

FAMILY ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

Awareness, Accessibility, Adequacy

Iowa families with young children face unique challenges navigating state systems to find and use quality services that they need. This report shares results from a statewide survey of Iowa families commissioned by Early Childhood Iowa - the only statewide alliance whose purpose is to support program coordination and collaboration among early childhood systems. The survey collected information from 2,185 families across 93 out of Iowa's 99 counties.

Awareness

Compared to 2019, families in 2022 are less aware of services:

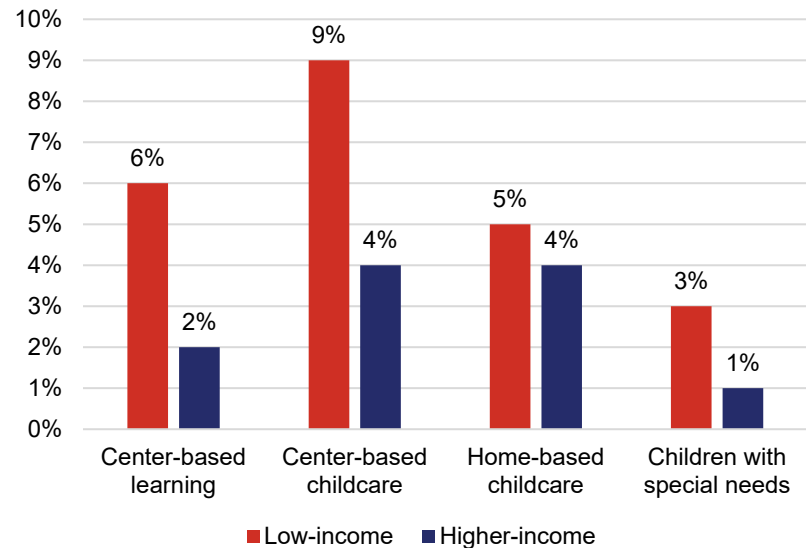
- **Low-income families** reported less awareness of home-based childcare (98% vs. 95%) and center-based care (89% vs. 84%)
- **Higher-income families** reported less awareness of home-based childcare (94% vs. 91%)

Low-income families (compared to higher-income) were more often unaware of the following services:

- Center-based learning (12% vs. 6%)
- Center-based childcare (16% vs. 7%)
- Home-based childcare (22% vs. 9%)
- Services for children with special needs (29% vs. 22%).

Accessibility

Low-income families more often wanted to use services but were unable to access them



Low-income families (compared to higher income) more often reported barriers to accessing services related to:

- Waiting lists (61% vs. 49%)
- Transportation (16% vs. 10%)
- Being asked to leave (4% vs. 1%)

The **cost of childcare**:

- Was an important factor when selecting childcare regardless of area of residency and ethnicity.
- Was a more important factor among low-income families (69%) than higher income ones (57%).

Family's open-ended responses suggested struggles with transportation that were related to tight schedules or limited daytime availability among working parents

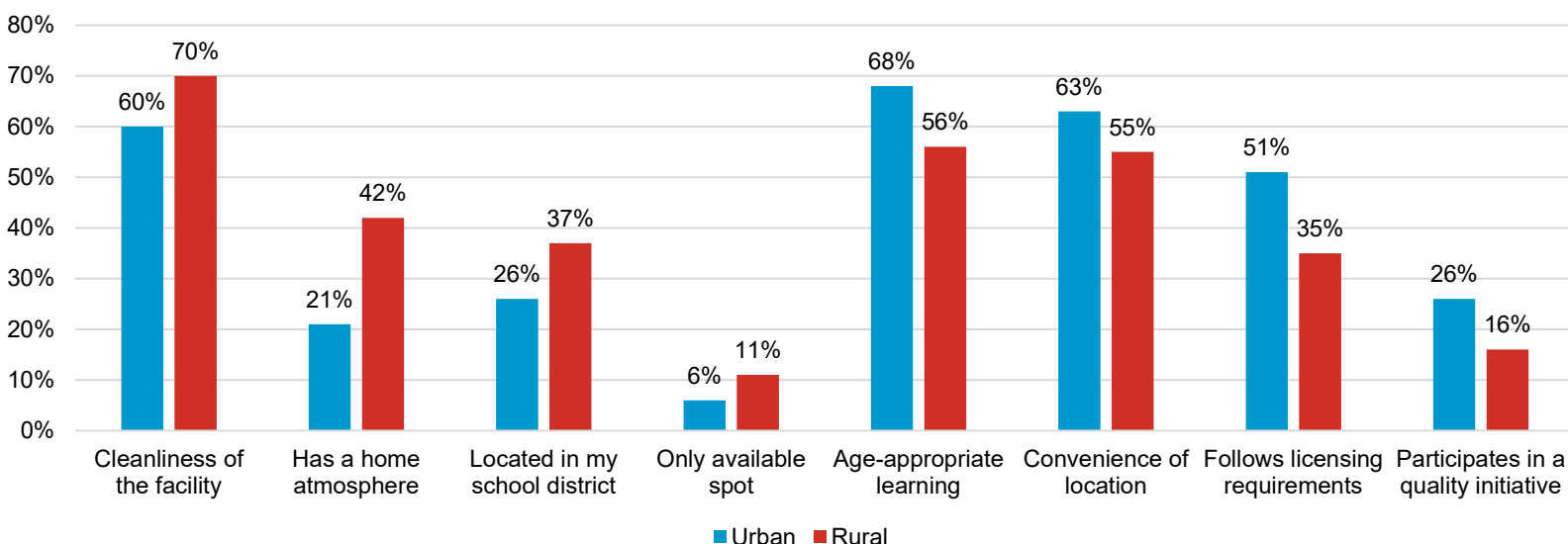
"What about working parents? Lots of these services don't work well for parents with full time jobs. And transportation from preschool to daycare is an absolute nightmare. I have to either enlist family or pay someone or take time off of work to transport my kid to and from in the middle of the day."

Perceptions of Childcare

Families in rural and urban areas face unique challenges when it comes to childcare:

- Almost half of **rural families perceive childcare services to have low adequacy (47%)**, while only **a third of urban families (32%)** give this assessment.
- Urban and rural families suggest different rankings of the most important factors when selecting childcare (see graph below).

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN SELECTING CHILDCARE



Families often pointed out that **staff turnover and low pay** are salient problems in their childcare.

“There is so much turnover in staffing within centers and that worries me enough that I didn't feel comfortable choosing a center for my children. For preschool, many don't seem to have teaching staff with degrees, and highly educated teachers could improve the quality they offer.”

Main Takeaways

- Low income families are at a disadvantage to find and enroll in childcare services. Thus, expanding outreach to them is fundamental to improve equity in service provision.
- The childcare challenges and preferences differed among urban and rural families, suggesting that a variety of childcare settings may be necessary to meet parental expectations and needs.
- Working parents face more challenges related to schedules and transportation, suggesting that longer or flexible schedules may be better suited to meet their needs.

This brief is provided by I2D2, a program of Iowa State University and Early Childhood Iowa committed to putting the state's most informed, passionate, and data-driven resources to work ensuring all Iowa children are successful from birth.



For a more in-depth look at family access to childcare scan the QR code or visit i2d2.iastate.edu

¹ Rouse, H.L., Betancur, L., Bruning, J., Dorius, C. (2022). Data Brief #7 – Family Access to Childcare. Iowa's Integrated Data System for Decision-Making, Ames, IA.