

# The Oregon Hispanic Community Discusses What's Important in Childcare and Early Education

A Report from the Equipo de Escucha Listening Team  
August 2023

# About This Project

In late spring 2023, the Western Oregon University Research Institute (WOU) sought to engage parents/guardians and early childhood educators in the redesign of the statewide Quality Recognition Improvement System (QRIS), or Spark, a program designed to support, recognize, and communicate to families about high-quality early care and education programs

WOU partnered with Community Wealth Partners (CWP) to support a parent/guardian and early childhood educator-led listening, learning and design process through a Participatory Action Research process over a 16-week period.

This is the result and the recommendations.

## Key Questions for the IAP or PAR:

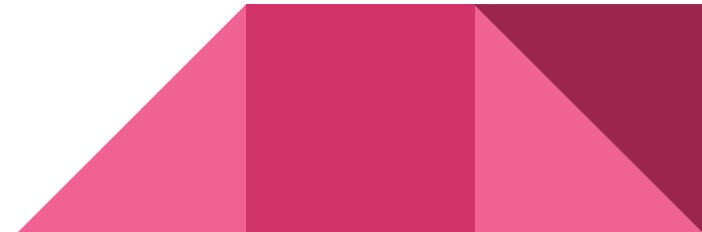
1. What is important to you when choosing or providing childcare and early education?
2. How do families want information to help them choose the childcare and early education option that best suits their children?
3. (for educators) What support would you like to receive to improve the care and education you provide to children in partnership with their families?

# Who is the Equipo de Escucha Listening Team

The Equipo de Escucha Listening Team is the name of our group of 15 members comprised of the community reflecting:

- A commitment to supporting early childhood for Oregon children and families with a variety of experiences with the Spark system and early childhood education.
- A variety of Oregon counties: rural, suburban, and urban communities.
- Parents/guardians from a variety of family structures who care deeply about their children (e.g., grandparents, siblings, etc.)
- Early childhood providers reflecting early childhood centers of various sizes and models (e.g. at home, central places, etc.)
- A network of connections with families and providers from a variety of nationalities, races, ethnic and indigenous groups, immigration statuses, and experiences reflecting children of a diversity of strengths and needs.

Biographies of the members of the Listening Team can be found in the Executive Summary of this report.



## Our goals for the listening process were:

- Listen from real experiences of parents/families and providers about childcare access and quality in Oregon.
- Develop trust with the people we listen to in order collect useful information in developing our recommendations.
- Highlight voices that are often not heard, due to lack of knowledge of the system in the U.S., or fear of being identified by their immigration status, or because they do not think their voice will bring about the necessary changes.

### **We achieved these goals by:**

- Traveling to where families and providers were - such as their homes, organizing barbecues and meetings and interviewing parents of families who work in the fields or driving to rural areas in the mornings, evenings and on weekends.
- Capturing their experiences as they told us with a great sense of responsibility to reflect their stories of hope for their children and their concerns about their education and care.
- Acknowledging the humanity of the people we met and prioritizing relationship development first to build trust for them to express their experiences honestly, sharing sometimes traumatizing and painful ones, to bring change and having better childcare for their children;
- With hundreds of families and providers throughout Oregon.

## As parents and providers, we had some ideas and curiosities as we started.

- What practices do providers have about nutrition?
- What are the educational practices and tools that families use in their homes?
- Inclusion - How do families feel included - is there discrimination based on language, immigration status or special needs?



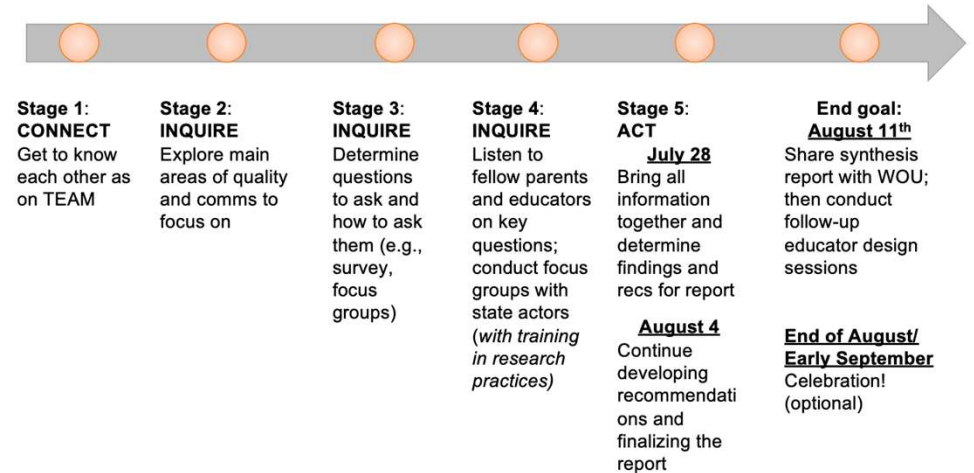
# Steps we took to listen to communities in Oregon:

From April to August 2023, our team:

- Reviewed data from 96 applicants across the state where these main areas were considered and identified.
- Used 3 listening methods:
  - Survey with 60 participants
  - Interviews and focus groups\* with 364 participants and
  - A TOTAL of 520 people heard.
- We conducted focus groups with members from different agencies/departments related to Spark. These included teams from
  - Spark
  - QRIS
  - CCR&R
  - Early Learning Hub
  - Department of Early Learning & Care (DELIC)

\*These methods were found to be the most valuable to utilize in our community.

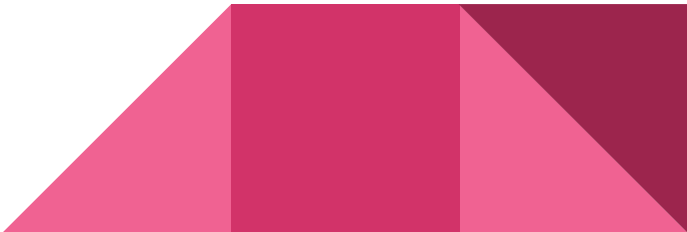
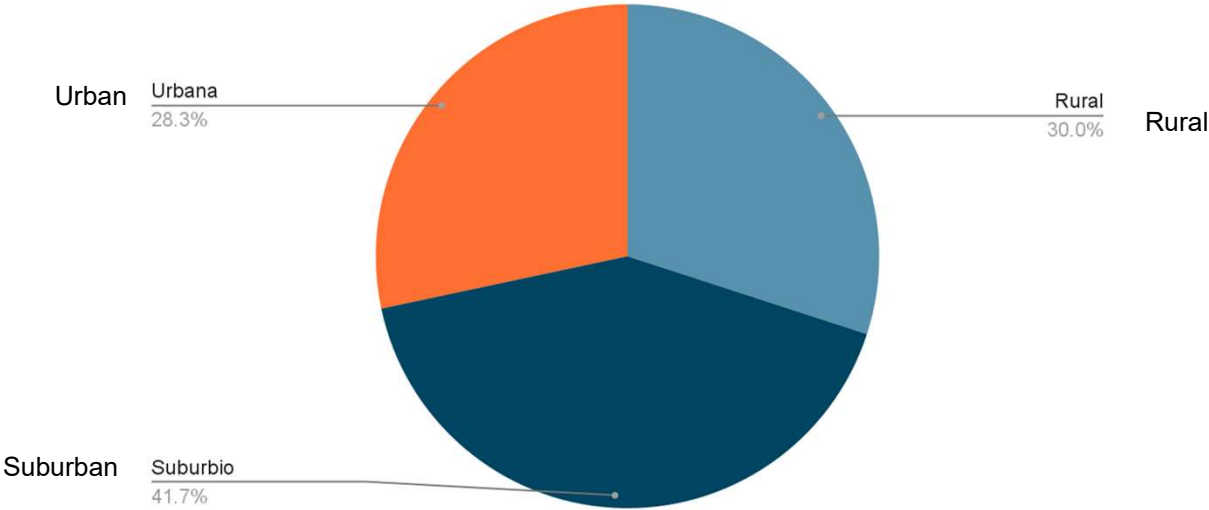
## Overview of Listening Team / PAR Process



# Survey Participant Demographics

Geography of survey respondents N=60

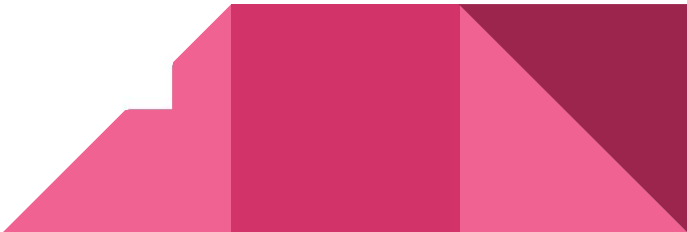
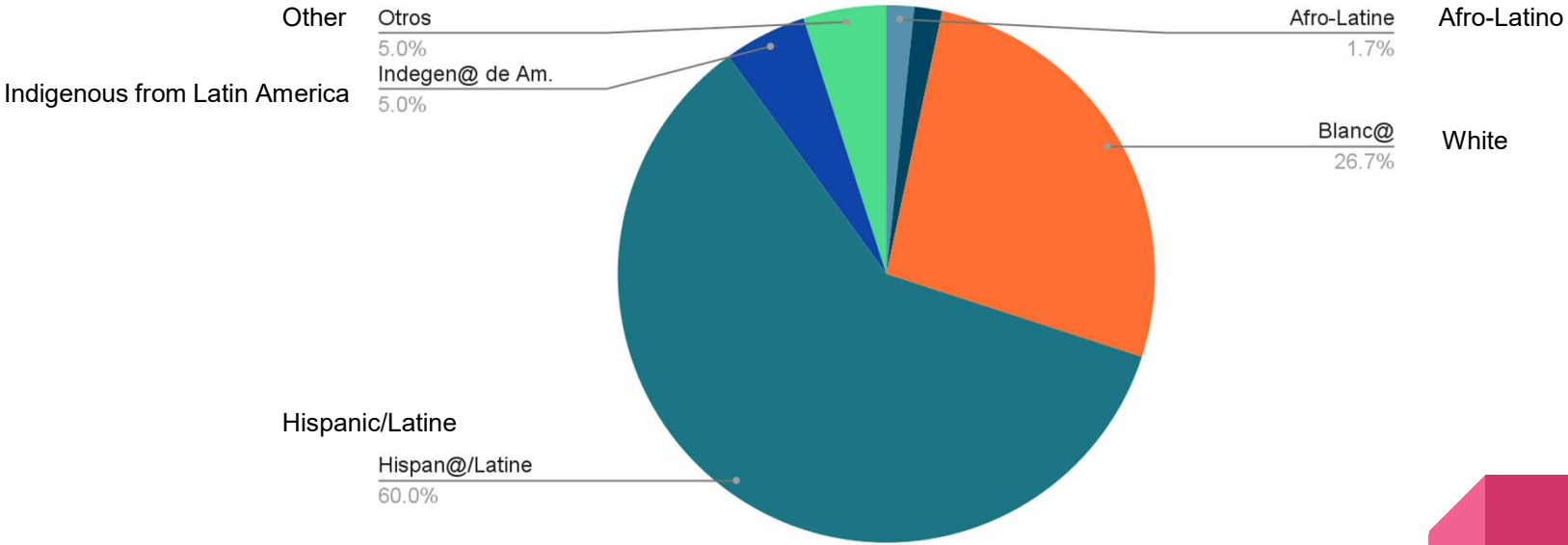
Geografía de los respondientes de la Encuesta N=60



# Survey Participant Demographics

Race/Ethnicity of survey respondents N=60

Raza/Etnicidad de los participantes en la Encuesta N=60







# Recommendations and Findings

# What's Important for Families

We begin our report with four key takeaways that emerged from the process of listening about what is important to families in our communities:



Have childcare options in their areas that are accessible (close to where they live and/or work) with schedules that fit their work hours.



Make the cost of childcare affordable.



Language is not a barrier to accessing state resources and participate in conversations between children and their teachers.



That they can trust the childcare center because it has the trained staff and environment prepared so that their children are safe.



## And in conversations with parents, we heard that:

- Parents who do not speak English feel marginalized, because both in meetings or activities, they do not have information in their language (in many cases, Spanish).
- There are many resources that are not reaching the people who need them. The biggest lack is the lack of Spanish-speaking information and personnel.
- Many parents don't know that there is a program like Spark in their language.
- There is a huge disconnect of understanding and information between parents and Spark resources.
- Parents want to work with a person to guide them and help navigate the childcare system, especially for those who do not speak English.

*None of the 20 parents interviewed knew that the level of preparedness of providers or centers could be determined by stars and is regulated by Spark.*

-- member of the  
Equipo de Escucha  
Listening Team

## **Recommendation 1: Grow childcare options and make them more accessible to families, especially in agricultural areas.**

The first three obstacles families face when choosing childcare identified by parents who completed the survey were:

1. **Lack of space** in childcare centers, especially during the hours they need it.
2. The **cost**
3. Language

For families living in agricultural areas, these obstacles are even more acute.

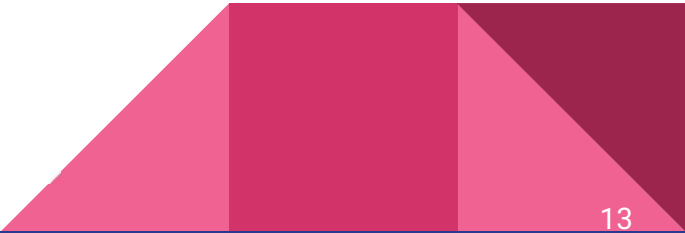


# Finding: Parents Struggle to Find What They Need When Looking for a Childcare Center

Total Responses: The Greatest Motivations for Families In Choosing a Childcare Center



\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to this question in the survey.



# In their own words!



*"We have been on a handful of waiting lists for 3 months, we no longer know where to look."*

*-South Salem Fathers*

*"I haven't been able to work because of a lack of help in finding the right daycare for my daughter. This causes you to stay in the system asking for SNAP and other help. I can't manage to get ahead if I have no one to leave my daughter with... I don't want to keep exposing her to further trauma, there's not enough help to be able to find the right place and navigate the system. Childcare locations are not all registered in one place and this makes it more difficult to find a good site that suits the needs of each family."*

*-parent*

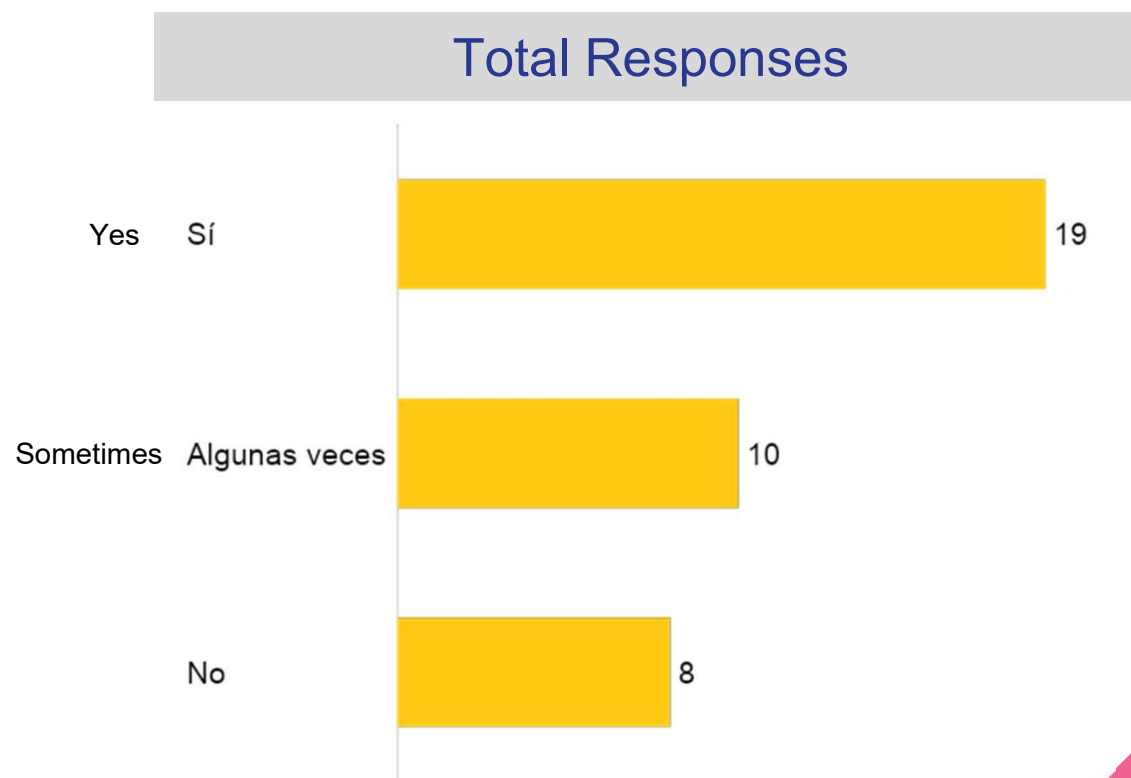
*"It's very difficult to find where to take care of my daughter. Their schedules don't fit mine. I work from 4 am to 4 pm, but my work is two hours away. I need a place that has tolerance in schedules for people who work far away."*

*-Single father, born in the U.S. to Mexican parents*





Finding: Most families in the survey indicated needing some form of scholarship to cover childcare costs



\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to this question in the survey.



# In their own words!

*"Another challenge that me and my husband have had is income. We went over and no longer qualified; But at the same time, we don't have the resources."*

*-Mexican and Zapotec mother of 2 girls, Multnomah County*

*"The cost is very high."*

*-Mother Latina, in Lebanon County*

*Not qualifying due to "making too much"*

*- Latine Mother, Clackamas County*

*"Where we live there are very good centers. Our neighbors speak well of them because some take their children there. For us, their fees are too much. We cannot pay those amounts. Our daughter is cared for by a friend who charges us per day and the payment is not overly costly."*

*-Benton County Parents*

*"It's very expensive to have a caregiver."*

*- Latina mom, Yamhill County*

*"The hurdle I've had is financial to pay for childcare/in the special education program."*

*-Latina Mother in Yamhill County*

*"With payment it is sometimes very expensive and not within my pocketbook."*

*-Native American mother of Latin America in Washington County*

*"I can't afford a center."*

*- Latino Father in Monroe County*





## In their own words!

She works in the fields and says it's hard for her to leave her young children in a childcare center because it's expensive and she leaves them in charge with their neighbors or sister.

-Interview with single mother with three children in the Lane area

It is difficult for them to have their little ones in a childcare center because they work in the fields, but it is temporary, so they save money to pay for the rest of the year to be able to pay for their basic needs.

-Guatemalan family of Cottage Grove

*"It's very difficult for us to find childcare. We change towns every 4 months or less depending on the duration of the grape and blackberry harvest. We have to go looking for work for the whole year and we are continuously in other places. When we look for someone to take care of our youngest son, we struggle a lot. Sometimes we don't know where to look. Sometimes we find somewhere but the hours they open are not what we need. They open very late. We started working from 5 in the morning. Sometimes my wife waits to work up to 3 weeks so someone can take care of our son."*

-Parents of 2 children in Monroe, Benton County

Father says it is very difficult for him to find childcare in his rural community. They found a childcare program, but they have their child on a waiting list as the childcare program can only receive 6 children and they have a waiting list of 30 children (parents of young children in Cottage Grove)

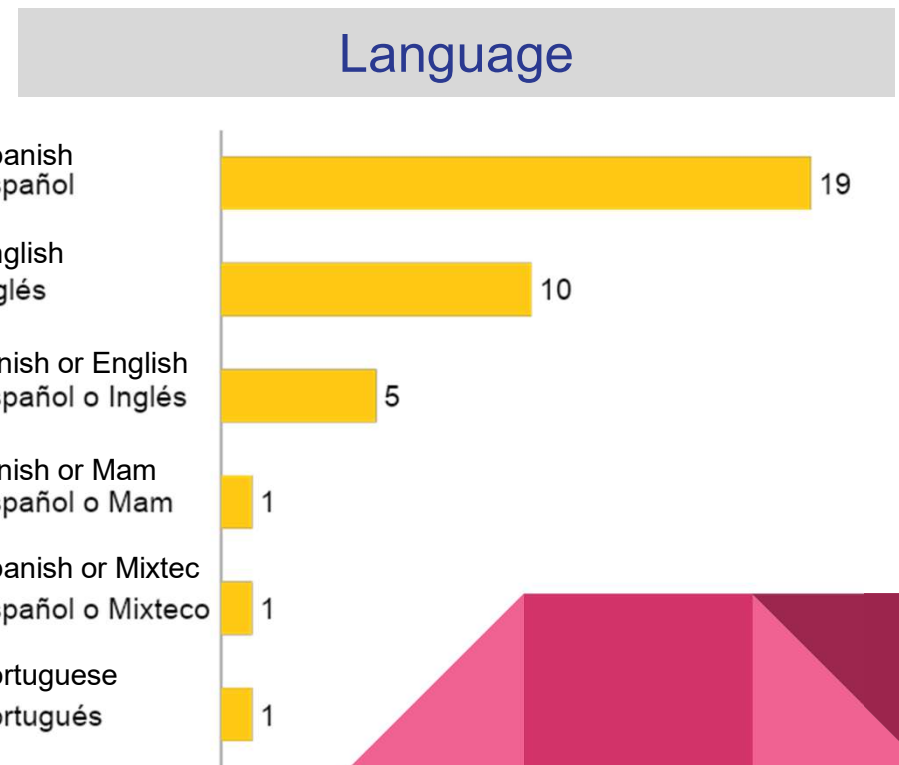
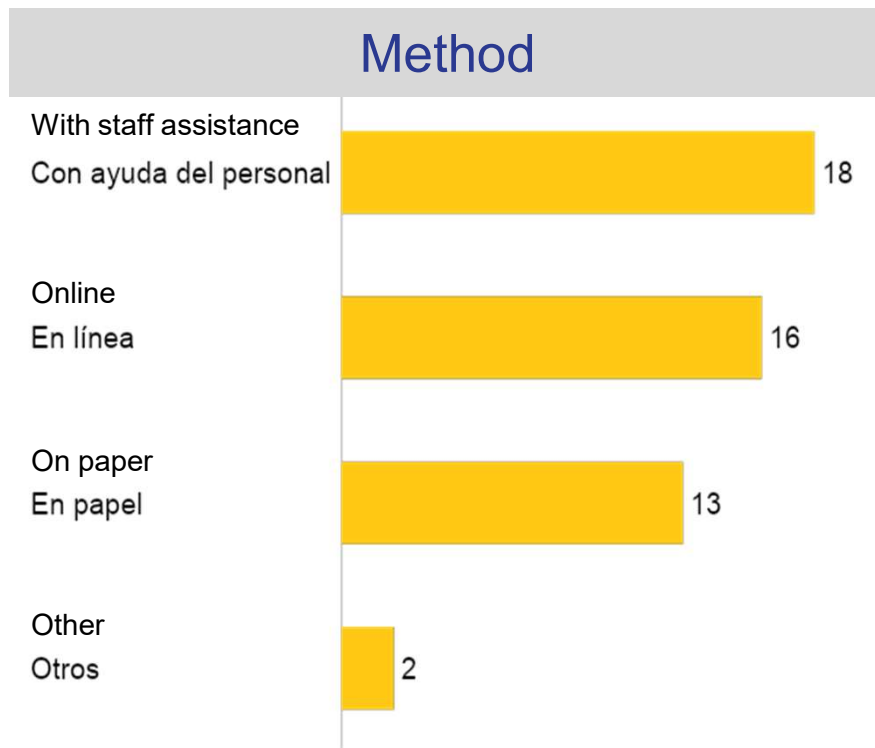
-Member of the Equipo de Escucha Listening Team

In the survey, we noticed the trend that parents mostly trust information from other parents, centers/teachers, and from organizations in the community

Response	Number of times named
Other Parents/Parent Centers	8
The school / the center / teachers and professionals as doctors	7
Other organizations in the community (NAEYC, bookstore, Peggy's Primary Connection, educational institutions)	5
Text / email / phone	4
Internet (Google)	3
I don't understand the question	3
No reliable sources	2
211	2

*CCR&R, government announcements, and paper were named once. One person said they didn't know.*

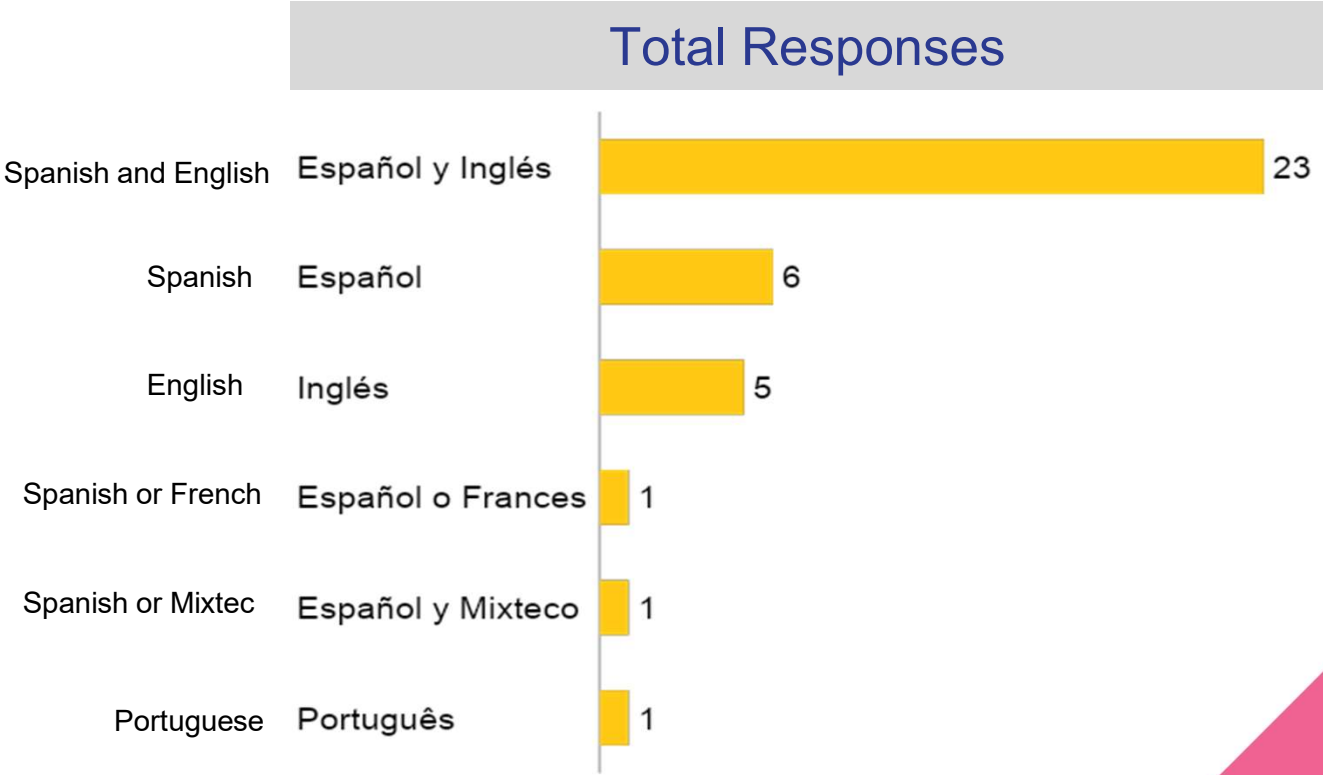
# Survey Findings: Family-preferred methods and languages for registration



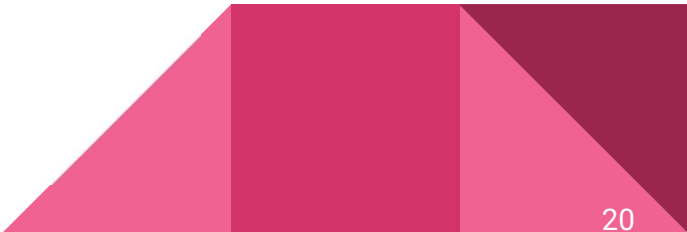
\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to these questions in the survey.



# Finding: The languages in which families want their children to receive their education in their childcare place:



\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to this question in the survey.



# In their own words!



These parents have struggled to find care for their two youngest children... They don't speak Spanish well, they are farm workers... And they are determined to learn Spanish, because their barriers are very great due to lack of good communication [in their language].

-Interview with Mexican Zapotec parents

Temporary farming family - do not speak English and commented that she likes to receive information from her children through letters and in the Spanish language... sometimes they send you information in English and you don't know what it says... They have missed appointments or important dates because they do not understand.

-Interview with family

"Teachers don't speak Spanish and it's hard to fill out paperwork."

*-father of family, rural area"*

"My children and I had a hard time adapting. We arrived and they didn't understand English. The teachers are not trained to help us adapt and it was very difficult for everyone."

*-Divorced mother of three children.*

Mother, works in the fields, her son is already 12 years old and has received on several occasions the answer that they do not know how to take care of their child because the providers and / or teachers of centers are not trained. They have left him on the waiting list and after a while she called and was told that there was no place for her son. She takes him to work and the boy is in the office area, sitting all day waiting for his mother to finish work. So the years have passed, because the mother does not speak English either.

*-Interview with mother*

## Some Ideas to Get Started

- Provide information, interpretation and documentation in the primary language spoken by the families.
- Design a platform in different languages about the available children's programs, their cost, providing details about the training of caregivers, their professional development and training hours, as well as educational approaches and services offered, with special emphasis on the Spark profile.
- Create a network of bilingual staff who can assist families when there are no staff who speak the same language as the parents at the childcare center.
- Equip centers with a Spark video that is part of each new parent registration to centers, discussing the importance of continuing education and the impact of stars, including information, phone numbers, and addresses where families can make a complaint, comments, or concerns.



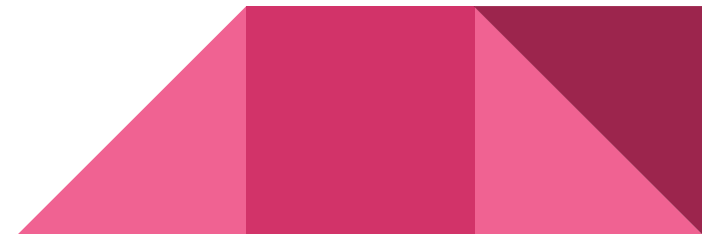
**Recommendation 2:** Invest resources so that childcare centers are better prepared (in their environment and staff training), to care for children with different abilities, needs, and so that parents have confidence that their children will be well cared for





# Findings

- 85% of parents feel unsafe leaving their children with untrained providers, and some childcare centers receive certification (and enrollment) without a study of who lives in those areas. Many parents spoke of the lack of quality in the centers committed to children and their development.
- We noticed a need for children's centers focused on children with disabilities, including children on the autism spectrum. It is important to explore the number of centers that do not have a ramp for children who need a wheelchair.
- Many of the parents' concerns are directed at nutrition, lack of understanding, good practices and trainings with children with disabilities or special needs. This could be a reflection of the lack of knowledge, training and follow-up by various organizations.







## In their own words!

*"In a center the children when they went out to play in the recreation area, they found a man asleep under the slide. The children were very frightened and some stopped attending (in that area there are many homeless people, and this case went unnoticed, endangering the children of that center."*

*-Interview with parent*

*"... We were nervous to leave our baby in this center... since we observed many children... and we only observed little staff... It is two minutes from my work... I'm still not sure it's a place where I can leave my baby and not be worried at work thinking if everything will be okay."*

*-first-time parents in Monroe*

*"I have my son in a Montessori school. This person does not apply Montessori principles as they had promoted to us... And now they have 20 kids in school with an aide, and we no longer feel comfortable with safety with such a large group. It's very difficult to find another option because we don't know where to look, or if there are any quality new programs."*

*-parent*

## In their own words!

"They haven't helped me with my son's problem. He has taken private therapies."

- *Latina Mother in Corvallis County*

"... about the lack of understanding of SPARK among parents, affects us directly since many of the providers have few stars, do not have stars or are no longer interested in the Spark process since there are several that determine our rates based on NEED not in Spark or level of education and the system allows us that!"

-*Provider in Marion County*

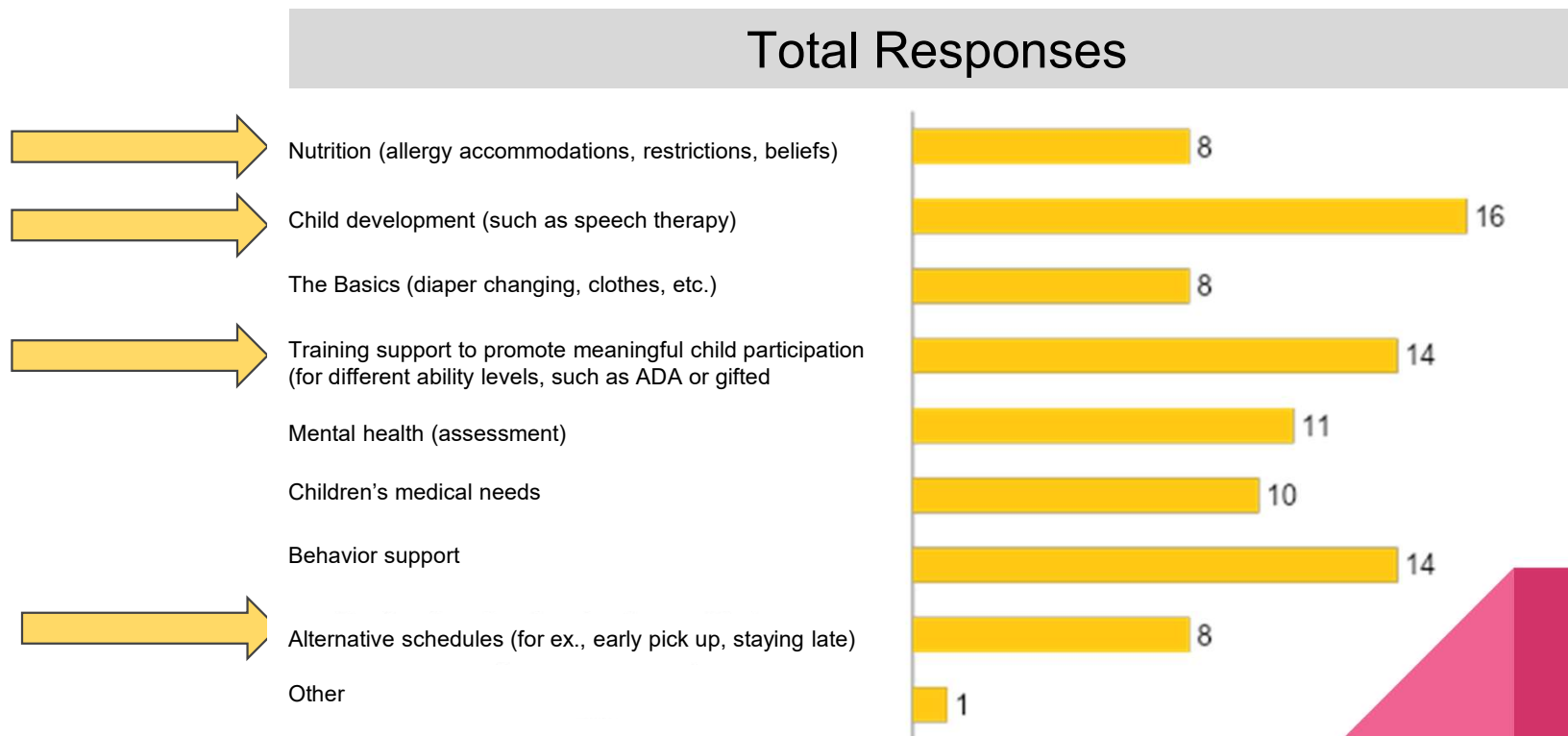
"My child has special needs and there is no sports program for him. has LIP."  
*Latina Mother in Yamhill County*

"I don't have any help."  
-*Latina Mother in Clackamas County*

In a focus group, six parents were affected by the fact that their children suffered accidents and the reports were made and did not proceed. A girl received a cut on her eyebrow by her peer using scissors without supervision - he wanted to cut her curly hair. The provider reported it as a minor incident. They also lied saying it had been a head-butt with her peer. It was reported and did not proceed.

-Member of the Equipo de Escucha Listening Team

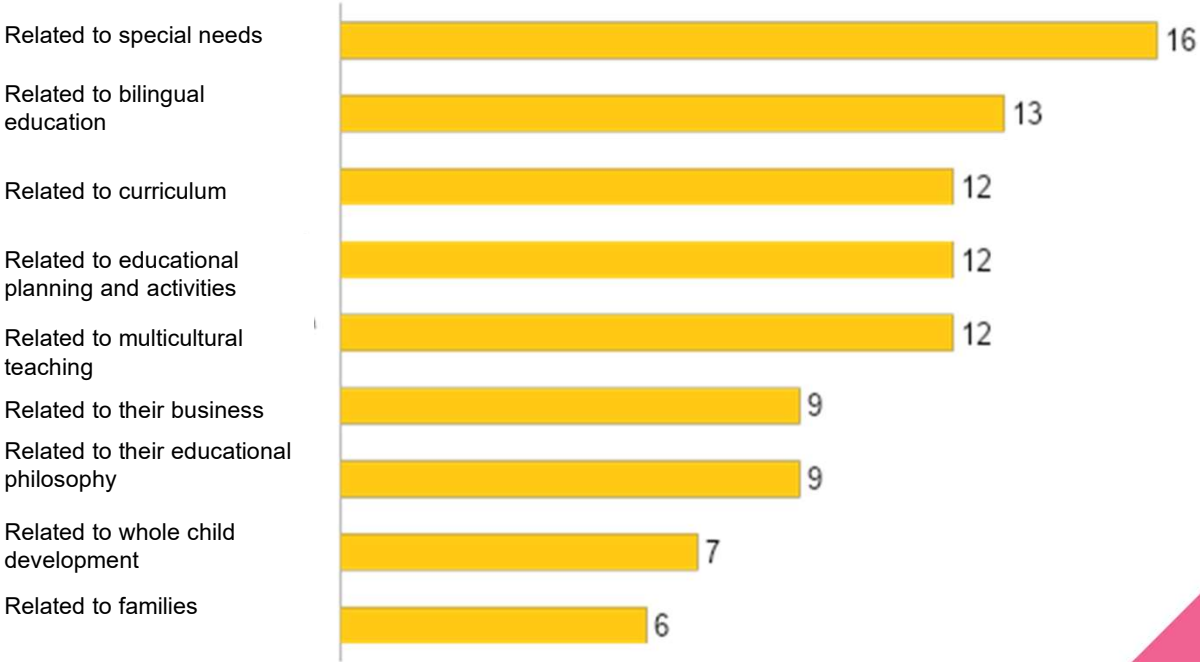
# Childcare providers want supports in the same areas that matter to parents



\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to this question in the survey.

Finding: Most providers indicated that the areas most in need of training to improve quality of care were related to special needs and bilingual education.

### Total Responses



\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to this question in the survey.

# In their own words!

What support or guidance would you like to receive to improve the childcare and education you provide in collaboration with families?

"Support of trainings in my language."  
-Latina provider in Washington County

"More in class supports for children with disabilities and behavioral needs."  
-White provider in Multnomah County

"Support in incentives for improvements in care and developmental advances."  
- Latina provider in Washington County

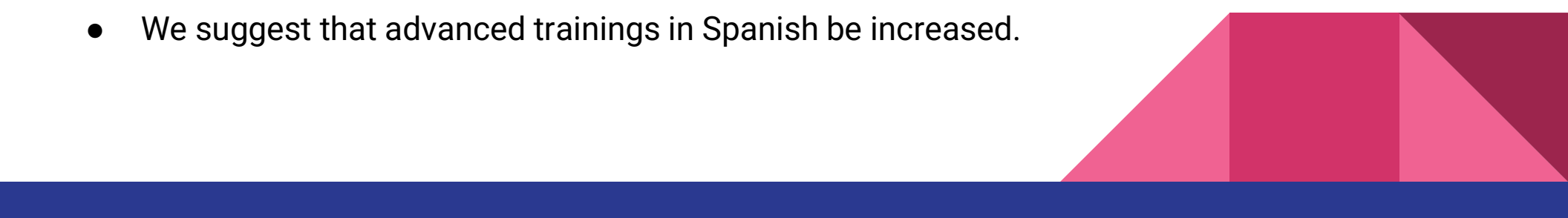
*"Classes to help with speech and potty training."  
-White provider in North Bend*

"Free classes to learn more."  
-Latina provider in Linn County

*"More disabilities training to implement in the classroom with materials and ideas."  
-Latina provider in Jefferson County*

"Special needs."  
-Latina provider in Washington County

## **Recommendation 3: Reform Spark so that training is accessible to more providers and prevents them from being overburdened**

- Providers require a more accessible and simple solution that allows them to enhance and improve the quality of their program, supported by the right resources and guidance.
  - Creating Spark's physical portfolio presents challenges, as it is expensive, difficult to understand, and time-consuming.
  - We suggest the creation of an interactive digital platform that simplifies the management of the Spark portfolio. This electronic tool would centralize documentation, allow for more efficient follow-up and offer intuitive guides for completion.
  - We suggest that advanced trainings in Spanish be increased.
- 

# Findings

- 4 of the providers we spoke to commented that working on a portfolio becomes a very heavy load after a 7-day work week. A provider noted that she would prefer not to feel so much stress completing the portfolio and that would help her better perform in providing quality education.
- The providers work in their centers about 9 to 10 hours a day, have to take trainings of 1 to 2 hours once or twice a week, follow a daily list of DELC rules to keep children safe, in addition to improving their quality with Spark where they invest more than 5 hours a week. This is not counting the number of emails that need to be checked per day for daily changes in DELC.



# Findings

- Providers say there are some providers who have a good educational program but have little information about Spark's stars and their benefits.
- In addition, comments included knowing providers who have Spark stars and have two or more centers and their programs are of poor quality and high cost -- some families who have been part of their program seek other options because of the cost. For them, it is surprising that these programs with Spark stars are not supervised.
- The providers consider that to give a better and more efficient service, they need to take specific training, and how to attend to children with autism, Down syndrome, and children with Hyperactivity, because they feel insecure when parents come to desperately ask for attention for their children with these conditions.





## In their own words!

*"The process is a bit inequitable since I have seen portfolios of other people (White providers) and it is a portfolio that leaves me a lot to think about. Then I see some of our Hispanic providers' ones and see a very thick book with a lot of writing and photographs. On the other hand, it has helped me to improve my environment of my program and to improve every day."*

"It's been good and I'm in the process, but I want to connect with a representative to give continuity to my portfolio."

*"I would like to have more time to be present with my children instead of having to worry about meeting standards designed for centers with multiple employees."*

*"I like the idea of stars, it's just a lot of work."*

**More provider voices**

*"If this is about improving the SPARK program, I would love the 3, 4, 5-star rating be changed. When my families were told that I had received a 3-star rating their first question is always 3 out of how many."*

## In their own words!

Providers commented that filling the portfolio is a lot of work, since after her work she continues with trainings. This provider would like the portfolio not to be so complicated.

-interview with Lane County provider

*"I was one of the first providers to participate in the Spark portfolio when it first came out. I did not know much English. My program is in Spanish. I did not have the financial support of resources to develop it or make the improvements they asked us. I had to do the portfolio in Spanish and English because my program is bilingual, yet I was the only one who had to do double work. And not having a proper guide took me a lot of time, effort to understand, and complete. I had to ask my eldest son for help to help me..."*

*"When I sent it there were rating problems and they did not accept my application to the stars because they said that I did not comply with what was asked. I was going to give up ... Finally, my license inspector helped me call and we verified that there was an error with another portfolio that was confused with mine. They asked me to make some edits and I could have my stars. It was a very frustrating process."*

*-Bilingual Program Provider*

## In their own words!

*Several of us are not interested in continuing with the stars as it is complicated... We would like to have a mentor who not only tells you what you lack, but who teaches you examples, explains, so that we do not have to copy others and in the end deliver what they ask for ... the current process keeps us 'frozen' with SPARK's star tracking."*

*- Provider in Washington County*

*"I tried to abide by all the rules and take care of the kids as best I could, but no one thought of me. They just asked me to take more courses on stress in the classroom... No one approached me to offer support. We don't have access to a psychologist, to personal therapy... I'm afraid to tell you the following for fear of retaliation, but I think it's important for someone to know. One of the licensing specialists was very disrespectful to me and was clearly unprofessional when she paid me a surprise visit."*

*-Child Care Provider*

*"At this moment there are providers that have records in the State system with complaints and bad practices and have 1 star or do not have a star and have their centers or places of care with waiting lists of several months charging what they want, paying fines for being over capacity with children, and nothing happens. I have 4 stars, fulfilling EVERYTHING they ask me. I strive in a system designed by Spark that is complicated and laborious, and I do not have the benefits of having as many children as other providers. It's not fair."*

*-Washington County Provider*

## **Recommendation 4: Improve facility observations and supplement them with training and coaching for providers, including on supporting immigrant and refugee families and children with special needs**

Spark should have a provider monitoring system that verifies that what they show in the portfolios is carried out and not just a photograph, in addition to monitoring and evaluating the level of learning and development of both children and teachers periodically.

Specific actions include more training, with a greater variety of topics and levels delivered in Spanish, and more detailed DEL C courses on rules for new providers with a help line for questions.



# In their own words!

"I went to pick up my little girl at the center where they were taking care of her... I realized she had a dirty shirt... When the teacher heard me, she took off her shirt in front of the parents and the children and left her naked in front of everyone... It seemed to me a lack of respect and knowledge on the part of the teacher. Hopefully, SPARK will listen to the situations and offer supervision in various ways to these providers. It seems that even they do not know about the stars."

*-Mother*

I watched a lot of news that happens to children and that scares me. I've never tried preschool with my older daughters and I'm never going to try preschool with my other younger children. I prefer to have them at home and go to school when they are in kindergarten.

*-mother, Multnomah County*

"Many providers do what they want and are not afraid of repercussions. If us as assistants don't have no preparation, much less the teachers!"

*-Micaela, hired as a children's center assistant although she admitted to having no experience*

"I visited the center [Montessori] and found it very good. I talked about my son's disability, and for them it wasn't a problem... Maybe 4 or 5 months passed, and my son would start crying when I left him... Until one day he told me that when the other children went out to the playground, they did not take him out to play. They only put him near the door so that he could observe his classmates and he spent that time doing nothing. From that day I stopped working to take care of my children."

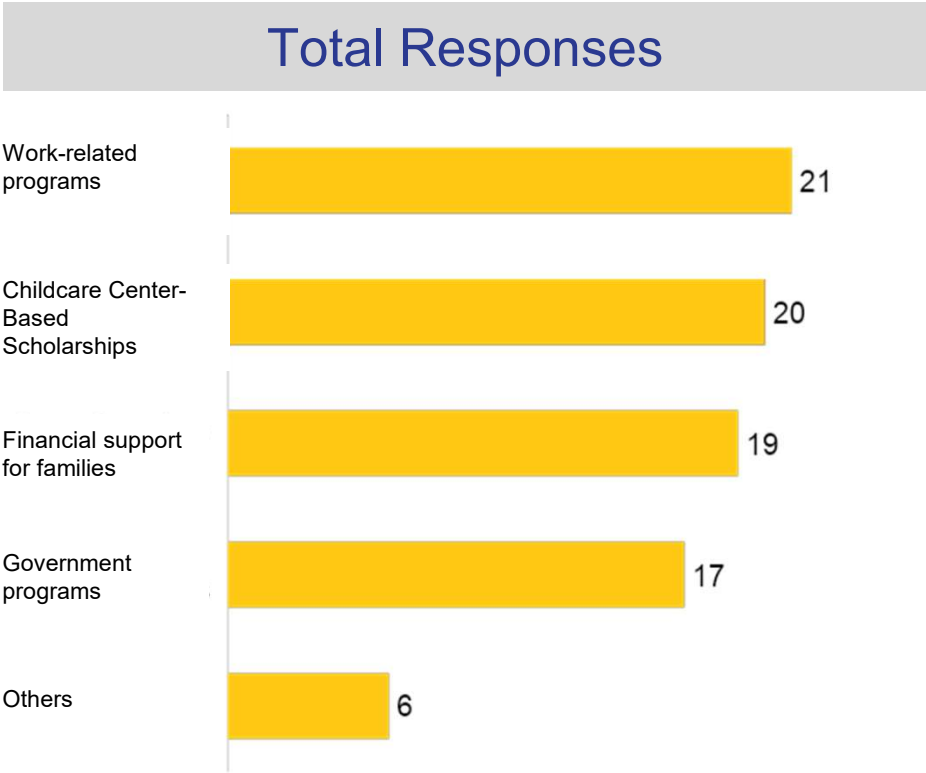
*- Parents of 2 children, one with special needs, Linn County*

## Recommendation 5: Facilitate collaboration among provider organizations

- Collaboration is necessary between organizations (Childcare Division, CCR & R, Spark, USDA, etc.) that provide some level of assistance, preparation, registration to providers. This collaboration would create a common understanding of how preparation, stars, education, good practices determine the level of quality and cost. This is important because families want better coordination so they can find what they need.
- In addition, monthly meetings could be held with these institutions, where all providers have access, including those who are not licensed, so that everyone knows the benefits of being part of this guild.



# Finding: Families Indicated Needing Various Financial Resources to Care for Their Children



Greater collaboration among institutions that provide these resources could help families.

\*The total corresponds to the number of responses to this question in the survey.

## **Recommendation 6: Increase awareness of Spark among parents and providers and inspire confidence in the system**

Spark really needs to **evolve into a supportive and backing resource for providers**, as there are also providers committed to doing good work who need more support to make improvements.

People are needed who know how to recognize the needs of our community and be the reflection of training and confidence so that those who are, were or want to be providers, see the advantage of being part of it.



# Findings

- There is a disconnect between parents' and providers' understanding of Spark:
    - The general feeling of providers is frustration and disappointment. None of the providers we spoke to in one of our groups could recall the last time a parent asked about SPARK's stars or the quality of their care or at least ask how Spark benefits their pursuit of quality care and benefit for their children.
    - The huge disconnect of understanding and information between parents and Spark is troubling. A parent did not relate Spark to the quality and education of their children and that is the biggest problem.
  - Providers need a system with fewer barriers, support such computer management and more support for access to training in Spanish
  - Providers are not able to cope with care and when they hire help. It is very difficult to find people with experience in childcare, so they have to settle for anyone who wants to work in childcare. Often, a lot of staff turnover causes disruption for the children. There must be a type of help that allows providers to find qualified personnel that does not negatively affect children.
  - Childcare becomes a very tiring job, where many hours of work, a lot of personal time and a lot of stress are invested and it is underpaid, so providers choose to open educational programs of less than 4 hours a day, without a license where they do not have to invest so much time and the compensation is better.
- 