



SECTION

4

PROXIMITY EXPERTS ENVISIONING THE IDEAL

THRIVE, GROW, AND EVOLVE


Families, educators, and administrators spend the bulk of their time working within the confines of the existing child care system. →



The same is true for professional advocates, government agency staff, policymakers, and philanthropic organizations. We all have been patching up the current system because reimagining it has been an unaffordable and seemingly unattainable luxury.

The WeVision EarlyEd initiative is designed to challenge us all—particularly those with the most privilege and influence. It challenges the “it is what it is” mentality to instead address “what it should be.” WeVision EarlyEd pushes us to step resolutely into the future and claim it. It provides the gathering spaces, tools, and time that are needed to define the ideal system and prepare to make the ideal real.

Imagine a system that supports families, educators, and administrators every step of the way—all in support of each child’s healthy

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EarlyEd**
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The Ideal Experience

- * Child-centered
- * Quality-centered
- * Math that “adds up”
- * Appropriate resources
- * Simple and streamlined processes
- * Connected to public schools
- * Viable choices
- * Collaboration
- * Easy access to information
- * Quality drives regulations
- * Fair
- * Decentralized regulations
- * Seat at the table
- * Fewer hats
- * Constructed by the people in the system
- * Unified language/shared vocabulary
- * Advocacy for self and others
- * Adult well-being

development. We know what these experts want from a child care system that works and adds up for everyone. They told us.

WHAT FAMILIES WANT

Families most want viable and quality options. They want to be able to choose care from a family member, a trusted caregiver in their community, and/or an ECE professional in a regulated program (home-based, center-based, or in a school). They want options that meet their child’s needs, are affordable, and are in a neighborhood close to home or work. They want a system that helps them understand their child care options so that they can find the right fit. In their ideal scenario, information is clear and accessible, describing each option. Regardless of the option(s) families choose, all families receive (direct or indirect) funding and support.

They imagine a system where quality ECE programs, based on established industry standards, are accessible to all families that want them. Drawing from this baseline of quality

options, families select the program that meets their more individualized needs.

Partnerships between families, trusted caregivers, and early childhood educators are a priority. They share information about each child’s development and plan intentional experiences based on this information. Materials help families support their children’s learning at home. Families

have multiple opportunities to share information and meet with other families. Educators provide regular feedback on each child’s progress, and administrators communicate changes

(such as closings) in a timely way. Transitioning from child care (ECE or trusted caregiver) to elementary school is a seamless process.

Bottom line: Families are trusted and treated like the full-fledged educational partners they are.



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FIG. 5

The Ideal Experience

Educators, families, and administrators all want:

- * Similar journeys
- * Similar focus on child growth and development



WHAT EDUCATORS WANT

Educators want consistent support, fair compensation, and a clear path for advancement and growth. They want to be healthy (physically and mentally) and fully prepared to support the individual needs of children and families. They want to be able to support child outcomes that are rooted in the science of child development.

They imagine a system that supports educators every step of the way. To start, they are responsible for meeting the professional standards and code of ethics of the job they are seeking. In return, they have the professional autonomy to focus on child outcomes. To help educators prepare, they receive financial support for debt-free college education, practical work experience, and opportunities to discuss the job and professional practice with knowledgeable practitioners. Targeted support is provided to recruit and retain educators who reflect the racial, cultural, gender, and linguistic identities of the children and families they serve. Certification and job application processes are clear, streamlined, and user-friendly. Roles are defined so that educators and administrators are aligned on expectations from the beginning.

Once on the job, educators are fairly compensated, reflecting their qualifications and experience, and receive benefits such as health care, paid time off, and retirement plans. Programs have measurable goals and performance indicators that are child centered

and profession led. There is plenty of time for collaboration, thinking, and planning across and between educator teams. Educators routinely collaborate with professionals from other disciplines, such as mental health specialists, speech-language pathologists, and early interventionists,



Educators have multiple opportunities to grow.

to meet the needs of young children. Educators regularly share progress reports with administrators and families, and they have access to relevant information on the children in their classroom. A work schedule takes educators' well-being into account so that they can maintain a more reasonable work/life balance and are healthy enough to provide quality care during this critical phase of human development.

Educators also have multiple opportunities to grow. Mentors and networks of peers provide much-needed expertise and advice. Certification levels are tied to experience and quality delivered, encouraging administrators to prioritize educator training. Educators can seamlessly move among program type and age group without unnecessary restrictions. Promotions, including out of the classroom if they choose, are based on merit and competence. And staff have a voice in policy decisions affecting their work. **Bottom line: Educators are treated like the professionals they are.**

WHAT ADMINISTRATORS WANT

Administrators want help at the front end of establishing their programs, clearer facility licensing rules, more flexible regulations, and more opportunities to partner with peers to share services, such as accounting and facilities management. They want the math to add up (simply put, for business revenues to meet or exceed costs and expenses) so they can support their staff, ensure consistent quality, build community partnerships, and respond to families.



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They imagine a system that supports administrators in launching their program, with a streamlined process that provides training, mentors, clear guidelines, and access to clear criteria for how to develop a quality program. They know about best practices, so they can incorporate them into their program design plan from Day one. Administrators have the knowledge and funding needed to complete the licensing process, which is more centralized to help expedite the paperwork and similar logistics. Startup timelines are flexible; for instance, a center that ultimately might be serving 20 infants won't be required to have 20 cribs on-site on Day one.

Administrators have a solid understanding of both child development and business practices. If not, they have access to or can afford to hire staff or consultants with the expertise they need. Additional resources (e.g., accounting support) help them set up and manage the business. The expectations for quality are realistically aligned with the actual costs, including occupancy, payroll, equipment, and supplies. A financial analysis helps verify whether a new ECE program is financially viable and can attract outside capital to fund the project. They can easily access information about fundraising opportunities available through banks and community business centers (debt services), investors (financial equity), foundations (grants), or landlords (tenant improvements). Community fairs help them recruit both educators and families. Contractors, architects, and experts from regulatory agencies help them navigate areas they may not be familiar with, such as facilities management.

Some of these resources are provided through peer groups such as professional associations, groups of administrators working together to forge partnerships with vetted vendors, and contractors, which might result in cost savings through economies of scale and shared services. Administrators position their programs as one-stop shops to connect families and staff with community and government services. **Bottom line: ECE administrators get the kind of support that is commonplace in other publicly funded sectors of the economy.**

Similarities Across States

We received similar feedback from proximity experts around the country as we asked them to expand on the human-centered design data and dream big.

Through the interactive exhibit, we engaged 829 attendees at the NAEYC Annual Conference

in November 2022, 439 attendees at the NAFCC Annual Conference in July 2023, and 292 attendees at the FLAEEYC Annual Conference in October 2023. Here are three sets of data that deepened our understanding; they are helping us make ideal child care more concrete and demonstrate that the ideal is possible.

Image courtesy of National Association for Family Child Care



Quality and Accessibility

Respondents at all three conferences were asked to prioritize the top three elements of the ideal child care system out of five choices. NAEYC and NAFCC attendees—the majority of whom work in ECE programs—selected funding to ensure quality, compensation to attract competent and diverse

staff, and all families having access to quality child care options. FLAEYC respondents—the vast majority of whom identified as educators—included better work schedules with paid time off as one of their top three items. For proximity experts, the ideal child care combines both quality and accessibility.

FIG. 6

Top Three Elements of the Ideal Child Care System

1 = Top Element

	NAEYC 2022 ANNUAL CONFERENCE	NAFCC 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE	FLAEYC 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Rules and regulations that make sense	-	-	-
Quality child care options for all families	3	2	-
Funding to cover the real cost of quality ECE	2	1	2
Compensation that attracts and retains competent and diverse staff	1	3	1
Better work schedule with paid time off	-	-	3

Identity, Clarity, and Coherence

When asked to identify where respondents would fit if the future child care system had four clear and well-funded options, the majority selected

ECE centers and homes. Nearly 11% of the 264 respondents at the NAFCC conference selected the trusted caregiver option, compared to 1.5% of 432 respondents at the FLAEEYC conference.

FIG. 7

Where Do You Fit?

NAFCC Annual Conference, July 2023

10.9%

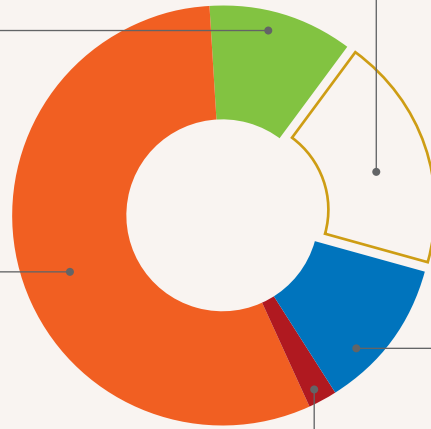
Trusted Caregiver
(Stay-at-Home Parent, Family Member, Nanny, Au Pair, Community Member)

55.5%

Early Childhood Education Program: Home-Based

2.3%

Early Childhood Education Program: School-Based



19% of respondents,

particularly those with systems-level roles or those providing professional development services, selected a combination of these options

11.6%

Early Childhood Education Program: Center-Based

FIG. 8

Where Do You Fit?

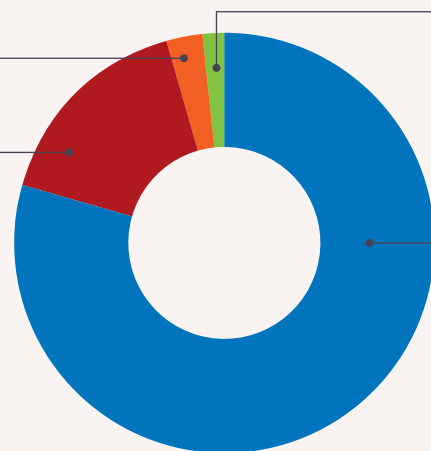
FLAEEYC Annual Conference, October 2023

2.7%

Early Childhood Education Program: Home-Based

16.3%

Early Childhood Education Program: School-Based



1.5%

Trusted Caregiver
(Stay-at-Home Parent, Family Member, Nanny, Au Pair, Community Member)

79.6%

Early Childhood Education Program: Center-Based

Working Conditions and Well-Being

When asked to select one scheduling option (out of three possible) that would help improve the well-being of ECE professionals in order for them to better support young children,

most respondents at the FLAEYC and NAFCC conferences wanted time away from the classroom to be a part of their full-time schedule. However, fewer respondents were willing to work longer hours to make this possible.

FIG. 9

Preferred Scheduling Option

NAFCC Annual Conference, July 2023 (491 respondents)

In-and-out schedule; four days in the classroom and one day to work on other responsibilities	36.6% (180 respondents)
Monthly paid day off; one mental health day off each month, with full pay	34.6% (170 respondents)
Four-day workweek; working longer hours for a shorter workweek	28.7% (141 respondents)

FIG. 10

Preferred Scheduling Option

FLAEYC Annual Conference, October 2023 (469 respondents)

In-and-out schedule; four days in the classroom and one day to work on other responsibilities	40.7% (191 respondents)
Monthly paid day off; one mental health day off each month, with full pay	42.6% (200 respondents)
Four-day workweek; working longer hours for a shorter workweek	16.6% (78 respondents)

Staffing for Education and Administration

The split was pronounced when conference attendees were asked to identify their education and administration staffing priorities in an ideal child care system. NAEYC respondents

consistently highlighted the need for full-time teachers and assistant teachers, while NAFCC respondents expressed the greatest need for grants and development staff. The results varied by role for FLAIEYC respondents.

FIG. 11

Additional Staff Needs in the Ideal Child Care System

1 = Most Important

	NAEYC 2022 ANNUAL CONFERENCE			NAFCC 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE			FLAIEYC 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE		
	Administrator	Educator	Other Role	Administrator	Educator	Other Role	Administrator	Educator	Other Role
Full-Time Teacher/Assistant Teacher	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	3
Special Education Teacher/Coordinator	2	2	3	5	-	-	3	2	1
Mental Health Specialist	3	3	2	4	3	5	1	3	2
Grants and Development Staff	4	4	4	1	1	1	4	4	4
Finance or Business Manager	-	-	-	3	5	3 (tie)	-	-	-
Administrative Support	5	-	-	-	-	3 (tie)	5	-	5 (tie)
Family Engagement Specialist	-	5	5	-	4	-	-	5	5 (tie)
Community Outreach Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Quality Improvement Specialist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staff Scheduling Associate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-