



# MAKING CHILDCARE WORK

*Results from a survey on childcare arrangements and challenges in Boston*



Dear friends:

There is no better investment we can make than providing our children with access to supportive, loving environments, full of learning opportunities, from an early age. Since the beginning of my administration, we have laid a strong foundation by offering more high-quality Pre-K seats than ever before. And while we are incredibly proud of our progress toward fulfilling our commitment of ensuring that every 4-year-old in Boston has access to high-quality pre-kindergarten, we are getting ready to answer a new question: what more can we do?

In 2019, we added an optional survey to the annual citywide census related to early education and care. We wanted to better understand how families access and experience care for their children ages five and under. This report summarizes the results of the survey pilot and provides insights into questions that many stakeholders have been trying to answer for a number of years, such as: How are families arranging for the care of their young children? What kinds of challenges are they facing in the process? How can the City of Boston make it better? Better understanding this information will help us create thoughtful policy that works for all, and ensure that City services are accessible to everyone.

By supporting the care of our youngest residents, we promote brain growth that occurs in the first three years of life. This sets the stage for long-term academic, financial, and social-emotional gains. We also enhance a key sector of our economic ecosystem, the early childhood workforce, which enables the rest of our workers to participate in the labor force and boosts our economy. In this way, we encourage a healthy and prosperous future for all of Boston.

It is our hope that the analysis presented here sparks conversations and helps all of us find ways to contribute to solutions. In the Mayor's Office, we have started to do so by developing and launching the Childcare Entrepreneur Fund Pilot. The pilot will provide financial and business development support to family childcare providers, helping them grow or sustain their businesses and opening up more childcare seats in our neighborhoods. Together, policymakers, early education professionals, parents, families, employers, and academia can call attention to the collective challenge of ensuring Boston's working parents and our youngest learners thrive. In Boston, we never shy away from a challenge. Let's face this one head on.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin J. Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Martin J. Walsh  
Mayor of Boston



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## MAYOR'S OFFICE OF WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT (MOWA)

We strive to promote gender equity by empowering women and removing systemic barriers to their advancement. Using research and data we create programming and advocate for policies that advance and support women in Boston.

## THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY LAB

As a team of social entrepreneurs, we research and test ideas to help advance the economic mobility of low- and moderate-income Bostonians. Using a people-centered approach, we coordinate action across departments to address gaps and help residents reach critical benchmarks to economic security.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Although this report was spearheaded by the Mayor's Office of Women's Advancement and the Economic Mobility Lab, it could not have been done without the many contributions of our partners. Their passion for addressing the childcare crisis and supporting Boston families is evident throughout this report. We want to thank specifically the Department of Innovation and Technology, the Elections Department, and the Civic Engagement Cabinet at the City of Boston.

A special thanks for their support on this project to Kristin McSwain, Fernanda Campbell, Pratima Patil, and the entire Data Committee at the Boston Opportunity Agenda; Wendy Robeson and Nancy Marshall at the Wellesley Centers for Women; Sarah Savage, Marija Bingulac, and the Family Council at the Regional and Community Outreach Department at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; and Jessica Taubner and the member families at the Family Independence Initiative.

Also, we thank Ashley White, Segal Fellow at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, for her commitment to this work, sharp analysis, intellectual rigor, and quality writing.

Finally, we express our gratitude to the parents and caregivers of Boston, for making this city run and for taking the time to contribute your thoughts and experiences.



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# 1. OVERVIEW

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Care work is the backbone of our economy. It makes all other types of work possible and is one of the critical workforce issues in our city and across the country. Much of this work, including childcare, is also predominantly done by women. In Boston, women make up 92% of the childcare workforce<sup>1</sup>. And women who have access to affordable childcare participate in the labor force at higher rates than those who do not<sup>2</sup>.

Stakeholders across the sector have identified a critical need for more and better data to inform action. Cities need to be at the forefront of addressing this challenge. This report focuses on childcare arrangements and challenges facing families in Boston, one of the biggest gaps in knowledge we identified. We will be focusing on information related to our specific area of inquiry - experiences and challenges Boston residents have in providing care for their children ages five and under.

### Key findings:

- **The cost of childcare is the top concern for families in our sample, regardless of which neighborhood they live in.**
- **Women in our sample reported childcare as a challenge to entering/re-entering the workforce.**
  - Almost a third of the parents/guardians who stay home to care for their children said they needed/wanted to work. These parents are disproportionately women--91% of those who reported their gender, were female.
- **Families in our sample reported more childcare challenges associated with 0-2 year olds than 3-5 year olds.** This makes parents with infant children potentially more vulnerable to being left out of the workforce.

Although we cannot say that our results are representative of the entire Boston population, this survey is an important step towards better understanding childcare in the city. It gives us data that has never been collected before and sets a foundation the City and its partners can build on.

***“Child care costs more than I am paid, so I work part time from home (mother).”***

- South End Resident

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis.

<sup>2</sup>NBER, *Universal Childcare, Maternal Labor Supply, and Family Wellbeing*, 2005.



## II. BACKGROUND

Massachusetts is the second most expensive state for childcare in the U.S., with center-based infant care costing an average of \$20,913 per year<sup>3</sup>. To put it in perspective, this cost outpaces UMASS Boston tuition for residents<sup>4</sup>. Childcare for four year olds in the state is nearly as expensive, with an average annual cost of \$15,095 for private, center-based care<sup>5</sup>.

The result is that families are forced to make difficult choices or put together unstable childcare arrangements that make it difficult to fulfill work or family obligations. For women in particular, this often limits participation in the workforce<sup>6</sup>.

Although much is known nationally about the state of childcare, particularly around its costs, substantial market and neighborhood-level data regarding childcare in Boston is sparse. Last February, the Mayor's Office of Women's Advancement and the Economic Mobility Lab partnered to insert an optional, anonymous survey into the annual citywide resident census. For the first time in Boston's history, we will be able to better understand families' specific childcare arrangements and the challenges they face in accessing/affording care within the city.

***“Childcare is shockingly expensive- forget saving for college- I wish someone had told me to save for daycare.”***

- Charlestown Resident

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<sup>3</sup> Economic Policy Institute. *The Cost of childcare in Massachusetts*. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> UMASS Boston, *Admissions and Financial Aid*, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Economic Policy Institute. *The Cost of childcare in Massachusetts*. 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Child Care Aware of America. *The US and the High Cost of Child Care*. 2018.



## 2. SURVEY RESULTS

The City of Boston launched the Language, Disability, and Childcare survey in February 2019, which was distributed to all Boston residents via direct mail, with an online version also available in multiple languages. Over 29,000 people responded to the survey. Our findings are based on the 2,616 respondents who answered a childcare question and had a child between the ages of zero and five. The American Community Survey estimates that there are roughly 28,000 families in Boston with children 0-5, making the Childcare Survey response rate approximately 9%.

***“Even with the voucher it's too difficult to pay. Almost half of my monthly income goes towards daycare...”***

- Roslindale Resident

### I. OUR FINDINGS

**86% of respondents within our sample listed “Not Affordable” as a childcare challenge.** This validates national survey data that indicate that cost is a major barrier to accessing early childhood education<sup>7</sup>. These findings also mirror results from a 2015 Washington Post poll wherein 74% of respondents reported that the cost of paid childcare was either very or somewhat expensive<sup>8</sup>.

**45% of respondents within our sample said childcare was either too far or too difficult to find.** This supports the findings of preliminary research conducted by the Boston Opportunity Agenda, which indicates that in most neighborhoods, potential demand is outpacing supply. This gap means that several neighborhoods have fewer childcare options, especially for children 0-2 years<sup>9</sup>.

**Children 0-2 within our sample have more childcare challenges than children 3-5.** 57% of all the challenges reported were associated with children between the ages of 0-2. Affordability seems to be a greater issue for families with children 0-2 (see figure 1) and they reported lower levels of access to financial support; only 3.8% of families in our sample were using a childcare voucher and only a third of them were for 0-2 year olds.

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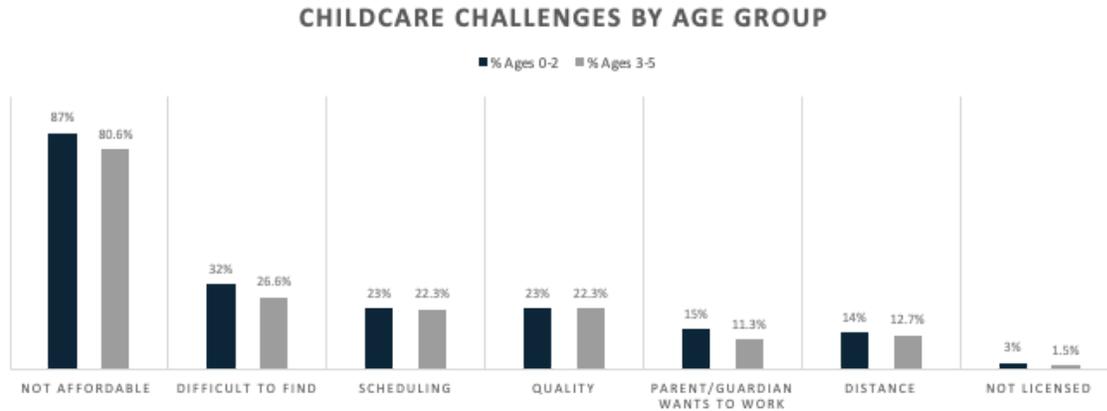
<sup>7</sup> Corcoran, L., and Steinley, K. (2019). Early Childhood Program Participation, From the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016 (NCES 2017-101.REV), National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved 9/20/19 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

<sup>8</sup> Washington Post Child Care Poll. July 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Boston Opportunity Agenda. Report to be released in December 2019.

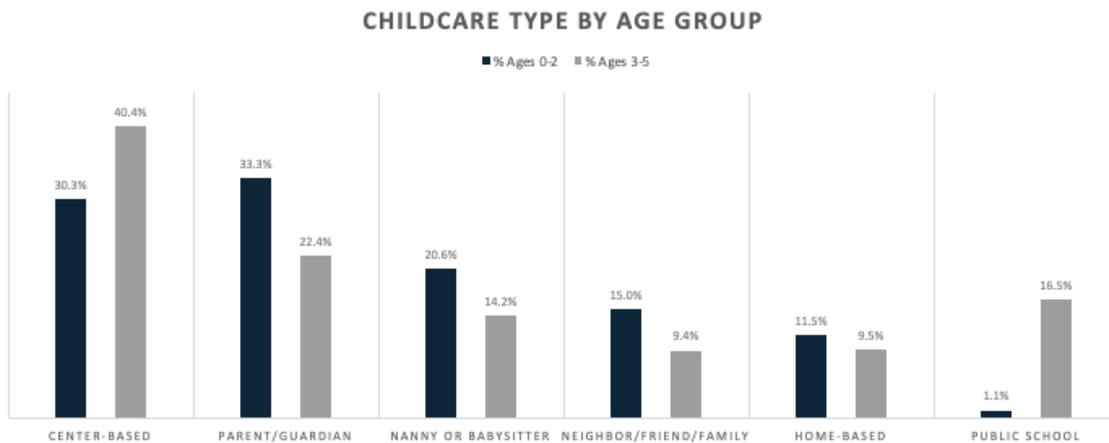


Figure 1.



**Children 0-2 within our sample have a higher percentage of informal childcare arrangements** (see figure 2). In Boston, 59% of 0-2 year olds who reported a childcare arrangement are not using any type of formal care, as compared to 39% of 3-5 year olds. Parent/guardian care is the most frequently used care type among 0-2 year olds: 33% of children 0-2 are cared for by a parent/guardian compared to 22% of children 3-5; 62% of all children in parent/guardian care and 64% of all children in neighbor/friend/family care are 0-2 years old.

Figure 2.



**Women in our sample reported childcare as a challenge to entering/re-entering the workforce.** Parent/guardian care was the second-most selected childcare arrangement with 30% of respondents using it in some capacity. Additionally, 26% of parents who care for their children selected “wants/needs to work” as a childcare challenge and 58% selected “not affordable.”

In our sample, 15% of children 0 to 2 and 11% of children 3 to 5 had a parent who was out of the workforce but wished to re-enter it (see figure 1). Of the parents/guardians who reported their gender, 91% were women and 9% were men.

***“I feel unable to get a better job because I need the flexibility to leave work to pick my kids before 5pm. Please help working parents.”***

- Roslindale Resident

***“There isn’t enough affordable infant care. I’m having another baby and considering ending my employment.”***

- Roslindale Resident



# 3. METHODOLOGY

## I. THE SURVEY

The survey was available both online and in paper format. The paper version was sent through direct mail to all Boston households as an insert within the larger annual City of Boston Resident Census. The print version was offered in English and Spanish. The online version was available on the City’s website in English, Spanish, traditional Chinese, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Vietnamese.

The City’s efforts to reach Boston residents took shape in a variety of ways including via social media posts and flyer distribution in seven languages, press outreach, email and newsletters, and working with community partners to encourage many residents to respond.

Figure 3.



Figure 4.



## PESQUISA DA CIDADE: SERVIÇOS DE CUIDADOS PARA CRIANÇAS (CHILDCARE)

### ANÔNIMO E CONFIDENCIAL

Pela primeira vez, a Prefeitura de Boston está incluindo uma pesquisa opcional no censo anual da cidade que inclui algumas perguntas sobre educação infantil e serviço de cuidados infantis (childcare). A Prefeitura quer saber as melhores maneiras de apoiar e servir famílias e crianças em Boston.

Se você é pai/mãe ou guardião de uma ou mais crianças com cinco anos ou menos, por favor, dedique alguns minutos para ajudar, respondendo às perguntas no formulário enviado pelo correio ou on-line.

**CITY of BOSTON**

中文 | Tiếng Việt | Kreyòl ayisyen | Português | kriolus:  
[boston.gov/language-disability-childcare-survey](http://boston.gov/language-disability-childcare-survey)

**W** Women's Advancement

Figure 5.



**W** Boston Women  
@BostonWomen

¿Es usted padre o tutor de uno o más niños de 5 años o menores residiendo en @CityofBoston? Por favor, comparta su experiencia con servicios de educación temprana y guarderías para ayudarnos a apoyarle:  
[boston.gov/ldc-survey](http://boston.gov/ldc-survey) | #BostonChildcare

Translate Tweet



***“I have not been able to work for one year because they have been on a voucher waitlist for a year or longer.”***

- South End Resident

Respondents were asked to fill out where they lived and the dates of birth for members of the household. The first section asked for the birth dates of up to five members of the household, and a separate section asked for the birth dates of up to five children living in the home. Respondents were also asked whether or not each child in the home received a childcare voucher. Childcare arrangement(s) were collected for each child in the home that was between the ages of 0-5 (e.g. center-based care, nanny or babysitter, parent or guardian, etc.). Challenges for each child were also collected (e.g. not affordable, difficult to find, parent/guardian wants/needs to work, etc.). The survey was structured so that children could be assigned more than one type of care and more than one challenge. Lastly, an open response section collected qualitative data about family’s arrangements and the struggles that they face when navigating the childcare industry in Boston.

## **II. OUR SAMPLE**

The Language, Disability and Childcare Survey was distributed to all Boston residents and collected 29,522 responses across Boston neighborhoods. Our sample - respondents with children between the ages of 0-5 who answered a childcare question - consisted of 2,616 families and 3,336 children. The American Community Survey estimates that there are roughly 28,000 families in Boston with children 0-5, making the Childcare Survey response rate approximately 9%.

The average age of respondents was 34 years old and families had, on average, one child between the ages of 0-5. Children were divided into two age groups: 0-2 year olds and 3-5 year olds. Children between the ages of 0-2 comprised 52% of the sample, while 3-5 years olds comprised the remaining 48%. The main reason for dividing the data by age is that the cost for caring for 0-2 year olds is significantly higher than for 3-5 year olds because of the difference in state-mandated teacher-to-child ratios.

The highest response rates to the survey are in the neighborhoods of the North End and the South Boston waterfront, where more than 30% of households with children under 5 submitted a response (See Table 1). In contrast, we observed the lowest response rates in Roxbury and Mattapan, both at 2%.

The two neighborhoods with the largest numbers of respondents were Jamaica Plain (13%) and Dorchester (12%). This is not surprising given those neighborhoods have a large population of children 0-5 (see table 1). Roxbury, Mattapan, Hyde Park, and East Boston also have high percentages of children 0-5 in the Boston population, but had lower percentages of respondents to the survey.



***“Childcare is a disaster even for the ‘middle class’. It's unsustainable. We have no savings, no credit and all my friends are in the same situation.”***

- East Boston Resident

Table 1.

**Childcare Survey Response Rate by Neighborhood**

	Families w/ Children 0-5 Boston	Families w/ Children 0-5 Sample	Response Rate
Boston	28,244	2,616	9%
Allston	203	40	20%
Back Bay	391	57	15%
Beacon Hill	416	60	14%
Brighton	1,394	176	13%
Charlestown	1,284	227	18%
Dorchester	6,414	305	5%
Downtown	448	59	13%
East Boston	2,753	146	5%
Fenway	252	37	15%
Hyde Park	1,666	105	6%
Jamaica Plain	1,988	334	17%
Mattapan	1,342	31	2%
Mission Hill	391	19	5%
North End	143	47	33%
Roslindale	1,498	221	15%
Roxbury	2,757	51	2%
South Boston	1,395	165	12%
South Boston Waterfront	84	26	31%
South End	1,347	252	19%
West End	153	28	18%
West Roxbury	1,925	197	10%
Blank		33	



Table 2.

**Distribution of Children Age 0-5 By Neighborhood**

Neighborhood	Sum of Children In Boston	Sum of Children In Sample	% Total Children In Boston	% Total Children In Sample
Allston	307	46	1%	1%
Back Bay	572	73	1%	2%
Beacon Hill	582	85	1%	3%
Brighton	2312	227	6%	7%
Charlestown	1856	310	5%	9%
Dorchester	9356	383	23%	12%
Downtown	663	76	2%	2%
East Boston	3741	186	9%	6%
Fenway-Kenmore	482	43	1%	1%
Hyde Park	2305	133	6%	4%
Jamaica Plain	2777	424	7%	13%
Mattapan	1911	37	5%	1%
Mission Hill-Longwood	481	24	1%	1%
North End	172	65	0%	2%
Roslindale	2080	279	5%	8%
Roxbury	4105	59	10%	2%
South Boston	1838	208	4%	6%
South Boston Waterfront/Fort Point	106	31	0%	1%
South End	1914	315	5%	10%
West End	217	34	1%	1%
West Roxbury	3315	255	8%	8%
Blank		43		1%

### III. LIMITATIONS

The survey largely accomplished its goal of answering broad questions about families’ childcare choices and challenges. Space and resource limitations restricted our ability to ask the amount and kinds of questions that we would have liked to include. We have resolved a number of these challenges and expect to ask more and more specific questions in the 2020 edition of the Survey.

The main limitation of the findings is that the sample was not representative of the Boston population. In comparing the percent of children 0-5 in our sample to the greater Boston population, Jamaica Plain, Charlestown, Roslindale, and the South End were the most over sampled neighborhoods, while Dorchester and Roxbury were the most under sampled. 13% of children in our sample came from Jamaica Plain, 8% came from Roslindale, and 9% came from Charlestown and the South End. In the Boston population, 7% of children live in Jamaica Plain and 5% live in Roslindale, Charlestown, and the South End. Additionally, 12% of children in our sample came from Dorchester and 2% came from Roxbury compared to 23% and 10% in the Boston population, respectively<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey, BPDA Research Division Analysis.



The survey also did not specifically ask where each family receives their primary childcare, making us unable to understand differences in the childcare market by location. As a result, our analysis did not focus on neighborhood-level data or draw any conclusions that generalized about the Boston population.

***“The cost of care is astronomical and even if I had unlimited funds, I still can’t get a spot in a daycare nearby!”***

- South Boston Resident



## 4. CONTINUING OUR WORK

### I. NEXT STEPS

This data collection effort is a critical early step and part of a multi-stakeholder collaboration to address a sector in crisis. Over the next year, we will focus on the following immediate next steps:

#### *Continue listening to Boston families*

We will launch an updated Childcare Census insert in 2020 and continue to collect this data yearly. This will allow us to better understand progress over time and inform action to address one of the biggest issues keeping families from upward economic mobility.

#### *Improve data collection techniques*

Improving the survey design is a key focus area for MOWA and the Economic Mobility Lab. Using additional resources assigned to this initiative, we will be able to collect more and more specific data in the 2020 edition of the Survey and beyond. This will allow us to ask new questions to expand our knowledge of this critical issue and design solutions suited to the particular needs of Boston families.

#### *Open Data*

The data collected for this report will become part of a series of open datasets that will allow researchers, advocates, and residents to track the state of early childhood in the city. Many types of stakeholders converge in the field of early childhood. Open datasets help stakeholders develop a common understanding from which to create the most impactful strategies and solutions. The City is participating as a partner in this effort led by the Boston Opportunity Agenda and will contribute this data to this initiative.

#### *Action*

While we work to collect better data, we understand the need to act immediately. Based on previous research, the City developed and launched a pilot to support family childcare entrepreneurs. Our goal is to reverse the trend of family childcare closings in order to maintain the supply of available childcare seats for families. If the pilot proves successful, the City will expand it in the coming years and look for ways to bring this solution to scale.

***“I understand this is not just a Boston problem...but Boston can and should take the lead on this critical issue.”***

- South End Resident



# 5. APPENDIX

## I. TABLES

**Challenge Type within Age Group**

Childcare Challenge	% Ages 0-2	% Ages 3-5
Not Affordable	87%	80.6%
Difficult to Find	32%	26.6%
Distance	14%	12.7%
Quality	23%	22.3%
Not Licensed	3%	1.5%
Scheduling	23%	22.3%
Parent/Guardian Wants to Work	15%	11.3%

**Care Type within Age Group**

Childcare Type	% Ages 0-2	% Ages 3-5
Center-based	30.3%	40.4%
Neighbor/Friend/Family	15.0%	9.4%
Nanny or Babysitter	20.6%	14.2%
Home-based	11.5%	9.5%
Public School	1.1%	16.5%
Parent/Guardian	33.3%	22.4%

**Age Distribution within Challenge Type**

Challenge Type	% Ages 0-2	% Ages 3-5
Not Affordable	56.1%	43.9%
Difficult to Find	58.5%	41.5%
Distance	56.1%	43.9%
Quality	54.7%	45.3%
Not Licensed	68.5%	31.5%
Scheduling	54.7%	45.3%
Parent/Guardian Wants to Work	61.1%	38.9%

**Age Distribution within Care Type**

Childcare Type	% Ages 0-2	% Ages 3-5
Center-based	45.4%	54.6%
Neighbor/Friend/Family	63.9%	36.1%
Nanny or Babysitter	61.6%	38.4%
Home-based	57.3%	42.7%
Public School	6.9%	93.1%
Parent/Guardian	62.2%	37.8%

**% of Children with a Child Care Voucher**

	Voucher by Age	Percent
Child 0-2	38	33%
Child 3-5	78	67%
Total	116	3.8%

\*some tables may not add up to 100% due to respondents being able to select more than one arrangement/challenge type.

