

MAKING TOUGH CHOICES, MAKING ENDS MEET

**The Economic and Other Effects
of Child Care Subsidy Waitlists
on Families in Boston**

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Introduction

A recent count completed by the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) found that the statewide waitlist of state-funded child care subsidies numbered more than 13,000. This waitlist is composed primarily of low-income working families who are on waitlists at individual centers or at regional resource and referral agencies (CCRAs) for vouchers or contracted slots funded through the “income eligible” child care program. Thirty-eight percent of the statewide waitlist is made up of infants and toddlers, while 28% of the children on it are pre-school aged (three or four years old). To be eligible for this program, parents must be employed or participating in a formal education or training program, and their total gross household income must not exceed fifty percent of the State Median Income (SMI) for entry. Once a family has a subsidy through the income eligible program, it can continue using that subsidy until its income reaches 85% SMI.¹

In the summer of 1998, the Boston Early Education Quality Improvement Project (Boston EQUIP) worked with Child Care Choices of Boston, the area’s CCRA, to survey a total of 499 parents who were either on a waitlist to receive a child care subsidy, or were currently using a child care subsidy at the time of the study. The subsidized families were either using a slot in a center contracted by the state or were using a voucher to fund their child’s care. Data was collected by Boston EQUIP from parents on waitlists at group child care centers, and by Child Care Choices of Boston, the local child care resource and referral agency, from parents on the agency’s waitlist for child care vouchers.

The survey administered to parents covered a range of issues, including their economic situation, ability to work, choices of care, and the quality of care their children received. **The major findings of the study include:**

- **Overall, respondents reported very low educational levels. Parents receiving subsidized care – either through a voucher or a contracted slot – had higher participation in school and training at the time of the survey than those families on the waitlist for subsidies.**
- **Families on the waitlist paid higher annual out-of-pocket expenses for child care services than families receiving subsidies.**
- **Those families with subsidies had significantly higher annual incomes than those on the waitlist, although waitlist status did not appear to be related to recent employment or the number of hours worked.**
- **Although most parents reported satisfaction with the quality of their current child care arrangements, a majority of families on the waitlist for subsidized care said that they**

¹ For eligibility determination, OCCS currently uses a sliding fee scale based on the Massachusetts SMI for 1992. OCCS has updated the scale to use more current SMI figures, and will be implementing that new scale as of May 1, 2000. To enter the income eligible program at 50% SMI, a family of four must make no more than \$2,229 per month using the current scale. Under the new scale, that threshold will be \$2,709 per month.

would change their youngest child’s caregiver if they could. Infants and toddlers made up almost half of the children on the waitlist, and center-based and licensed family child care programs were most in demand.

- **Most families on the waitlist for subsidized care reported using parents or grandparents to care for their youngest children, while those with subsidies were more likely to use licensed family child care or group care.**

Boston Waitlist Study Methodology

The Boston waitlist study gathered information from a total of 499 parents who were either on a waitlist to receive a child care subsidy, or were currently using a child care subsidy at the time of the study. Of the respondents, 313 were on a waitlist, and 186 were receiving care at the time they completed the survey. Boston EQUIP collected data from parents on waitlists at group child care centers, and Child Care Choices of Boston, the local child care resource and referral agency, collected data from parents on the agency's waitlist for child care vouchers.

To identify parents on center waitlists, Boston EQUIP first obtained a complete list of Boston's licensed child care centers from Child Care Choices of Boston, the city's child care resource and referral agency. EQUIP sorted the complete list by prototype: infant/toddler, preschool and school-age care. The resulting list was then sorted again by neighborhood, then randomly stratified to ensure a proportional representation of each neighborhood. The final sample included programs from 12 different Boston neighborhoods, defined by zip code, including Allston, Back Bay, Charlestown, Chinatown, Dorchester, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, Roxbury, South Boston, the South End, and West Roxbury. [See Appendix 1 for a complete list of participating programs.]

In May 1998, EQUIP sent a letter to 100 centers selected using a random number table from the final stratified list of programs. EQUIP's introductory letter briefly described the waitlist study, and the methodology for interviewing parents as part of the project. It then requested that each program help in identifying parents using the program's subsidized slots (contracted with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) and parents on the program's waitlist for those slots. EQUIP requested lists of names and phone numbers, and asked that the waitlist names be recent (from within the past six months.) EQUIP also assured programs that parent names would be kept confidential.

EQUIP followed up the letter to programs with two telephone calls. In the end, however, only 14 of the 100 programs contacted responded to the request for names. To build a large enough sample population, EQUIP supplemented the names provided with waitlists from three programs operated by Associated Day Care Services, EQUIP's host agency. The type of care varies among centers ultimately participating in the survey. Out of the seventeen centers, only 5% provide two or more types of care. Approximately 90% of centers provide preschool child care. Only 22% of centers provide infant and toddler care. Five of the seventeen centers, or about 29%, provide school-age care.

Ultimately, EQUIP collected approximately 450 names of parents currently using contracted child care and 750 names of parents on the waitlist for contracted care. Sixteen EQUIP interviewers made up to five attempts to contact families from the list of 1,200. Although many families were never reached, interviewers eventually spoke with 183 parents, of whom 160 completed the survey – 72 on the waitlist and 88 subsidized parents.

All participating centers had a waitlist twice as long as the number of children that currently were in child care. The longest waitlist of approximately 350 names was from the Acorn Child

Care Center, which provides care to many families in the Chinatown neighborhood. The survey was conducted in Chinese by two interviewers, who achieved a higher than average completion rate. As a result more than half the surveys completed from the center-based waitlists and families receiving care were completed by parents whose native language is Chinese.

In addition to the parents contacted by EQUIP interviewers, Child Care Choices of Boston (CCCB), Boston's Resource and Referral and voucher management agency, surveyed parents as they added their names to the agency's waitlist for voucher subsidies, or as they came in to renew their current child care vouchers. As clients came into CCCB, staff asked parents to complete the questionnaires. Similarly, when someone called or came into be placed on the waiting list, they were asked to complete the questionnaire. Child Care Choices of Boston collected a total of 339 completed surveys.

Despite considerable efforts, the study did not achieve a representative sample of people on the waitlist or receiving subsidized child care in Boston. Therefore the findings included in this report should be used for informational purposes, but should not be generalized beyond the group that was interviewed.

Findings

Profile of families surveyed

Boston is a city divided into specific neighborhoods, each of which has its own character and demographics. In order to best reflect that diversity, EQUIP administered surveys to parents on waitlists and in contracted slots in a variety of neighborhoods throughout Boston, including Chinatown, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, Dorchester, and the South End. In addition, EQUIP enlisted the resource and referral agency which serves the entire City of Boston to administer surveys to parents on its waitlist for voucher subsidies.

Race and Ethnicity

Overall, the population responding to the survey was very diverse². Almost half of the respondents (48%, n=243) identify themselves as Black (non-hispanic). Twenty percent (n=101) of the respondents are East Asian, 11% (n=54) are Latino or Hispanic, and 5% (n=23) identified themselves as White (non-hispanic).³ While these percentages do not correspond to citywide data showing that 36% of Boston's youth are white⁴, they may reflect more accurately the six neighborhoods represented in the survey. In addition, since the parents and not the children themselves responded to the survey, the racial breakdown of the population may not mirror the citywide data on youth.

The average age of parents responding was just over thirty years old (30.2). Only 36% (n=179) of all the parents who responded had an additional adult living within their households and contributing financial support for their children. Of those, eighty-three percent (n=146) said that they had a spouse or partner living in the household. A small number of respondents (10%, n=18) had a parent living with them, and a few others had adult relatives or friends in their homes. Subsidized parents less often had another adult in the house contributing financial support than those on the waitlist (28%, n=51 versus 42%, n=128 of responding families). Among those receiving subsidies, there was little difference between voucher and contract families regarding the presence of another adult in the household (31%, n=27 of contracted parents, compared to 25%, n=24 with vouchers).

Children's Ages

Respondents to the survey reported having children ranging in age from one month old to 14 years old, with the average child age overall being 4.5 years. The average age of children did not seem to vary in relation to either waitlist status of the family or whether subsidized families were using contract or voucher care. The average age of children actually on the waitlist was slightly lower – 4 years – and children on the waitlist ranged in age from one month to 12 years.

² The demographics of the respondents are not representative of families on the waitlist for subsidies statewide.

³ Because of the efforts of programs serving mainly East Asian families to get responses to the survey, this population was disproportionately represented in the groups of families on and off a waitlist for care. (sample on waitlist = 14.0% East Asian, receiving subsidized care = 24% East Asian)

⁴ Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Who are Boston's Children?* December 1998

Almost half (47%, n=167) of the children reported to be on the waitlist were infants or toddlers, ranging in age from one month to two years, nine months. Twenty-six percent (n=92) were pre-school aged (2 years, 9 months through 4 years), and 26% (n=92) were five years old or older.

The children on the waitlist for contracted care were more likely to be pre-school aged, while those on the waitlist for vouchers were more likely to be infants and toddlers. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Ages of Children*

Percentage of children on waitlist in age group	On Waitlist % (n)	Waitlist for Contracted slot % (n)	Waitlist for Voucher % (n)
Infant	19 (68)	14 (11)	21 (57)
Toddler	28 (99)	28 (21)	28 (78)
Pre-School	26 (92)	34 (26)	24 (66)
School Age	26 (91)	24 (18)	27 (73)
Total	99 (350)	100 (76)	100 (274)

(*Numbers of children are higher than numbers of parents because some parents reported more than one child.)

Education and Training

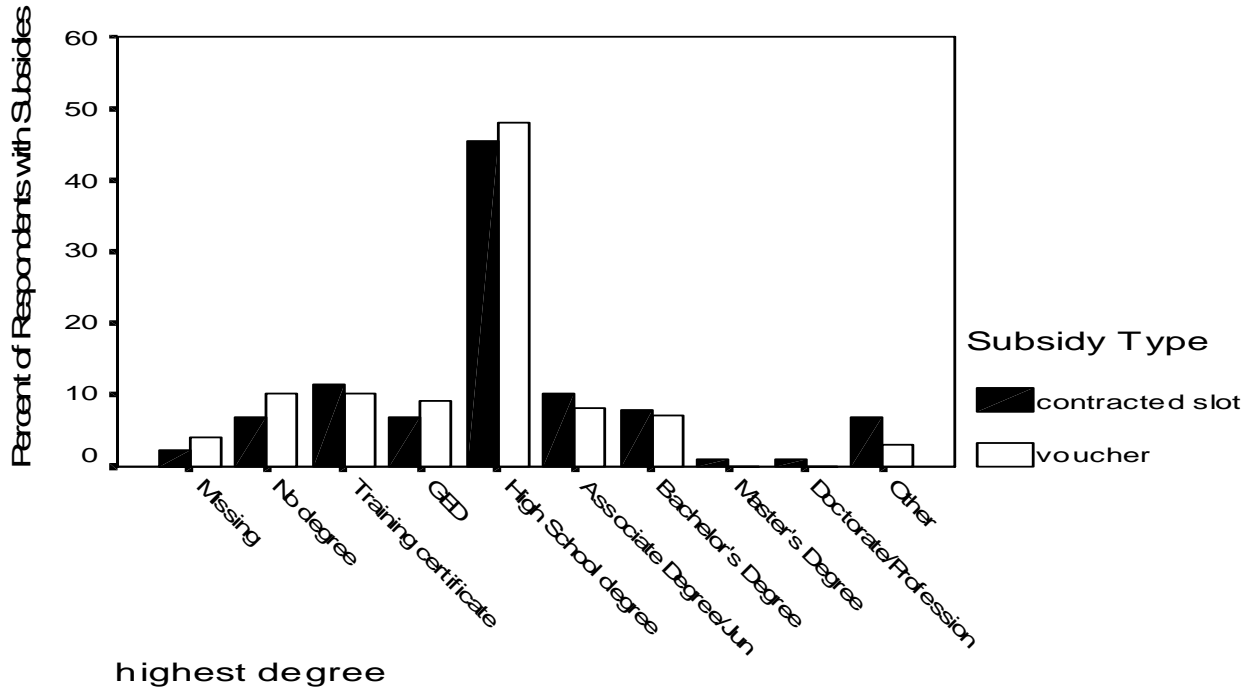
When surveyed about their educational background, almost half of the parents responding (50%, n=239) had completed high school, but had not gone beyond that educationally. Some (19%, n=93) had completed higher education, most of whom had finished Associates degrees or Junior College.

Table 2. Educational Backgrounds of Respondents

Highest Degree	Parents On Waitlist % (n)	Parents Receiving Care – Contracted Slot % (n)	Parents Receiving Care – Voucher % (n)
No degree	13 (41)	7 (6)	10 (10)
Training Certificate	6 (19)	11 (10)	10 (10)
GED	8 (24)	7 (6)	9 (9)
High School Degree	49 (152)	46 (40)	48 (47)
Associate Degree	13 (39)	10 (9)	8 (8)
Bachelor’s Degree	6 (18)	8 (7)	7 (7)
Master’s Degree	1 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)
Doctorate/Professional	<1 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)
Other	2 (7)	7 (6)	3 (3)
Total	97 (303)	98 (86)	95 (94)

Illustration 1.

Educational Background of Parents of with Subsidies



As Table 2 shows, there were no significant differences between educational backgrounds based on waitlist status, but some correlation does exist between educational background and subsidy type for those families receiving subsidized care (See Illustration 1). Families receiving care through vouchers more often had no degree while parents using contracted slots reported higher percentages of college degrees.

To become eligible for a child care subsidy, parents must either be working, attending school, or participating in job training. Interviewers asked parents a number of questions regarding their participation in school, training, and other types of education. Overall, participation in some type of school was reported by 71 (14%) of the respondents. Only 28 (6%) respondents reported participating in some sort of training, while 334 (67%) said they were neither in school nor in a training program.⁵ A greater percentage of parents with subsidies were either in school or in training than parents on the waitlist. Within the group of waitlisted families, parents of families

⁵ When only the parents with a high school diploma or less training were considered for this analysis, the resulting percentages were similar to those obtained for the entire population of parents.

on the waitlist for contracted slots were more likely to be involved with school or training (21% of parents on contract waitlists, compared to 13% of those on the voucher waitlist). 32% of subsidized parents using contracted slots were engaged in school or training compared with 25% of subsidized parents using vouchers. (Table 3.)

Table 3. Participation in Education and Training

	Families on waitlist % (n)	Families receiving care – contracted slot % (n)	Families receiving care – voucher % (n)
In School	10 (32)	22 (19)	20 (20)
In Training	5 (14)	10 (9)	5 (5)
In Neither	69 (218)	67 (59)	58 (57)
Not Responding	16 (49)	1 (1)	17 (16)
Total	100 (313)	100 (88)	100 (98)

Parents involved with either school, training or both were asked about the type of program in which they were involved, and their responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Type of Education or Training Program In Which Parents Are Engaged

Type of Program	Parents on waitlist & in school/training % (n)	Parents using contracted slots & in school/training % (n)	Parents using vouchers & in school/training % (n)
Regular High School	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
GED Program	4 (2)	7 (2)	8 (2)
Junior/Community College	10 (5)	26 (7)	15 (4)
Regular college/university	17 (9)	11 (3)	12 (5)
Vocational Training	14 (7)	15 (4)	0 (0)
JOBS Program	6 (3)	11 (3)	19 (5)
On-the-Job Training	16 (8)	7 (2)	8 (2)
Other	33 (17)	22 (6)	38 (10)
Totals	100 (51)	99 (27)	100 (28)

Of subsidized families in education or training, about one fifth (21%, n=11) reported participating in a GED program, compared to only 10% (n=5) of those not on the waitlist; 15% (n=8) of those with subsidies reported being in the JOBS program, compared with 6% (n=3) of those on the waitlist. In contrast, only 11% (n=6) of those in care reported attending a regular college or university, compared to 18% (n=9) of those on the waitlist. Illustration 2 compares school or training participation with wait list status.

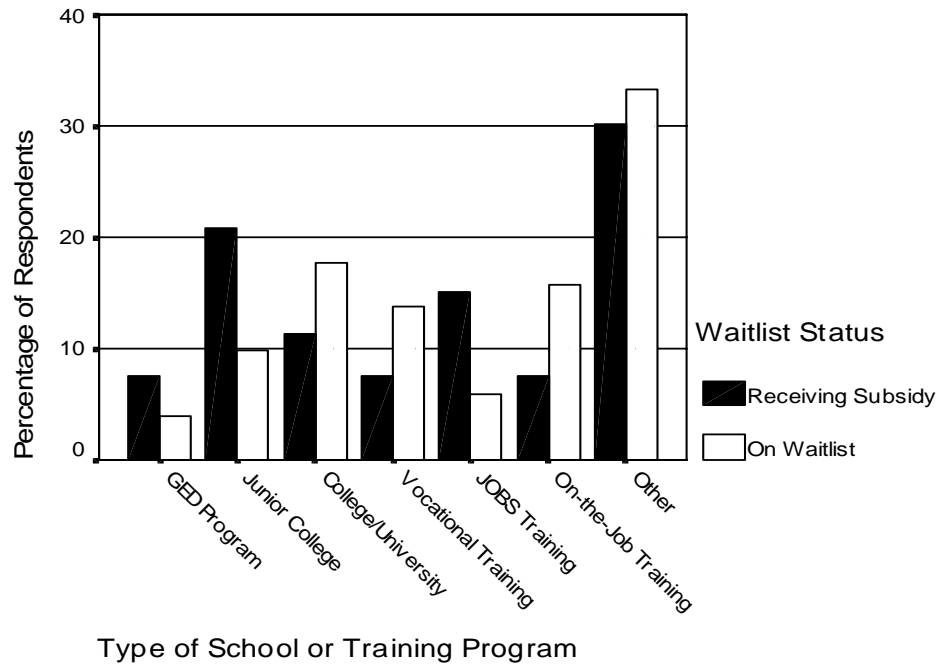
Earnings and Employment

Overall, approximately 76% (n=359) of respondents reported doing some type of work for pay. Waitlist status or the type of subsidy did not appear to affect the likelihood that parents surveyed

were working. Among respondents to the question, approximately 77% (n=133) of those parents using subsidies were employed compared to 76% (n=226) of those on the waitlist. Of those on the waitlist, 75% (n=49) of those waiting for a contracted slot were working for pay compared to 77% (n=176) of those waiting for vouchers. 74% (n=61) of those using contracts were working for pay compared with 80% (n=72) of those using voucher subsidies.

Illustration 2.

Type of School/Training by Waitlist Status



The median annual income of all households surveyed was \$16,000 per year. The median annual income of families with subsidies was higher than those families who were on the waitlist for a subsidized slot -- \$17,500 annually, compared with \$15,600.⁶ Those families using contracted slots had a median annual income of \$18,000, while the annual median income of families using vouchers was only \$16,788. Twenty-nine percent of families receiving subsidized care and 38% of families on the waitlist reported an annual income below \$15,000. There was no significant relationship either between waitlist status and whether or not respondents had been unemployed within the past year, or between the numbers of hours per week respondents reported working for pay and their status on the waitlist.

⁶ Respondents were asked to provide their household income on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis. All responses with sufficient information were converted into annual income.

Child Care Expenses

Families with subsidized child care received more outside assistance for child care expenses from sources other than state subsidies than did families on the waitlist. Approximately 17% (n=54) of those families on a waitlist received some form of outside child care assistance, other than a state subsidy, compared to 50% (93) of those who were not on a waitlist. Overall, of those receiving other types of outside assistance with child care expenses, 78% (n=151) said that the assistance was coming from the government⁷, 6% (n=11) received assistance from a relative or friend, 2% (n=4) received assistance through a center scholarship, and 3% (n=5) through an employer.

Families on the waitlist tended to pay higher out-of-pocket expenses for child care (Table 5). They paid an average of \$4,393 out of pocket per year, while those with subsidies paid an average of \$3,252. Again, there was no significant difference between child care expenses based on subsidy type for those families receiving subsidized care.

Table 5. Out-of-Pocket Child Care Expenses

	Families on waitlist	Families receiving care – contracted slot	Families receiving care – voucher
Median and (Mean) annual out-of-pocket child care expenses	\$3900 (\$4393)	\$2600 (\$3210)	\$2600 (\$3283)

The Hours of Care Needed

Parents were asked what hours they needed care for each of their children. Of those surveyed, 303 responded to the question for one child, 101 responded for two children, and only 21 responded for three children. For their first child, parents listed start times ranging from 2:30 to 11:00, and end times ranging from 3:00 to 12:30⁸. Just under one third (n=100 of 304) listed start times earlier than 8:00 for their first child, with one third of those (n=35 of 100) being from 7:00 through 7:30. For ending times, 91% of respondents listed times at or before 6:00. Of the 26 who listed times after 6:00, more than half (n=14) listed times between 6:00 and 8:00. Similarly, only 15 (3%) parents of 502 indicated a need for Saturday and/or Sunday care.

⁷ The high numbers of families reporting additional outside assistance from government sources indicates that parents may have misunderstood the question and “double-reported” their state child care subsidies.

⁸ Since we did not ask parents to specify a.m. or p.m., this data is unclear. For example, a starting time of 6:00 could indicate the need for relatively normal care hours or the need for evening or nighttime care.

Current Care Arrangements

Parents were asked about the care currently being used for their youngest child, or their youngest child on the waitlist. Parents current care arrangements for their *youngest children* are represented on Table 6. Percentages are of all respondents, but since parents were able to choose more than one response, column totals may equal more than 100%.

Table 6. Type of Care Currently Using

Type of Care	Families on waitlist % (n)	Subsidized families - contracted slot % (n)	Subsidized families – vouchers % (n)
Parent	38 (119)	27 (24)	10 (10)
Grandparent	20 (61)	21 (18)	10 (10)
Other relative	16 (50)	15 (13)	3 (3)
Sibling	3 (10)	6 (5)	2 (2)
Informal Care	17 (52)	13 (11)	3 (3)
Family Child Care	12 (38)	13 (11)	26 (25)
Group Care	9 (28)	46 (40)	37 (36)
No regular arrangement	5 (17)	3 (3)	1 (1)

When asked the type of care they are on the waitlist to receive, families – particularly those on the voucher waitlist – indicated a preference for group day care. (See Table 7.) Again, parents were able to choose more than one response, therefore column totals may equal more than 100%.

Table 7. Type of Care for which Child is on Waitlist

Type of Care	Families on waitlist % (n)	Families on contract waitlist % (n)	Families on voucher waitlist % (n)
Licensed Family Child Care	41 (127)	28 (20)	44 (107)
Group Day Care	69 (215)	42 (30)	76 (184)
Head Start	13 (41)	21 (15)	10 (25)
Pre-Kindergarten or Pre- School at Public School	9 (28)	23 (16)	5 (12)

Clearly, the highest unmet demand is for licensed group day care facilities, followed by licensed family child care. Sixty-nine percent (n=215) of respondents on the waitlist said they were

waiting for group day care. Families on the voucher waitlist were most often waiting for group day care. Families subsidized through contracted slots also had a high demand for these types of care, but were also often waiting for Head Start or pre-school care.

Satisfaction with Care

When asked directly about their satisfaction with the quality of the care their child was currently receiving, there were no significant differences between those parents who were on the waitlist and those who were receiving subsidized care. Forty-three percent (n=76) of those in care said their care was “perfect,” compared to 46% (n=98) of those on a waitlist. Almost a third of those using subsidies (30%, n=52) described their care as “above average,” while almost a third of those on the waitlist (29%, n=63) described the care they were using as “average.” Only small numbers of either group chose “below average” or “awful” to describe their care. Consistent with these findings, in follow-up questions about specific aspects of care (teacher-child interaction, safety, physical environment, etc.), parents with subsidized care were more likely in each case to respond positively when asked about the quality of specific aspects of their care. There were no significant differences in the satisfaction of the families receiving assistance through contracted slots or vouchers.

Another indicator of satisfaction with the quality of care is the frequency of changes families make in care providers. More than two-thirds (70%, n=283) of the parents responding reported no changes in their child care arrangements in the past 12 months. A vast majority of those who had changed arrangements two, three, or four times in the past year, however, were on the waitlist for care. (See Illustration 3.) 12% (n=50) reported changing once; 8% (n=32) reported changing twice; 5% (n=21) reported changing three times; and 4% (n=17) reported changing four or more times within the past 12 months. (Table 8)

Table 8. Changes in Child Care Arrangements in Past Year

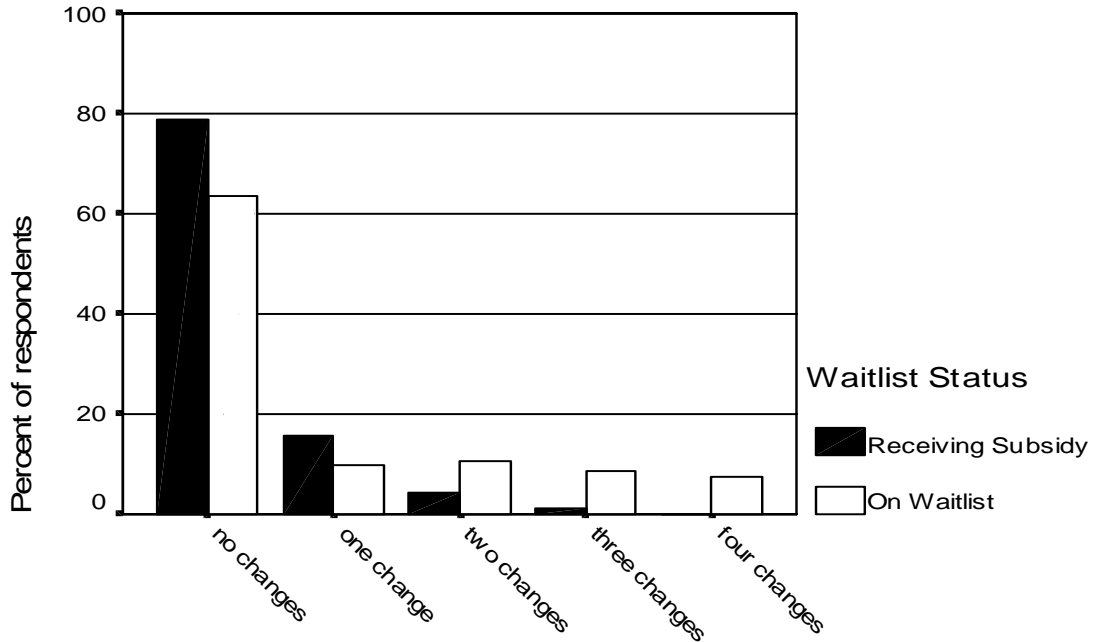
	Families on waitlist % (n)	Families receiving subsidy – contracted slot % (n)	Families receiving subsidy – voucher % (n)
no changes	46 (143)	77 (68)	74 (72)
one change	7 (22)	13 (11)	17 (17)
two changes	8 (24)	6 (5)	3 (3)
three changes	6 (19)	2 (2)	0 (0)
four or more changes	5 (17)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Not Responding	28 (88)	2 (2)	6 (6)

Families on the waitlist made more changes in day care arrangements than did those receiving subsidies.⁹

⁹ Pearson Correlation = .264, significant at p<.001

Illustration 3.

Changes in Care Provider in the Past 12 Months



changes in child care arrangements in past year st half (48%, n=188) of those parents responding said they would. Again, the parents using subsidized care appear to be more satisfied with the care that their children are receiving. While only 28% (n=49) of families in subsidized care would change providers if they could, 63% (n=139) of those on the waitlist for subsidized care would do so.¹⁰ Twenty-four percent (n=21) of those using contracted slots would want a different provider while 32% (n=28) using vouchers would change.

The Search for Care

When searching for care for their current care arrangement for their youngest child, most parents responding (72%, n=209) looked at four or fewer places. The average response for the number of places parents had to look was 3.95. Parents using subsidized care looked at an average of three places, while families on the waitlist looked at approximately five places for their current arrangement. There was no significant difference in the average number of places looked at by subsidized families with contracted slots or vouchers (contracted slots = 2.8, vouchers = 3.2). Parents reported having to look at between 0 and 30 places before finding their current care arrangement.

When asked about the resources they used to assist in their searches for care, families most frequently reported using information they received by “word of mouth” (n=225, or 45%),

¹⁰ Pearson Correlation = -.347, 2-tailed, significant at p<.001

followed by the resource and referral agency (n=126, or 25%)¹¹, and “other” (n=96, or 19%). Only 33 families (7%) reported using the Yellow Pages, 17 families (3%) reported using advertising from a newspaper or magazine, and 2 families (.4%) reported using advertising from the radio or television.

Transportation

According to the reports of their parents, a large proportion (27%) of the children represented in the study are driven to their child care arrangements by parents or other relatives. (See Table 9.) A nearly equal number of families, however, use public transportation services to bring their children to care.

Table 9. How Child is Transported to Care

Form of Transportation	Number of families	% of respondents
Walk	96	19
Public Transportation	123	25
Parent or Relative Drives	137	27
Non-Relative Drives	30	6
Other	60	12
Not Responding	53	11

Conclusion and Questions for Further Research

The Boston waitlist study provides a number of insights on the effects of child care subsidies on low income families. The responses indicate that child care subsidies – both vouchers and contracts – appear to contribute to the economic stability of families. Although rates of employment were similar between those families on the waitlist and those receiving subsidies, income levels were higher and out-of-pocket child care expenses were lower for those who had access to subsidies. Although respondents have relatively low education levels, participation in school and training appears to be higher among those families who have subsidies.

Most of the families surveyed reported being happy with their care, but satisfaction was generally higher among those with subsidized care. A majority of those on the waitlist indicated a desire to change their current child care arrangement. Most families drawn from the waitlist used family members to care for their children while awaiting subsidized licensed care – most often group care. Since almost half of the children on the waitlist in this study were infants or toddlers, this finding reinforces the need to address the development of licensed infant and toddler care.¹²

The study uncovers several lines of inquiry for further research and possible policy changes. For example, it seems important to pursue the educational and income differences between those

¹¹ This compares to the 339 parents who actually completed the survey as a result of their contact with Child Care Choices of Boston, the City’s child care resource and referral agency.

¹² Statewide, approximately 38% of children on the waitlist are infants or toddlers, according to OCCS.

families using voucher subsidies and those using contracts. While these effects might very well be the result of a higher use of voucher subsidies with welfare-related programs, it would be important to learn whether there are any effects on education or work related to the greater stability of contract subsidies over vouchers. In addition, more work needs to be done to collect usable data concerning the hours of care that are needed by subsidized families and those on the waiting list, particularly the need for off-hour care. While intuitively it seems that child care demand must be increasing (impacted by welfare reform and a strong economy), the data in this study are not sufficient to support that assumption or related policy changes.

Appendix A

List of Participating Programs

Child Care Choices of Boston, Resource and Referral Agency (voucher recipients and waitlist)

- ◆ Acorn Child Care, Chinatown
- ◆ Associated Day Care Services, Castle Square, South End
- ◆ Associated Day Care Services, East Boston
- ◆ Associated Day Care Services, Jamaica Plain Day Care, Jamaica Plain
- ◆ Associated Day Care Services, Jamaica Plain Day Care Preschool, Jamaica Plain
- ◆ Associated Day Care Services, Ruggles Street/Mission Hill, Roxbury
- ◆ Boston Childrens Services, Chinatown
- ◆ Col. Daniel Marr, Dorchester
- ◆ Cooper Community School, Roxbury
- ◆ Crispus Attucks, Dorchester
- ◆ Dimock Community Health Center, Roxbury
- ◆ East Boston Social Centers, East Boston
- ◆ Ellis Memorial, South End
- ◆ Marshall After School, Dorchester
- ◆ Red Oak After School, Chinatown
- ◆ SMILE Pre-school, Roxbury
- ◆ Wesley Child Care, Dorchester

Appendix B

Context: Recent Studies of Child Care Waitlists and their Impacts on Families

In recent years there have been several studies completed on the state level to measure the impact of child care shortages and long waitlists for subsidies on low-income families and families working their way off of welfare. With the implementation of federal welfare reform, access to child care services has been an even more critical need, leading many researchers to explore the barriers families face in finding and keeping employment. **The Boston waitlist study is informed in particular by two recent studies completed in Florida and Minnesota. Although these studies posed similar questions to the Boston research, the designs, methodologies, and results vary in each case.**

Pinellas County

Florida's Pinellas County worked in conjunction with Project Playpen and Latchkey Services to complete a study of families on the waitlist for subsidized care. The researchers chose a random sample of 534 families by choosing every third child from the waitlists for subsidies related to each of the following eligibility criteria.

Eligibility	Sample Size	Response	Response Rate %
Children at Risk	46	15	32.6
Project Independence	293	69	23.5
AFDC/SSI	39	12	30.7
Group Eligible	8	6	75
Income Eligible	91	35	38.4
Total	477	137	28.4

137 parents completed and returned the survey – an overall 28 % response rate.

Demographics

Of those responding to the Pinellas County survey, ages of parents ranged from 14 to 49, with a mean age of 27 years old. Seven parents were under the age of 17. 44% of the respondents were single, 22% were separated, 20% were divorced, and 14% were married. 23% of the households responding were single adults living with their child or children, while 33% of respondents reported living with four other people. Of those, 13 were single parents with three children. For the purposes of the study, respondents under the age of 18 were not considered adults.

Overall, respondents to the Pinellas County survey had very low incomes. 64% of respondents reported incomes of less than \$5,000 annually. 88% reported incomes of less than \$10,000. Researchers determined that approximately 70% of respondents were living below the federal poverty level.

Even with extremely low incomes, some parents awaiting subsidies reported paying out-of-pocket expenses in order to work or participate in training. For those parents who were paying for child care at the time of the study (29 respondents), 11 were in the income eligible category and ten were Project Independence clients. The amounts paid by respondents for child care ranged from \$10 to \$136 per week.

Alternative Arrangements

Almost half of the survey’s respondents (47.7%) reported needing child care in order to be able to work or go to a job, while 13.3% needed care to find a job, 13.3% needed care to attend job training or counseling, and 13.3 % needed care to attend high school. Other reasons given for needing access to child care included attending college, and having an opportunity to be with other children.

Of those responding to the survey, 31% reported staying at home with their children until they could receive a subsidy. About half of those parents were eligible for subsidies as participants in project Independence – an employment and training program for welfare recipients. About 21% of those families on the waitlist reported that their children were in care, but that the care was too expensive. Over 41% of families on the waitlist had been waiting for assistance for more than six months. About 17% had been waiting between four and five months.

The following table shows the *number* of parents who reported using each alternative arrangement while waiting for a child care subsidy:

Relatives	56
Staying at home	40
Friends or neighbors	32
Older child	12
Child stays home alone	9
Child goes to library after school	2
Child goes to supervised recreation	2

For families relying on an older child to baby-sit as a secondary child care arrangement, they reported the age of the older child as being between eight and 17 years old, with a median of 12.5 years old. 88% of children do not stay home alone, and six percent stated that their children were home alone for less than an hour per day. Three parents left their children ranging from 3-8 years old alone for one to two hours. Three other parents left their children between 20 months and 12 years old unsupervised for four or more hours.

In addition to the lack of subsidies, another of the barriers to accessing care identified by respondents to the County’s study was transportation. 38% of the respondents used taxi or public buses to meet their transportation needs from their homes to their child care centers. This implies that only 62% of respondents have access to private transportation or their own automobiles.

The Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association

The Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association conducted a study of 270 families who were either using or on the waitlist for child care services. Families were selected randomly from the Hennepin County waitlist. 38 of the families surveyed were actually using services, 232 were on the waitlist at the time of the study.

Demographics

In the families studied, 68% of the mothers were single and 25% were married. Of the respondents, 61% were white, 28% were African American, 4% were American Indian, and .05% were Hispanic. 63% of the mothers surveyed were working, 10% were in school, and 11% were both working and going to school. Finally, respondents had an average family size of three people, with an average annual income of \$15,400. The average number of children per family was 1.5.

Affordability

Child care expenses play a pivotal role in the economic status of families. For a family with earnings of \$15,000, approximately 23% of its income goes to child care costs. In contrast, a family with an income of \$50,000 only contributes 65 toward child care costs.

According to the Minnesota study, the following is a breakdown of a monthly budget of a family who earns \$1,521 per month, and is on the waitlist for child care expenses:

Type of expense	Percent of budget	Dollar amount
Transportation (using a car)	19%	\$289
Health care (Using Minnesota Care)	2%	\$27
Food	17%	\$266
Clothing/Misc. (home and personal)	10%	\$155
Housing utilities	42%	\$639
FICA	7.5%	\$114
Child Care Expenses	2%	\$27

Of the 270 families surveyed, 71% of parents who paid for child care fell into debt, 47% depleted their savings accounts, 47% relied on food stamps and/or medical assistance, 24% had begun receiving cash assistance (AFDC), and 14% had left their jobs as a result of child care expenses.

Quality

In the Minnesota study, thirty percent of parents were dissatisfied with the quality of their child care in areas such as age-appropriate programming, the amount of attention paid to their children, and unsafe or unclean environments. Twenty-two percent also expressed concern with the lack of reliability and the location of child care arrangements.

According to the study, the stability of child care arrangements varied depending on whether the parents were on the waitlist or receiving subsidized child care at the time of the survey. Four percent of parents on the waitlist reported changing their child care arrangements weekly, while none of the parents receiving subsidies reported changing their arrangements that frequently. Eight percent of parents on the waitlist used five or more providers, compared to one percent of the parents in sliding fee care. A quarter of the parents on the waitlist reported using three to five providers, compared to eleven percent of parents with subsidies. Finally, 50% of parents on the waitlist reported using one or two providers compared to 88% of the parents receiving subsidies.

Parents who were on the waitlist at the time of the study and were attending school or work use different types of child care. Fifty-five percent of parents on the waitlist have relatives care for child versus five percent of parents receiving child care subsidies. Forty-six percent of parents on the waitlist use family child care, compared to thirty-three percent of parents receiving sliding fee care. Not surprisingly, thirty-nine percent of parents on the waitlist use center based care versus seventy-three of parents receiving the child care sliding fee. Parents on the waitlist were also more likely to use informal, rather than formal child care as a result of child care expenditures.

The Minnesota study found that the average monthly costs to taxpayers for supporting a family is least expensive when the government implements a sliding fee assistance program for working families. When families go on AFDC, food stamps or medical assistance and the child care sliding fee program \$845, \$405, \$259 is spent respectively. In addition to economic benefits, parents feel more satisfied and comfortable with the formal child care services.