

## WHAT CHILD CARE PROVIDERS WOULD DO IF THEY HAD A MAGIC WAND

Structural change is necessary in order to ensure child care providers have what they need, and caregiving is properly valued. The child care providers we spoke with shared several recommendations as a starting point for what that change should look like. Most commonly, they noted a need for higher compensation, guaranteed health care, and shorter or more flexible hours. They also raised the need for other supports, and for a re-valuation of caregiving.



**Increased Pay and Health Insurance.** While pay expectations varied by state, all providers wanted to earn more through their jobs. Of the providers who worked additional jobs, many wanted to be able to make enough through their paid care work to be able to leave their side jobs. On the flip side, owners also wanted to be able to pay their employees more for their work. Many of them shared their dreams of what they could do if they earned more— buying a bigger house for their child care or family, and having more time to spend with their family. Providers also expressed the need for significantly less expensive and more readily available health insurance.



**Shorter Hours and More Paid Time Off.** Many of the providers we spoke with wanted to work shorter hours if they were still able to make enough money to support themselves. Many providers worked significantly more than 40 hours a week, so even reducing their hours and increasing their pay so they could work 40 hours and support their families was ideal for them. Other providers preferred working 30 hours a week or six hours a day, so they would have sufficient time to care for their family members. Providers also raised the need for more paid time off, and for home-based providers, for having a system where they could more easily call a substitute so they could attend to their own health or other needs.



**Support for Their Families.** Providers described wanting direct support to nurture the growth and education of their own children. For providers with young children, providers suggested meaningful discounts for child care and for providers with school-age children, some wanted support for summer programs or aftercare, or special activities and tutoring.



**Public Education.** Providers emphasized the need for public education on the importance of child care and early education. This is critical in building public support and respect for early educators and moving toward just pay and working conditions. Parents, as caregivers who share some of the same struggles as child care providers and interact with them frequently, can play a critical role increasing the visibility of child care and advocating for investments that value the work providers do.



**Workplace Flexibility for All Parents of Young Children.** Providers noted that some of their struggles, such as caring for sick children and working long hours, stemmed from the inflexible work conditions of their children’s parents. As a remedy, they recommended all professions having workplace policies that support families. Parent’s need more flexible scheduling and paid time off so that the burden does not ultimately fall to child care providers.



**Professional Development.** Overall, providers felt that meaningful and accessible professional development opportunities were important, but too often the opportunities available were superficial, rushed, or did not actually translate to the type of work they do with children. There was a large variation in the types of professional development the providers we spoke with participated in, from “repetitive” annual trainings that had not changed in 15 years to college courses that helped them work toward an Associates, Bachelors, or Master’s degree in the early childhood field. They emphasized that training should not just check a box to comply with requirements, but provide useful information about child development, curriculum development, and more. Some providers pointed out that the incentives for professional development opportunities could be helpful, and incremental raises offered with degree attainment were appreciated. Others noted the importance of being able to do training during the normal work day, so that it did not eat into hours that they spent with their own families, that it be free-of-cost to providers, available in multiple relevant languages, and open to undocumented providers and DACA recipients. Providers also need help navigating the different classes and resources, as they work such long hours and have limited time to seek out supports—an even greater challenge for those who have language barriers or the added barrier of their legal status.



**Additional Support for Home-Based Providers.** There are specific supports home-based providers need because of the unique position they are in providing care from their homes and often running businesses by themselves. Providers expressed needing help navigating all of the aspects involved in owning and running a business. Home-based providers typically relied on both formal, professional and informal networks of other providers to get information on licensing and setting their rates, navigating professional development, complying with city codes, and to connect with other providers socially. However, providers expressed that these networks can be difficult to find, or not necessarily racially and ethnically representative of the field. Ideally, they would be more coordinated, easier to access, racially and ethnically representative of the providers in the area, and language inclusive.

Many home-based providers also expressed a desire for more financial support for the fixed costs of running a child care program. Some wanted more space for their family and child care, so the two spaces could be separate. They also expressed a desire for funding and stipends to cover the day-to-day expenses related to cleaning and maintaining their houses, and addressing the general wear and tear involved in owning a child care program. For those who had received federal support during the pandemic for these purposes, it had been incredibly helpful.