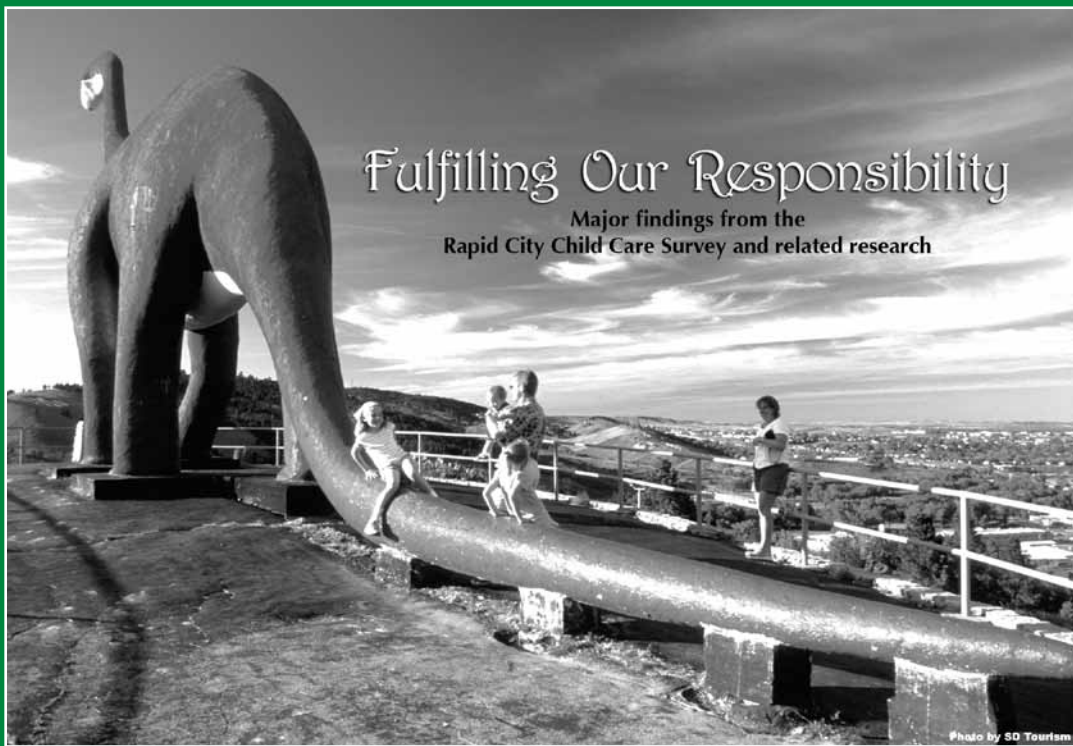


“Education is more than a luxury;  
it is a responsibility that society owes to itself.”  
— Dr. Robin Cook





# Fulfilling Our Responsibility

**Major findings from the  
Rapid City Child Care Survey and related research**

*A publication of the*  
Rapid City Area Council on Early Care and Education  
and  
South Dakota Voices for Children



*Advocating for our children ... healthy, educated, safe.*

*With support from*  
The Mayor's Task Force on Strengthening Families  
The Rapid City Area School District  
and



**Bush Foundation**

## Executive Summary

### School readiness begins at birth

Children are born ready to learn and their brains develop with amazing speed. By the time a child turns 3, fully 85 percent of core brain structure is developed.<sup>1</sup> By age 5, when many youngsters start kindergarten, pre-reading, language and math foundations are in place.

Babies' brains grow as they learn to interact and function within their environment. When their cries bring food or comfort, that strengthens the neuronal pathways of the brain through which babies learn to get their physical and emotional needs met. A relationship with a loving, consistent caregiver allows a child to build trust and to thrive.

But when adults ignore a baby's cries or respond with abuse that can seriously impair that child's physical, cognitive, emotional and social growth.<sup>2</sup>

From birth, research shows, infants begin to develop an understanding about themselves, their parents, caregivers, and the world, based on early relationships.

### Far-reaching benefits of quality care

Research by economists with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis shows that investing in high quality, well-managed and well-funded early education programs is a powerful economic development tool that yields high public returns.

Those benefits, which include improved school readiness and success in school, more educated workers and less crime<sup>3</sup>, are greatest for children from low-income household.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were enrolled in quality pre-kindergarten programs achieved at higher levels than those who weren't when tested at ages 8, 10 and 14. Those former preschool students graduate from high school at significantly higher rates than non-participants and they earn more in later life. For every dollar invested in quality early education for low-income children, more than \$7 in public funds was saved.<sup>4</sup>

The quality and availability of early care and education is as vital to businesses and communities as to individual children.

### Major findings from the Rapid City child care survey

A spring 2009 survey of parents working in Rapid City who have children age 11 and younger (531 parent respondents with 850 children in that age group) provides insight into child care and early education services and unmet needs. The survey data was supplemented by focus groups with child care and preschool providers. Both the survey and focus groups were developed by South Dakota Voices for Children in collaboration with the Rapid City Council on Child Care and Early Learning, a committee of the The Mayor's Task Force on Strengthening Families.

From this and other related research, the Rapid City Council on Child Care and Early Education developed recommendations to move toward improving the services available for families.

<sup>1</sup> Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age, Voices for America's Children, Child & Family Policy Center, February 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Effects of Child Maltreatment on Early Brain Development, Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> "The ABCs of ECD: A Discussion on the Economics of Early Childhood Development," Art Rolnick, Rob Gruenwald, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, December 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 8.



## A snapshot of child care in Rapid City

Rapid City area workers use a variety of child care options with 91 percent choosing care in Rapid City. According to survey respondents, 55 percent of children are in child care centers, 27 percent are in family day care (a home-based business) and the remaining 18 percent are using care by family, a friend or neighbor.

As children moved through the pre-school years, parents turned more to child care centers for care. Once a child became school age, the use of child care centers decreased and that by family, friend or neighbor grew.

Whatever the type of care chosen, 59 percent of survey respondents use child care 30 or more hours/week.

## What parents value

Parents participating in the survey rated eight child care qualities on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*not very important*) to 5 (*very important*). “*Health and safety*” was the top rated item followed closely by “*adults relate well to the children*” and “*good ratio of children to adults.*”

When asked to choose the top three most important qualities, a significant majority of parents chose health and safety, followed by learning focus and cost.

## Finding and paying for care

One-third of parent respondents said they had a hard time finding child care so they could go to work. This proved most difficult among those earning \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year (*51 percent*). In identifying barriers to quality care, lack of quality child care availability (“*what I want doesn’t exist*”) was noted by 45 percent of the respondents. Eighty-six percent of the parent respondents said they needed care in the summer.

As children enter school, parents continue to need care for their children during after school hours. Slightly more than half (*51 percent*) reported their school-aged child was in an after-school program.

Thirty-one percent of parent respondents noted that paying for care was difficult. This is most pronounced at lower income levels where more than 40 percent of parents said it was tough. More than half (*55 percent*) of all parent respondents said cost was a major barrier to obtaining quality child care and providers’ pay requirement (*paying for a full week even though one may not need a full week of care*) was a close second (*51 percent*). And yet child care businesses cannot operate on a drop-in basis; they need a steady income.

## Missed work

Parents may have to miss work to care for a child who is ill. Eighty-five percent of respondents missed some work because of a sick child. Slightly more than half missed one to four days to care for their sick child.

Sixty-one percent of respondents missed some work because child care wasn’t available. Twenty-seven percent of parent respondents missed only one to two days for this reason. Meanwhile nearly 40 percent never missed work because of a lack of child care.

## Pre-kindergarten

Fully 88 percent of respondents answered yes to the question: “*If you have children not yet of school age would you be inclined to enroll your child at ages 3 or 4 in a quality preschool program on a sliding fee scale?*”

Twenty-six percent of parent respondents with children of preschool age indicate their child attends a preschool or Head Start. Head Start in Rapid City serves children in families earning 100 percent or less of the federal poverty threshold. As of September 2009, there are 151 children on the waiting list for Early Head Start (*younger than 3 years*) and 89 children on the waiting list for Head Start for 3- to 5-year-olds.

## Recommendations

1. Include child care and early education in community planning for economic and infrastructure development.
2. Institute an awareness campaign that makes the connection between a safe and healthy environment and being a registered provider.
3. Increase parent participation in the child-care assistance program to help address low-income parents’ barriers in paying for care.
4. Educate and encourage businesses to explore family friendly policies including flexible scheduling, job-sharing and other creative options so that parents can attend to the needs of their children.
5. Identify resources to expand the availability of quality care for infants, school-aged children and children with special needs.
6. Explore making preschool services available on a sliding fee (zero to market rate) scale to all families who want it.

## Full Report

Mention that you're from South Dakota in any of the other 49 states — or just about anywhere in the world, for that matter — and the likely response will be “*Rapid City?*” It's a place almost everyone knows.

Founded in 1876 by a group of miners, Rapid City is a destination for millions of visitors. It's also journey's end for some 62,700 people who call it home. The Rapid City Area Chamber of Commerce describes the region as “*a land of wonderment, pristine ponderosa forests, rippling streams, iconic monuments and a rich western history.*”

Ever watchful for ways to improve the quality of life in Rapid City, the Rapid City Area Council on Early Care and Education, The Mayor's Task Force on Strengthening Families, the Rapid City Area School District and South Dakota Voices for Children studied child care and early education needs.

In summer 2009 parents in the workforce were surveyed and focus groups were conducted with providers to gain a better understanding of local needs regarding child care, preschool and after-school programming.

### School readiness begins at birth

Children are born ready to learn. Their brains grow with amazing speed. 85 percent of core brain structure develops by the third birthday.<sup>5</sup> By age 5, when many youngsters start kindergarten, pre-reading, language and math foundations are in place.

Timing matters. Babies' brains grow and develop as they interact with their environment and learn to function within it. When their cries bring food or comfort, that strengthens the neuronal pathways of the brain through which babies learn to get their physical and emotional needs met. A relationship with a loving, consistent caregiver allows a child to build trust and to thrive.

But when adults ignore a baby's cries or respond with abuse that can seriously impair a child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth.<sup>6</sup> From the moment of birth, research shows, infants begin to develop an understanding about themselves, their parents, caregivers, and the world, based on early relationships. Children who don't develop social-emotional and basic language skills enter kindergarten at a disadvantage. Many never catch up.

*“The infant's development begins and continues within the context of an emotional relationship,”* according to developmental psychologist Gerard Costa. *“There are times when the past calls each of us,”* he continued. *“Early memories remind that elements from the past affect the present.”*<sup>7</sup>

Research backs Costa's claim. Children who don't receive quality early care and education from parents or other caregivers may not develop normally. The part of the brain that controls higher levels of thought and helps curb emotional response is affected to the point that those children are later more likely to struggle, drop out of school and commit crime.

But with quality early education and care, children become successful learners, workers and citizens. That benefits the individual, the Rapid City economy and all of society.

### Far-reaching benefits of quality care

The following are among the measures of quality care:

- Surroundings that are safe for children,
- Consistent, loving caregivers who are trained in early childhood development,
- An appropriate adult caregiver-to-child ratio,
- Group size (*the younger the child, the smaller the size of the group*).

While enacting standards for child care businesses does not assure quality, standards do provide a baseline of safety. Over the long run, the quality and availability of early education and child care will affect the Rapid City area.

Research by economists with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis shows that investing in high quality, well-managed and well-funded early education programs is a powerful economic development tool that yields high public returns.

Those benefits, which include improved school readiness and success in school, more educated workers and less crime<sup>8</sup>, are greatest for children from low-income households.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were enrolled in quality pre-kindergarten programs achieved at higher levels than those who weren't when tested at ages 8, 10 and 14. Those former preschool students graduate from high school at significantly higher rates than non-participants and they earn more in later life. For every dollar invested in quality early education for low-income children, more than \$7 in public funds was saved.<sup>9</sup>

The quality and availability of early care and education is as vital to businesses and communities as to individual children and their families.

## Major findings from the Rapid City child care survey

A spring 2009 survey of parents working in Rapid City who have children age 11 and younger provides insight into child care and early education services and unmet needs. The survey data was supplemented by focus groups with child care and preschool providers. Both the survey and focus groups were developed by South Dakota Voices for Children in collaboration with the Rapid City Council on Child Care and Early Learning, a committee of the The Mayor's Task Force on Strengthening Families.

The survey was distributed through employers and was also available on the Internet. From this and other related research, the Rapid City Council on Child Care and Early Education developed recommendations to move toward improving the services available for families.

In Pennington County, 70 percent of children younger than six are in families where all parents are in the workforce.<sup>10</sup> This positions Rapid City between the state and national average of parents in the workforce, at 82 percent and 69 percent respectively.

Five hundred thirty-one valid surveys were received from parents across the income spectrum. These parents had at least 850 children age 11 and younger as follows:

- Birth to 1 year: 4 percent
- Age 1-2 years: 21 percent
- Age 2-3 years: 17 percent
- Age 3-5 years: 29 percent
- Older than 5 years: 19 percent

Of those responding to the survey, 83 percent live in Rapid City. Seventy percent work traditional hours (between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday). The remaining 30 percent of respondents work nontraditional hours (evenings, overnight, weekends or varied hours).

Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. But while they are at work, moms and dads depend on others to assist with teaching and nurturing. The quality of the early learning and care they find has far-reaching consequences for children, their families — and the Rapid City business community.

Employee peace-of-mind benefits employers even beyond increased productivity. Quality child care programs have been linked to lower employee turnover, increased employee loyalty and improved morale, which result in reduced training costs and a better return on recruitment efforts.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age, Voices for America's Children, Child & Family Policy Center, February 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Effects of Child Maltreatment on Early Brain Development, Child Welfare Information Gateway. [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov), 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute, convened by South Dakota Voices for Children, May 6-7, 2009, Pierre, SD.

<sup>8</sup> "The ABCs of ECD: A Discussion on the Economics of Early Childhood Development," Art Rolnick, Rob Gruenwald, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, December 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, page 8.

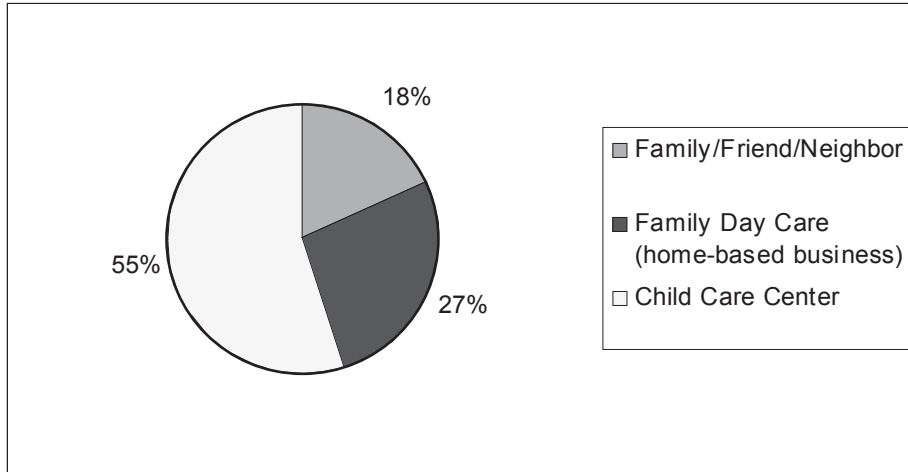
<sup>10</sup> SD KIDS COUNT project, The University of South Dakota, Beacon School of Business, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, [www.pa.gov](http://www.pa.gov), June 23, 2008

### A snapshot of child care in Rapid City

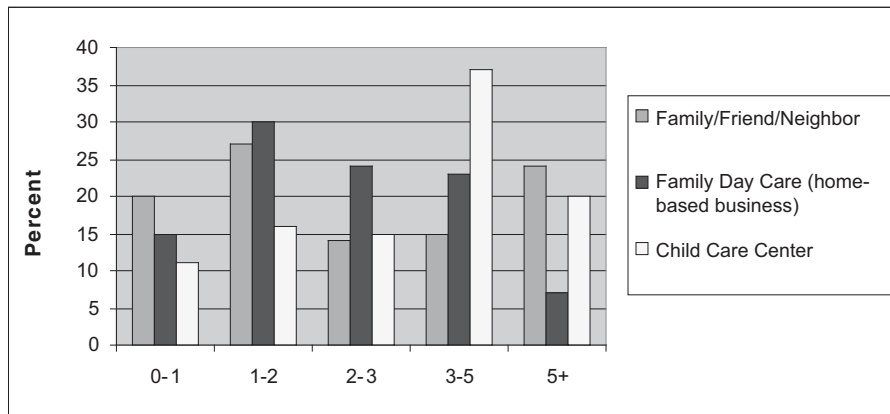
Rapid City area workers use a variety of child care options with 91 percent choosing care in Rapid City. According to survey respondents, 55 percent of children are in child care centers, 27 percent are in family day care (a home-based business) and the remaining 18 percent are using family/friend/neighbor care (see *Chart 1 – Child care options used*).

**Chart 1 – Child care options used**



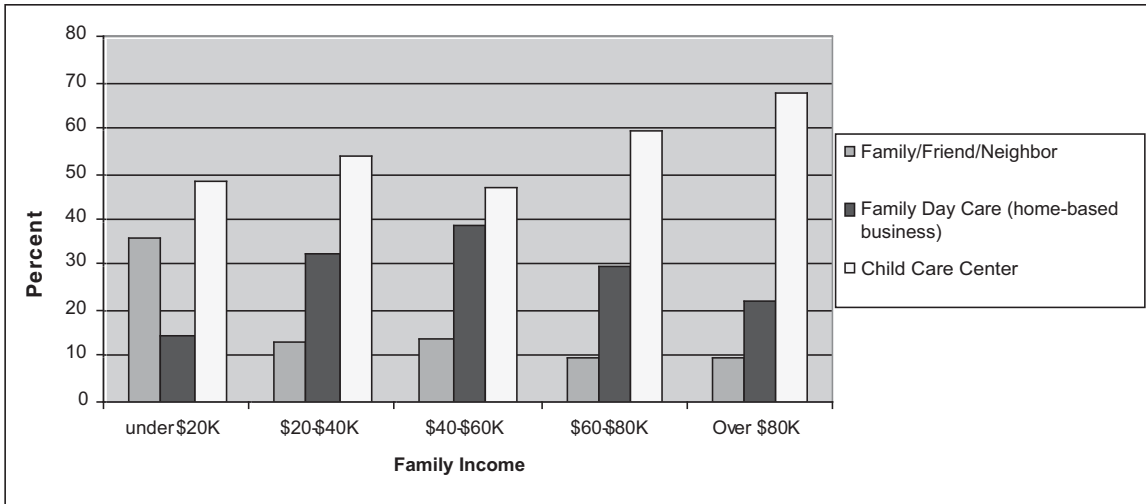
As children moved through the pre-school years, parents turned more to child care centers for care. Once a child became of school-age, the use of child care centers decreased and family/friend/neighbor care grew (see *Chart 2 – Type of child care by age of child*).

**Chart 2 – Type of child care by age of child**



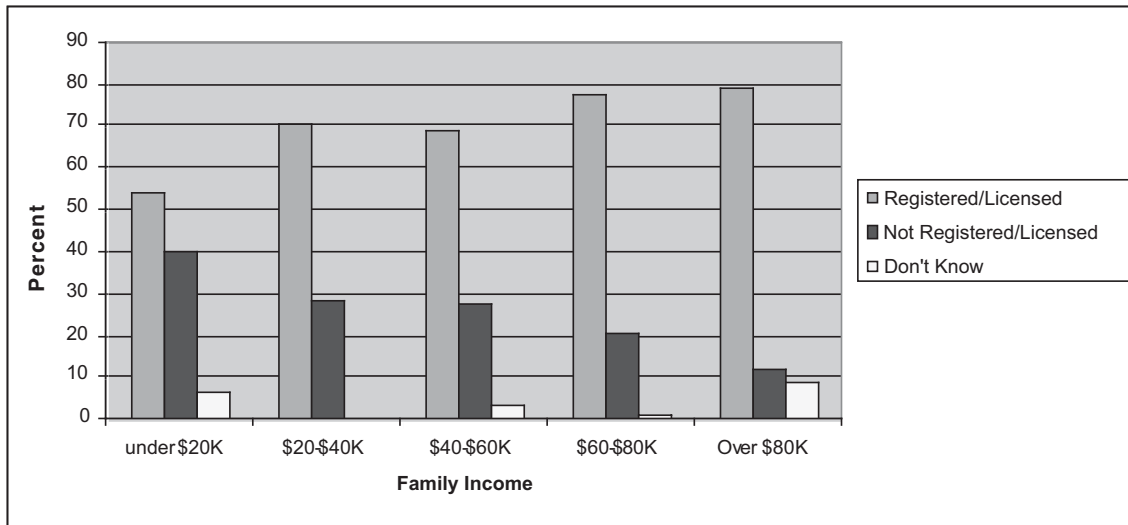
While child care centers are widely used across the income spectrum, as income increased parents turned more to child care centers. Parents with the lowest income used family/friend/neighbor care more than any other income group (See *Chart 3 – Who provides care by family income*).

**Chart 3 – Who provides care by family income**



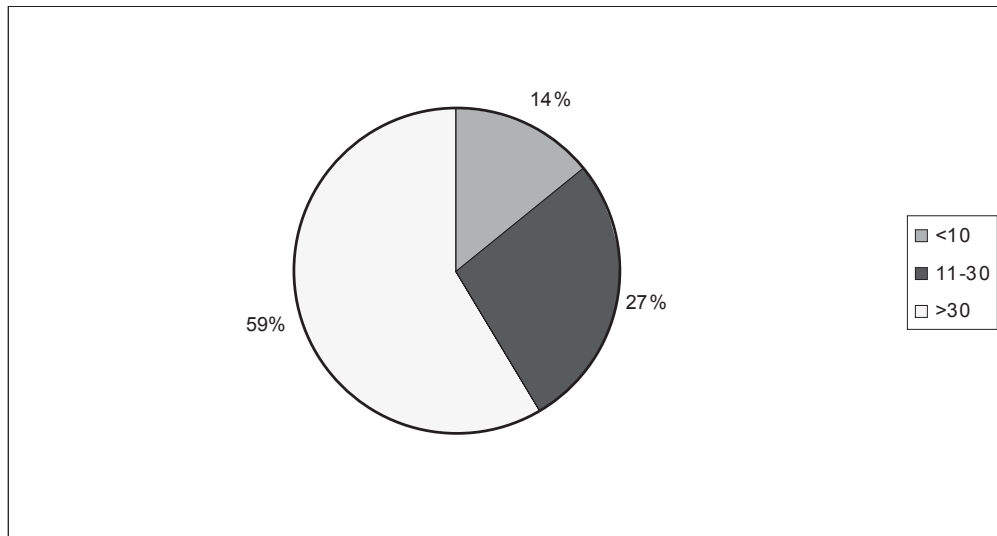
Sixty-nine percent of parent respondents used child care providers who are licensed/registered with the state; 31 percent did not. There are 133 registered family day cares in Pennington County, nine licensed group family day cares, and 23 child care centers (all required to be licensed). In addition, families in Rapid City may use child care in nearby Meade County where there are 27 registered family day cares, 6 group family day cares, and 4 child care centers.<sup>12</sup> (See Appendix for description of types of child care in South Dakota.) As a family's income increases, so does the likelihood that they will choose registered/licensed care (see Chart 4 – Registered/licensed care by family income).

**Chart 4 – Registered/licensed care by family income**



Whatever the type of care chosen, 59 percent of respondents use child care 30 or more hours/week (see *Chart 5 – Number of hours families use child care*).

**Chart 5 – Number of hours families use child care**



Child care comes at a price with an average hourly rate reported by parent respondents at \$2.29 per hour. This is comparable to the child care labor market survey, self-reported by providers in Pennington County (see *Table 1 – Child care market rate survey for Pennington County*). This provider survey shows the cost of care ranges from \$2.25 per hour to \$2.95 per hour depending on the age of the child and the care setting.

**Table 1 – Child care market rate survey for Pennington County**

Type of care	<3 years old	3-6 years old	6 years or older
Family child care (home-based business)	\$2.50 an hour	\$2.25 an hour	\$2.50 an hour
Group Family/Center Care	\$2.95 an hour	\$2.70 an hour	\$2.75 an hour

Source: South Dakota Department of Labor, Department of Social Services, 2009.

### What parents value

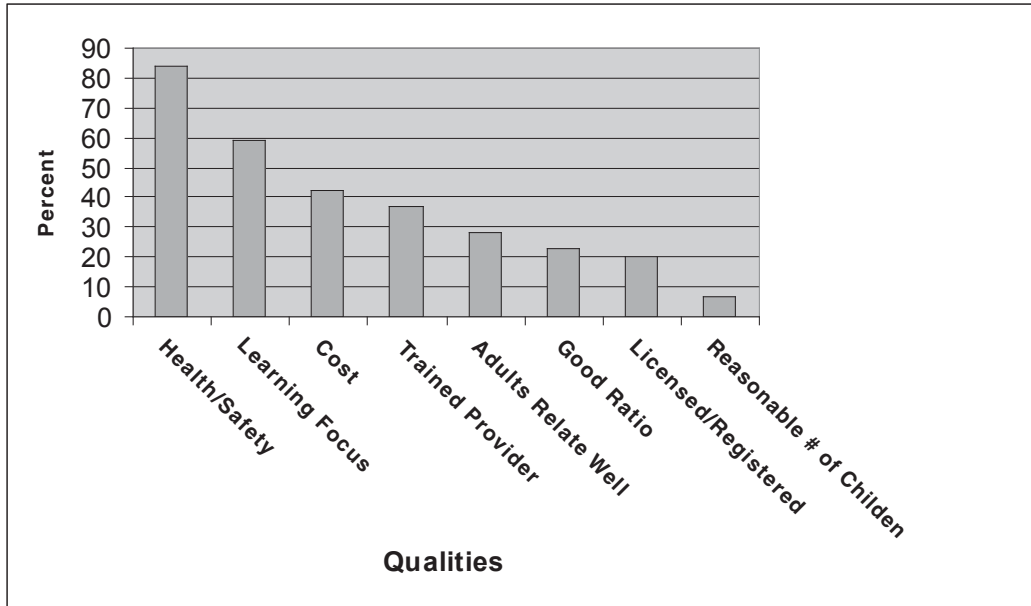
Parents participating in the survey rated eight child care qualities on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not very important) to 5 (very important). **“Health and safety”** was the top rated item followed closely by **“adults relate well to the children”** and **“good ratio of children to adults”** (see *Table 2 – Parent rating of child care qualities*).

**Table 2 – Parent rating of child care qualities**

Characteristic	Ratings (average score on a 1-5 scale)
Health and safety	4.91
Adults relate well to the child	4.71
Good ratio of children to adults	4.67
Learning focus	4.62
Trained provider	4.57
Reasonable number of children	4.45
Cost	4.31
Licensed/registered provider	3.95

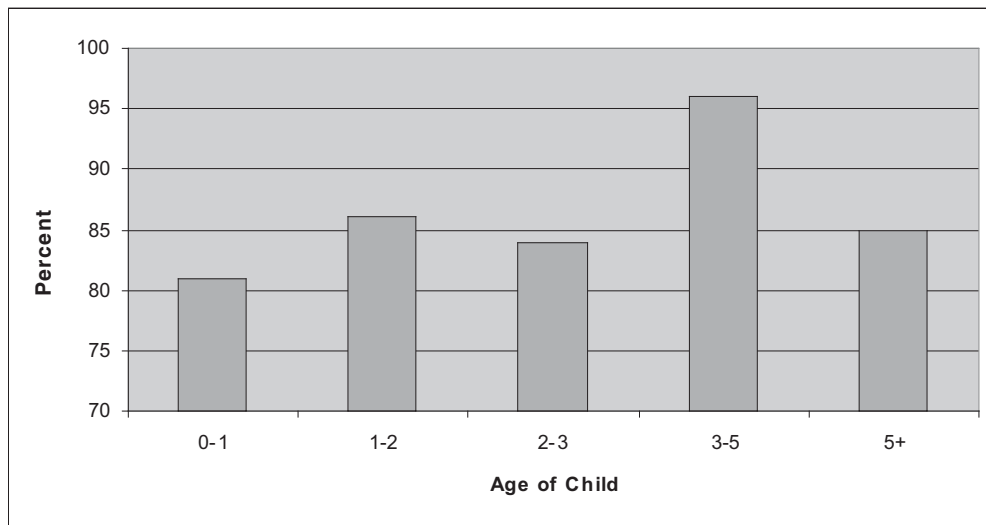
Parent respondents were then asked to choose the top three most important qualities from the list above. A significant majority chose health and safety, followed by learning focus and cost (see *Chart 6 – Most important qualities desired in child care*).

**Chart 6 – Most important qualities desired in child care**



Eighty-eight percent of parents indicate that they are satisfied with the quality of care their youngest child receives. There is variation, however, by the age of the child. Parents of preschoolers are most satisfied with the quality of care received (96 percent). Parents of infants have the lowest satisfaction rate (81 percent) with one in five expressing dissatisfaction (see *Chart 7 – Parent satisfaction with child care by age of child*).

**Chart 7 – Parent satisfaction with child care by age of child**



## Finding and paying for care

Parents in Rapid City face challenges in finding a child care provider and paying for quality care. One-third of parent respondents said they had a hard time finding child care so they could go to work. This proved most difficult among those earning \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year (51 percent). In identifying barriers to quality care, lack of quality child care availability (“what I want doesn’t exist”) was noted by 45 percent of the respondents. Eighty-six percent of the parent respondents said they needed care in the summer.

How do parents find child care? Many (61 percent) turn to their family, friends, and neighbors for advice. Parents report getting information about child care from a number of sources that include the phone book, signs on the streets, schools, the Chamber of Commerce and their employer. Eight percent specifically mentioned the state child care licensing office as a source of information in finding child care.

Parents seek stable, quality child care. **Eighty-six percent of the parent respondents indicated that they would take advantage of such care at or near their workplace. This was highest (93 percent) for those in the under \$20,000 income group.**

As children enter school, parents continue to need care for their children during after school hours. Slightly more than half (51 percent) reported their school-aged child was in an after-school program. This was most prevalent (71 percent) in the under \$20,000 income group. Seventy-five percent reported satisfaction with their child’s after-school program. Only 4 percent of parents indicated that they were dissatisfied.

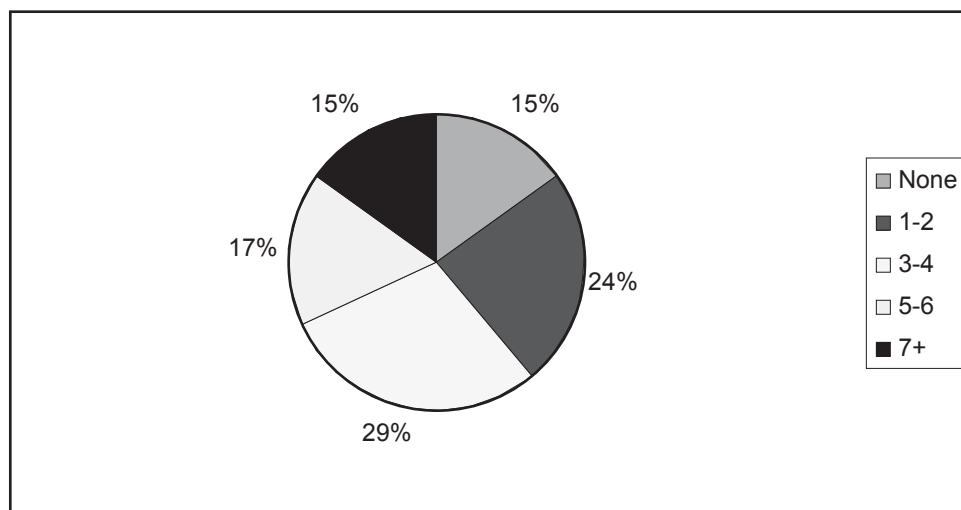
Thirty-one percent of parent respondents noted that paying for care was difficult. This is most pronounced at lower income levels where more than 40 percent of parents said it was tough. More than half (55 percent) of all parent respondents said cost was a major barrier to obtaining quality child care and providers’ pay requirement (paying for a full week even though one may not need a full week of care) was a close second (51 percent). And yet, child care businesses cannot operate on a drop-in basis; they need a steady income.

Financial help with child care is available for families who qualify (up to 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold). While 11 percent of parent respondents use child care assistance, potentially 40 percent of those completing the survey could be eligible for child care assistance.

## Missed work

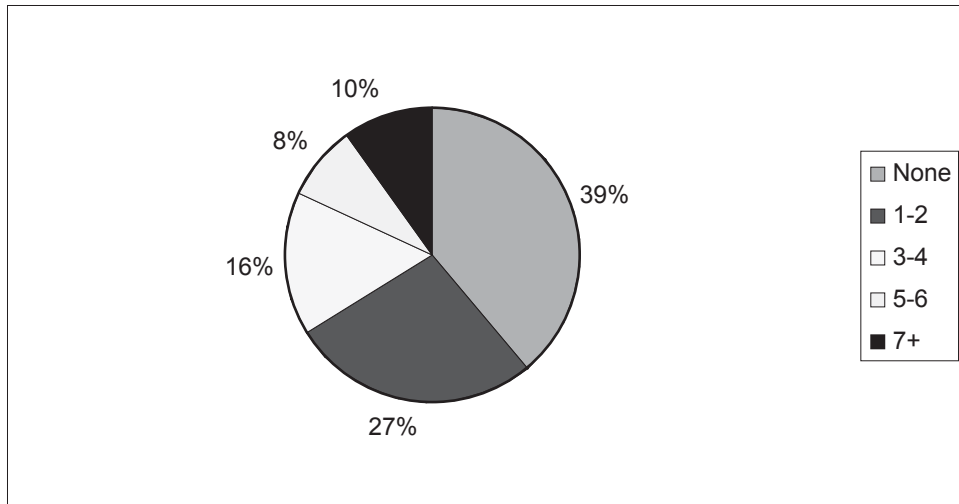
Parents may have to miss work to care for a child who is ill. Eighty-five percent of respondents missed some work because of a sick child (See Chart 8 – Missed work due to ill child). Slightly more than half of the parents miss between one to four days to care for their ill child.

Chart 8 – Missed work due to ill child



Sixty-one percent of respondents missed some work because child care wasn’t available (see Chart 9 – Missed work due to no care available). Twenty-seven percent of parent respondents missed only one to two days for this reason. Nearly 40 percent said they never missed work because of a lack of child care.

Chart 9 – Missed work due to no care available



Half of the parent respondents had a back-up in case their provider was not available. One in ten (11 percent) could not always count on their provider being there as planned, with this most likely for those using family/friend/neighbor child care.

### Pre-kindergarten

Fully 88 percent of respondents answered yes to the question: "If you have children not yet of school age would you be inclined to enroll your child at ages 3 or 4 in a quality preschool program on a sliding fee scale?" Of the children of pre-school age (3-5), 26 percent of parents indicate that their child attends a preschool (11 percent) or Head Start (15 percent). Head Start in Rapid City serves children in families earning 100 percent or less of the federal poverty threshold. As of September 2009, there are 151 children on the waiting list for Early Head Start (younger than 3 years) and 89 children on the waiting list for Head Start for 3- to 5-year-olds.



## Recommendations

The Rapid City Area Council on Early Education and Child Care developed the following recommendations to move toward improving the child care and early education services available to families.

1. Include child care and early education in community planning for economic and infrastructure development.
2. Institute an awareness campaign that makes the connection between a safe and healthy environment and being a registered provider.
3. Increase parent participation in the child-care assistance program to help address low-income parents' barriers in paying for care.
4. Educate and encourage businesses to explore family friendly policies including flexible scheduling, job-sharing and other creative options so that parents can attend to the needs of their children.
5. Identify resources to expand the availability of quality care for infants, school-aged children and children with special needs.
6. Explore making preschool services available on a sliding fee (zero to market rate) scale to all families who want it.

## Rapid City Area Council on Early Care and Education

Dick Brown, *former legislator*

Malcom Chapman, *alderman, City Council*

Todd Christensen, *Rapid City Area Schools*

Sandy Diegel, *The John T. Vucurevich Foundation*

Kevin Dietz, *Black Hills Community Bank*

Judy Duhamel, *Duhamel Broadcasting*

Dennis & Loretta Eisenbraun, *child care provider*

Carol Fitzgerald Simpson, *former legislator*

Dr. Mark Garry, *psychiatrist*

Jennifer Gross, *child care provider*

Nancy Gowen, *retired early childhood educator*

Autumn Gregory, *Early Childhood Connections*

Lori Janssen, *Department of Social Service*

Tonya Johnson, *RJ Design Company*

Janine Kern, *7th Judicial Circuit Court*

Vicki Lowry, *Youth & Family Services*

Alan McCoy, *Lutheran Social Services*

Jan Murray, *Rapid City Regional Hospital*

Laurette Pourier, *SANI-T*

Anne Reddy, *Rural America Initiatives*

Stephanie Schweitzer-Dixon, *Front Porch Coalition*

Sandy Stanton, *YMCA*

Dr. Willis Sutliff, *Black Hills Pediatrics & Neonatology*

Judd Thompson, *7th Judicial Circuit Court*

Tina Uecker, *Department of Social Services*

Dr. John Usera, *Chiesman Center for Democracy*

Dr. Peter Wharton, *Rapid City Area Schools*

Terri Williams, *Gunderson, Palmer, Goodsell & Nelson*

Amy Willman, *Head Start State Based Training*

Holli Vanderbeek, *Youth & Family Services*



Photos courtesy



## Appendix

### Types of child care in South Dakota\*

Family Child Care (registration voluntary, not required by state)

May care for up to 12 children regardless of the number of helpers.

Registration requires:

- Six hours of training each year for the provider and any registered helpers,
- CPR certification,
- Compliance with limitation on number of infants/toddlers younger than age 2,
- Cleared background check of provider and other adults in presence of children,
- Meeting basic health and safety standards.

Group Family Child Care (license mandatory prior to operation)

Caring for 13 to 20 children

Licensing requires

- 10 hours of training each year for director and staff,
- CPR certification,
- Compliance with staff-to-child ratios,
- Cleared background check for all staff,
- Meeting facility standards for health and safety,
- Adherence to policies and practices for health and safety.

Child Care Center (license mandatory prior to operation)

Caring for 21 or more children

Licensing requires:

- 20 hours of training each year for director and staff,
- CPR certification,
- Compliance with staff-to-child ratios,
- Cleared background check for all staff,
- Meeting facility standards for health and safety,
- Adherence to policies and practices for health and safety.

Before- and after-school programs (license mandatory prior to operation)

Caring for children who are 5 years of age or older and enrolled in school.

Licensing requires:

- 10 hours of training each year for director and staff,
- CPR certification,
- Compliance with staff-to-child ratios,
- Cleared background check for all staff,
- Meeting facility standards for health and safety,
- Adherence to policies and practices for health and safety.

\* Source: South Dakota Department of Social Services, Division of Child Care Services, March 2009.

# Fulfilling Our Responsibility

Major findings from the  
Rapid City Child Care Survey and related research



*The mission of South Dakota Voices for Children is to  
improve the lives of children through policy and program advocacy.*

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