

# **UNDERSTANDING CHILD CARE AND PUBLIC SPACES IN BOSTON**

*Key Findings from the 2023  
Child Care Census Survey*

**PAULA GAVIRIA VILLARREAL** | Child Care Analytics and Program Director,  
Mayor's Office of Early Childhood

**MARIE DAVIDSON** | Rappaport Public Policy Fellow, Mayor's Office of Early  
Childhood

**ASUSENA MUÑOZ** | Social Work Master Program BU, Mayor's Office of Early  
Childhood

**CITY of BOSTON**



Early Childhood

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Contributors

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the many partners whose collaboration was instrumental in the creation of this survey, the data analysis, and the completion of this report. First and foremost, this report would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of the parents and caregivers of Boston. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences, which are the foundation of this work.

### *The Boston Office of Early Childhood*

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Kristin McSwain for her exceptional leadership and direction at the Boston Office of Early Childhood. This effort

would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of Paula Gaviria Villarreal, the Child Care Analytics and Program Director. Her leadership was instrumental in conducting the survey and meticulously analyzing the data to generate insights and ensure the accuracy and integrity of our findings. Her dedication and expertise were crucial to the success of this project.

## *Child care professionals*

To the caregivers throughout Boston, you are the backbone of child care. Your tireless dedication and hard work make it all possible, and for that, we are profoundly grateful.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FINDINGS: PUBLIC SPACES.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>SURVEY POLICY APPLICATIONS.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>35</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2019, the City of Boston has conducted the child care survey to understand the pressing needs that parents and guardians face regarding early education and care. This is the first survey of its kind launched by a city government, and aims to inform and understand families' access to and experiences with care for their children under the age of five. Our 2021 [City of Boston Child Care Survey report](#) highlighted important issues such as financial costs, lack of child care accessibility, the impacts of Covid-19, wealth disparities across Boston, and gender wage gaps. While this report covers the ongoing presence of some of these issues, this year we also sought to understand children's access to public spaces.

In addition to questions about families' current experiences and challenges with child care, the 2023 Child Care Census Survey inquired about the use and perception of specific public spaces for their children. These insights help us to gauge how families currently interact with these spaces and understand how to better support families and create systems that address the needs of parents and guardians.

To understand children's access to public spaces, we examined their access to four specific spaces: parks, playgrounds, libraries, and community centers. These spaces offer children opportunities to play and acquire essential developmental skills. In this segment, we asked families questions to understand the access and perceived quality of these spaces. The questions aimed to identify the proximity and safety of the areas and their suitability for children aged zero

to five. Survey responses highlighted the significant disproportionate effects of the wealth gap on families across Boston.

## Key Findings:

### Child care

- The most common child care arrangement used by caregivers who replied to the survey was by the parent, at 44%, but as children age, the use of parental care decreases.
- More than half (54%) of primary caretakers identify as women, and in 38% of the cases both parents participate as primary caretakers.
- Nearly half of participants (48%) identified child care costs as the main challenge experienced by child care, while 28% stated having no challenges with child care.

### Public spaces

- Nearly 80% of respondents identified using parks, playgrounds, and libraries with their children, indicating that public spaces are an indispensable resource for families with young kids.
- Accessibility plays a crucial part in families' ability to use spaces. Lack of information, location proximity, and space hours dictate the true availability of these spaces.
- Parents stressed the need for investment in public spaces, highlighting the importance of safe, accessible areas for children to play and interact. This is vital for supporting children's development and making our city family-friendly.

# BACKGROUND

## **Why high quality child care matters**

High quality child care plays a crucial role in children's development and family well-being. Research shows that the first five years of life significantly influence long-term social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development, shaping children's readiness for kindergarten and beyond. Access to early education programs is critical for fostering the mental and physical development of young children during these formative years (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

Specifically, participating in early care and education has been proven to help children learn the foundational skills for reading, math, self-control, and positive relationships. Children benefit the most from "high-quality" early childhood education programs, or those which exceed basic health and safety standards by fostering warm, responsive relationships between children and educators, providing engaging and developmentally appropriate curricula, and ensuring ongoing professional training for educators (Schoch et al. 2023).

High-quality early childhood education is beneficial for all young children, but it is particularly crucial for those from low-income families, children with disabilities, and dual language learners (Schoch et al. 2023). This is especially relevant in Boston, where 21% of families with children under 5 live in poverty and approximately 35% speak a language other than English at home (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.)

## **The costs of child care**

Massachusetts has consistently ranked the second most expensive state in the nation to provide center-based child care. In 2023, center-based care was estimated to cost an annual amount of \$16,781 per four year old. For single parent households that make a medium income of \$32,621 the cost of child care is more than half of their yearly income at 51.4% (World Population Review, n.d.). These high child care costs and limited accessibility disproportionately exacerbate the challenges many families face. This report outlines the challenges faced by many families in Boston, largely driven by child care cost, which was a main challenge for 48% of caregivers.

## **Impacts of cost and availability barriers**

Cost and accessibility barriers can significantly impact family decisions and dynamics. Families who are not wealthy often struggle between maintaining employment and staying home to care for their children. As a result, some families may choose to move to areas with better support systems or more affordable child care options. Others might decide to have fewer children or carefully consider child care availability and costs when planning to expand their family. Additionally, one parent might opt to stay home and stop working to manage child care needs effectively. Often, women report being the primary caretakers, which in turn affects their ability to advance in the workforce (Calef 2022).

## **Nature play**

While the cost and availability of child care are ongoing and pressing issues, many additional concerns exist for families regarding the healthy development of young children. For five-year-olds, crucial developmental milestones include social-emotional growth, language and communication skills, cognitive abilities, and movement and physical development (CDC, n.d.). Previous child care survey reports have analyzed the impacts of child care cost and availability on the lives of parents. This year, the focus also aims to explore the outdoor and public spaces available to children, which play a significant role in child development (Beery 2020).

“Nature play,” defined as outdoor free play in natural areas that is imaginative, constructive, sensory-rich, and cooperative, has been shown through Research to be an important component of the development of resilience in early childhood (Beery 2020). Access to outdoor spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, and community centers, has been shown to foster physical, cognitive, and social-emotional growth in young children. The inclusion of questions on public spaces in this year's Child Care Survey highlights the importance of identifying areas within the city that have been underfunded and require additional infrastructure and resources.

Boston has long grappled with deep-rooted segregation, resulting in neighborhoods with higher populations of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents often lacking adequate financial resources and support. Historically, governments and industries have disinvested in these communities through discriminatory practices like redlining and restrictive land use planning and zoning policies (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024). This systemic disparity has contributed to educational achievement gaps for children of color and those from low-income backgrounds, who often have fewer opportunities for high-quality programs and access to outdoor spaces compared to their wealthier white peers.

Our analysis of the survey data aims to shed light on the infrastructural needs of Boston neighborhoods, particularly in relation to outdoor spaces that promote early childhood development. By identifying and addressing these inequalities, we can work towards ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or neighborhood, have access to the resources and environments necessary for healthy growth and development.

# METHODOLOGY

## Survey

In 2019, the City of Boston created a first-in-the-nation approach to understanding child care across the city by launching the Child Care Census Survey. Through the survey, we directly ask parents and guardians about their early education and care needs in order to better understand how families access and experience care for their children ages five and under.

In 2023, the Child Care Census Survey was released through the Office of Early Childhood for the first time. This office, established by Mayor Michelle Wu in 2022, represents the mayor's commitment to strengthening Boston's child care and early education services to help close access gaps for families and expand employment opportunities for Boston residents. The office has aimed to prioritize the needs of families highlighted in the 2021 Child Care Survey launched by the City of Boston's Women's Advancement Office. These needs include accelerating the creation of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten ("UPK") system, creating a one-stop shop for enrollment and access to early education and child care programs, investing in the early education and child care workforce, and coordinating outreach and information for City of Boston and community programming.



The survey was sent by mail to each family in Boston through the annual census, and was also available online in seven different languages, in order to reach as many families as possible and ensure equitable access.

## Sample

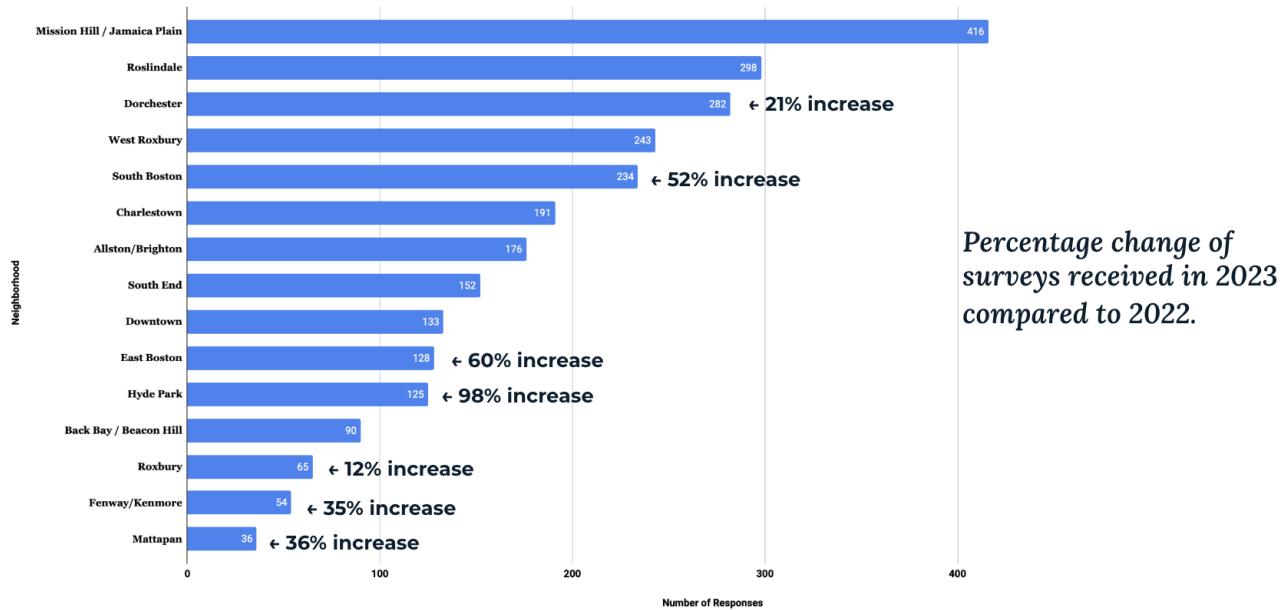
### Response rates by neighborhood

In 2023, the survey received 2,782 responses, marking a 43% increase from the previous year. This substantial participation allowed us to collect detailed information on 3,616 children aged 0-5, representing approximately 10% of the children in this age range in Boston. Such a significant sample size provides a robust foundation for the analysis, ensuring that the findings are both comprehensive and representative of the community. To maintain the focus on local needs and conditions, only responses from residents within Boston were included, which constituted 94% of the total responses.

The distribution of survey participation across different Boston neighborhoods reflects input from a variety of areas across the city. This year the survey experienced the highest number of responses from Mission Hill/Jamaica Plain with 416 surveys, accounting for approximately 15% of the total responses. This is followed by Roslindale with 298 responses (about 11%), Dorchester with 282 (10%), and West Roxbury with 243 (9%). The neighborhoods with the fewest responses are Fenway/Kenmore with 54 (2%) and Mattapan with 36 responses (1%).

Notable increases in responses from prior years in various areas indicate growing engagement within the community. Hyde Park experienced a remarkable 98% increase with 125 responses. East Boston and South Boston also saw substantial increases of 60% and 52%, with 128 and 234 individual responses, respectively. These increases suggest a positive trend of community involvement and interest in sharing feedback.

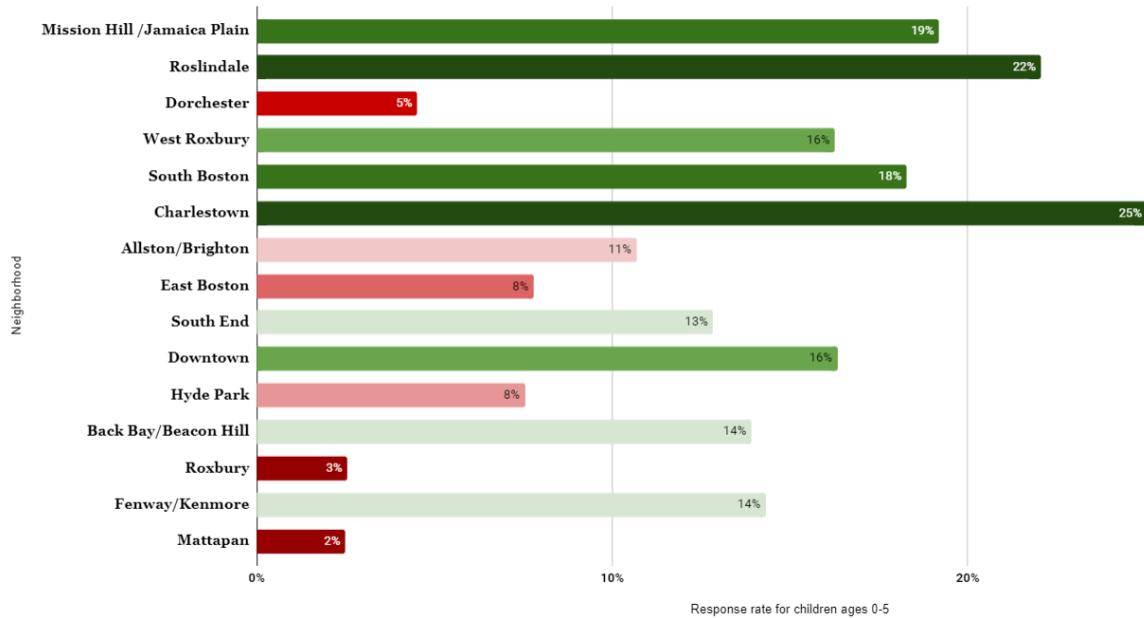
## SURVEYS RECEIVED BY NEIGHBORHOOD



Note: While the survey data was collected on children whose ages range 0-5 when the parent fills out the survey, it may also capture some data for children that are closer to 6 because of our timeframe to collect data.

The chart below displays the response rate for children ages 0-5 across various neighborhoods in Boston. The response rate is calculated by dividing the number of children for whom data was gathered by the total number of children living in that neighborhood. The neighborhood with the highest response rate is Charlestown at 25%. Roslindale and Mission Hill/Jamaica Plain also have relatively high response rates at 22% and 19% respectively. On the lower end, neighborhoods like Dorchester (5%), Roxbury (3%), and Mattapan (2%) have much lower response rates.

Response rate for children ages 0 to 5 by neighborhood

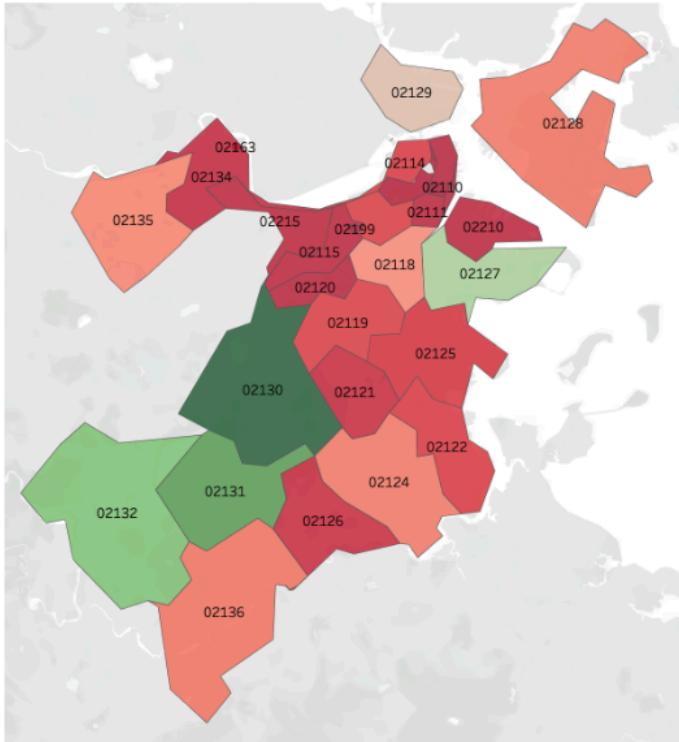


## Geographic distribution of responses

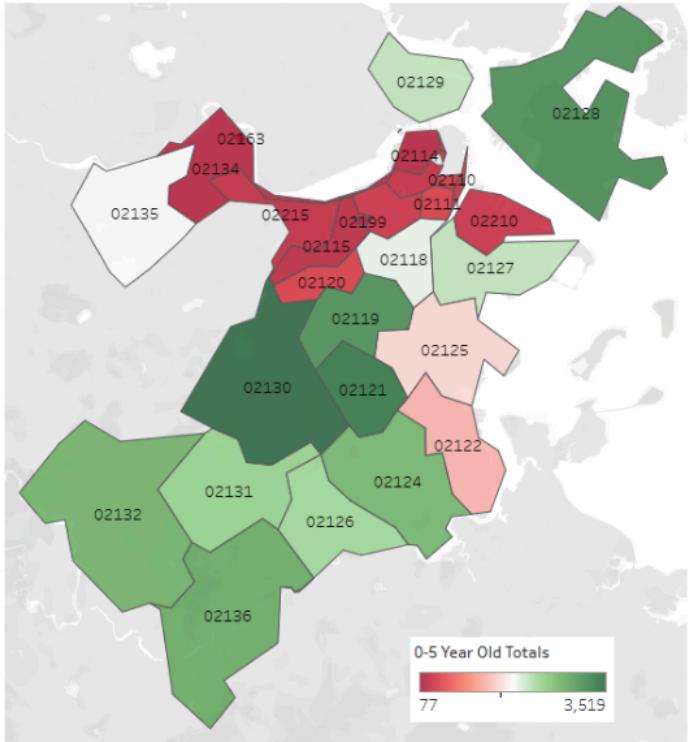
The maps display below data related to the Child Care Census survey responses in Boston, broken down by ZIP codes. The map on the left shows the distribution of surveys received by ZIP code, while the map on the right shows the distribution of children ages 0-5 by ZIP code. ZIP codes are color-coded in shades of red and green, with darker shades of green indicating a higher number of surveys received from that area and darker shades of red indicating a lower number of surveys received.

When reviewing responses geographically, it appears that the survey responses are disproportionately coming from high-income neighborhoods, while neighborhoods with more children and a higher immigrant population, such as Mattapan, Dorchester, Hyde Park, and East Boston, have lower response rates despite having a higher concentration of young children. These neighborhoods tend to have a higher proportion of immigrants, BIPOC, and lower-income residents. The data suggests that the survey responses are skewed towards more affluent neighborhoods, and the results may not be representative of all demographics in Boston.

## SURVEYS RECEIVED BY ZIP CODE



## CHILDREN AGES 0-5 BY ZIP CODE



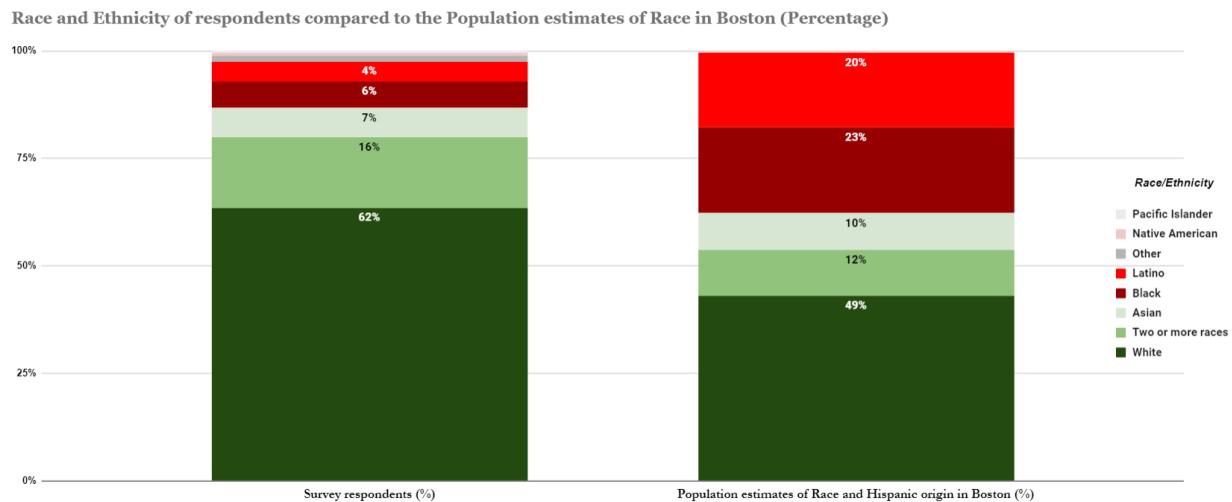
### Racial distribution of responses

The image below compares the racial and ethnic makeup of survey respondents to the broader population estimates of race and Hispanic origin in Boston. On the left side, the percentages represent the actual survey respondents. The majority (62%) identified as White, followed by 16% identifying as two or more races, 7% as Asian, 6% as Black, and 4% as Latino. On the right side, the percentages reflect the population estimates in Boston. The largest group is White at 49%, followed by Black at 23%, Latino at 20%, two or more races at 12%, and Asian at 10%.

The data reveals some discrepancies between the racial/ethnic makeup of the survey respondents and the actual population estimates in Boston. For example, White respondents appear overrepresented in the survey compared to the population, while Black and Latino respondents are underrepresented. This information can help identify potential gaps or biases in the survey responses and highlight the need for more inclusive and representative data collection efforts to accurately capture the diversity of the city's population.

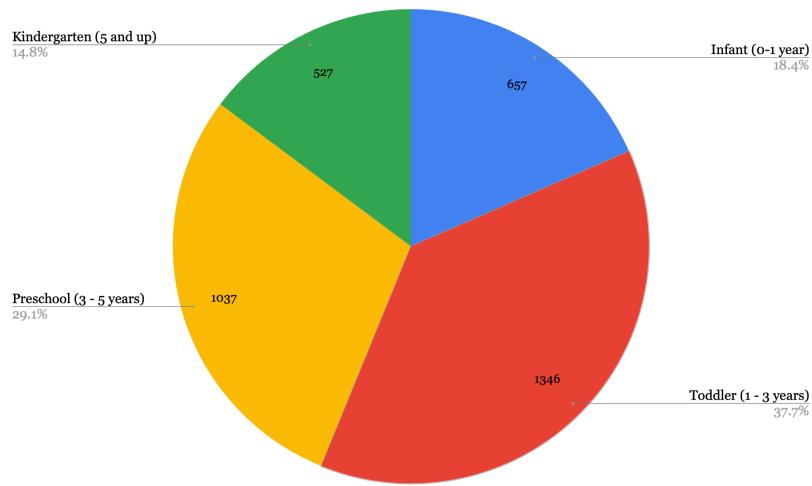
The underrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic groups in the survey responses may be due to various factors, such as language barriers, cultural differences, trust issues, and a lack of confidence in government agencies. Some communities may not have received the survey in their primary language or may not feel comfortable sharing personal information with government entities. Additionally, historical experiences of marginalization and discrimination may contribute to a sense of distrust and reluctance to participate in official surveys. Addressing these concerns and building trust through community

outreach, partnerships with local organizations, and culturally sensitive approaches could help improve the representativeness of future data collection efforts.



## Age distribution of responses

The survey results show that the largest group of children whose parents answered the survey, comprising 37.7% of the total, falls into the Toddlers category, which includes ages 1 to 3 years old. The second-largest group, making up 29.1% of the children, represents the Preschool age range of 3 to 5 years old. Infants aged 0 to 1 year old account for 18.4% of the children in the survey. Finally, the School Age group, which includes children aged 5 and above, makes up 14.8% of the children represented in the survey.



## Limitations

Limitations exist regarding how representative the survey sample is of the true population demographics in the City of Boston. These include:

1. **Geographical representation:** Certain areas of Boston had lower response rates or representation compared to others. This could lead to an underrepresentation of certain neighborhoods and their unique characteristics in the survey data.
2. **Demographic diversity of representation:** There are also discrepancies in the race and ethnicity of respondents compared to the population estimates for Boston. White respondents are overrepresented in the survey, while Black and Latino respondents are underrepresented compared to their actual population percentages in Boston. It is important to note that immigrant populations in Boston, who might not be included in the census, are not represented. This could result in biases and a failure to accurately capture the experiences and needs of diverse communities.
3. **Age distribution:** Overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain age groups could skew the survey findings, such as skewing toward the representation of toddlers over other age groups.
4. **Socioeconomic factors:** The survey data did not include information on the socioeconomic status, income levels, or other demographic factors of the respondents beyond geographic location and race/ethnicity. This could lead to a potential underrepresentation of certain socioeconomic groups, which may have different experiences and needs regarding child care and early childhood services.

To address these limitations and ensure a more representative sample, the following measures could be considered in upcoming year's census surveys:

1. **Targeted outreach and engagement** efforts in underrepresented neighborhoods and communities to increase participation.
2. **Purposefully oversampling of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups** to ensure their perspectives are adequately captured.
3. **Collecting additional demographic information**, such as socioeconomic status, to identify and address potential biases. However, it is important to acknowledge the drawbacks of including these types of questions in the survey. For example, in the past when including a question on annual income, often participants did not answer. To address this in the 2024 survey, we included a question comparing the cost of child care to the cost of rent or mortgage. This approach allows respondents to provide accurate information without feeling like they are sharing sensitive details. We will continue to explore how to accurately represent this important information.

By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, we can work towards obtaining more comprehensive and representative data that accurately reflects the diverse experiences and needs of its residents regarding early childhood services and programs.

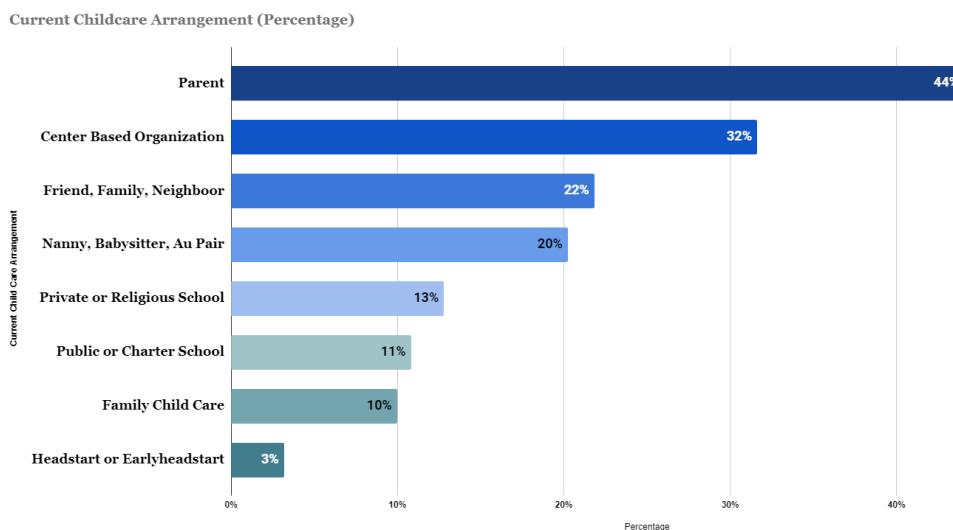
# FINDINGS: CHILD CARE

## Current child care arrangements used by caregivers

In the survey, parents were asked about primary caregiver arrangements for their child, and were able to choose more than one option if they use multiple arrangements. For example, if their child attends a Universal Pre-K classroom that does not cover the full day, the parent may also seek additional types of primary care after 3pm. This means that the percentages used for each type of arrangement can add up to more than 100%.

The most common child care arrangement used by caregivers who replied to the survey is care provided by a parent at 44%. The second most common is Center Based Organization at 32%, followed by Friend, Family, Neighbor at 22% and Nanny, Babysitter, Au Pair at 20%. Private or Religious School and Public or Charter School are used by 13% and 11%, respectively. Family Child Care is utilized by 10% of respondents, while the least common arrangement is Headstart or Early Headstart at 3%.

The data indicates that parents participate as caretakers for the majority of children. Formal child care facilities like center-based organizations, Head Start, public or charter schools, private or religious schools, and family child care collectively are part of arrangements for 69% of children. Informal or private arrangements with friends, family, neighbors, nannies, babysitters, and au pairs are used for 42% of children.



## Gender of parent who is the primary caretaker

The overwhelming majority (54%) of sole primary caretakers are women, outnumbering men by more than 6 to 1. However, it's noteworthy that in over a third of situations (38%), caregiving duties are shared among all parents rather than falling primarily on one individual. The inclusion of non-binary individuals (1%), though a small



percentage, recognizes the diversity of primary caretakers beyond the binary gender categories.

### Type of child care arrangement by age

We also analyzed the type of arrangements used based on the age of the child. As with above, the percentages for each age group can add up to more than 100%.

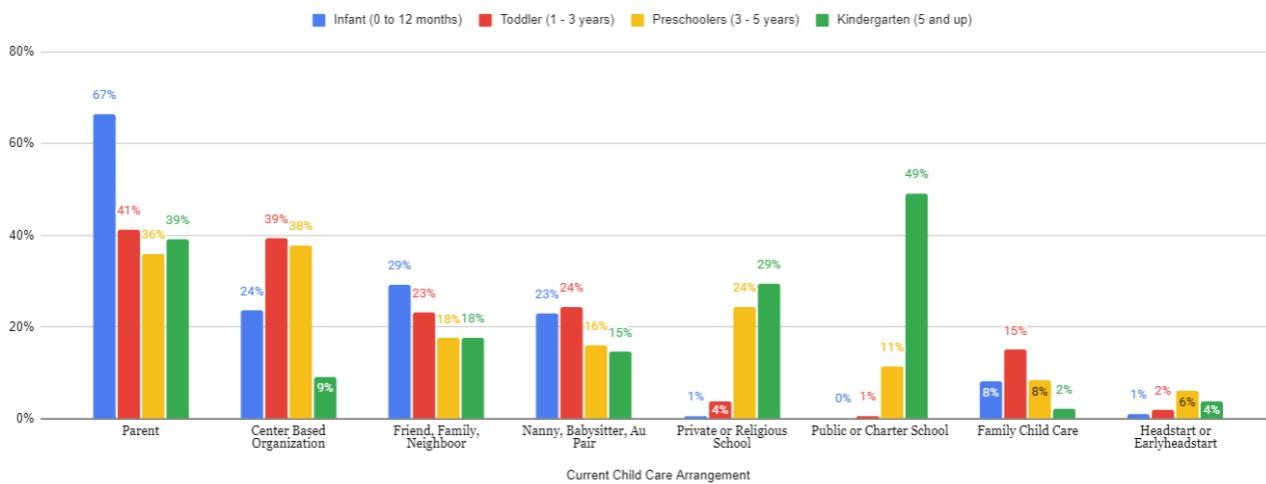
For infants, the most common child care arrangement is Parent at 67%, followed by Friend, Family, Neighbor at 29%, Center Based Organization at 24%, and Nanny/Babysitter/Au Pair at 23%. Some families opt to use Family Child Care at 8%, while very few families utilize Private/Religious Schools, Public/Charter Schools, or Headstart/Early Headstart.

Parents of toddlers aged 1-3 years also selected Parent as the most prevalent arrangement at 41%, but Center Based Organization follows closely at 39%. Nanny/Babysitter/Au Pair (24%), Friend, Family, Neighbor (23%), and Family Child Care (15%) are used less frequently, while Public/Charter Schools, Private or Religious Schools, and Headstart/Early Headstart remain uncommon.

For preschoolers aged 3-5 years, Center Based Organization is the most common arrangement at 38%, while Parent follows closely behind at 36%. Private or Religious Schools and Public or Charter schools are used more frequently than for younger age groups at 24% and 11%, respectively. Friend, Family, Neighbor (18%) and Nanny/Babysitter/Au Pair (16%) become less common with these age groups, and fewer children in these age groups use Family Child Care (8%) and Headstart/Early Headstart (6%).

Among school-age children (5 and up), Public or Charter School is the most common arrangement at 49%. About 39% of parents of school-age children still report Parent as being one of the primary care arrangements. Private or Religious School, and Nanny, Babysitter, Au Pair are used less frequently at 29% and 15%, respectively. Center-based organizations, Headstart/Early Headstart and Family Child Care are the least common arrangements.

#### Current Child Care Arrangement by Age Group



Overall, the data shows that as children age, the use of parental care, family, friends, and neighbors, as well as Nanny/Babysitter/Au Pair decreases. The use of more formal arrangements, including center-based organizations, private or religious schools, and public or charter schools increases.

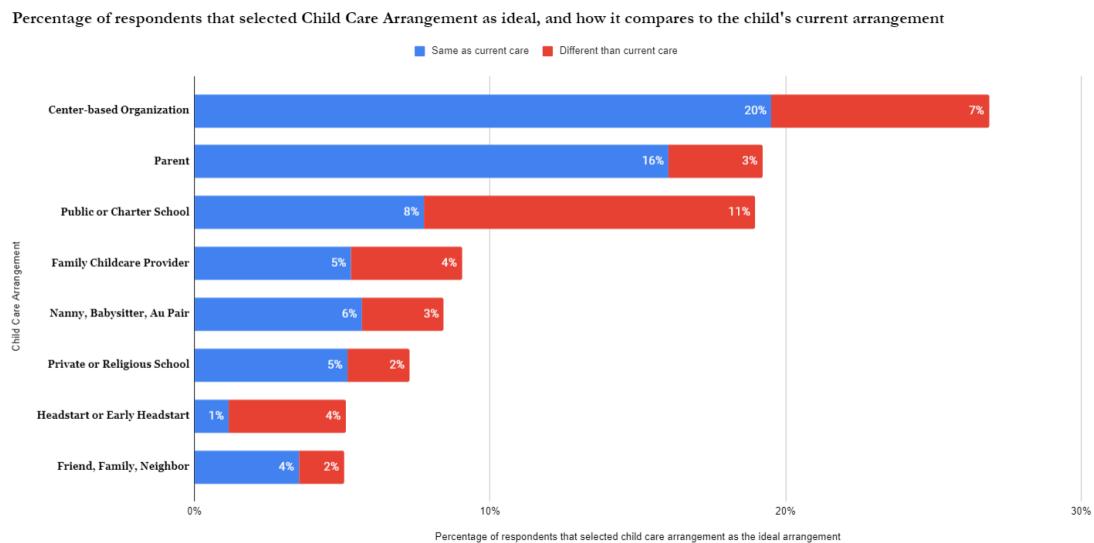
## **Formal vs. informal child care**

In our sample, a majority of children (56%) are cared for through one or more informal arrangements, such as by parents, friends, family members, neighbors, or nannies, while a smaller percentage (44%) use one or more formal child care arrangements. The preference for informal child care may be influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, affordability, and accessibility. In a city like Boston, which has a significant immigrant population, many families may find comfort and familiarity in relying on their extended family, friends, or neighbors for child care. Additionally, this is especially relevant given children who are not US citizens do not qualify for government vouchers for child care. These informal networks can provide a sense of trust, shared values, and linguistic or cultural continuity that may be harder to find in formal child care settings. Additionally, the high cost of living in Boston, coupled with the expense of formal child care, may make informal arrangements a more financially viable option for many families, particularly those with lower incomes or multiple children.

## **Ideal child care arrangement compared to current arrangement**

The survey also asked parents to report their preferred child care arrangement compared to their current arrangement. In the graph below, for each type of child care provider, the full bar represents the total percent of families who prefer that type of child care. Within each bar, the blue bar portions represent the percent of total arrangements in which the parent prefers that type for their child *and* the child is *already enrolled* in that type of child care, while the red portions show the total arrangements in which the parent would prefer that type, but the child is not currently enrolled in that type.

Overall, 64% of the respondents currently have their child in a care arrangement which they consider ideal. However, the data reveals some interesting patterns in the differences between current and ideal arrangements. Center-based organizations have the highest overall demand, with 20% of parents preferring this type for a child who is already enrolled in this type, with an additional 7% of arrangements where the parent prefers this type but the child is not already enrolled. Public or charter schools are the next most common current (and preferred) arrangement with 16% of parents preferring and children already using this type, with an additional 3% who would prefer this arrangement for a child but are not already using.



Public or charter schools had the largest gap between current and ideal arrangements, with only 8% of those who prefer this type of arrangement currently being enrolled in that type. In an additional 11% of arrangements, families would prefer that option but the child is not already enrolled, suggesting significant unmet demand. The highest percentage of respondents for a preschool-age child (27%) selected this as the ideal arrangement, indicating a strong preference for public educational settings. This preference for public or charter schools is likely influenced by the fact that these options are typically free or more affordable compared to other child care arrangements.

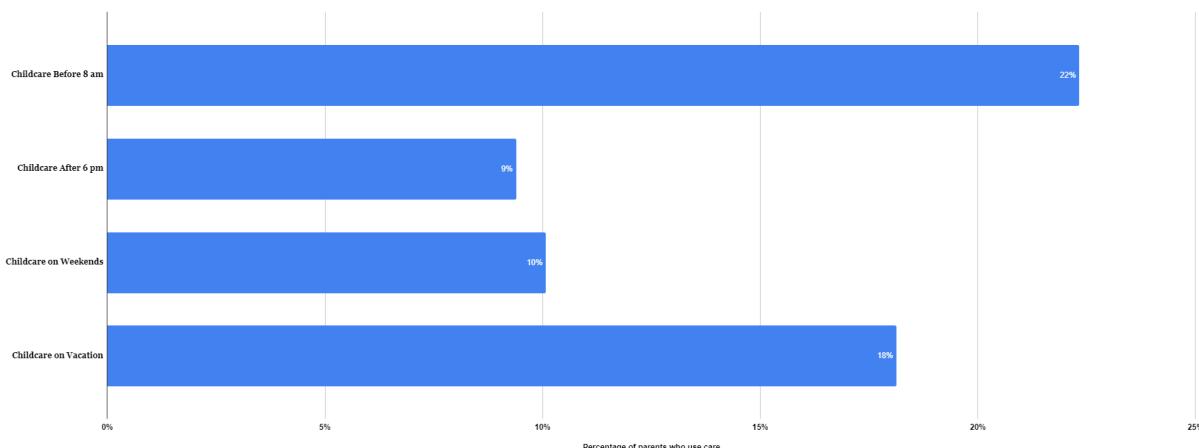
Headstart/Early headstart and Friend/family/Neighbor care have the lowest overall demand at about 5% for each. For Headstart/Early Headstart, only 1% of the families who prefer this type of care are currently in this arrangement.

The data suggests that while nearly two-thirds of families are satisfied with their current child care setup, there remain significant gaps between actual and preferred arrangements, particularly for public or charter schools. Addressing barriers families face in accessing their preferred care type, whether cost, availability, age of their child, location or other factors, could help improve child care arrangements for many households and ensure more families can enroll their children in the setting they consider ideal.

### **Other information**

The survey also found that 41% of parents utilize more than one type of child care arrangement, likely to accommodate their work schedules and ensure adequate coverage for their children. An overwhelming majority of parents, 90%, prefer child care options that are close to their homes as compared to close to their work. This preference is understandable, as proximity to home can greatly simplify logistics, reduce commute times, and provide a sense of comfort and familiarity for both children and parents.

The data also reveals that 39% of the respondents use a child care arrangement outside of traditional hours, including before 8am, after 6pm, on weekends or on vacation. The graph below details which options are used most frequently, with parents being able to select multiple options. **22% of these parents participate in formal before or after school care programs offered by schools.** These findings suggest a significant need for care outside of regular school hours, possibly due to parents' work commitments or the desire to engage their children in additional educational or recreational activities.



Only 4% of respondents report using vouchers or subsidies to assist with child care costs. This number is low when compared to the estimated 17% of children served throughout the State (Hardy, Schmit, and Wilensky 2024). This relatively low percentage may be a result of our survey sample, indicating that most parents are either using care which is free of charge or have the financial means to pay for care, but could also indicate either a lack of awareness about available financial assistance programs or challenges in accessing and qualifying for such support.

### **Challenges experienced with child care**

The survey also asked caregivers about the main challenges they face with their current child care arrangements. 28% of caregivers report having no challenges with child care, reflecting that a substantial portion of respondents are satisfied with their current arrangements and do not feel they have unmet needs. When analyzing the data by age group, we observed that caregivers with children ages 3 and up report having no challenges with child care more often than those with infants and toddlers. When it comes to challenges with costs, we see the opposite trend.

The remaining rows present reasons why caregivers feel their current child care arrangements do not meet their needs. The most significant factor, cited by 48% of respondents, is the high cost of child care. This suggests that for many families, affording quality child care is a major challenge and barrier to accessing the care they need. When breaking down this data by age, this finding is especially true for parents of infants (55%) and toddlers (50%), compared to 36% of parents of kindergarten-aged children.

Childcare Challenge			Age Group			Total
	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	Kindergarten		
Childcare costs	55%	50%	45%	36%	48%	
I have no challenges with childcare	20%	26%	30%	40%	28%	
Currently on a childcare waitlist	11%	6%	4%	3%	6%	
Work schedule does not match childcare schedule	10%	12%	14%	14%	13%	
Other (please specify)	2%	2%	3%	4%	3%	
Safety reasons due to COVID-19	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	
Childcare is too far to access from home	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%	

Other notable reasons include work schedules not matching child care schedules (13%), being currently on a child care waitlist (6%), child care being too far from home (2%), and safety reasons due to COVID-19 (2%). These factors highlight the importance of child care options that are flexible, accessible, and responsive to the diverse needs and circumstances of families.

2.6% of respondents selected "Other" as their main reason, suggesting that there may be additional challenges or barriers not captured by the predefined categories in the survey. Overall, the data emphasizes the critical role that cost plays in shaping access to child care and underscores the need for policies and programs that make quality care more affordable and accessible for all families.

### **Quotes from parents**

Finally, the survey asked for any additional comments from parents regarding challenges experienced with child care. The quotes provided by caregivers shed light on the significant challenges they face regarding the cost and availability of child care.

Several caregivers emphasize that the high cost of child care is a major burden, with one stating that half of their living expenses are spent on child care. Another caregiver suggests that due to the high costs, it could be a better decision to leave their job and take care of their child full time. A third caregiver expressed, "child care is SO expensive-- only option is to rely on family."

The issue of availability is also highlighted, with one caregiver mentioning, "We had to wait almost a year and a half to get a spot that is almost 30 min away." This indicates that not only is affordability a concern, but simply finding an open spot in a child care facility can be a lengthy and challenging process. Another notes, "Child care in Boston is difficult to come by and way too expensive. The city is losing families to the suburbs."

Lastly, a caregiver points out that the cost and competition for child care seats are causing them to feel "daunted", suggesting that these challenges are ongoing and can create significant stress for families. Overall, the quotes paint a picture of the heavy financial burden and logistical challenges that many caregivers experience when seeking quality, affordable, and accessible child care for their children.

**QUOTES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED IN BOX:**

*"I switched from working full-time to working part-time in the evenings in order to provide full-time care for my child."*  
- Caregiver from 02127

*"child care costs are too expensive. The cost is more than my salary therefore it could be a better decision to leave my job and take care of my child full time."*  
- Caregiver from 02118

*"Child care in Boston is difficult to come by and way too expensive. The city is losing families to the suburbs."*  
- Caregiver from 02126

# FINDINGS: PUBLIC SPACES

For the first time, the 2023 Child Care Census Survey included questions about families' experiences using public spaces with children ages 0 to 5. The survey included questions about a variety of types of public spaces, asking parents:

- Do you use this space with your children?
- Is it within walking distance from your home?
- Do you consider it a safe place for children?
- Is it a place where children between ages 0 to 5 play?
- Are the materials or facilities appropriate for children ages 0 to 5?



The inclusion of these questions highlights the growing recognition of the importance of public spaces in the lives of young children and their families. Access to safe, engaging, and age-appropriate public spaces can provide valuable opportunities for play, socialization, and learning outside of the home and child care settings. The responses offer insights into how well current public spaces are serving the needs of families with young children, as well as potential areas for improvement. This information can inform urban planning, park design, and community development initiatives to create more inclusive and nurturing environments for children and their caregivers.

The tables below outline the high level responses we heard from families as averages across all neighborhoods in Boston, divided into a table for the families who do use the space and those who do not:

Public Space	Use the Space	Use the Space				
		Safe	Near	Clean	Place where children 0-5 play	Appropriate materials/facilities for children 0-5
Parks	96%	95%	94%	87%	96%	90%
Playgrounds	93%	96%	96%	89%	99%	94%
Library	78%	99%	85%	98%	93%	96%
Community Center (BCYF)	43%	98%	77%	93%	90%	90%

Public Space	Don't Use the Space	Don't Use the Space				
		Safe	Near	Clean	Place where children 0-5 play	Appropriate materials/facilities for children 0-5
Parks	4%	63%	72%	48%	72%	62%
Playgrounds	7%	81%	81%	73%	86%	84%
Library	22%	93%	67%	87%	62%	81%
Community Center (BCYF)	57%	85%	62%	80%	64%	70%



When asked for additional written comments, the major themes that emerge from the quotes provided by parents who do not use parks revolve around safety concerns and cleanliness issues. Many parents express apprehension about allowing their children to visit parks unaccompanied due to the presence of individuals engaging in unwanted activities, such as "camping out and loitering." The mention of "discarded needles" in parks is a recurring concern, as it poses a significant safety risk for children.

Another prominent theme is the lack of cleanliness in parks. Parents frequently cite the presence of "trash, empty bottles, cigarette butts," and even "goose poop" as deterrents to using the parks. These unsanitary conditions not only make the parks less appealing but also raise concerns about the overall safety and well-being of children playing in these areas. A parent from zip code 02119 notes that they wouldn't send their kids to the park alone because "the park is full of trash" and they have to pick up "joints and beer cans" while also "making sure [their child] doesn't use broken equipment."

Lastly, gun violence and shootings near parks, particularly at night, are mentioned as a serious safety issue. A parent from zip code 02126 expresses that "the violence and shootings do not have a schedule," preventing them from allowing their children to access parks freely, even if the parks are located close to their homes. The unpredictable nature of such incidents further heightens parents' concerns and limits their children's opportunities to enjoy outdoor spaces.

#### **QUOTES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED IN BOX:**

*"The main challenge is cleanliness. Most parks have glass, empty bottles, trash, and cigarette butts in the grass. Second challenge is safety, there is gun violence near the parks at night."*

*- Caregiver from 02124*

*"A park and playground is near my home but is not safe, because the violence and shootings do not have a schedule."*

*- Caregiver from 02126*

## **Playgrounds**

### [Overall findings](#)

The survey findings reveal that across all neighborhoods in Boston, a significant majority of caregivers utilize playgrounds, with usage rates ranging from 88% to 95% and an average of 93%. This underscores the importance of playgrounds as essential community resources for families and highlights the need to ensure that these spaces are well-maintained, safe, and accessible to all. Fenway/Kenmore has the lowest percentage of caregivers using playgrounds, at 88%. In contrast, Charlestown and West Roxbury have the highest



percentage of caregivers using playgrounds, at 95%.

#### Additional insights from those who do not use playgrounds

While a majority of those who do not use playgrounds still consider them safe (81%), a noteworthy 19% do not find the playgrounds to be safe, which may be a significant factor in their decision not to use these facilities. Similarly, 19% of non-users do not find the playgrounds to be conveniently located near their homes, suggesting that accessibility could be a barrier for some families. 27% believe that the playgrounds are not clean, which may further deter them from using these spaces. Interestingly, 14% of non-users report that children do not play at the playgrounds, which could be linked to the aforementioned concerns about safety and cleanliness or could be because they do not find them age appropriate for children ages 0-5. Lastly, 16% of non-users do not believe that the playgrounds have appropriate materials and facilities, indicating that improvements in playground equipment and amenities may be necessary to attract more families. Overall, the survey results highlight that while the majority of non-users hold positive views, there are significant concerns regarding safety, accessibility, cleanliness, and appropriate materials/facilities that need to be addressed to encourage greater usage of playgrounds within this group.

Additional stated concerns about playgrounds are similar to those regarding parks in general: Parents who do not use playgrounds mentioned the presence of trash, broken glass, and needles, which poses a significant risk to children who may come into contact with these hazardous materials. Additionally, some parents have reported instances of drug use and public drinking occurring in or near playground areas, further compromising the safety and well-being of children.

Another issue highlighted by these parents is the poor condition of playground equipment, with some describing their local playgrounds as outdated and containing broken pieces. This not only limits children's enjoyment of these spaces but also presents potential safety hazards. Moreover, the presence of public urination near playgrounds and parks has been noted, contributing to an unsanitary and unpleasant environment.

Similar to parks in general, the fear of violence and shootings in close proximity to playgrounds has been a major deterrent for families. Parents express a strong desire for their children to have access to safe, clean spaces for play but feel that the current state of some playgrounds in their neighborhoods prevents them from using these facilities due to the significant safety risks and unsanitary conditions. These concerns underscore the need for regular cleaning, maintenance, and security measures to ensure that playgrounds remain welcoming and secure environments for children and their families.

#### QUOTES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED IN BOX:

*“Finding trash, needles, or people who are using drugs in the playgrounds that make the space feel unsafe.”*  
*- Caregiver from 02122*

*“I would love to use the parks/playgrounds close to my house, but those locations are riddled with shootings and violence daily which*

*causes me to be fearful due to safety issues”*  
- Caregiver from 02124

*“Our playground is old, outdated, and has many broken pieces.”*  
- Caregiver from 02119

## Libraries

### Overall findings

The survey findings reveal that library usage varies significantly across neighborhoods in Boston, with usage rates ranging from 67% to 87%, with an average of 78%. Roslindale has the highest percentage of caregivers using libraries at 87%, followed closely by Back Bay / Beacon Hill and Mission Hill / Jamaica Plain at 84%. This suggests that libraries in these areas are well-utilized and may be more accessible, well-maintained, or offer programs and services that cater to the needs of the community. On the other hand, Dorchester and Fenway / Kenmore have the lowest library usage at 67% and 68%, respectively, indicating that nearly a third of caregivers in these neighborhoods do not use libraries. The data highlights the importance of libraries as valuable community resources but also reveals disparities in usage across different neighborhoods. Addressing these differences and understanding the reasons behind them could help improve access to and utilization of libraries across all communities in Boston, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from the resources and services they provide.



### Additional insights from those who do not use libraries

For families who do not use libraries, the survey results reveal some potential concerns, although the majority of responses are still positive. While 93% believe the libraries are safe and 87% find them clean, 33% believe the libraries are not conveniently located nearby, which poses an accessibility barrier. Additionally, 38% perceive that the libraries do not offer appropriate opportunities for children aged 0-5 to play, and 19% believe the libraries lack suitable materials and facilities.

When asked for further comment, parents who do not use libraries have expressed concerns about the accessibility and availability of library services in their communities. Inconsistent library hours and extended closures have made it difficult for families to plan visits and take advantage of the resources offered. Additionally, the scheduling of programs and activities during weekdays and daytime hours can be inconvenient for families with children in daycare or school and for working parents. More weekend programs catering to a wider range of age groups, including toddlers, might ensure that more children have the opportunity to benefit from these resources. The closure of specific libraries, such as the South End, has also had a significant impact, with parents seeking new community spaces to fill the

void and provide a safe, engaging environment for children.

These concerns highlight the importance of libraries as community hubs and the need for them to be accessible, well-maintained, and responsive to the diverse needs of families. Addressing issues such as inconsistent hours, limited programming options, and the impact of library closures can help ensure that these vital resources continue to support the growth and development of children in their communities.

**QUOTES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED IN BOX:**

*“The community center and library have programming during the week which a child in daycare cannot attend - need more weekend programs for those without stay at home parent or nanny... and more variety for different age groups, including toddlers.”*

*- Caregiver in 02131*

*“Library has a lot of activities for this age group on weekdays during the day when my daughter is at school and I am working. I can't find anything at the library at times we can attend.”*

*- Caregiver from 02122*

## **Community Spaces**

### [Overall findings](#)

Finally, the survey asked about community centers. Boston Centers for Youth & Families (“BCYF” or “community centers”) are vibrant hubs within neighborhoods, providing spaces where residents can gather and engage in activities. Boston’s network of community centers offer a diverse array of education, recreation, and enrichment programs across Often featuring amenities such as gyms and basketball courts, they primarily focus on serving older youth and adults. While their programming may not always extend to younger children, they are essential resources for elderly adults, promoting physical activity, social interaction, and lifelong learning. Through these offerings, community centers foster a sense of belonging and support within the community.

The data reveals significant disparities in community center utilization across different neighborhoods, with usage rates ranging from 22% to 64%, with an average of 43%. Mattapan has the highest percentage of caregivers using community centers at 64%, followed closely by Charlestown at 57%. On the other hand, Fenway / Kenmore, South End and East Boston have the lowest usage at 22%, 26%, and 30%, respectively, indicating that community centers may not exist or may not be accessible if they do. The survey highlights the uneven access to community centers across neighborhoods, suggesting a need for additional community spaces or targeted efforts to improve accessibility and awareness in areas with lower utilization. Ensuring that all residents have equitable access to community resources is essential for fostering community engagement and support.



#### Additional insights from those who do not use community centers

Among the parents who do not use community centers, they still generally find them safe (85%) and clean (80%) and appropriate materials / facilities (70%). For those who do not use community spaces with children, the major issues appear to be that they are not near to caregivers (38%) and they do not offer spaces for children to play (36%).

Parents who do not use community centers have expressed a lack of awareness and accessibility to community centers in their areas. Many are unsure about the existence of these centers or have difficulty finding information about available programs, especially for young children under 5.

Many have encountered issues with the scheduling of programs, especially for young children. One parent shared that their local community center "doesn't have any programming for kids less than 5 yrs old". Another mentioned wanting to use a specific community center but not being able to find much info, and noted that most toddler programs are during the workday.

Some community centers have faced delays or remain inaccessible, with one parent stating, "Curley Community Center is so delayed! We haven't been able to use it" (02127). Better communication and outreach regarding community center offerings are essential. Programs should cater to various age groups and be scheduled to accommodate working families. Developing new community centers in underserved areas can provide much-needed resources and spaces for families with young children.

#### QUOTES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED IN BOX:

*"Not aware of any community center"*  
- Caregiver in 02127

*“Our local community center doesn't have any programming for kids less than 5 yrs old.”*  
- Caregiver in 02124

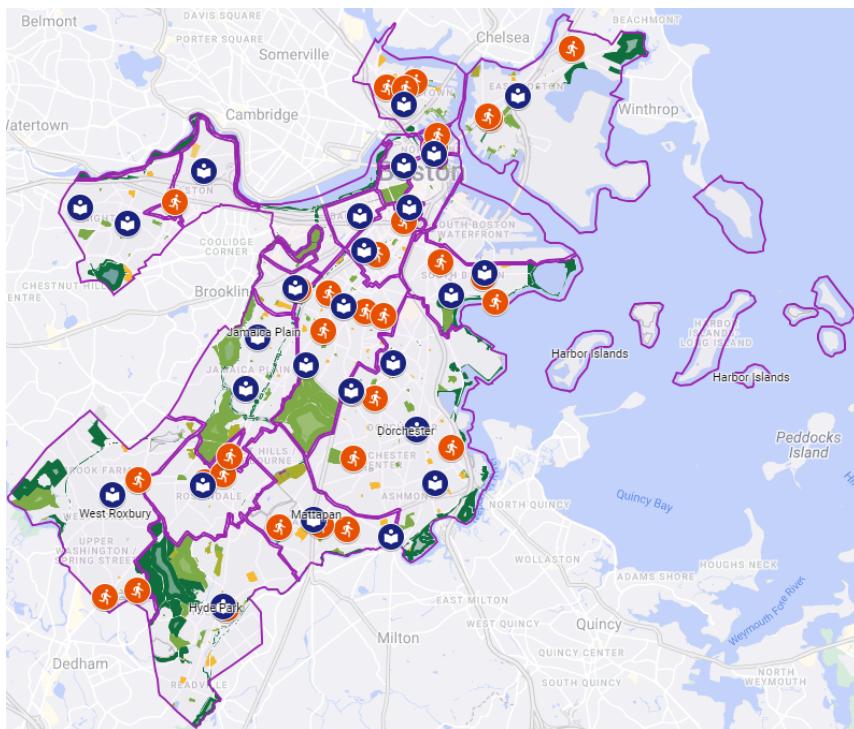
*“Many of the programs at the community center are during working hours and require an adult to bring the child, so while it is a great resource, we were not able to use it.”*  
- Caregiver in 02109

The survey highlights the uneven access to community centers across neighborhoods, suggesting a need for additional community spaces or targeted efforts to improve accessibility and awareness in areas with lower utilization. Ensuring that all residents have equitable access to community resources is essential for fostering community engagement and support. Despite perceiving these centers as clean and safe, many people do not use these centers due to a lack of information, awareness, or access, with issues like inconvenient hours or distant locations posing barriers, rather than negative perceptions of the centers themselves.

#### **Summary of Suggestions (from caregivers) related to public spaces**

- Community Centers and Libraries could become an accessible place for children ages 0 to 5 to play during the winter months.
- Adding hours during some weekdays or during the weekend for working parents to visit the library with their children.
- Adding accessible bathrooms with changing tables in public spaces where children ages 0 to 5 play.
- Recurring events at BPL and community centers that are well advertised.
- Programming for children in Community Centers and at the Library so caregivers can use the facilities.

The map below shows all of the public spaces available in Boston: Purple borders represent neighborhoods, with parks in green, playgrounds in yellow, libraries in blue, and community centers in orange. You can also explore the interactive map [here](#).



# SURVEY POLICY APPLICATIONS

To all of the parents who provided this valuable information about the current state of early childhood in Boston—Thank you! Your responses have shed light on the pressing issues families face regarding child care affordability, accessibility, and the importance of public spaces for children's development. We appreciate your insights and are committed to addressing these concerns to make Boston a more family-friendly city.

## Current initiatives

The City of Boston's Office of Early Childhood is committed to ensuring all children have access to affordable, high-quality early education and care. The survey results have clearly highlighted the significant impact of child care costs on families, with nearly half (48%) of all participants identifying it as the main challenge they experience with their current arrangements. The Office of Early Childhood is continuing to work diligently on initiatives to make child care more affordable, such as

expanding Universal Pre-Kindergarten and increasing awareness and uptake of state and federal subsidy funds. By addressing the financial burden of child care, we aim to alleviate the stress and hardship faced by many families in our city.

We are also committed to improving the accessibility of child care. This year, the Office of Early Childhood rolled out [Great Starts Boston](#), a platform designed to offer families a streamlined, simplified dashboard of all of their child care options. The survey revealed that while 64% of respondents currently have their child in their ideal care arrangement, there are still significant gaps between actual and preferred arrangements. Recognizing the importance of Family Child Care (FCC) settings, we are making significant investments to support these providers. This includes grants, professional development opportunities, and resources to enhance the quality of care.





The “Family Child Care Roadmap” is a step-by-step guide to navigate the process and ensure business's successful start and/or expansion. In addition, this comprehensive plan outlines the Office's programs to help providers establish a nurturing environment for children and a thriving business.

Initiatives to assist FCCs along this roadmap includes licensing support for new programs as well as programs to upskill current FCC providers. These include the child care Entrepreneur Fund Training Program (CEF 101), which offers financial support and business training to FCC providers, the Marketing and Communication Program (CEF 201) which helps FCCs develop technical skills and market their programs to the community, and ASQ Trainings, which enables FCCs to attain the skills to conduct developmental screening for children.

By supporting and encouraging the growth of FCCs, we aim to create more accessible child care options throughout the city, ensuring that families have the flexibility and choice they need to balance their work and family responsibilities.

Finally, we recognize the importance of having qualified and well-educated early childhood educators. The quality of care and education provided to our youngest residents is directly linked to the knowledge, skills, and experience of their teachers. To ensure that children receive the best possible care and support, we are investing in programs that support educators in obtaining degrees and professional development opportunities. By enhancing the qualifications and expertise of our early childhood educators, we aim to create a strong foundation for children's learning and development, setting them up for success in

school and beyond. This approach also creates opportunities to train new teachers and open additional classrooms, thereby expanding the availability of high-quality early childhood education.

In addition to efforts to increase the affordability and accessibility of child care efforts, Mayor Wu is also focused on initiatives which address the holistic experience of children in Boston. The Connect, Learn, Explore initiative goes beyond meeting basic needs to empower kids to explore and find their passions. This includes a commitment that by the age of eight, all young people in Boston should have opportunities to learn to swim, connect with the arts, play a sport, learn to bike, and learn to grow something. The city is offering opportunities for children to engage in these activities through programs like Swim Safe Boston, access to musical instruments and artists, top-notch sports programs, biking lessons, and community gardens.

### **Moving forward**

The Office of Early Childhood remains committed to addressing the challenges faced by families in accessing affordable, high-quality early education and care. Moving forward, we will continue to prioritize and expand upon our current initiatives to make child care more affordable and accessible. This includes the ongoing expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten, increasing awareness and uptake of subsidy funds, and supporting the growth and development of Family Child Care programs through training and resources.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that addressing the affordability and accessibility of child care requires collaboration and partnership

across sectors. With only 4% of parents who filled out the survey reporting the use of vouchers or subsidies to assist with child care costs, it is clear that more needs to be done to make quality care accessible and affordable for all families. In Massachusetts, the state income eligibility to qualify for a voucher is set at 50% of the state median income, leaving many families who struggle to afford child care without support. This is underscored by the fact that child care costs are the number one challenge reported by parents. Advocacy efforts are pushing to raise the eligibility threshold to 85% of the state median income to serve more low and moderate-income families.

Moving forward, we will actively seek out and foster public-private partnerships to tackle these challenges head-on. By working with businesses, non-profits, and other stakeholders, we can develop innovative solutions and leverage resources to create a more robust and inclusive child care system in Boston. These partnerships may include initiatives such as employer-sponsored child care benefits, shared services models for child care providers, and targeted investments in underserved communities. For example, the City of Boston has partnered with Nurtury Early Education to launch a pilot “FCC incubator” program that will provide workspace and resources to newly licensed FCC educators who have not been able to acquire a space of their own due to the many housing barriers we are currently experiencing.

In addition to the efforts outlined above, we recognize the multi-faceted needs of children and families. The survey results showed that community center utilization varies significantly across neighborhoods, ranging from 22% to 64%, with an average of 43%. Community centers play

a crucial role in providing resources and spaces for city residents, and we are committed to continued investment in these valuable assets. We will explore how community centers could be enhanced to offer further programming targeted at younger children to ensure they are welcoming and accessible to all. By strengthening these vital community resources, we can create more opportunities for children to learn, grow, and thrive outside of formal child care settings.

As we move forward with these initiatives, we remain committed to listening to the needs and experiences of families in Boston. The insights gained from this survey will continue to guide our policies and programs as we work towards our goal of ensuring that all children have access to the high-quality early education and care they need to thrive. By working together and leveraging the strengths of our community, we can build a brighter future for our city's youngest residents and their families.

# CONCLUSION

We are grateful for all parents who have allowed the 2023 Child Care Survey to provide us with valuable insights into the current state of early childhood in Boston. Our results have highlighted the pressing needs and challenges faced by families regarding child care and access to public spaces, and they underscore the importance of affordable, accessible, holistic, and high-quality early education and care for the well-being and development of our city's youngest residents.

The survey revealed that child care costs remain a significant barrier for many families, with nearly half of all participants identifying it as their main challenge. This finding emphasizes the urgent need for initiatives that address the affordability of child care, such as the expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and increased awareness and uptake of subsidy funds. By alleviating the financial burden of child care, we can create a more equitable and inclusive early education system that supports all families, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Additionally, the survey highlighted the importance of investing in public spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, and community centers, as essential resources for families with young children. These spaces provide opportunities for play, socialization, and learning, which are crucial for children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional

development. The survey revealed disparities in access to and utilization of these public spaces across different neighborhoods, emphasizing the need for targeted investments and improvements to ensure that all children have equitable opportunities to thrive.

Moving forward, the City of Boston's Office of Early Childhood remains committed to addressing the challenges identified in the survey and working towards our goal of making Boston a more family-friendly city. We will continue to prioritize initiatives that increase the affordability and accessibility of child care, support the growth and development of Family Child Care programs, and invest in the education and professional development of early childhood educators. We will also explore ways to invest in accessibility of public spaces.

Furthermore, we recognize that addressing these complex challenges requires collaboration and partnership across sectors to leverage the strengths and resources of our community to develop innovative solutions and create lasting change and make Boston the most family friendly city. Together, we can build a brighter future for our city's youngest residents and their families, ensuring that every child in Boston has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

# REFERENCES

- Beery, Thomas. 2020. "Exploring Access to Nature Play in Urban Parks: Resilience, Sustainability, and Early Childhood." MDPI. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/12/4894>.
- Calef, Anne. 2022. "The Stubborn Persistence of the Gender Pay Gap in Massachusetts." Boston Indicators. <https://www.bostonindicators.org/article-pages/2022/march/gender-pay-gap-20220331>.
- CDC. n.d. "Important Milestones: Your Baby By Five Years." CDC. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/milestones-5yr.html>.
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2024. "How Segregation Creates Communities of Color in MA." Mass.gov. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/how-segregation-creates-communities-of-color-in-ma>.
- Hardy, Alycia, Stephanie Schmit, and Rachel Wilensky. 2024. "Child Care Assistance Landscape: Inequities in Federal and State Eligibility and Access." The Center for Law and Social Policy. [https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024.6.27\\_Child-Care-Assistance-Landscape.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024.6.27_Child-Care-Assistance-Landscape.pdf).
- Migration Policy Institute. n.d. "Young Dual Language Learners in the United States and by State." Migration Policy Institute. Accessed July 10, 2024. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-state-profiles-young-dlls>.
- Schoch, Annie D., Cassie S. Gergson, Tamara Halle, and Meg Bredeson. 2023. "Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of the Evidence." The Administration for Children and Families.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/%232023-226%20Benefits%20from%20ECE%20Highlight%20508.pdf>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. n.d. "Early Childhood Development and Education – Healthy People 2030 | health.gov." Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Accessed May 28, 2024.

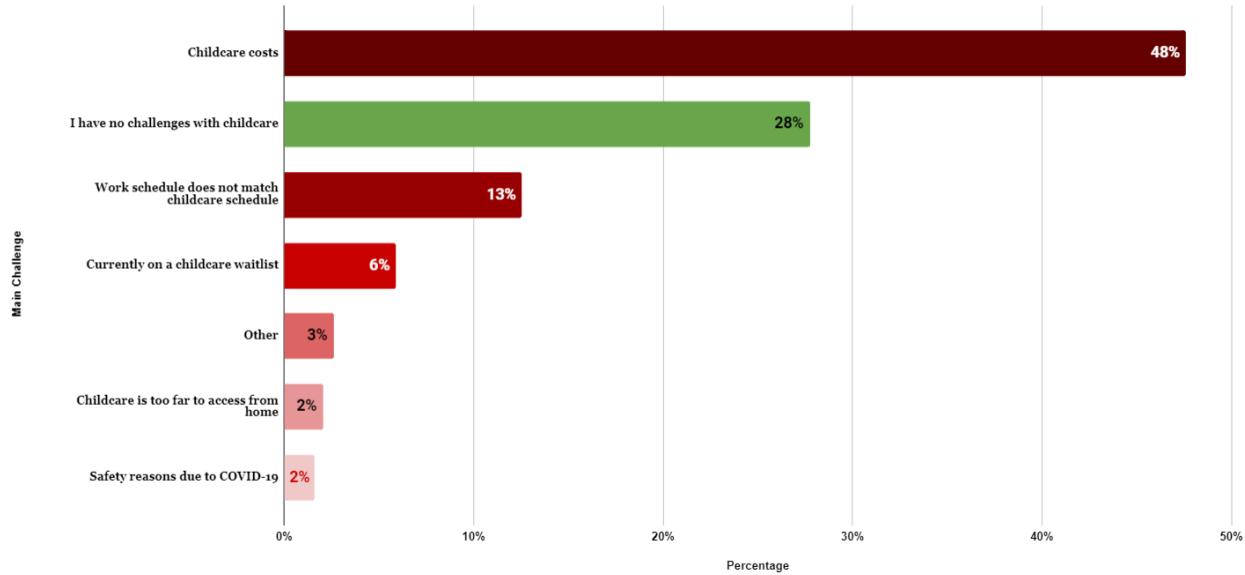
<https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/early-childhood-development-and-education>.

World Population Review. n.d. "Child Care Costs by State 2024." World Population Review. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/child-care-costs-by-state>.

# APPENDIX

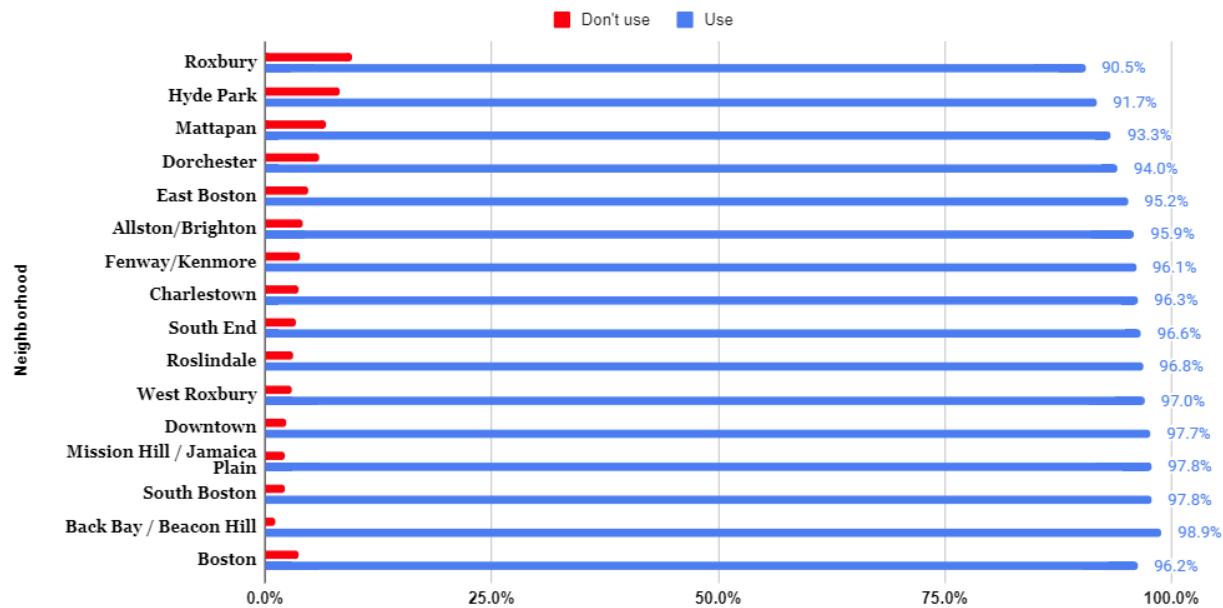
## Child Care - Additional Detail

Main Reason Current Childcare Arrangement Does Not Meet Caregivers Needs

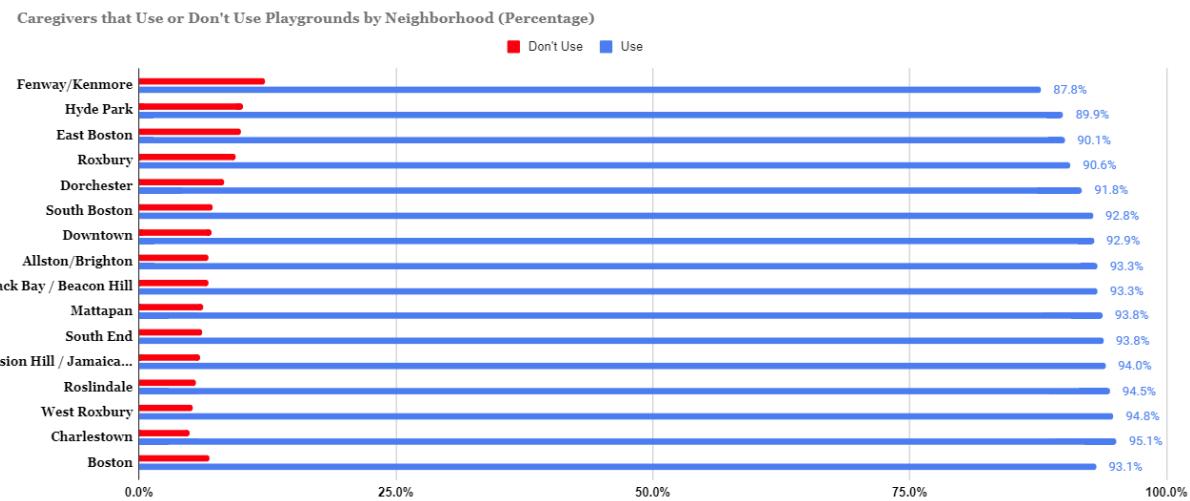
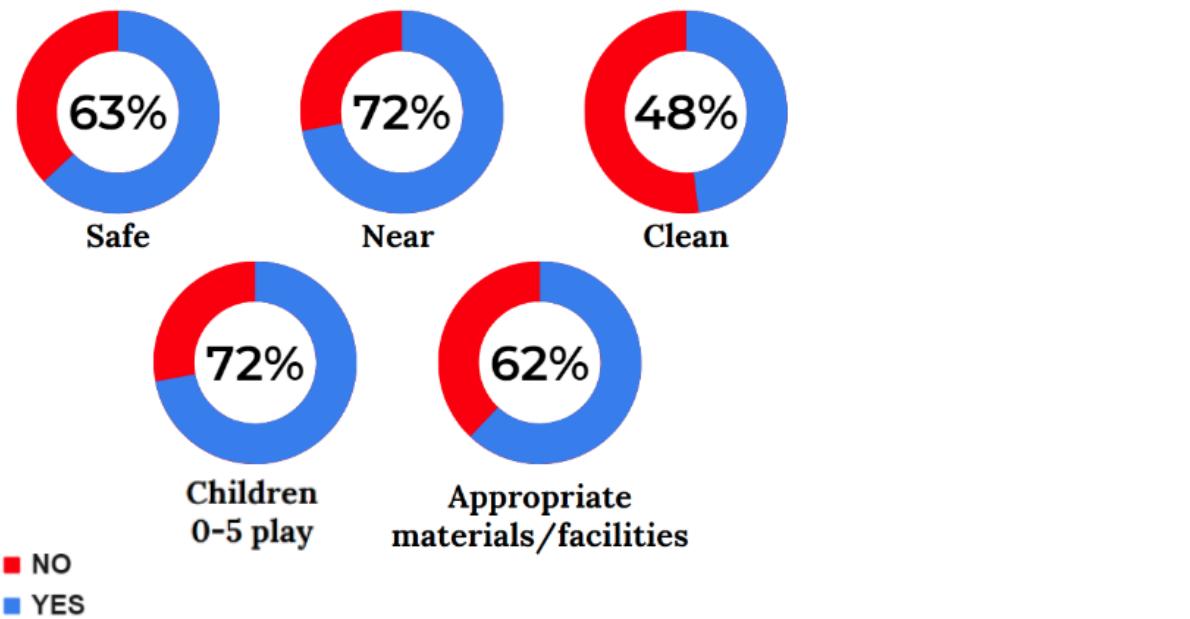


## Public Spaces - Additional Detail

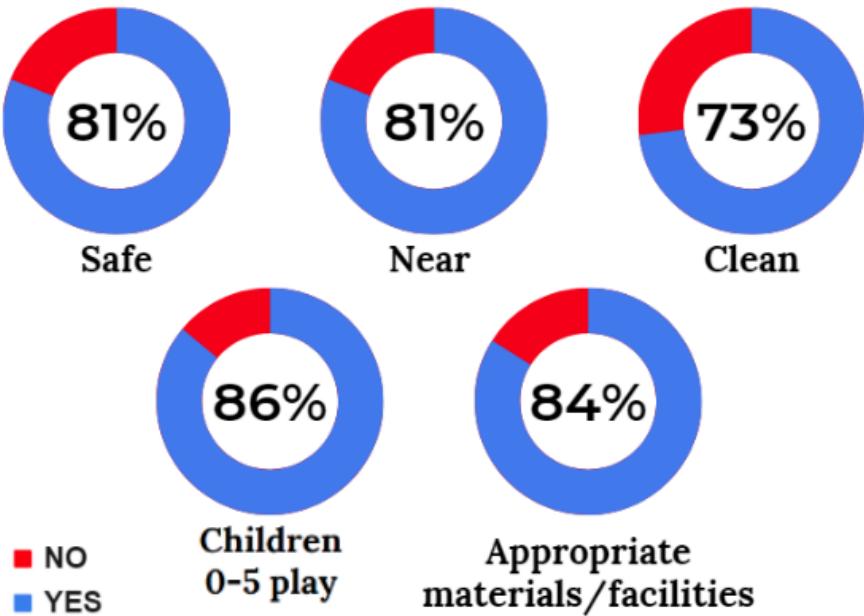
Caregivers that Use or Don't Use Parks by Neighborhood (Percentage)



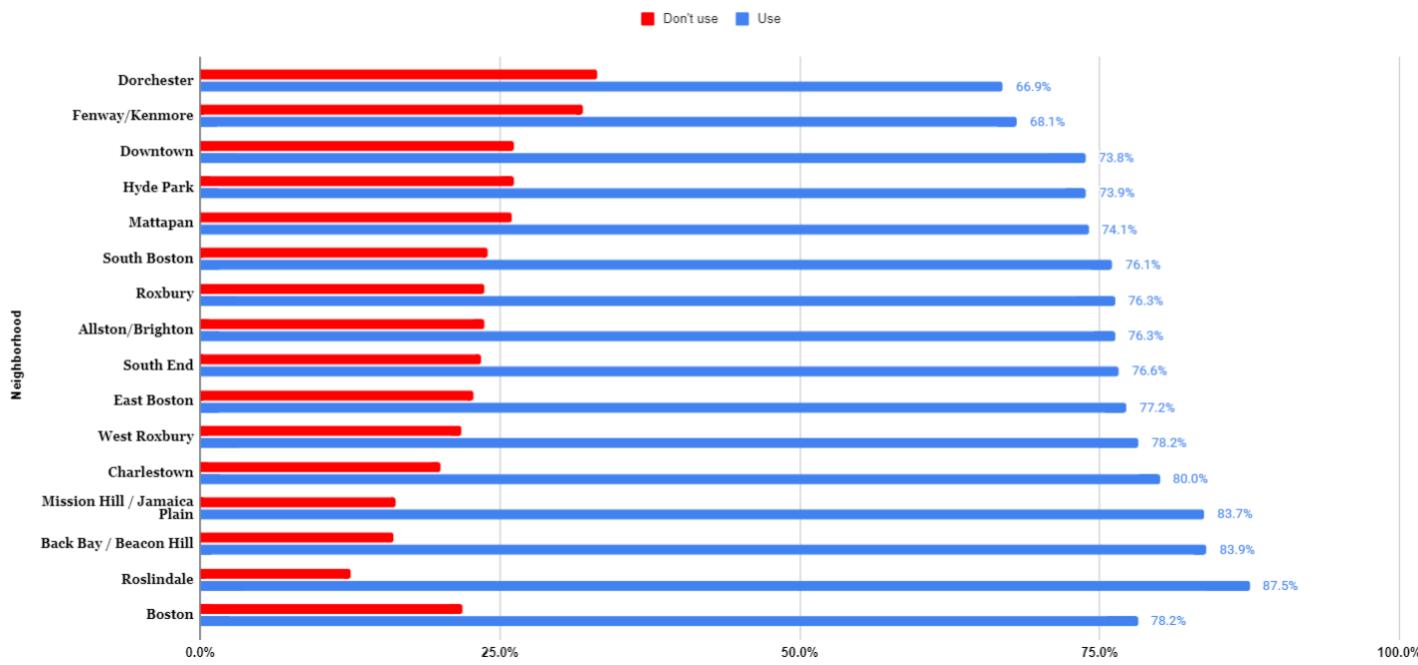
**Overall, 4% of the respondents do not use parks with their children.**



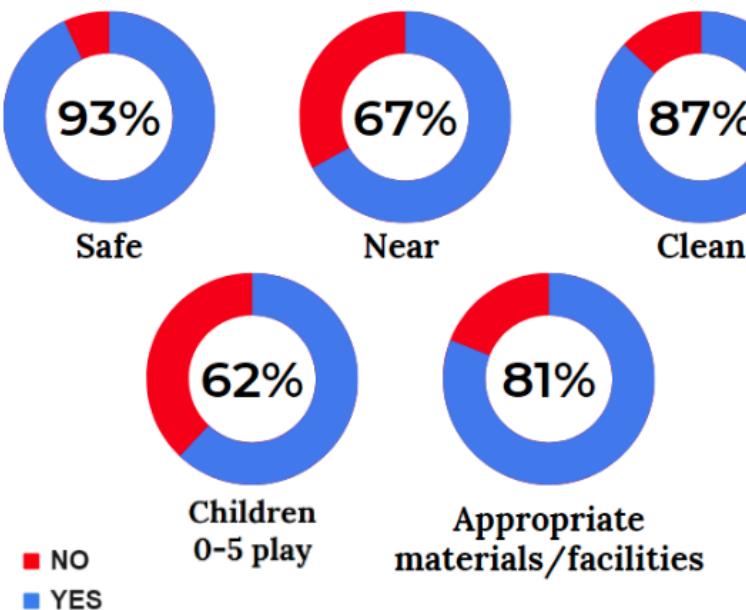
Overall, 7% of the respondents do not use playgrounds with their children.



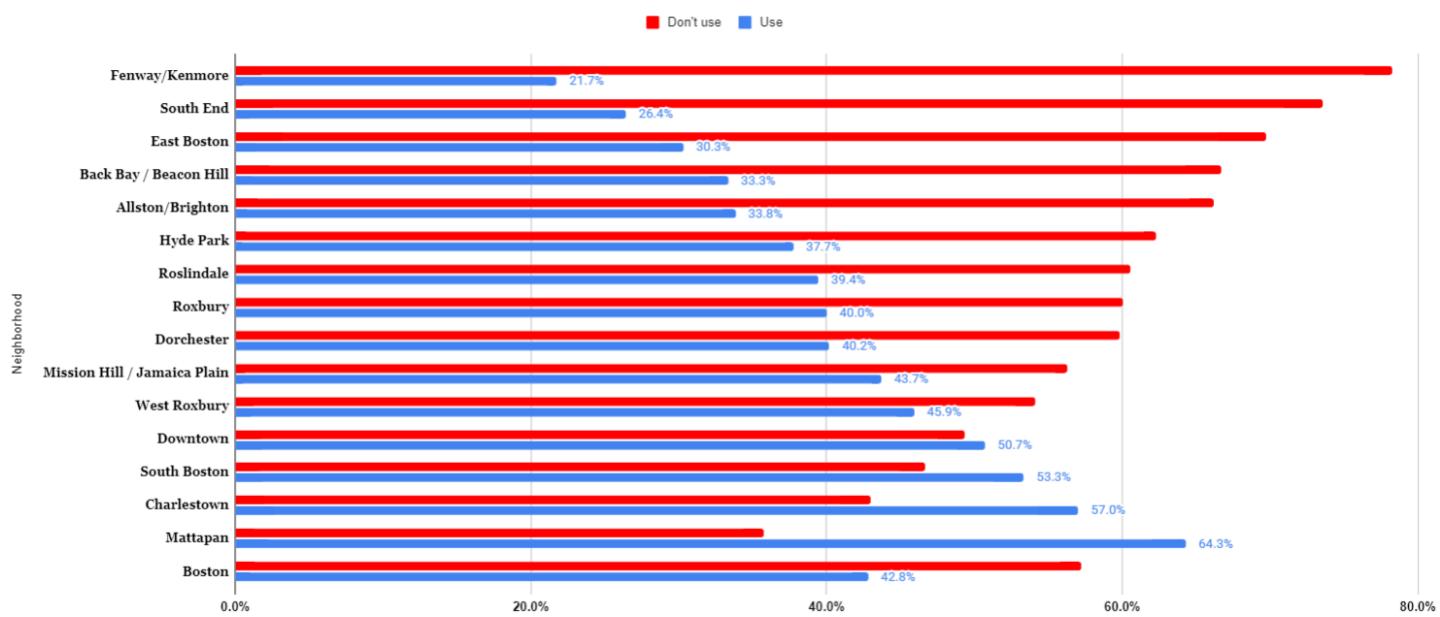
Caregivers that Use or Don't Use Libraries by Neighborhood (Percentage)



Overall, 22% of the respondents don't use the library with their children.



Caregivers that Use or Don't Use Community Centers by Neighborhood (Percentage)\*



\*Adjusted for sample of 48% of respondents that answered all questions

Overall, 57% of the respondents do not use community centers with their children\*.

