



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT STUDY: Informal Care in East Oakland



Final Report to  
Oakland Starting Smart and Strong (OSSSI)

May 1, 2017

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2016 Parent Voices Oakland (PVO), a grassroots, parent-led organization fighting for affordable, accessible, quality child care for all families, partnered with the Oakland Starting Smart and Strong Initiative (OSSSI) through its mini-grant program. Parent Voices Oakland mobilizes parents and develops their leadership to engage in policy advocacy and parent-powered campaigns to address issues identified by parents. PVO's work is guided by the belief that parents know what's best for their children.

Thousands of Oakland families of children ages 0-5 need but don't have access to child care. PVO proposed to bring families to the table not only to better understand the problem, but to advance concrete solutions. This parent-led research project focused on families accessing informal care in four East Oakland neighborhoods: Highland, Castlemont, Havenscourt and Lockwood/Tevis. In tandem with the comprehensive early childhood household survey by Glen Price and the Kenneth Rainen Foundation, Parent Voices Oakland seeks to create a holistic view of how the early childhood systems of care are delivered in Oakland *from the parents' perspective*.

## **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

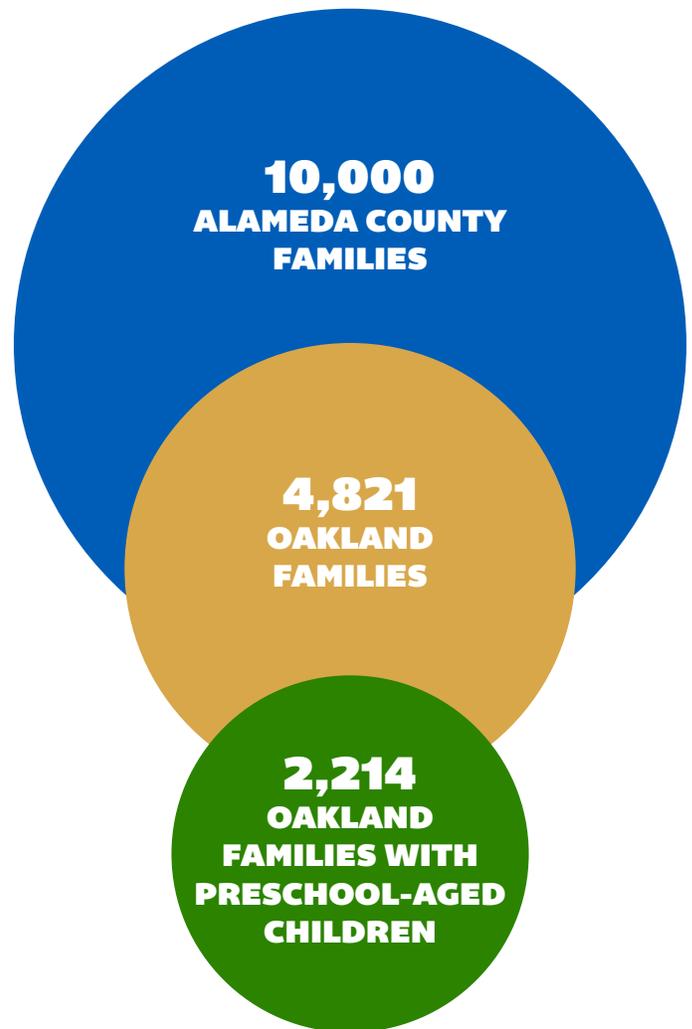
Oakland has a child care problem. There are an estimated 10,000 families on the waiting list for child care in Alameda County, including Pre-K and aftercare. Almost half (4,821) of these families live in Oakland. Most of the parents on the waiting list in Oakland (according to the BEL or BANANAS eligibility list) are African American mothers living in East Oakland. More than a quarter (2,214) are preschool-aged children waiting for care. Living in the most under-resourced neighborhoods of this rapidly gentrifying city, families are faced with the complex challenges of preserving housing while finding child care that adapts to their often erratic or unpredictable scheduling, nontraditional work hours, such as nights and weekends, and limited transportation options.

While we know there is a problem, we haven't addressed how to best support struggling families with their child care needs, and where investment dollars will be most effectively leveraged for positive child outcomes. Local government systems, including agencies providing direct services, struggle to engage families affected by this problem whose lived experiences offer deeper insights as to the multifaceted nature of these issues. For example:

- How many families actually use informal care? Why?
- How do factors such as the housing crisis, public safety and transportation influence parents' decisions about child care?
- What systemic barriers, such as complex enrollment and eligibility processes, navigating services with multiple agencies, and implicit bias contribute to lack of child care access?

With a base of parent leaders with deep roots to the African American community in East Oakland and decades-long commitment to child care advocacy and developing the leadership of families, Parent Voices Oakland was uniquely positioned to assist OSSSI to support informal caregivers, engage families and pinpoint scalable solutions.

### **FAMILIES WAITING FOR CHILD CARE**



## USING A RESEARCH JUSTICE APPROACH

Why is it important to create a community-driven, parent engagement strategy to gain insight on child care needs and solutions? First, data shows that families of color face persistent inequities in access to quality child care and academic outcomes, despite years of study and intervention. Families continue to encounter formidable barriers to accessing life-affirming services that lead to social mobility and security. This indicates a need for greater understanding of these barriers and solutions, using a diversity of research and engagement approaches.

In support of inclusiveness and cultural competence, elected officials and large agencies have collected data and feedback from families and communities. Unfortunately, this engagement has not always led to real solutions addressing the root causes of poverty. Furthermore, families who are asked to give feedback are often pre-selected by researchers, agency leaders and/or service providers. As a result of this limited and inequitable selection process for engaging families and the inability to implement real solutions to addressing poverty, many institutions operating in communities of color have not been able to

establish the level of trust required to truly shift child and family outcomes.

Research Justice is a strategic framework that shifts the power dynamic between institutions and communities deeply impacted by economic injustice and racism. This shift provides a starting point for policy making that is representative and inclusive of impacted communities. Research justice employs methods that seek to elevate rather than exploit the lived experience, expertise and power of the community to create systemic change.

For these reasons, Parent Voices Oakland is working to incorporate Research Justice as a complementary approach to their organizing work, gathering and democratizing information for use by those most impacted by social inequity. Parent leaders worked together to design

and implement research strategies that place the needs and voices of those impacted at the center, and recognize community members as experts. This work enhances the community organizing process and ensures that service delivery and related interventions are effective and reflect the true needs of the communities to be served.

**Research Justice is a strategic framework that shifts the power dynamic between institutions and underserved communities.**



## METHODOLOGY

The goal of the study was to engage 500 parents/caregivers of children ages 0-5 in the Highland, Castlemont, Havenscourt and Lockwood/Tevis neighborhoods in East Oakland to gain deeper insights into the challenges parents face accessing child care. Parent leaders designing the study were especially interested in exploring connections between access to child care and other community issues, such as transportation, community safety, housing and the impact of exposure to trauma.

Applying a Research Justice framework, Parent Voices Oakland involved parents in all phases of the study: identifying the issues, designing the survey, gathering responses and making meaning from the data. The study involved the following steps:

**1. DEVELOPING SURVEY:** PVO parent leaders organized and led four community listening sessions (one in each target neighborhood) with over 30 parents and caregivers at each. The purpose of the listening sessions was to gain insight about issues families were facing in order to develop survey questions. From these insights, parent leaders drafted a survey tool and circulated it to the Campaign Planning Committee for feedback. They then tested the survey with a sample of 25 parents/caregivers to further refine it. The test sample led to changes in the language of some questions to be more reflective of families' experiences and shortening the overall length to make it possible to capture a large number of surveys for analysis.

**2. ADMINISTERING SURVEY:** A team of four parent leaders organized multiple "walk days" in target neighborhoods, training other leaders to reach out to parents and caregivers in their homes, at social services offices and in neighborhood parks. Using the survey, the parent researchers asked respondents about their child care needs, what kind of child care they used, child care options, and questions about neighborhood concerns. Parent leaders made strategic decisions to maximize the impact of the walk days, including shifting from a strictly residential door-knocking approach to one that encompassed more community venues, such as bus stops, churches, and social services offices. This decision provided opportunities to speak to a larger number of parenting transitional age youth, and displaced and unhoused families. A total of 608 parents/guardians responded.

**3. DATA ANALYSIS:** Parent Voices Oakland contracted with evaluator Laura Pryor, a doctoral candidate with the UC Berkeley School of Education, to perform a preliminary analysis. PVO then shared preliminary data using tabulated results from 572 of the surveys with a parent review panel, and listened to any questions raised about the data, potential inaccuracies in representation of their community and what families thought of the findings.

**4. FOCUS GROUP:** PVO then held a focus group with a total of 10 community members, including eight parents, and two child care providers. PVO asked a series of questions based on themes from the preliminary data gathered to understand why families answered the way they did, and discuss potential solutions to issues that surfaced in the analysis.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study identified strong correlations between parents' job and housing stability, as well as neighborhood safety concerns, and their child care choices. Survey data suggests that **families with the least stability are the most likely to have problems accessing child care and higher levels of mistrust about formal child care and "strangers" watching their children.** This group was also the most likely to access informal care through unlicensed providers, typically Family, Friends and Neighbors. **Overwhelmingly, parents said they chose Family, Friends and Neighbor care because there was no other choice.** The study also identified interest among parents to shape community-based solutions to their child care challenges.

**Overwhelmingly, parents said they chose Family, Friends and Neighbor care because there was no other choice.**

### Survey Demographics

#### The typical profile of survey participants was:

- 31 years old with one or two children
- Black or Latino
- Living in the neighborhood an average of 12 years
- Working nontraditional and varying hours
- Using Family, Friends and Neighbors for child care

#### Other important data include:

- One-third of the parents were concerned about housing or had been forced to move in the past six months.
- Eleven parents who are 18 years old and under participated.
- Black families made up the largest racial/ethnic group, more than three times the number of Latinos, who were the second largest group.
- Nontraditional work schedules included hours that changed often, weekend and evening work, and multiple jobs.
- Fourteen percent were students and five percent were unemployed.



## Child Care Choices

Parents surveyed ranked child care second in a long list of challenges associated with raising children. Families overwhelmingly agreed that having choices in the type of child care, and child care setting was very important. When asked to choose up to three biggest worries about child care as a system, the most often chosen was **“Can’t get child care”**.

The current child care situation most parents reported using was Family, Friends and Neighbors (FFN), a term used to describe informal care by non-licensed providers. **FFN was used by nearly three times as many parents as Licensed Family Day Care (second highest), and more than three times as many as Head Start (third highest)**. In addition, 63 percent of all parents surveyed said they relied on FFN at some point to care for their children.

*“I would only work part time jobs because I didn’t feel comfortable trusting anyone with my children. It’s not that they’re [center based or family child care providers] bad, we just have different values and ideas.” - Parent*

Why do so many families choose Family, Friends and Neighbors for child care? Is it really a choice, or is it a last resort? Only 22 percent said they relied on Family, Friends and Neighbors because they thought it was best, while 53 percent said they had no other option. Analysis of the data reveals a **significantly higher proportion of Latino parents, parents who are students and parents with nontraditional or unpredictable work hours rely on Family, Friends and Neighbors for child care.**

*“I prefer home child care because it’s a smaller group setting. We’re African American and Muslim, so we have dietary restrictions and I wanted something more personal. I want to build a relationship with the teachers.”  
- Parent*

## Intersecting Issues

Examining parents' top three worries/concerns about child care highlighted other factors influencing child care choices: **housing, enrollment problems, transportation and employment.**

### HOUSING

Housing instability affects more than a third of families surveyed by Parent Voices Oakland. This is not surprising, given the scale and scope of the housing crisis in Alameda County. According to the Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless Program's study on the prevalence of family homelessness, 923 households with kids under 18 received support in 2016 from Alameda County's homeless services, including shelter, transitional housing and other homeless services. Homelessness affects Black families disproportionately: less than 12 percent of Alameda County's overall population is Black, yet in 2015, 59 percent of families with children under 18 who spent time in shelters or without shelters were Black.

Families who responded that they had housing concerns were more likely to:

- **Work irregular hours**
- **Choose 'can't get child care' as one of their top three concerns**
- **Choose 'don't trust teachers/schools/strangers' as one of their top three concerns.**

A significantly higher proportion of parents without housing concerns chose 'No Problems' as one of their top three concerns about child care. This indicates that families with stable housing have a less challenging time obtaining and maintaining quality child care for their children.

**Families with stable housing have a less challenging time obtaining and maintaining quality child care for their children.**

### TRANSPORTATION

- A significantly higher proportion of parents who have non-traditional or unpredictable work schedules chose 'transportation problems' as one of their top three concerns about the child care system.

*"...[T]he parent's salary will increase a little bit and all of a sudden they lose [their child care subsidy] and have to start all over again.... They can't seem to make it or get ahead."  
- Provider*

### ENROLLMENT PROBLEMS

In the focus group, parents and providers brought up the challenges of enrolling in child care programs, especially in Oakland Unified School District Child Development Centers. Onerous paperwork and unclear policies have made access to affordable preschool difficult to navigate. Families with complex needs are more likely to struggle with paperwork, appointments, and strict timelines to apply for care. Additionally, artificially low State and Federal income eligibility continues to cause families to lose subsidy access, despite minimal wage increases that do not cover the full cost of care.

*"The Centers used to open at 7, a lot of parents have to be at work at 8.... And they need a place to take their kids. We close at 5, some parents just get off work at 5." - Provider*

### EMPLOYMENT

- A significantly higher proportion of parents who have non-regular work schedules stated that they rely on a family member, friend or neighbor for child care.
- A significantly higher proportion of unemployed parents chose 'can't get child care' as one of their top three concerns.



## Community-based Solutions

These challenges also present an opportunity: PVO's study indicates that most families are eager to access community-funded or cooperative support as alternative models of child care. In this study, PVO defined such alternatives as Collective Care: neighborhood-based child care run cooperatively by providers, parents or other community members. Collective Care can be flexible, localized and delivered in a variety of environments including: child care centers, family home-based child care, family resource centers, or city-run recreation centers.

The overwhelming majority of parents surveyed were supportive of the idea of "Collective Care": 51 percent said they would use it and 42 percent said they supported it but wouldn't use it. Delving into the data, we see that parents were 37 percent more likely to use collective care

if they had housing concerns than those without housing concerns (controlling for other factors) and significantly more likely to use collective care if they had than one child. In addition, a significantly higher proportion of Latino parents (as compared with other races/ethnicities) stated that they would use collective care. Conversely, a significantly higher proportion of unemployed parents stated that collective care would NOT be helpful.

Parents also expressed a willingness to get involved in other community activities. Support Groups was the most popular option chosen, followed by Parent Cafes and Play Groups. A significantly higher proportion of parents who have non-regular work schedules stated that they would participate in support groups and a significantly higher proportion of unemployed parents stated that they would participate in play groups.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parent Voices Oakland's parent-led study of informal care in communities and neighborhoods breaks new ground for the current child care delivery system by linking two of the OSSSI core pillars:

- Supporting and Providing Resources for Informal Caregivers and Ensuring Parent Engagement
- Scaling What Works by Creating Strong Infrastructure and Systems, Committing Resources, and Engaging Leaders

Parents' views on what is right for their children according to their values, beliefs and cultural preferences are often ignored in favor of "research-based" programs and practices. When these programs fail to have the desired effect on child outcomes or the reach desired participation levels of certain populations, we need to consider bold alternatives.

In summary, this study shows that most families are choosing Family, Friends and Neighbors to watch their children because they don't have access alternatives. This is especially true for parents who work nontraditional hours. Another consideration for families is the level of trust they have for strangers caring for their children. The high level of concern about community safety indicated in survey responses suggests that this may also be a factor in decision making about child care. Finally, PVO's research indicates a strong connection between housing instability and displacement and usage of informal care. This connection merits further study. The study also showed keen interest among families, especially those with the issues named above, in alternative informal care options such as "Collective Care."

The findings of this parent-led study indicate a need to:

- **Create feedback loops between systems and parents/caregivers:** Policies and programs will be better able to address the interlocking root causes of families' child care problems and build sustainable solutions when consumers are actively engaged in designing solutions that meet their needs.
- **Build on and strengthen Family, Friends and Neighbor (FFN) care:** FFN care is the most relied upon and yet unsupported child care option for families struggling with housing and job instability. Improving the quality of informal care will require partnership with families to build infrastructure to support informal care providers and the parents that rely on them.
- **Explore co-operative child care solutions:** Communities might adopt co-operative child care models that are not exclusively subsidy-dependent while building community connections and better meeting the needs of families and caregivers. Piloting collective child care for low-income families would also improve child outcomes for children, especially for families with children ages 0-3.
- **Build stronger early childhood community hubs:** Strengthen and align a community ecosystem of parent-child play opportunities, peer-to-peer supports and leadership development opportunities that go beyond "interventions" to provide holistic, life-affirming services.
- **Leverage public-private partnerships:** Connect public housing agencies, churches and nonprofit housing developers with parents and providers seeking to create community alternatives to child care systems.
- **Align advocacy efforts to** expand funding for child care and housing subsidies for low-income families.

## **CONCLUSION**

As demonstrated in PVO's study, listening to families deepens our understanding of the interlocking socioeconomic issues affecting their access to quality, affordable child care. This understanding informs effective, sustainable solutions that have potential to drive community-wide improvements. The family voices lifted up in this study point the need for further exploration of these interconnections.

We need to explore child care solutions that are more holistic and community based, and to build mechanisms that allow families to inform and influence institutions and programs for early education. We can draw from the transformative potential of Parent Voices Oakland's leadership model, which builds close, trusting relationships between parents, parent leaders and organizers, and explore how to transfer aspects of this model to strategies for community transformation.

Another area that requires further research is the the relationship between low-income families and unlicensed child care providers. According to a recent study by the

**Too often, families are asked for their feedback on a program after it has been pre-selected by researchers, systems or service providers.**

UCLA Labor Center, 75 percent of informal child care employers are low-income. These families, who struggle to afford child care, gravitate toward informal care providers to meet their child care needs. These providers earn extremely low wages and have little or no support, creating a relationship that reinforces the cycle of poverty in communities.



## **APPENDIX A:** **Informal Care Provider Story**

At a Parent Café I was having a conversation with a friend there who needed care for her baby. I have two little ones and used to care for my cousin's baby. I have experience but not a license. After a week trial we filled out the paperwork for me to be a provider for her baby. She had a child care subsidy through an agency. I have been providing care as a licensed exempt provider since July 2016. It works well for me to stay with my two kids. **As an informal care provider who receives payment from the state, I average a 9 hour day, sometimes much more.** Initially I was being compensated \$680 monthly but in October he turned two and **they lowered the reimbursement to \$587 monthly, which comes to about \$3.14 an hour currently.** I receive diapers from the child care agency and it would be helpful to have other programs to help with clothes and that sort of thing. I would like a program to walk me through the steps of getting a license so that I can earn a higher rate. I am looking forward to getting a license but I need more information about school programs and all of that. I'm not sure how or where to start. The little boy I provide care for is comfortable with me and my kids, he likes it here because he feels happy and has fun and is safe.

- Flor Chavez, *Informal Care Provider*

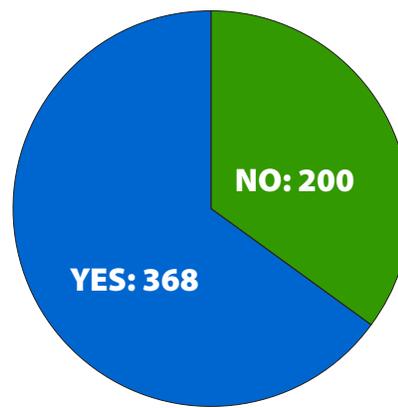
## **APPENDIX B:** **Parent Voices Oakland Child Care Survey Summary of Findings (572 Respondents)**

### 1. How long have you lived in your neighborhood?

- a. Average = 12 Years
- 

### 2. Are you concerned about your housing, or have you been forced to move within the last 12 months?

**PARENTS  
CONCERNED ABOUT  
HOUSING OR FORCED  
TO MOVE IN THE  
LAST 12 MONTHS**

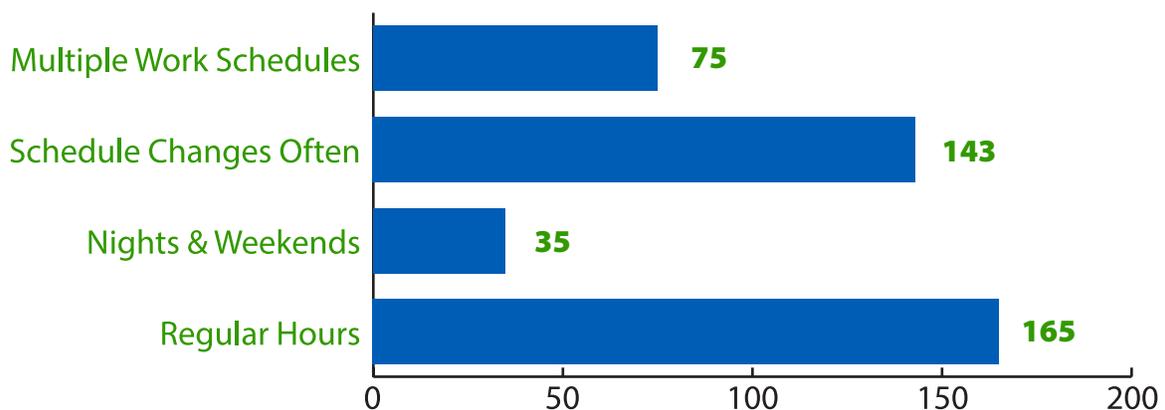


### 3. What is your occupation?

- a. 13% are students (n=70)
- b. 5% are unemployed (n=26)

### 4. What is your current work schedule?

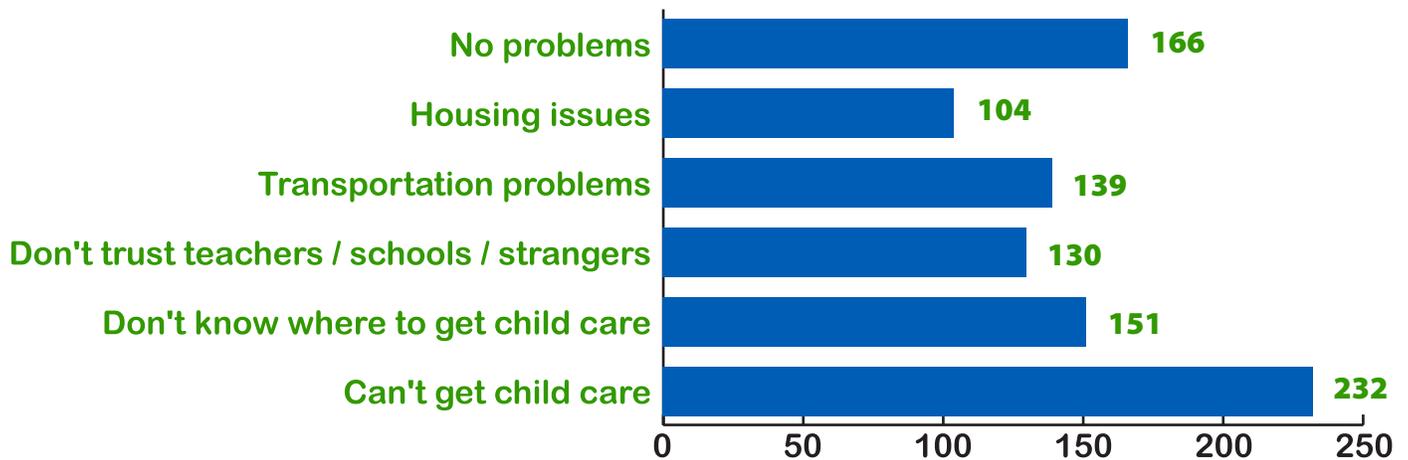
#### PARENTS' CURRENT WORK SCHEDULES



### 5. Choosing up to three, what is your biggest worry/concern about child care (as a system)?

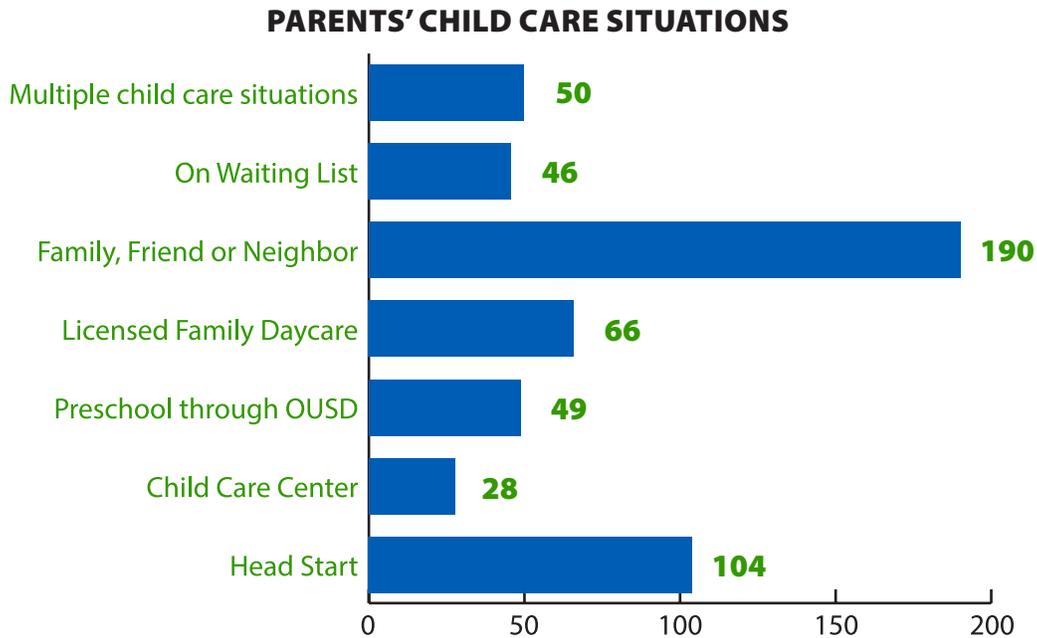
- a. A significantly higher proportion of parents who have nontraditional work schedules chose 'transportation problems' as one of their top three concerns (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.004$ ).
- b. A significantly higher proportion of parents who have housing concerns chose 'can't get child care' as one of their top three concerns (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.032$ ).
- c. A significantly higher proportion of parents who have housing concerns chose 'don't trust teachers/schools/strangers' as one of their top three concerns (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.04$ ).
- d. A significantly higher proportion of parents WITHOUT housing concerns chose 'No Problems' as one of their top three concerns (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p<0.000$ ).
- e. A significantly higher proportion of parents who are students chose 'transportation problems' as one of their top three concerns (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.021$ ).
- f. A significantly higher proportion of unemployed parents chose 'can't get child care' as one of their top three concerns (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.011$ ).

#### **PARENTS' BIGGEST WORRIES / CONCERNS ABOUT CHILD CARE**

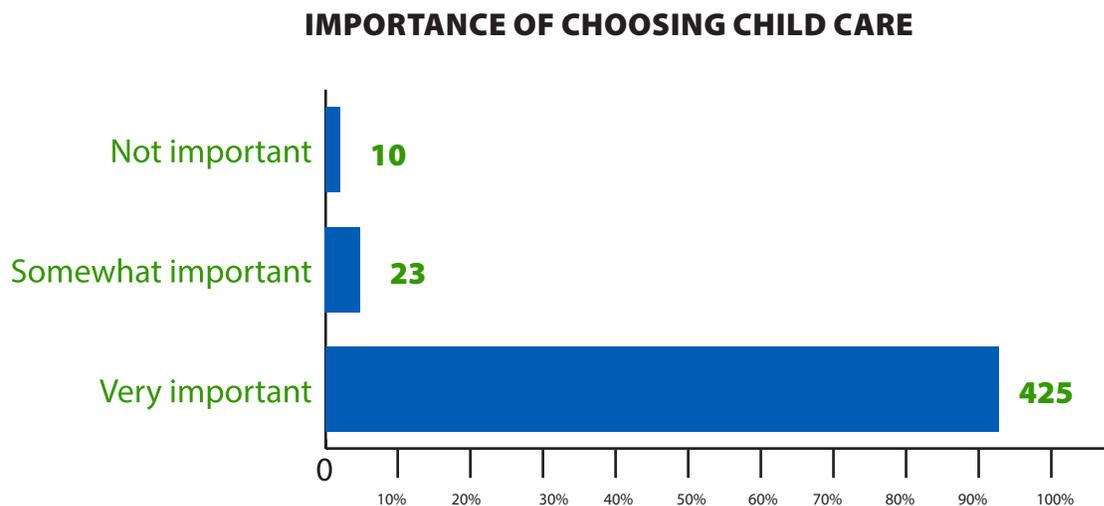


## 6. What best describes your current child care situation?

- a. A significantly higher proportion of parents who have non-regular work schedules stated that they rely on a family or friend for child care (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p < 0.001$ ).

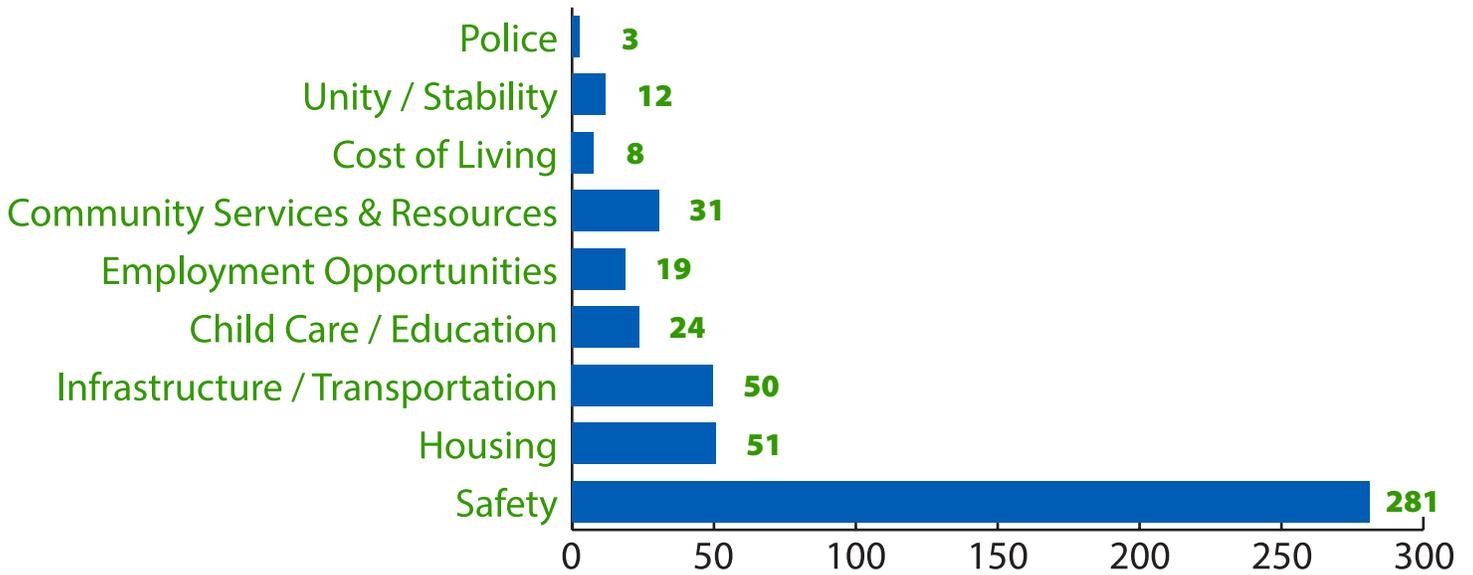


## 7. How important is it, that you are able to choose which child care your child uses?



**8. What is one thing you'd like to improve in your neighborhood?**

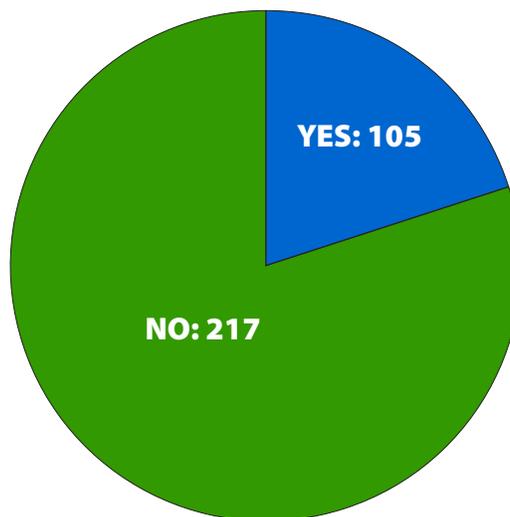
**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:  
ONE THING PARENTS WANT TO IMPROVE IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD**



**9. Do you rely on care from a Family Friend or Neighbor?**

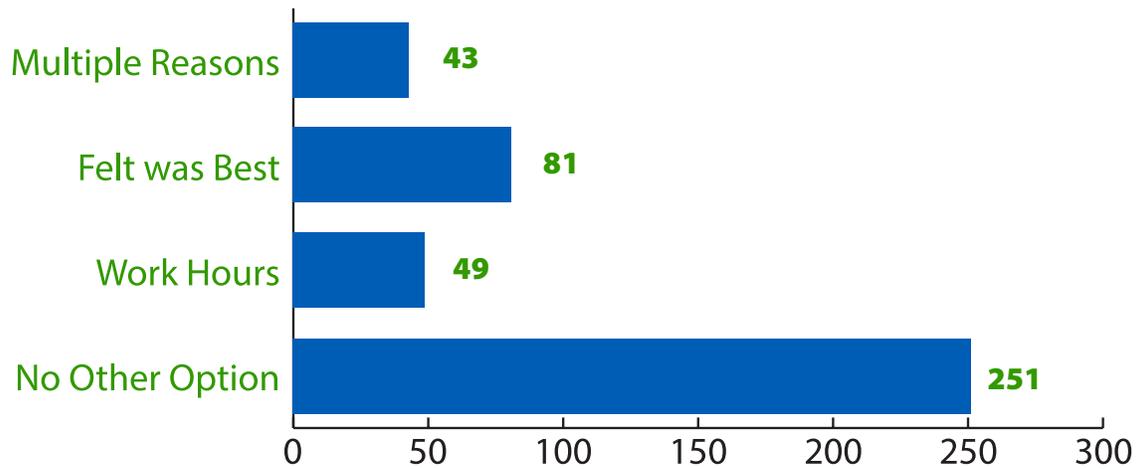
- a. A significantly higher proportion of parents who are students stated that they rely on a family or friend for child care (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.038$ ).

**PARENTS WHO RELY  
ON CARE FROM A  
FAMILY OR FRIEND**



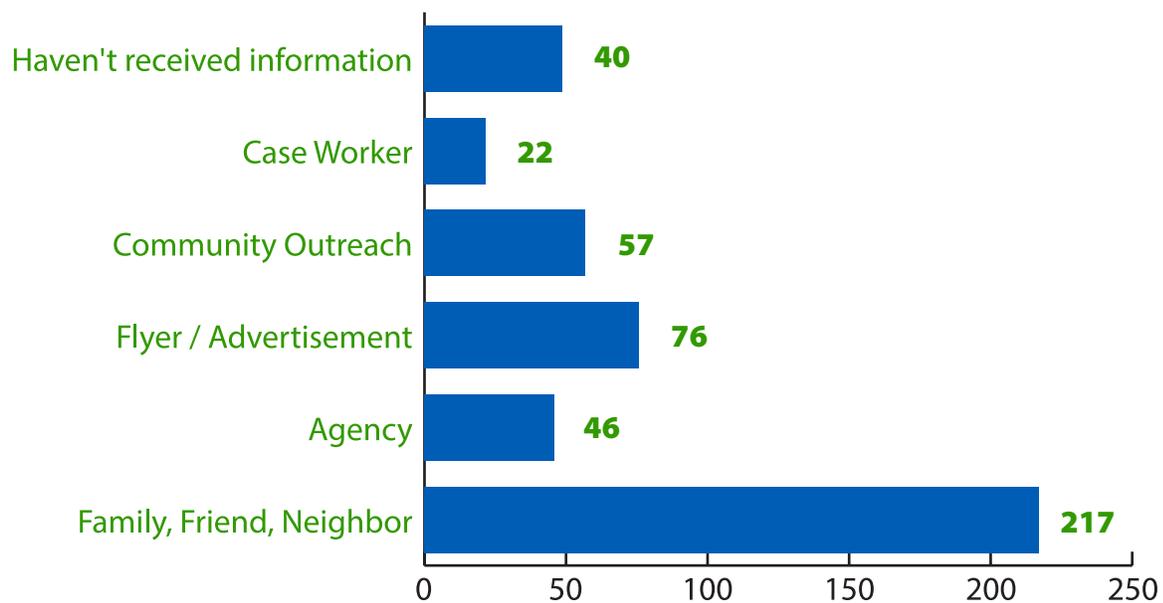
**10. If Yes, Why?**

**REASON WHY PARENTS TURN TO A FAMILY OR FRIEND FOR CARE**



**11. What is the best way to learn about child care or other services? (CHOOSE ONE)**

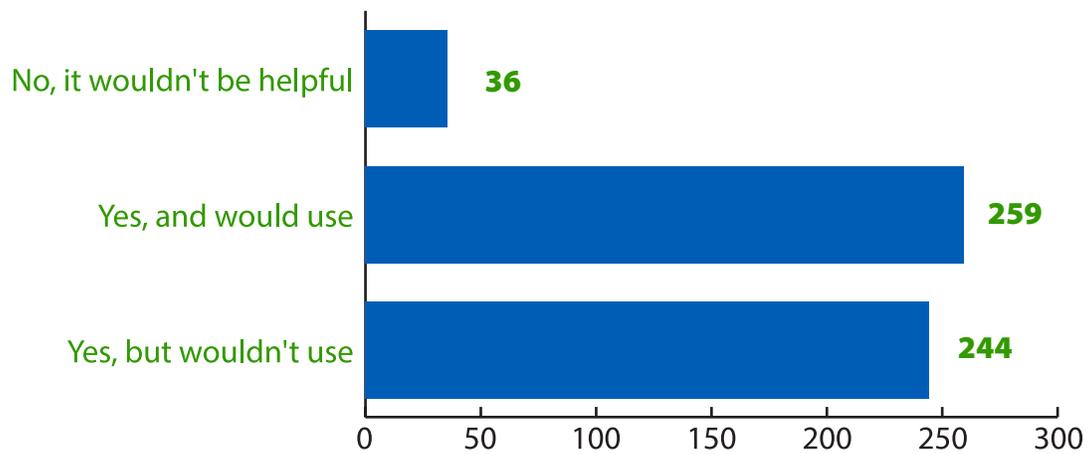
**BEST WAY FOR PARENTS TO LEARN ABOUT CHILD CARE**



**12. Do you feel neighborhood-based care (people watching each other's children as needed), run by parents or other families, would be helpful?<sup>1</sup>**

- a. Parents with unstable housing are 30% more likely to use collective care than families without housing concerns, controlling for race, number of children, and length of time in the neighborhood (logistic regression, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.007$ )
- b. A significantly higher proportion of Latino parents (as compared with other races/ethnicities) stated that they would use collective care. (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.011$ ).
- c. A significantly higher proportion of parents with more than one child stated that they would use collective care (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.013$ ).
- d. A significantly higher proportion of unemployed parents stated that informal care would NOT be helpful (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.002$ ).

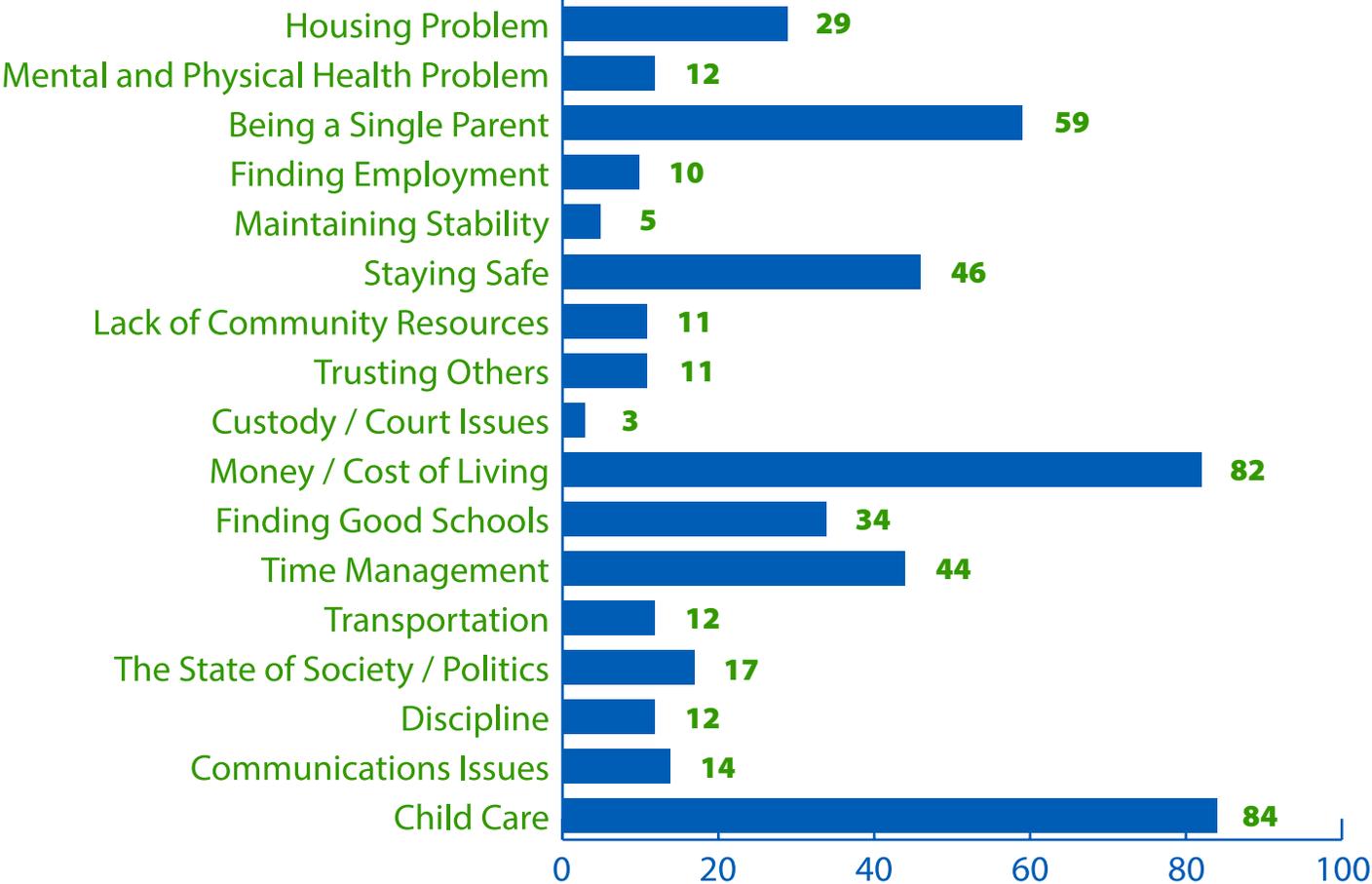
**PARENTS' OPINIONS ON COLLECTIVE CARE**



<sup>2</sup> Termed "Collective Care" for the purposes of this study.

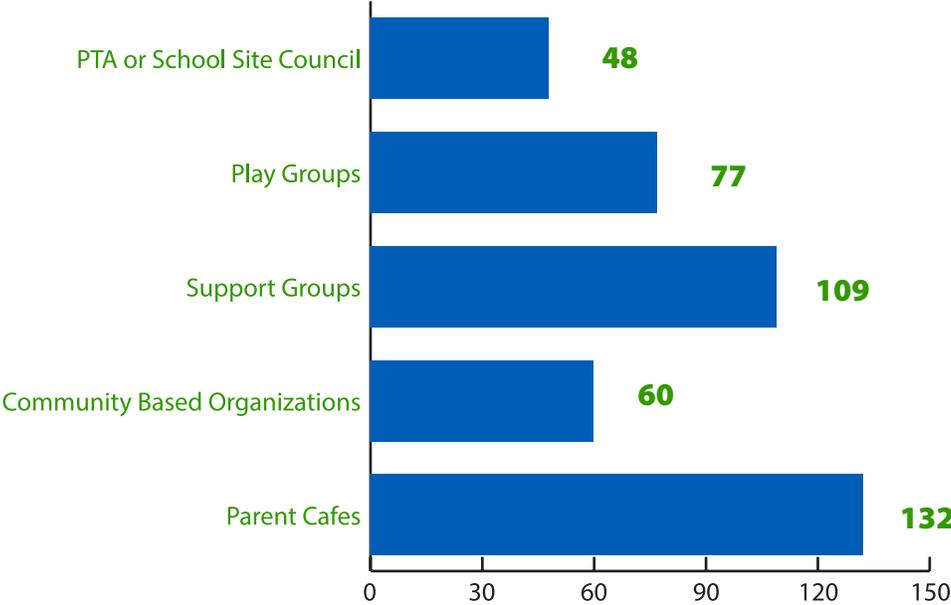
**13. What is your biggest challenge as a parent of young children?**

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:  
PARENTS' BIGGEST CHALLENGES WITH RAISING A YOUNG CHILD**



14. Do you have time or would you make time to participate in the following:

**PARENTS' WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY GROUPS**

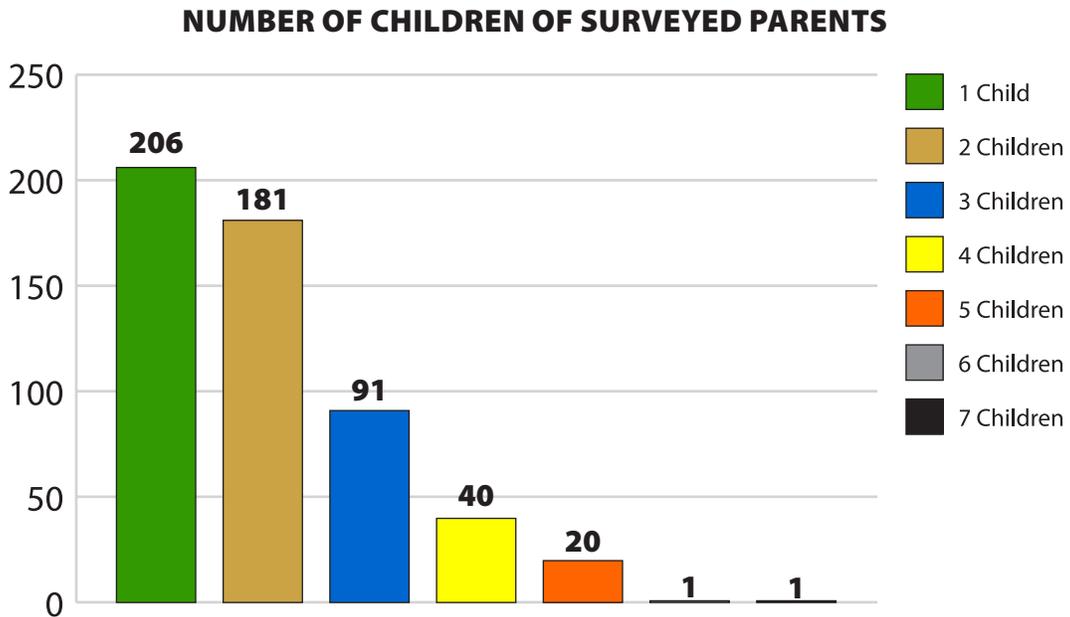
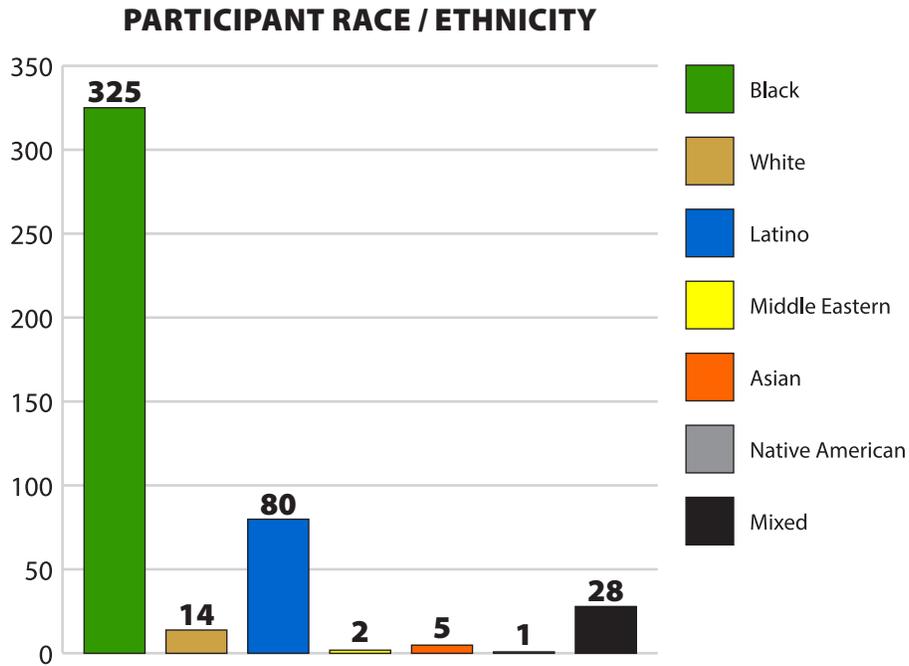


- A. A significantly higher proportion of parents who have non-regular work schedules stated that they would participate in support groups (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p=0.02$ ).
- B. A significantly higher proportion of unemployed parents stated that they would participate in play groups (chi-square test, 0.05 alpha,  $p<0.000$ ).

Tell us more about you...

**AGE**

- a. Average age is 31
- b. 11 parents are age 18 or below (one 15-year-old and two 16-year-olds)





CITY OF OAKLAND

TASSAFARANGA

RECREATION CENTER

OFFICE OF

PARENT VOICES  
Child Care Keeps Parents Earning  
and Children Learning!

PARENT VOICES  
Child Care Keeps Parents Earning  
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VOCES DE PADRES  
El Cuidado de Niños Mantiene  
a los Padres Ganando y a los Niños  
Aprendiendo!

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PARENT VOICES  
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and Children Learning!

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a los Padres Ganando y a los Niños  
Aprendiendo!



**PARENT VOICES OAKLAND (PVO)** is a parent-led grassroots organization that advocates for affordable, accessible, quality child-care. PVO organizes and empowers families with the highest need to build effective campaigns toward economic and educational justice.

**OAKLAND STARTING SMART AND STRONG (OSSSI)** is an active collaborative of funders, community advocates, family service providers and The Oakland Unified School District, all working to ensure kindergarten readiness for every child in Oakland.

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