

Martinsville and Henry County Survey of Childcare Needs

Report of Results

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Executive Summary

The Martinsville and Henry County Survey of Childcare Needs was conducted during late summer of 2019 by the Center for Survey Research at the University of Virginia on behalf of The Harvest Foundation, the City of Martinsville, and Henry County. The purpose of the survey was to assess unmet childcare needs among parents who work or live in Martinsville and Henry County. In particular, The Harvest Foundation was interested in understanding the childcare experience of and gaps in services for moderate and low income families.

This survey used non-probability sampling, with community partners and local employers inviting residents/employees via email to complete the online survey, yielding 1,929 completions. Because these responses are non-probability, results cannot necessarily be generalized to the entire population and should instead be viewed as a window into the experiences of the nearly 2,000 parents who completed the survey. A series of focus groups of local providers was conducted to supplement the survey findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of childcare in the area. This report presents these findings, which may be used to inform future programming and support for childcare needs in Martinsville/Henry County.

Current Childcare Arrangement and Satisfaction

The survey began by determining the current childcare landscape. Among respondents, licensed childcare centers were the most widely used type of childcare. However, when looking just among respondents whose annual household income was below \$50,000, home providers are the most widely used arrangement.

The majority of respondents were satisfied with their current children arrangement; however, approximately one in seven respondents reported some level of dissatisfaction. Further, overall satisfaction differed significantly by household composition with respondents in one-adult households reporting a lower average satisfaction with their current childcare than respondents in other household types. Satisfaction across specific aspects of childcare differed by income. Specifically, respondents with household income under \$50,000 reported statistically lower satisfaction than respondents with higher household income when it came to cost of care and hours of care.

Barriers to Childcare

When asked about specific barriers respondents encounter in their current childcare, the most widely cited issue was lacking a childcare option for a child when they are sick, reported by 53% of respondents. Ideally, parents would like a drop-in childcare facility that could watch children when they are sick and can't attend school or their regularly scheduled childcare. The second and third most reported items across all respondents were needing care that is more consistent and having concerns about the quality of care.

Coverage

Almost half of respondents (47%) agreed that they need child care that is more consistent. The second most common coverage issue was needing care that is more flexible. Regarding desired availability, respondents requested facilities with extended hours (opening earlier in the morning

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and staying open later in the evening), childcare available on an irregular or sporadic schedule (to accommodate non-traditional 9-5 jobs, such as hospital shifts), and again childcare for children when they're sick, along with coverage on weekends and during school breaks.

Approximately a third of respondents reported trouble finding care that meets their hours. When looking at respondents whose income was less than \$50,000, the rate jumped even higher to 50% experiencing this barrier.

Quality of Care

Two in five respondents reported concerns with the quality of care and 29% reported having concerns with the childcare environment. Of respondents who reported concerns about the quality of care, the three most frequently reported concerns were: training of providers in health and safety practices (expressed by 65% of concerned respondents), the licensing and inspection history of the childcare program (58%), and the teacher to child ratio (56%).

Affordability and Costs

Over a quarter of respondents agreed to having trouble affording their childcare. This experience differed by income and household structure. Respondents with household income below \$50,000 reported the highest agreement to having trouble affording their childcare compared to all other income groups. Additionally, single parents reported having trouble affording care at a significantly higher rate than households with two adults; in fact, more than two-thirds of single-parent respondents reported agreement to having trouble affording their childcare.

Location

Approximately a quarter of respondents reported having trouble with the location of their care, and this also varied by income. Respondents whose income was below \$75,000 reported having trouble with location at a higher rate than respondents with higher income. Among respondents who reported having trouble with the location of their childcare, the most common issue was the distance between the childcare facility and their work; this was expressed by over one-third of these respondents.

Additional Needs

As already noted, over half of all respondents reported needing care for a sick child. This need reflects a gap in current care coverage as children are unable to attend school or their usual day care when they become sick, leaving working parents with limited, if any, ad hoc options. Parents expressed a need for having a reliable alternative childcare facility where they could drop off a sick child when that need sporadically arises.

Additionally, nearly a third of respondents reported needing care for a child with special needs or behavioral issues, and a separate third reported having trouble finding infant care. Both of these needs were reported at statistically higher rates by African American respondents and respondents whose income was below \$75,000.

Alternative Childcare Arrangements

Overall, one third of respondents reported an interest in additional childcare options if they became available in the area. Interest in alternative options varied significantly by demographic

characteristics as interest jumped to over 50% among respondents whose income was below \$50,000.

This trend held across income categories, with interest in additional options decreasing as income increased. Additionally, respondents in single-income households were much more likely than respondents in dual-income households to report an interest in additional childcare options (with 76% of respondents in one-adult households and 42% of respondents in two-adult, single-income households expressing interest compared to just 28% of dual-income households). As for types of additional childcare options that respondents would like, the prominent responses were focused around coverage, quality of care, and location.

When asked to describe their ideal childcare arrangement, respondents provided characterizations similar to those offered by the respondents describing the additional childcare options they would like to see. Regarding the ideal childcare arrangement, the most frequent answer was wanting high quality care. Of the respondents who referenced quality of care, approximately one third specifically referenced care that was educational and/or developmentally-minded.

The second most common response was on the topic of hours and schedule with respondents requesting childcare facilities that operate extended hours, both earlier in the morning and later in the evening to enable parents to drop off before and pick up after their work hours. A comparable number of parents requested facilities that could accommodate more flexible schedules, including part-time hours or just certain days, as well as irregular schedules that change from one week to the next. This response also included parents who would like a pay-by-day option. Simply put, existing childcare facilities do not seem to accommodate the full range of schedules of all working parents.

Provider Perspectives

To supplement the survey of parents, a series of focus groups was conducted of childcare providers in Martinsville and Henry County. The anecdotal perspectives of providers on the changing needs of families in the area closely matched the survey findings. On the topic of schedule coverage, almost all participating providers recognized that there was a need for extended hours, but responses were mixed about whether or not that was feasible.

In addition to changes in operating hours, providers noted a need for more affordable childcare, but at the same time, providers noted that they felt childcare workers needed to be paid better. Participants noted that it is difficult to find and retain qualified and highly-trained staff—perhaps better pay and benefits would alleviate this issue. The barriers for accessing affordable childcare were also mentioned by providers in the context of infant care. Many noted that infant care could be exceptionally difficult to find—especially care that is both affordable and high-quality. The providers explained this gap exists because infant care requires more space, materials, equipment, furnishings, exits, sinks, and training, among other needs, so it costs significantly more. Coupling that with the need for extra staff to implement these additional needs, it was apparent to focus group participants that infant care poses significant challenges, despite the great need for it.

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Providers observed similar challenges when it came to securing care for special needs children. In addition to necessary changes to the physical configuration of the space to accommodate special needs children, providers noted additional training is needed. Many participants indicated that they *do not* currently feel prepared to adequately provide care for children with special needs. To address this, a few providers suggested additional local training and certification opportunities for providers, support from families regarding care for their children, and early intervention services.

Providers offered many suggestions about what kinds of support could be offered to help deal with the challenges they noted in providing childcare. Providers noted that more funding and additional resources were among the most important support needed.

For complete detailed analysis of the survey findings and additional discussion of the provider focus groups, please see the full report narrative and appendices.

I. Introduction

About the Survey

The Martinsville and Henry County Survey of Childcare Needs was conducted during late summer of 2019 by the Center for Survey Research at the University of Virginia on behalf of The Harvest Foundation, the City of Martinsville, and Henry County. The purpose of the survey was to assess unmet childcare needs among parents who work or live in Martinsville and Henry County. In particular, The Harvest Foundation was interested in understanding the childcare experience of and gaps in services for moderate and low income families.

The questionnaire focused on three topic areas: current childcare arrangements and satisfaction, encountered barriers to accessing childcare, and interest in alternative childcare options. The survey was conducted online with non-probability sampling. To supplement the survey of parents, a series of focus groups of childcare providers was conducted in Martinsville and Henry County.

Survey Methodology

The Harvest Foundation provided an initial conceptual outline of questionnaire topics. The Center for Survey Research developed the complete questionnaire, and the instrument was evaluated with an online pretest of Martinsville/Henry County parents who attended an in-person informational session held by The Harvest Foundation on August 15, 2019. Additional questions were added to the instrument as a result of the pretest. The final questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix F.

Survey data were collected between August 26 and October 4, 2019. The survey used non-probability sampling with community partners and local employers inviting residents/employees via email to participate. To qualify, the individual needed to live and/or work in Martinsville/Henry County and be a parent of a child 12 years old or younger. Survey participants were given a \$5 Amazon gift card upon submitting their survey. A total of 1,929 complete survey responses were collected. The provider focus groups were conducted on September 5, September 9, September 18, and September 26, 2019 with a total of 34 participants across the four groups. For a complete narrative of the survey methodology, see Appendix E.

Demographic Overview

Approximately 56% of respondents were female, compared to about 44% male. Almost 20% of respondents were between 18 and 29 years old, over one-third (37%) were between the ages of third and thirty-four, 29% were aged thirty-five to thirty-nine, and 15% were forty years of age and older. The mean age of respondents was 34 years old.

The vast majority of respondents (87%) were married, with an additional 6% living with a domestic partner. Thirty-eight percent of respondent had a child under two years old; 40% have a child between three and five years old.

Seventy-two percent of respondents were working full-time, an additional 15% were working part-time. Two percent were homemakers and 1% were students. Of those who were employed,

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more than two-thirds worked in Martinsville, 24% working in Henry County, and 7% work somewhere outside these localities.

Forty-one percent of respondents lived in Martinsville, 13% in Bassett, 11% Collinsville, 8% each in Axton and Ridgeway, 7% in Fieldale, 5% each in Spencer and Stanleytown. Three percent lived elsewhere.

Of those reporting their annual household income, 32% had annual household incomes less than \$50,000, 16% earned \$50,000 to \$75,000, 27% earned \$75,000-\$100,000 to \$150,000, and over one-third earned over \$100,000.

Seventy-one percent of respondents identified as White, 13% as African American or Black, 9% as Asian, and 7% as another race/ethnicity.

Analysis

In this study, both cross-tabulation and means comparison analysis were run on select variables. The cross-tabulation analysis relates demographic variables to types of childcare facility, satisfaction with current arrangement, and interest in additional childcare options. Complete crosstabulation tables can be viewed in Appendix C.

The means comparison analysis relates demographic variables to satisfaction with current arrangement, agreement with encountering barriers to access, and interest in additional childcare options. Complete means comparison tables can be viewed in Appendix D. Select findings of each the crosstabulations and means comparisons are discussed in this report.

As mentioned, full frequencies can be viewed in Appendix A. Since addressing the needs of moderate to low income families is a priority of this study, complete frequencies of respondents with annual income below \$50,000 are presented in Appendix B, which capture the childcare needs and perspectives specific to this subgroup.

There were several open-ended questions presented throughout the questionnaires in order to give respondents the opportunity to describe their experiences and needs in their own words. The report summarizes findings of CSR's thematic coding of these open-ends. For the complete list of verbatim open-ends, see Appendix G.

Finally, it is prudent to note that because these responses were collected from non-probability methods, results cannot necessarily be generalized to the entire population and should instead be viewed as a window into the experiences of the nearly 2,000 parents who completed the survey. This report presents these findings that may be used to inform future programming and support for childcare needs in Martinsville and Henry County.

II. Current Childcare Arrangements and Coverage

Age Ranges of Children

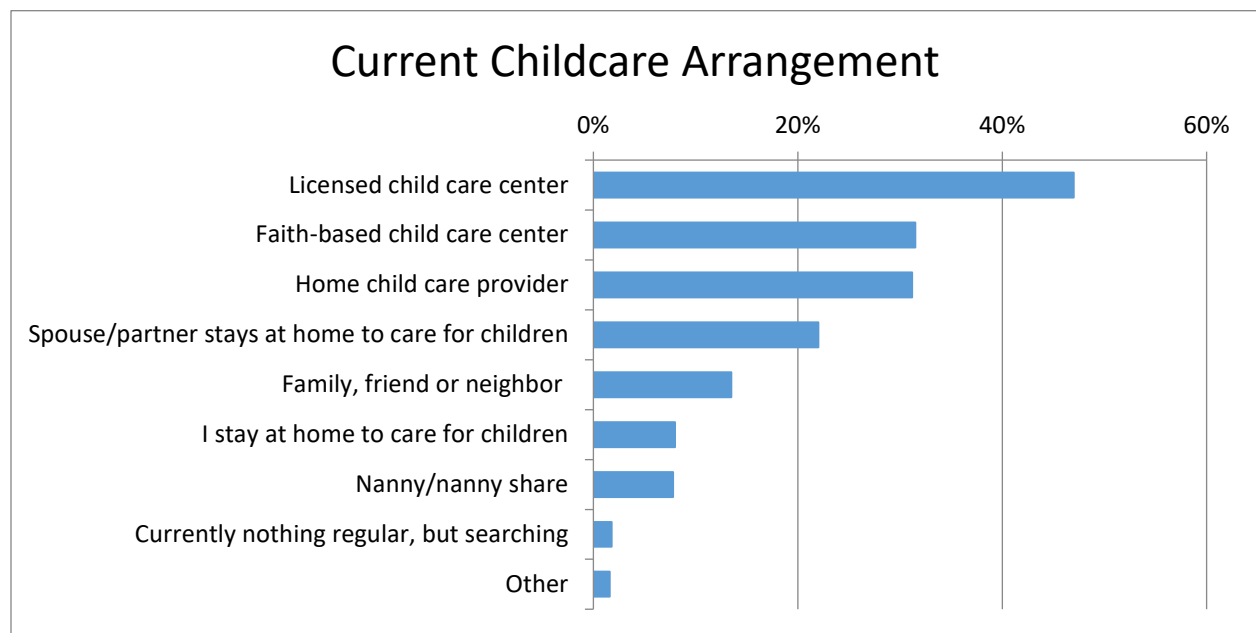
First, to understand the potential childcare needs of the community, survey respondents were asked to indicate how many children they have and the ages of each. Subsequently, respondents were asked how many children by age they have in childcare at the time of the survey.

Most respondents (74%) reported having one child, while 23% reported having 2 children, and 4% reported 3 or more children. The children represented in this survey tend to be young. The largest share of respondents (41%) reported having children between 3 and 5 years of age and 38% reported having a child less than 3 years of age, while 32% reported having children between 6-9 years of age, and 15% report having a child between 10 and 12 years of age. Many respondents (70%) who reported having a child in a particular age range also reported having that child in childcare.

Current Childcare Arrangements and Coverage

Respondents were next asked to indicate which types of childcare arrangements they currently use and the types of coverage they have and/or need. The top four child care arrangements reported by all respondents included: licensed child care center (47%), faith-based child care center (32%), home child care provider (31%), and spouse/partner stays home to care for children (13%). See Figure 1 below for all categories. Please note that respondents were able to select multiple arrangements as some families use a combination of facilities to cover their childcare needs – hence, the percentages exceed 100%. The most common “Other” response was specified as having extended family care for the child followed by after-school programs, including YMCA and MHC.

Figure 1. Current Childcare Arrangement



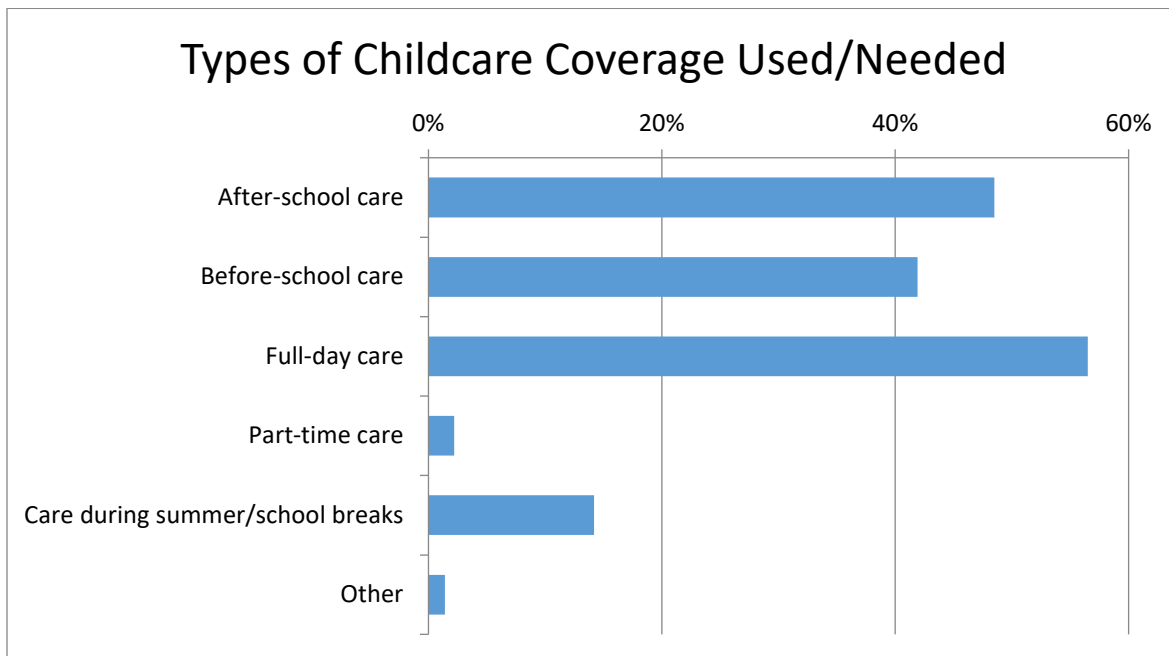
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Differences in reported childcare arrangements were found among a few demographic characteristics. First, using a home child care provider was the most widely used arrangement among families whose income was below \$50,000; for all other income groups, the most widely used arrangement was a licensed child care center. Compared to other groups, families whose income was under \$50,000 also reported the highest rate of using the arrangement of family, friends, or neighbors caring for the children as well as not currently having a regular childcare arrangement but searching for one.

Use of different child care arrangements was also examined by the respondent's age. Respondents over 40 were the most likely to report that a spouse or partner stays home to care for children, with 35% of respondents in this age category reporting this arrangement. Similarly, the rate of respondents reporting their spouse stays at home varied by race, with over half of Asian respondents and a third of Black/African reporting this arrangement compared to just 16% of White respondents. For more details on these comparisons, please reference Appendix C.

When asked what types of childcare coverage respondents currently use and/or need, full-day care was selected by over half (57%) of all respondents, 49% of respondents also selected after-school care, and 42% reported before-school care. See Figure 2 below for all categories. No notable patterns emerged across demographic traits for type of coverage used/needed.

Figure 2. Types of Coverage Used or Needed

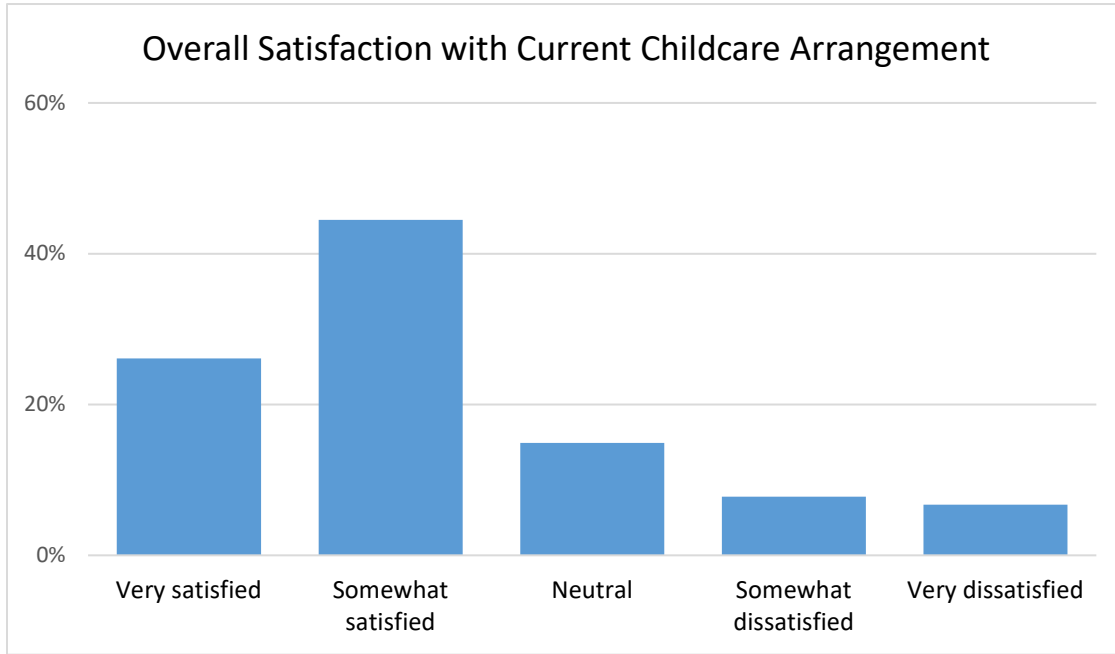


III. Satisfaction with Childcare Arrangement

The survey contained several questions examining the overall satisfaction with current childcare arrangements as well as the level of satisfaction with the quality, cost, hours, and location of their childcare arrangements. Most respondents are at least somewhat satisfied with their current arrangement (45%), and an additional one quarter are very satisfied. However, approximately

one in seven respondents reported some level of dissatisfaction with their arrangement. Results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Overall Satisfaction with Current Childcare Arrangement



Significant differences were found when comparing satisfaction by key demographics. Parents 40 years and older reported the most dissatisfaction compared to all other age groups. When examining satisfaction by area of residence within Martinsville/Henry County, respondents living in Spencer reported the highest levels of overall dissatisfaction with the current child care arrangements (32%) followed by those that live in Stanleytown (28%). In contrast, respondents living in Martinsville reported the highest levels of overall satisfaction with their childcare arrangement (81%). Satisfaction also varied by type of arrangement, with respondents who have a nanny reporting the highest satisfaction (78%), followed closely by respondents who stay at home to care for their children (75%) and licensed childcare centers (74%). The highest dissatisfaction, unsurprisingly, is reported by respondents who do not currently have a scheduled arrangement but are searching for one. See Appendix C for additional percentage comparisons.

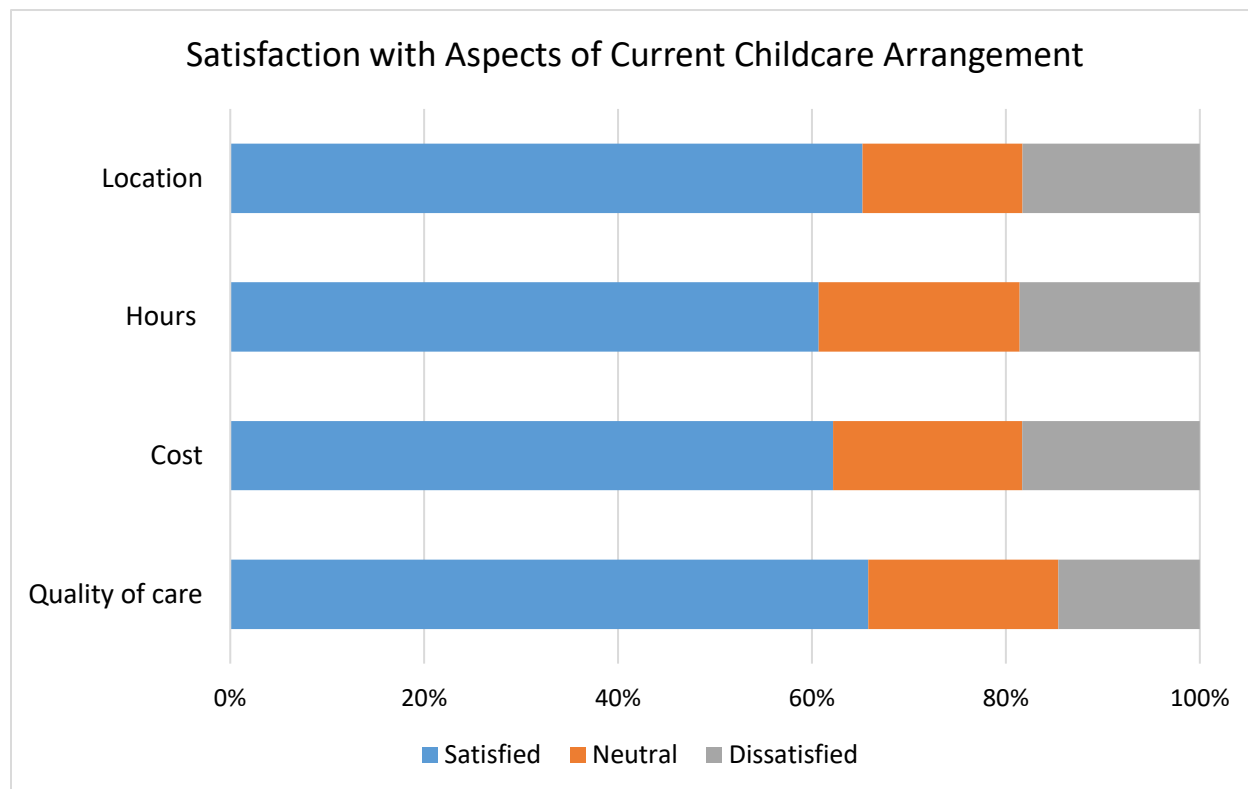
Overall satisfaction with current childcare arrangements also differed significantly by household composition. Respondents in one-adult households had a statistically significantly lower average overall satisfaction with their current childcare arrangement than respondents in other household types. Similarly, Asian respondents reported lower average overall satisfaction than respondents of other races, which is a statistically significant difference. See Appendix D for further details on these means comparisons.

Respondents were then asked about their level of satisfaction across four specific aspects of their current childcare arrangement (quality, cost, hours, and location). Results are presented in Figure 4. Across all respondents, the aspect that received the greatest dissatisfaction was the hours of

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current childcare (19% reported dissatisfaction) followed by cost (18%), location (18%), and quality of care (15%).

Figure 4. Satisfaction with Specific Aspects of Current Childcare Arrangement



Satisfaction across aspects of childcare differed by several demographic characteristics. Respondents with household income under \$50,000 reported statistically lower satisfaction than respondents with higher household incomes when it comes to cost of care and hours of care. Specifically, one in four respondents whose income was below \$50,000 reported dissatisfaction with the hours of care, and approximately one in five reported dissatisfaction with the cost. On the other hand, respondents in two-adult dual income households reported a statistically significant lower average satisfaction with the quality of current childcare than respondents in other household types. Respondents in two-adult dual income households also reported lower average satisfaction with the cost and location of current childcare than two-adult single income households, both of which are statistically significant differences.

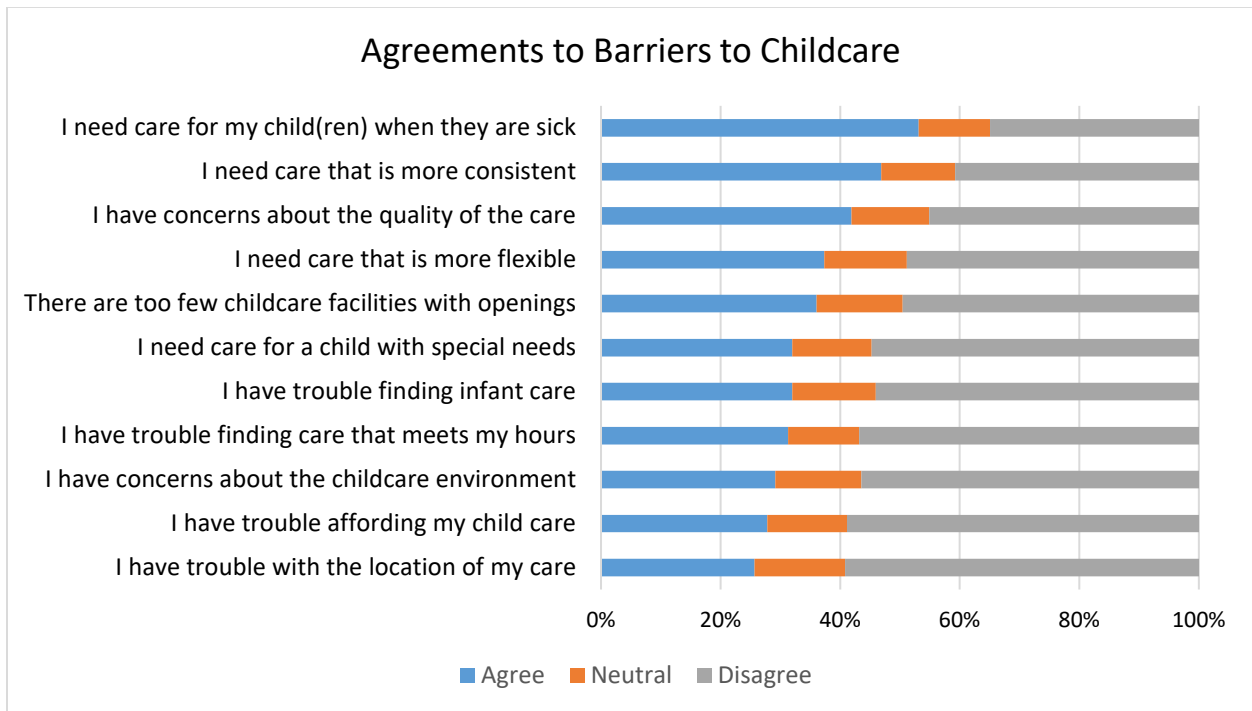
Satisfaction in aspects of childcare also differed by the location of the respondent. Respondents from Stanleytown and Spencer were more likely to report dissatisfaction with the location of childcare (37% and 33% respectively) than respondents in other areas, which may be unsurprising as these are the same two localities who reported greatest dissatisfaction overall. For additional comparisons on satisfaction, please refer to Appendices C and D.

IV. Barriers to Childcare

Respondents were asked to report on the extent to which they encounter trouble or have concerns with different aspects of their current childcare arrangements. The specific items included having trouble affording the child care, having trouble finding care that meets their hours, having trouble with the location of care, needing care that is more flexible, having concerns about the childcare environment, concerns about the quality of care, needing care that is more consistent, feeling that there are too few childcare facilities with openings, needing care for their child(ren) when they are sick, having trouble finding infant care, and needing care for a child with special needs.

As can be seen in the graph below, the item with the most agreement was needing care for a child when they are sick, which over half of respondents reported. Based off open end comments elsewhere in the survey, parents would like a drop-in childcare facility that could watch children when they are sick and can't attend school or their regularly scheduled childcare due to temporary illness. The second and third most agreed upon items across all respondents were needing care that is more consistent and having concerns about the quality of care. These and other barriers are discussed in greater detail below, including demographics comparisons.

Figure 5. Encountered Barriers in Childcare



Coverage

Several questions were posed to understand respondents' needs related to coverage of care. The most widely-cited coverage issue was needing care that is more consistent. Almost half of respondents (47%) agreed that they need child care that is more consistent. The second most common coverage issue was needing care that is more flexible. Respondents who expressed desiring more flexibility were asked in an open-ended question specifically what more flexibility

meant. The vast majority of responses revolved around when the childcare facilities were open, with requests for facilities with extended hours (opening earlier in the morning and staying open later in the evening), childcare available on an irregular or sporadic work schedule (to accommodate non-traditional 9-5 jobs, such as hospital shifts), childcare for children when they're sick, and coverage on weekends and during school breaks.

Approximately a third of respondents reported trouble finding care that meets their hours. When looking at respondents whose income was less than \$50,000, the rate jumps even higher to 50% experience this barrier. Respondents who expressed this challenge were asked in a follow-up question what kinds of hours need covered. The most common response was needing coverage for earlier in the mornings (with drop-off as early as 6am) and later into the evenings (with pickup after 7pm). Many parents expressed frustration that they struggled with their work hours extending beyond standard childcare center hours, and that an additional hour on either end would substantially improve their ability to balance work and getting to/from the center in time.

The rate of encountering these coverage barriers did vary across demographic characteristics. Both needing more flexibility and having trouble with the hours of care varied by income level, with the reported rate of experiencing either barrier decreasing as income increases. In other words, families with higher incomes did not report experiencing coverage issues as much as families with moderate to lower incomes. Additionally, Black/African American and Multiracial or other race respondents reported more agreement, on average, with needing more flexible and consistent care. More so than two-adult households, single parents expressed higher rates of trouble finding care to meet their hours and needing care that is more flexible.

Quality of Care

Next, examining reported concerns about current childcare arrangements, two in five respondents (42%) reported concerns with the quality of care and 29% reported having concerns with the childcare environment. Of respondents who reported concerns about the quality of care, the three most frequently reported concerns were: training of providers in health and safety practices (expressed by 65% of concerned respondents), the licensing and inspection history of the childcare program (58%), and the teacher to child ratio (56%).

Respondents who reported concern of the childcare environment were asked in an open-ended question specifically what aspects of the environment were causing concern. The most common response centered around safety; in particular, concerns about the background of staff, the neighborhood in which the facility is located, and non-providers being present around children (applicable in the context of home providers). Other common responses included concerns about cleanliness of the facility and lack of attentiveness by providers toward the children.

Reporting having concerns over quality of care and the childcare environment did vary by select demographic characteristics. White respondents were statistically less likely to report concerns over quality of care compared to African American and Multiracial/Other race respondents. Average reported concern over the childcare environment was higher among respondents with annual income below \$75,000 compared to respondents in higher income categories. In other words, the childcare environment is less of a concern among higher income respondents.

Affordability and Costs

Twenty-eight percent of all respondents at least slightly agreed to having trouble affording their childcare. This experience did differ across several demographic groups. Respondents with household income below \$50,000 reported the highest agreement to having trouble affording their child care compared to all other income groups, and this difference is statistically significant. In fact, 48% of respondents with income below \$50,000 reported experiencing trouble affording care their childcare, compared with 28% of all respondents. Additionally, single parents reported having trouble affording care at a significantly higher rate than households with two adults. Strikingly, more than two-thirds of single-parent respondents reported agreement to having trouble affording their childcare.

Among the respondents who reported having trouble affording their care, one-fourth of respondents reported paying \$50-\$100 per week for childcare and another 24% reported paying \$100-\$200 per week for care. Approximately 28% pay more than \$300 per week. All respondents were then asked what amount they consider reasonable to pay per week, per child, for care, about one-quarter of respondents said \$50-\$100 per week per child, 21% said \$100 up to \$200, and 19% said \$200 up to \$300. While these figures seem comparable, the story becomes more nuanced when we look within demographic groups.

Respondents with household income below \$50,000 reported lower price ranges that they considered reasonable. For this income group, one-quarter consider \$50 or less per week reasonable, and an additional 44% consider \$50-\$100 reasonable. This combined 69% stands in sharp contrast to the 36% reported by the entire sample. It is clear that expectations of childcare cost vary by income, and this should be kept in mind when designing resources for childcare support to the community.

Also on the topic of cost, numerous respondents expressed dismay at how childcare fees are typically set. For example, a few parents explained that they must pay additional fees for every minute they are late to pick up their child from daycare, which is sometimes outside of the parent's control due to work demands or traffic. Additionally, parents would like a childcare option in which they only pay for care on the days the child is in attendance.

Location

Approximately a quarter of respondents reported having trouble with the location of their care. Experiencing this barrier did vary by income. Respondents whose income was less than \$75,000 reported having trouble with the location at a higher rate than respondents with higher income, and this difference is statistically significant.

Among respondents who reported having trouble with the location of their childcare, the most common issue was the distance between the childcare facility and their work; this was expressed by over one-third of these respondents. These parents lamented having to drive out of the way to drop off and pick up their children from work, made even more difficult when the facility hours do not extend far beyond regular work hours. Some parents also expressed frustration that they felt they had no choice but to enroll their children in a facility that is far away because of

limited options closer to where they live and work. In particular, closer options were either unavailable, too expensive, or couldn't accommodate a child with special needs.

Additional Needs

As already noted, over half of all respondents (53%) reported needing care for a sick child. This need reflects a gap in current care coverage as children are unable to attend school or their usual day care when they become sick, leaving working parents with limited, if any, ad hoc options. Parents expressed a need for having a reliable alternative childcare facility where they could drop off a sick child when that need sporadically arises. This need was high across demographic characteristics, however a handful of groups reported experiencing this barrier at a higher rate than others. Single parents, African Americans, and respondents with income below \$50,000 or above \$100,000 reported needing care for a sick child at a higher rate than other respondents.

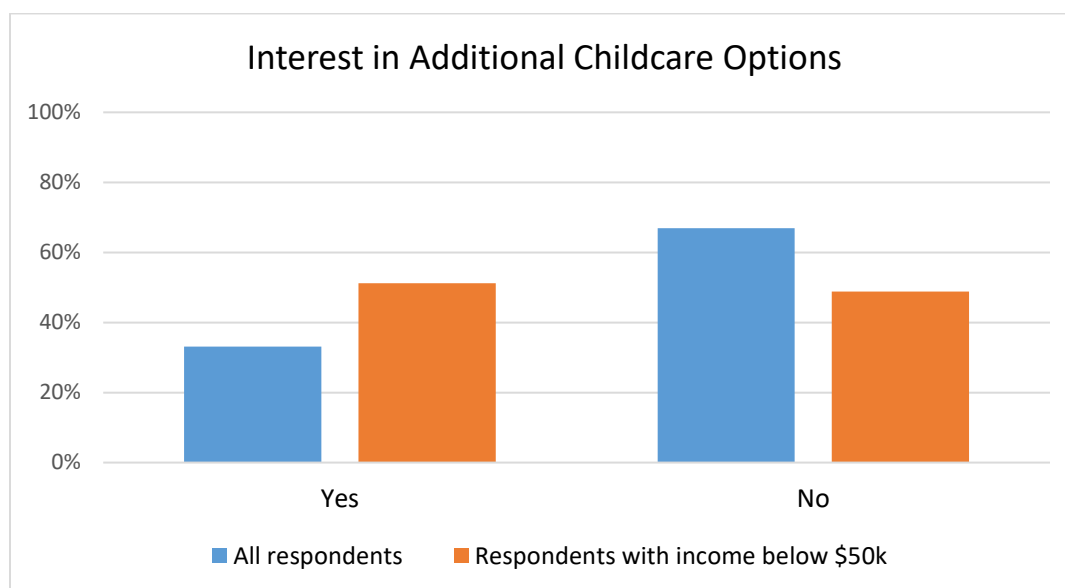
Additionally, nearly a third of respondents reported needing care for a child with special needs or behavioral issues, and a separate third reported having trouble finding infant care. Both of these needs were reported at a statistically higher rate by African American respondents and respondents whose income was below \$75,000. Single parents and two-adult households with a single income also reported trouble finding infant care at a higher rather than parents in a dual-income home.

V. Alternative Childcare Arrangements

Interest in Additional Childcare Options

An additional set of questions assessed interest in additional childcare options in Martinsville and Henry County. Overall, one third of respondents (33%) reported an interest in additional childcare options if they became available in the area. Interest in alternative options varied significantly by demographic characteristics. As can be seen in Figure 6 below, interest jumps to over 50% among respondents whose income was below \$50,000.

Figure 6. Interest in Additional Childcare Options by Income



This trend holds across income categories, with interest in additional options decreasing as income increases. Additionally, respondents in single income households were much more likely than respondents in dual income households to report an interest in additional childcare options (with 76% of respondents in one-adult households and 42% of respondents in two adult, single income households expressing interested compared to just 28% of dual-income households).

Among the various childcare arrangements that respondents currently have, additional options were of most interest to parents who currently do not have any scheduled childcare (74%) and those who rely on a family member, friend, or neighbor to watch their children (54%). As a final comparison, interest in additional childcare options was of most interest to parents with children in childcare who are aged 1-2 years (38%), 3-5 years (43%), and 6-9 years (37%).

Respondents who expressed interest in additional childcare options were asked to describe what types of options they would like to see. These open-end responses were thematically coded, and the prominent themes were around coverage, quality of care, and location. Approximately 40% of respondents said they would like additional childcare options that offered extended hours beyond typical childcare facilities hours (both in the morning and evening), coverage until late in the evening, and coverage for when school is out of session (e.g., summer, holiday breaks, and teacher workdays). One respondent noted that it was very difficult to find regularly scheduled care for the evening when she needed to attend night classes. A subset of respondents expressed need for coverage through the night as their jobs require them to work night shifts. Another subset of respondents wanted childcare options that could accommodate flexible schedules, such as those needed for shift work, as well as part-time care and pay-by-the-day coverage.

Approximately a quarter of respondents who wanted additional childcare options wanted to ensure the quality of care would be high. In particular, they wanted care that was either curriculum-based or at least had a focus on development and enrichment of the children. Twelve percent of respondents wanted additional options that had a more convenient location, including a subset who specifically requested care that was within or adjacent to their workplace. This response was especially common among hospital employees as their work schedule is incompatible with traditional day care hours. Finally, approximately eight percent of respondents wanted additional options that offered preschool and/or infant care, as they felt there was a gap in options for this age range. For a complete list of open-ended responses, please see Appendix G

Ideal Childcare Arrangement

All respondents were asked in an open-ended question what they consider their ideal childcare arrangement to be. Similar themes were found in these responses as were reported by the respondents describing the additional childcare options they would like to see.

Among all respondents, the most frequent answer for the ideal childcare arrangement was a desire for access to high quality care (38%). Of the respondents who referenced quality of care, approximately one third specifically referenced care that was educational and/or developmentally-minded. The second most common quality of care aspect was attending a licensed facility and/or facility in which the caregivers were objectively qualified (either through experience and training or certification).

The second most common response was on the topic of hours and schedule (21%). The description of coverage here is consistent with the earlier requests for coverage through the questionnaire. Of those who referred to hours, approximately half requested childcare facilities to operate extended hours, both earlier in the morning and later in the evening to enable parents to drop off before and pick up after their work shift. A comparable number of parents requested facilities that could accommodate more flexible schedules, including part-time hours or just certain days, as well as irregular schedules that change from one week to the next. This response also included parents who would like a pay-by-day option. Simply put, existing childcare facilities do not accommodate the full range of schedules of all working parents. A smaller percentage of respondents reported that they would appreciate childcare that was closer to work, home, or another more convenient location (8%) and more affordable childcare (8%).

VI. Childcare Provider Perspectives

In order to provide a more comprehensive account of childcare in Martinsville Henry County, a series of focus groups of providers was conducted. Specifically, four focus groups took place with a total of 34 participants across all four groups. Participants ranged from childcare providers at schools and independent agencies, providers at faith-based childcare centers, as well as executive directors and assistant owners of various childcare agencies.

Overall, participants overwhelmingly indicated that there are many ways in which childcare needs are changing in the area. Some potential reasons highlighted by providers include the rising prevalence of single-family households, and younger parents. Multiple providers also mentioned that parents are, in general, working more and working longer hours now. These changing hours—whether overnight or longer (e.g., 12 hour) shifts—would necessitate altering childcare center hours and providing extended or additional hours for overnight care. Providers suggested ways that childcare centers could implement such changes: accommodating night hours, extending existing hours, and providing available care for parents working 2nd shift or 12-hour shifts. While almost all participants recognized that there was a need for extended hours, responses were mixed about whether or not that was feasible. Specifically, executive directors and assistant owners were the most mixed, indicating there might be a need, but some might not be on board with actually implementing it. One participant also mentioned that it wasn't realistic to expect childcare to be available past 7pm, and that in-home care was more appropriate for these evening/overnight hours.

In addition to changes in operating hours, providers also noted a greater need for more affordable childcare. The increase in the number of working parents (as well as working parents who are now working longer hours) creates barriers for accessing childcare regardless, but particularly *affordable* childcare. Yet in addition to the need for affordable childcare, respondents also noted that they felt childcare workers needed to be paid better. In their explanations for why high-quality, affordable childcare is lacking, respondents noted that it is difficult to find and retain qualified and highly-trained staff—perhaps better pay and benefits would alleviate this issue. Respondents felt similarly about teachers who serve as childcare providers as well, noting that it can be a challenge to find not just qualified teachers, but *dedicated* and *caring* teachers as well.

The barriers for accessing childcare—in particular, affordable childcare—were especially evident in providers’ discussion about infant care. Many noted that infant care could be exceptionally difficult to find—especially care that is both affordable and high-quality. Multiple participants indicated that, when it came to infant care, they were at capacity and/or had a waiting list for parents seeking infant care (it is also worth noting that 25 of the 34 participants answered that they usually have a waitlist at their respective childcare centers, though this is not necessarily restricted to infant care only). The providers offered some plausible explanations as to why this could be: infant care requires more space, materials, equipment, furnishings, exits, sinks, and training, among other needs, so it costs significantly more. Coupling that with the need for extra staff to implement these additional needs, it was apparent to participants that infant care poses significant challenges, despite there being a great need for it.

In addition to infant care, providers offered feedback on care for special needs children. In particular, providers were very clear that there were multiple types of adjustments necessary to accommodate and care for children with special needs. Many mentioned necessary changes to the physical configuration of the space; whether the layout of the room or the availability of necessary equipment (one provider specifically mentioned a diaper changing area for older/larger children), there were changes that needed to be made to the physical space in addition to less material types of changes. Aside from spatial concerns, many respondents mentioned that the adjustment of the teacher to student ratio was crucial. One respondent in particular mentioned that more adult/child interaction was required, which also meant having more adults in the room.

In general, providers mentioned that the adjustments that need to be made vary considerably depending on the specific child and that child’s needs. Given that, multiple providers indicated that teacher skills, knowledge, and training would also need to be adjusted. One respondent stated, “Not every teacher has the training and education required when providing care for children with special needs.” In fact, many participants indicated that they *do not* feel prepared to adequately provide care for children with special needs, given how much variability exists in childcare needs from child to child. A few providers noted what would make them feel more prepared. These responses included additional training and certification opportunities for providers, support from families regarding care for their children, and early intervention services, as highlighted in the following moderator’s note: “Children receiving early intervention services at an early age, before they enter preschool, would help tremendously in being prepared. Group wanted early intervention to be underlined because they feel it is that important. Pediatricians making a diagnosis or a referral for additional diagnostics would also help support the need for early intervention services before the child enters preschool.”

Ultimately, adjustments and accommodations seem to mean more teachers, more time (on preparation and instruction), and more specialized attention for individual children. Thus, similar to infant care, care for children with special needs poses significant challenges along with a greater need for staff and resources.

Providers offered many suggestions about what kinds of support could be offered to help deal with the challenges they noted in providing childcare. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many participants noted that more funding and additional resources were among the most important support

needed. Many participants also mentioned that additional training and staff support (to deal with issues that might arise) were also necessary. Some providers also indicated that communication channels between caregivers, parents, and the community could be more transparent and that support from parents and the community is necessary to provide adequate childcare. For parents specifically, some participants suggested providing access to parent navigators or coaches, or someone in a mediating role to help assist with family and child needs and challenges.

VII. Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess the unmet childcare needs of parents in Martinsville and Henry County, especially among families with moderate to low incomes.

The majority of respondents are generally satisfied with their current children arrangement; however, approximately one in seven parents reported dissatisfaction. Further, satisfaction differed significantly by household composition single parents reporting lower levels of overall satisfaction. Additionally, respondents with household income under \$50,000 reported statistically lower satisfaction than respondents with higher household incomes when it comes to cost of care and hours of care.

The most widely agreed upon childcare issue was lacking an option for when a child is sick. This need reflects a gap in current care coverage as children are unable to attend school or their usual day care when they become sick, leaving working parents with limited, if any, ad hoc options. Parents expressed a need for having a reliable alternative childcare facility where they could drop off a sick child when that need sporadically arises.

Almost half of respondents agreed that they need child care that is more consistent, and the second most common coverage issue was needing care that is more flexible. On this point, parents need facilities with extended hours (opening earlier in the morning and staying open later in the evening); childcare available to match an irregular or sporadic work schedule (including accommodating non-traditional 9-5 jobs, such as hospital shifts, or students); and coverage on weekends and during school breaks.

Approximately a third of respondents reported trouble finding care that meets their hours, and this share jumps to 50% when looking at respondents with income below \$50,000.

Forty percent of respondents reported concerns with the quality of care. Specifically, their top concerns were the training of providers in health and safety practices, the licensing and inspection history of the childcare program, and the teacher to child ratio.

Having trouble affording care differed by income and household structure. Compared to other income groups, respondents with household income below \$50,000 reported the highest agreement to having issues with cost. Additionally, more than two-thirds of single-parent respondents reported agreement to having trouble affording their childcare, which was significantly higher other households.

Additionally, nearly a third of respondents reported needing care for a child with special needs or behavioral issues, and a separate third reported having trouble finding infant care. Both of these

needs were reported at a statistically higher rate by African American respondents and respondents whose income is below \$75,000.

Overall, one-third of respondents reported an interest in additional childcare options if they became available in the area, but this jumps to over 50% among respondents whose income is below \$50,000. Additionally, respondents in single income households were much more likely than respondents in dual income households to report an interest in additional childcare options. As for types of additional childcare options that respondents would like, the prominent responses were focused around coverage, quality of care, and location. Respondents described their ideal childcare arrangements in similar terms, where quality of care and hours/scheduling were of the most importance.

Results from the provider focus groups painted a similar picture of the childcare needs within Martinsville/Henry County. Almost all providers recognized there is a need for extended hours, but responses were mixed about whether or not that was feasible, raising the point that in-home care may be more appropriate for late evening or overnight childcare needs; however, in-home care raises the potential concern of cost and may be prohibitively expensive for some families.

On the point of cost, providers recognized the need for more affordable childcare, but at the same time, providers expressed that childcare workers needed to be paid better. The barriers for accessing childcare—in particular, affordable childcare—typically increase for infant care. Many note that affordable yet quality infant care could be exceptionally difficult to find because infant care requires more space, equipment, furnishings, exits, sinks, and training, and thus costs significantly more to provide.

Providers recognized a comparable challenge in accessing and providing care for special needs children. In addition to necessary changes to the physical configuration of the space to accommodate special needs children, providers also noted additional training is needed, which many felt they did not have adequately have. As one partial solution, providers suggested additional local training and certification opportunities on the specific topic of caring for children with special needs. In addition, providers offered many suggestions about the kinds of support that could be offered to help deal with these challenges. In order to match the childcare needs with the ability and availability of childcare facilities, providers stated that more funding and additional resources were among the most important support needed.

