

# UNDERSTANDING CHILD CARE AND PUBLIC SPACES IN BOSTON

## Key Findings from the 2023 Child Care Census Survey

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## *The Boston Office of Early Childhood*

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## *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.



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# 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.