own home means you can never relax. The mental demand for having to make sure that your own house is perfect all of the time is outrageous. The constant mental demand of having to make sure that your home is perfect whether or not daycare is in session is too much. On top of the mental load of caring for children, making them happy and healthy, and teaching them, you also have to worry about where you're going to get health insurance and how you're going to pay that \$5,000 fee for taxes because you didn't pay in all year even though you barely scraped by."

Fifty-nine percent of respondents rated a lack of benefits as having a medium to high impact on their decision to close their child care business. Specific benefits discussed in focus groups included health insurance, retirement, and paid time off. One focus group participant brought up a county-wide (in Swift County) discussion to include child care providers in a group insurance plan (through the county or the state health care plan) as an incentive to recruit and keep child care providers. One survey respondent shared, "I just wish people would appreciate us more and have some benefits while we are allowing the parents to have their benefits." Long hours, physical and mental strain from the work, family needs, and burnout all contributed to closures.

## Looking ahead

There are a handful of locations in Minnesota that are testing models for family child care provider substitutes through a pool model and subsidized fee structure. The need for substitutes exists across the state and the models should be expanded and made available and accessible to all family child care providers.

There are several states that are experimenting with policy and programmatic options for increasing access to health and retirement benefits for family child care providers. Minnesota laws allow for shared services alliances and may be further leveraged to address this area of concern. In addition, Minnesota's Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program, used by the majority of family child care providers, includes paying for benefits as an allowable use of these funds. Some emerging models to increase child care provider access to benefits include OregonSaves, a state run program that provides retirement coverage for employees whose private sector employers do not offer that benefit. Oregon recently opened this program to child care providers and seeded the fund with American Rescue Plan dollars. Another program is the DC Health Link. Governed by the DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority, DC Health Link offers a program called HealthCare4Childcare. The program provides free health insurance premiums for employees of licensed child development centers and

homes who are residents of the District. Nonresidents can receive discounted premiums. This model also supports health insurance for small businesses in other sectors. Such a model may benefit a broader array of entrepreneurs in Minnesota in addition to family child care providers.

## **Comparisons to the 2020 Results Management survey**

Several of the survey findings are consistent with the results of the 2020 survey conducted by Results Management. Complying with regulations, completing required paperwork, long hours, and a lack of benefits scored highly on both surveys. When asked specifically, documentation appeared to be less of a factor influencing closure in the 2025 survey. Providers used supports at similar levels in both surveys, with both surveys frequently rating the Child and Adult Food Care Program, Child Care Assistance Program, and Parent Aware Grants as supports used, although providers used regional supports with Child Care Aware more often in the 2025 survey. When asked about supports that may have helped keep businesses open, providers also responded similarly in both surveys, rating greater availability of substitutes, business support, and grants to fund professional development as the highest factors.

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- Tran, Tu-Uyen. "Fewer Child Care Businesses Struggled in 2023, but Many Relied on State Aid to Survive," *Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis*, April 15, 2024. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2024/fewer-child-care-businesses-struggled-in-2023-but-many-relied-on-state-aid-to-survive>.
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Tran, Tu-Uyen. "With Long Hours and Low Profits, Who Wants to Open a Child Care Business?" *Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis*, October 6, 2023. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2023/with-long-hours-and-low-profits-who-wants-to-open-a-child-care-business>.

Vieira, Natalie and Shannon Hill. "Creating the Conditions for Family Child Care to Thrive," *All Our Kin*, October 2019. [https://allourkin.org/files/galleries/Family\\_Child\\_Care\\_to\\_Thrive.pdf](https://allourkin.org/files/galleries/Family_Child_Care_to_Thrive.pdf).

Werner, Marnie. "Rural Child Care Solutions: From the Ground Up," *Center for Rural Policy and Development*, September 13, 2022. <https://www.ruralmn.org/rural-child-care-solutions-from-the-ground-up/>.

## Appendix B: Former family child care provider survey instrument

Management Analysis and Development (MAD), a consulting group within state government, is conducting this survey on behalf of the Office on the Economic Status of Women (OESW) and the state's Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers (OFCCP). The purpose of this survey is to hear from formerly licensed family child care providers who closed in the last five years. We would like to understand your experiences and the primary reasons why you closed your family child care business in order to better support current and future family child care providers.

This survey asks questions about any factors that may have affected your decision to close. As a former provider, you have valuable input that will inform state and local policymakers and be used to help other family child care providers as well as children and families in Minnesota. Participation in this survey is voluntary. There is no consequence if you decide not to participate in the survey, but we will not have the benefit of your input.

Responses to this survey are classified as public data, which means that our organization will be required to share the information if it is requested. However, we will only report information in summary form. MAD will summarize the results into a report that will be shared with OESW and DHS. Information that can identify you as an individual is considered private under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act ([Minnesota Statutes Section 13.64](#)), meaning MAD will not share it with others except as provided by law.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and you can return to a partially completed survey at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact Trevor Frey from MAD at [trevor.frey@state.mn.us](mailto:trevor.frey@state.mn.us).

### Business and owner information

**What year did you close your family child care license?**

- 2025
- 2024
- 2023
- 2022
- 2021
- 2020
- Before 2020
- I didn't close my child care license

**What was your primary reason for becoming a licensed family child care provider? Select the top reason.**

- To provide child care for my own children or related children (i.e., grandchildren)
- To work in child care or early childhood education field
- To own and operate my own business
- To run a home business
- Other (please specify)

**How many years did you continuously hold your most recent family child care license?**

- Less than one year
- 1–2 years
- 2–3 years
- 3–4 years
- 5–10 years
- 10–20 years
- 20 years or more

**Did you close your family child care license before you wanted to?**

- Yes
- No

**How old were you when you closed your family child care license?**

- Less than 25 years old
- 25–34 years old
- 35–44 years old
- 45–54 years old
- 55–64 years old
- 65+ years old
- Prefer not to say

**Which of the following age ranges of children were you open to serving? Select all that apply.**

- Infants
- Toddlers
- Preschoolers
- School-age

## **Demographics**

**What is your age?**

- Less than 25 years old
- 25–34 years old
- 35–44 years old
- 45–54 years old
- 55–64 years old
- 65+ years old
- Prefer not to say

### What is your primary language?

- English
- Spanish
- Hmong
- Somali
- Other (please describe)
- Prefer not to say

### What is your race/ethnicity?

- Asian
- Biracial/Multiracial
- Black/African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x
- Middle Eastern/North African
- Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say

### What is the highest level of education you received?

- High school
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree (master's or PhD)

*(For those who indicated they had an associate's, bachelor's, or graduate degree)* **You indicated that you had a degree. What major was this degree in?**

- Early childhood education
- Business
- Other (please specify)

## Reasons for closing

The following questions will ask about business, personal, and administrative factors that may have led to your decision to close your business. Below is a definition of each of these factors:

- **Business:** Factors related to the work, staffing, and costs of your business.
- **Personal:** Any personal effects felt from the work or major changes that occurred in your life over the course of your business.

- Administrative: Paperwork, requirements of running the business (such as training or compliance), or any interactions with state or county agencies/organizations.

**How much impact did these business factors have on your decision to close your child care business?** *Options include High impact, Medium impact, Low impact, No impact, Not applicable*

- Long hours, schedule
- Lack of benefits (health insurance, retirement, etc.)
- Limited or no professional support
- Not enough income/low earnings
- Families couldn't pay the rate I would need
- Managing relationships with parents
- Managing enrollment, turnover in families
- Physically-demanding work
- Home maintenance requirements (wear and tear on my home)
- Difficulty finding substitute providers
- CCAP (child care subsidy) reimbursement rate was too low
- Food program reimbursement rate was too low
- Other business factors (please specify)

*(If any impacts were rated as High impact)* **You selected (business impact) as having a high impact. If you selected more than one business factor, please list which most impacted your decision to close your business. If you only selected one factor, leave this question blank.**

**How much impact did these personal factors have on your decision to close your child care business?** *Options include High impact, Medium impact, Low impact, No impact, Not applicable*

- Wanted a change in job field or job conditions
- Change in child care responsibilities
- Retirement from work
- Mentally/physically demanding work
- Isolation from other adults
- Other personal reasons

*(If any impacts were rated as High impact)* **You selected (personal impact) as having a high impact. If you selected more than one personal factor, please list which most impacted your decision to close your business. If you only selected one factor, leave this question blank.**

**How much impact did these administrative factors have on your decision to close your child care business?** *Options include High impact, Medium impact, Low impact, No impact, Not applicable*

- Maintaining required paperwork, documentation
- Training requirements
- Complying with other regulations
- Background study requirements for myself

- Background study requirements for others
- Inability to get a variance
- Resolving citations with the county licenser or DHS
- Interactions with the county licenser
- Interactions with DHS
- Other administrative factors

*(If any impacts were rated as High impact) You selected (administrative factor) as having a high impact. If you selected more than one administrative factor, please list which most impacted your decision to close your business. If you only selected one factor, leave this question blank.*

**Documentation is required as part of running a licensed child care business. To what extent did the following types of documentation impact your decision to close your child care business? Options include High impact, Medium impact, Low impact, No impact, Not applicable**

- Documentation required for licensing
- Ongoing updates to children’s records
- Financial record keeping (i.e., taxes, employee records)
- Food program forms
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) billing forms
- Parent Aware forms
- Completing paperwork to obtain additional resources (i.e., grants)
- Tracking attendance, however applicable
- Other documentation

*(If any impacts were rated as High impact) You selected (documentation impact) as having a high impact. If you selected more than one documentation type, please list which most impacted your decision to close your business. If you only selected one documentation type, leave this question blank.*

**Training is required for all licensed providers. How much of an impact did training have on your decision to close your child care business? Options include High impact, Medium impact, Low impact, No impact, Not applicable**

- Ability to afford training
- Ability to find training that’s convenient for me (time offered, frequency, location)
- The trainings are repetitive
- Trainings are not challenging enough
- Taking time away from business or family to attend training
- Understanding training requirements
- Other training

*(If any impacts were rated as High impact) You selected (training impact) as having a high impact. If you selected more than one training, please list which most impacted your decision to close your business. If you only selected one training, leave this question blank.*

**Regulations are intended to ensure minimum health and safety standards. How much of an impact did regulations have on your decision to close your child care business? Options include High impact, Medium impact, Low impact, No impact, Not applicable**

- Infant safe sleep requirements
- Physical location or space requirements
- Water, food, and nutrition requirements
- Background study requirements for myself
- Background study requirements for others
- Activities and equipment requirements
- Capacity, ratio, and age distribution requirements
- Behavior guidance requirements
- Other regulations

*(If any impacts were rated as High impact)* **You selected (regulation impact) as high impact regulation(s). If you selected more than one regulation, please list which most impacted your decision to close your business. If you only selected one regulation, leave this question blank.**

## Supports and closing

**Did you make use of any of the following supports, payments, or assistance during the time your business was in operation? Select all that apply.**

- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- A regional grant through Child Care Aware
- CCAP (Child Care Assistance Program)
- Early Learning Scholarships
- Parent Aware Quality Coaching
- Parent Aware Grants to improve quality
- Child Care Aware Professional Development Advisor support
- Coaching, consultation, or training through First Children's Finance
- Coaching or consultation through the Center for Inclusive Child Care
- T.E.A.C.H or CDA Scholarships
- R.E.E.T.A.I.N. Grants
- Mentor program
- Great Start Compensation Grants
- I was not aware of these supports
- Other (please specify)

**Which of these additional supports or services, if any, would have helped you keep your child care business open for longer? Select all that apply.**

- Greater availability of substitutes
- Guidance on finding and applying for a grant
- Grants to fund professional development, curriculum, equipment, or home improvement expenses

- Business support (tax information, setting rates, etc.)
- Guidance on licensing requirements from licensor or DHS
- Training or professional development opportunities
- Higher CCAP (Child Care Assistance Program) rates
- Support from an association or provider group
- Mentor program
- Coaching support
- Additional supports such as these would not have mattered
- Other (please specify)

**Do you have any other comments you would like to share about why you closed your business or what could have helped to keep your business open longer?**

**Have you considered reopening your family child care business?**

- Yes
- No

**Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up conversation?**

- Yes
- No

**You selected that you would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up conversation. Please provide your name**

**Please provide your phone number**

**Please provide your email**

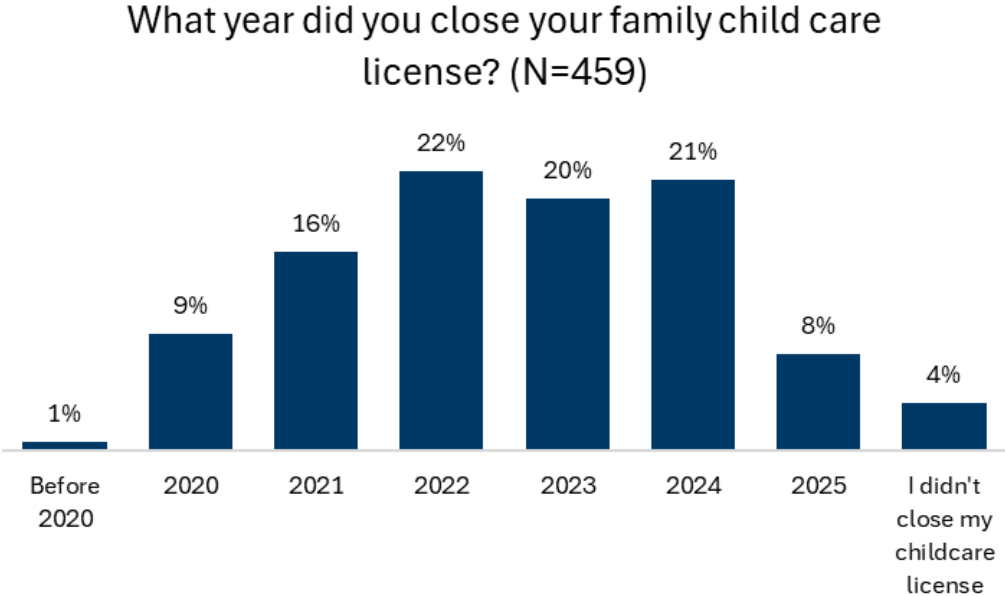
**Do you prefer having an interpreter?**

**Thank you for taking the survey. Please click submit below (the check mark on mobile devices) to make sure your responses are recorded.**

# Appendix C: Former family child care provider survey demographics

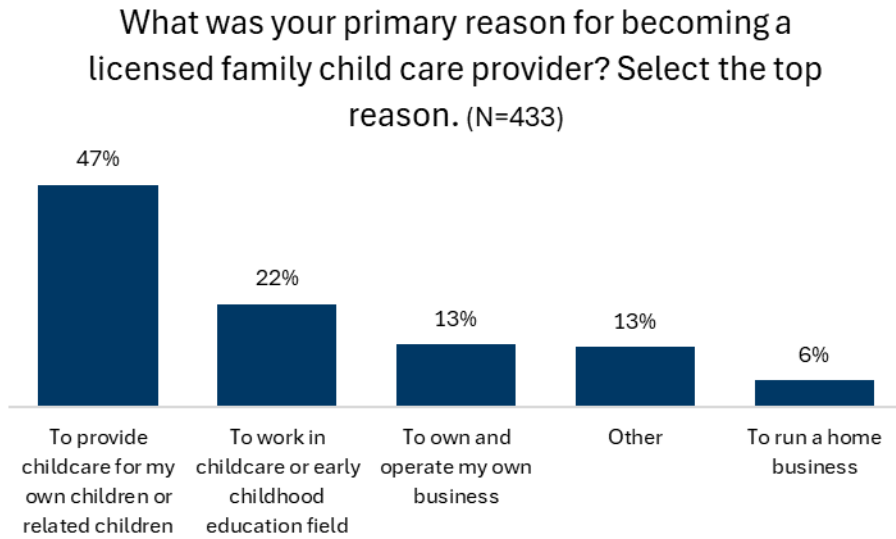
The survey asked respondents demographic questions about themselves and their family child care license. As shown in Figure 9, over half of the respondents who closed their licenses between 2020 and 2025 did so between 2022 and 2024.

Figure 9: Year providers closed their family child care license between 2020 and 2025.



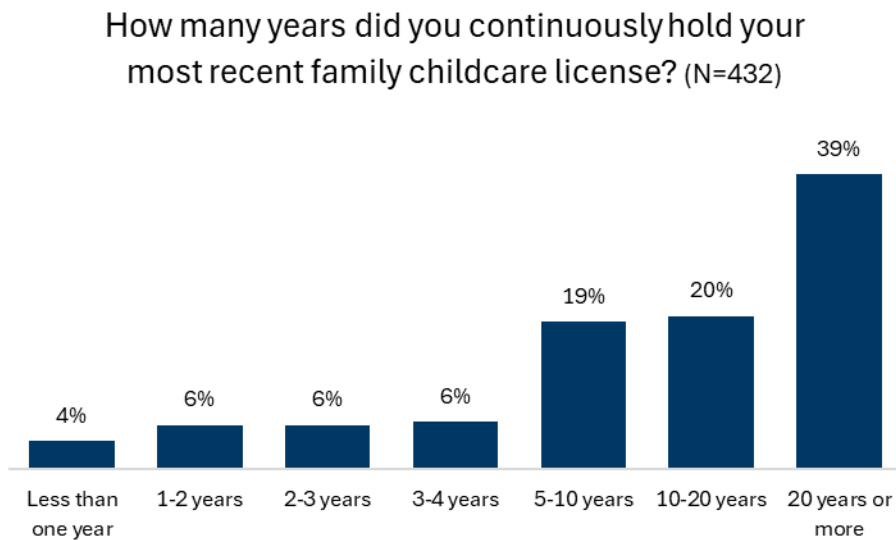
When asked why they became a licensed family child care provider, nearly half (47 percent) of the respondents said they wanted to provide child care for their own children or related children (Figure 10). Other responses included wanting to work in the child care or early childhood education field (22 percent) and to own and operate their own business (13 percent).

**Figure 10: Primary reason for becoming a licensed family child care provider.**



Respondents most commonly held their family child care license for many years before closing. Thirty nine percent of respondents held their license for 20 years or more and 78 percent of respondents held their family child care license for at least 5 years (Figure 11).

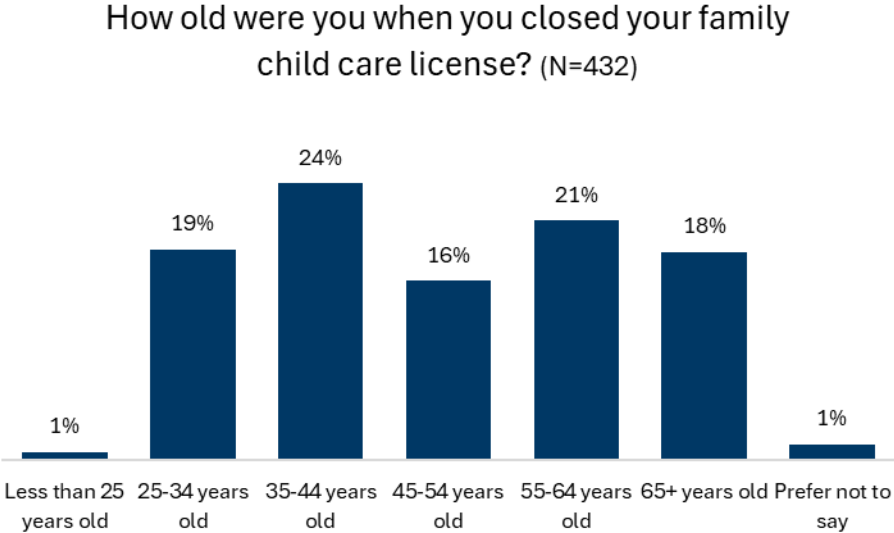
**Figure 11: Years providers continuously held their most recent family child care license.**



Respondents were split when asked if they closed their family child care license before they wanted to. Fifty-three percent of respondents said they did not close earlier while 47 percent of respondents did (Figure 12).

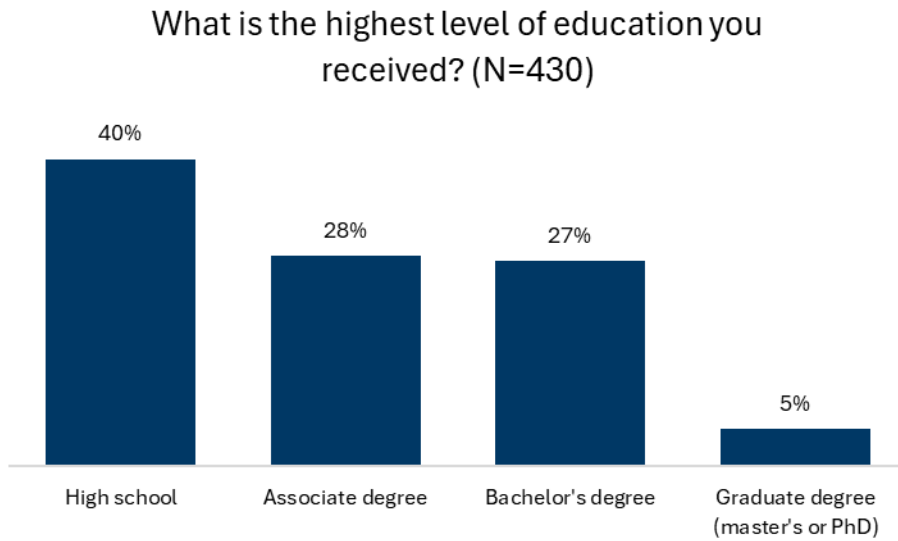
There was no reported clear age range of providers who closed their family child care license. As shown in Figure 13, the vast majority of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 65, with a fairly even distribution across surveyed age ranges. Each age range was represented by 16 to 24 percent of respondents. The one outlier was the age range of 25 years or younger, represented by 1 percent of respondents.

**Figure 12: Age of providers when they closed their family child care license.**



Nearly all (98 percent) respondents indicated that they spoke English as their primary language and identified their race/ethnicity as white. As shown in Figure 14, the most common level of education respondents received was high school (40 percent). About a quarter of respondents had an associate degree, another quarter of respondents had a bachelor’s degree, and five percent of respondents reported having a graduate degree.

**Figure 13: The highest level of education respondents received.**



Of the respondents who received a college degree, twenty nine percent indicated their degree was in early childhood education, and another fourteen percent indicated their degree was in business (Figure 15). Respondents also reported receiving degrees related to education, psychology, social work, nursing, and law.

## Appendix D: Former family child care focus group guide

**Purpose:** To deepen an understanding of the nuances of the experiences, challenges, and decisions that led former family child care (FCC) providers to close their programs. The insights will inform policy, support strategies, and systems improvement.

**Setting:** Virtual using Zoom, add phone number for those that are unable to use computer

**Time:** 1 hour

**Facilitator:** 1 moderator and 1 note taker

**Introduction from MAD:** Good morning/afternoon/evening and thank you for joining us for our focus group today. My name is <name> and I am joined by my colleague <name>, we are state workers from Management Analysis and Development (MAD), a consulting group within state government. This focus group is following up from a survey we conducted on behalf of the Office on the Economic Status of Women and the state's Office of the Ombuds for Family Child Care Providers to learn more around the circumstances that lead to the closure of formerly licensed family child care providers in the past five years.

Participation in this focus group is voluntary, and you may skip questions or leave the conversation at any time. Responses to these questions will be pooled into a larger summary that will go into a report shared out with OESW and OFCCP. Any identifying information is considered private under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act ([Minnesota Statutes Section 13.64](#)), meaning MAD will not share it with others except as provided by law. This focus group will take about one hour.

### Agenda and Discussion Guide

#### Welcome and Introductions

- Introduce facilitators
- Explain the purpose of the focus group
- Emphasize confidentiality and voluntary participation
- Review ground rules:
  - One person speaks at a time
  - All perspectives are valid
  - It's okay to pass on a question
  - Everything shared stays confidential

#### Closure Experience

- What were the main reasons you decided to close your program?
  - Pandemic impact?
  - Was it a single factor, or a combination of issues?
- How did it feel to make that decision?

## Operational Challenges

- What were the most difficult parts of running your FCC business?
  - Probing question—any technology/modernization issues?
  - Probing question—long work hours?
  - Probing question—balancing administrative work with care giving?
- Were there particular policies, regulations, or administrative burdens that made things harder?

## Support Systems

- What kinds of support did you have—financial, professional, emotional, physical/mental well-being?
- Did you face any challenges related to substitutes and managing time off?
- Were there programs or people that helped you stay in the field longer?
  - *Probing question—Great Start Compensation feedback*
- What supports do you wish had existed?

## Looking Back/Looking Ahead

- If you could go back and change one thing (either specific to your program or more broadly related to child care) that might have helped you stay open, what would it be?
- Would you ever consider providing care again? Part-time or not being sole provider in your home (substitute, mentor, trainer)? What would need to be different?
- How is your current employment or business different?
  - Fewer hours?
  - More flexibility?
  - Less job satisfaction?
  - Income change?

## Advice for Policymakers

- Preface—the legislature will be hearing from a bill related to regulation modernization, along with other related bills. All the licensing rules will be updated this year by the legislature.
- What should people in decision-making roles understand about the experience of FCC providers?
- What would have helped you feel more valued and supported?
  - Policy-wise, relationship with clients (families), more money, local support, other orgs, etc.?

## Wrap-up

- Is there anything else you want to share that we didn't ask about?
- Thank participants for their time and insights.
- Provide any follow-up details (e.g., how findings will be used, when they might hear back).