



MAKING IT WORK

Examining the Status of Non-Traditional
Child Care in Pennsylvania



ABOUT RESEARCH FOR ACTION

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved children and students. Our work is designed to: strengthen early education, public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public; and enrich civic and community dialogue. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: MAKING IT WORK

Examining the Status of Non-Traditional Child Care in Pennsylvania



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Introduction

As the number of jobs that require non-traditional work schedules (evenings, weekends, and overnight) increases, families' need for child care during non-traditional hours has also grown. Yet little is known about the availability of non-traditional child care (NTCC) in Pennsylvania, or about the following questions:

- What types of families rely on NTCC?
- What factors inform a family's decisions about where to place their children?
- How well are NTCC providers meeting the needs of families?
- What does high-quality mean in the context of after-hours, overnight, and weekend care?
- What impact does the availability of NTCC, or lack thereof, have on Pennsylvania's workforce?

Research for Action (RFA) sought answers to these and other questions by analyzing available quantitative data and conducting focus groups and interviews with families, NTCC providers, and workforce development board staff in Allegheny, Philadelphia, and several North Central Pennsylvania counties.

Key Findings

As described in the full report, we learned that Pennsylvania families, child care providers, and employers impacted by NTCC are trying hard to make it work in the face of significant challenges.

Below are the key findings of our research:

- **Demand for high-quality affordable non-traditional child care spans economic class and exceeds supply.** Eligible families are able to use Pennsylvania's Child Care Works subsidy (CCW) to defray the cost of either traditional child care or NTCC. But there can be long waitlists for CCW. Moreover, many families with incomes above the eligibility threshold also have needs for NTCC. Overall, we estimate that:
 - » **One in three Pennsylvania families with young children (approximately 150,000 families) have a likely need for NTCC.**
 - » **There are over three Pennsylvania families with likely need for every one NTCC seat.** Only one in four regulated child care providers offer any form of NTCC, and even a generous estimate shows those providers have fewer than 50,000 total seats available.
 - » **Families report challenges in finding affordable high-quality NTCC,** but providers indicate little need to advertise, relying primarily on word-of-mouth marketing.



- **The supply of NTCC varies significantly by region.** For example, in North Central Pennsylvania, we estimate 8.2 families for every available NTCC seat compared to 3.3 families for every seat in Allegheny County, and 1.3 families for every seat in Philadelphia. There are also regional differences in the availability of NTCC by provider type. Importantly, estimates regarding the availability of NTCC may be conservatively high as they are based on data that is self-reported by providers and not independently verified.
- **Cost is a large barrier to accessing high-quality non-traditional care.** Only one in 10 families receiving Pennsylvania's CCW use it for NTCC. There is a particular dearth of NTCC providers that both accept CCW and receive the top Keystone STARS ratings of 3 or 4. Relatedly, some families reported concerns about quality in their experiences with NTCC, raising issues such as poor communication, unqualified staff, unsafe and unclean conditions, and a lack of trust.
- **NTCC providers find it highly challenging to recruit and retain qualified child care staff,** due to a combination of low wages and non-standard, irregular working days and hours.
- **Some promising practices in the delivery of high-quality NTCC suggest opportunities for changes to Pennsylvania child care regulations.** Providers suggested that state policies do not recognize some practices that are unique to providing high-quality child care during weekend, evening, and overnight hours.
- **The lack of accessible NTCC is a barrier for both employees and employers.** Especially when combined with workplace policies that are not family-friendly, the lack of NTCC creates a significant barrier to maintaining employment for many families—both those eligible for subsidies and otherwise. Likewise, the lack of NTCC contributes to employers' difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff for non-standard work hours.

Considerations for Policy and Future Research

The findings of this new study suggest several implications for state and local policy. In particular, we recommend that policymakers consider initiatives to:

- Create financial incentives for non-traditional child care providers to provide high-quality care.
- Expand the size and eligibility criteria of Pennsylvania's child care subsidies.
- Review whether Keystone STARS and current regulations capture the unique characteristics of high-quality non-traditional child care.
- Improve overall data collection and reporting and verify the accuracy of data related to the services and hours that NTCC providers report offering.
- Provide greater clarity on terms and definitions related to NTCC.
- Mandate or incentivize the adoption of family-friendly workplace policies.
- Expand research on the availability and quality of NTCC in Pennsylvania.

Frequently Used Terms

NTCC: Non-Traditional Child Care

CCW: Child Care Works subsidy, also referred to as “child care subsidy” or CCIS

OCDEL: Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning

ELRC: Early Learning Resource Centers

DHS: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

Keystone STARS: Pennsylvania’s Quality Rating and Improvement System to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality of child care programs.

COMPASS: An online tool for Pennsylvanians to apply for many public benefits and search for child care providers.

PELICAN: Pennsylvania’s integrated information management system for early learning services.

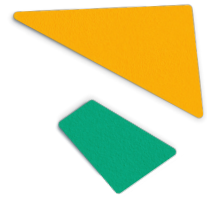


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Bibliography and Technical Appendix are available for download at:
<https://www.researchforaction.org/projects/examining-the-status-of-non-traditional-child-care-in-pennsylvania/>





Introduction

Every day thousands of families across Pennsylvania need help caring for their children during parents'/ guardians' hours of employment. For most families this care occurs between the traditional work day hours of 9 am-5 pm. However, many jobs require non-traditional work schedules, which take place during evenings, weekends, and overnight. As demand has grown for these jobs in the labor market,¹ there is also an increased need for child care during non-traditional hours.

Some in the child care field debate whether policymakers should prioritize *increasing supply* and access to non-traditional care or focus on *reducing demand* through policy reforms that would allow more parents and guardians to remain home with their children during non-traditional work hours. As captured by one non-traditional child care (NTCC) provider:

“There is a need out there as far as non-traditional care because companies run... on the weekends; they run on the evenings. I would love for it to [change], but I don't think that's going to happen.”

As the need for NTCC care grows, Pennsylvania providers, employers, and families alike are trying to *make it work* despite significant challenges. To better address the needs of families, the field needs more information about the availability of NTCC and answers to a number of questions. What families rely on non-traditional child care? What factors inform their decisions about where to place their children? How do NTCC providers meet the needs of families? What does high-quality care mean in the context of after-hours, overnight, and weekend care? What impact does the availability of NTCC, or lack thereof, have on Pennsylvania's workforce?

¹ Enchautegui, María E. “Nonstandard Work Schedules and the Well-Being of Low-Income Families.” *Urban Institute*, no. 26 (2013). 1-30. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32696/412877-Nonstandard-Work-Schedules-and-the-Well-being-of-Low-Income-Families.PDF>

This study

To address these questions, Research for Action (RFA) conducted an initial examination of non-traditional child care in Pennsylvania with support from the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) and The Heinz Endowments. This report describes the perspectives of working families, NTCC providers, government agency staff, and workforce development boards in North Central Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Allegheny counties. We conclude the report by identifying areas in need of additional research and considerations for policymakers seeking to improve circumstances for families and outcomes for children using NTCC.

Regulated child care in Pennsylvania: A brief description

NTCC providers operate within the larger regulatory context of all child care in Pennsylvania. OCDEL—a program office of both the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS)—regulates three types of child care: (1) Child Care Centers, (2) Group Child Care Homes, and (3) Family Child Care Homes.² In addition, many families receive child care through relative caregivers, which are relatives who care for three or fewer children, not including their own children. Relative caregivers are required to complete a CareCheck but are not required to have a state license.³

Non-traditional child care includes any child care that operates outside of the typical work schedule.

The Pennsylvania State Code defines non-traditional hours of child care as care for children on Saturday, Sunday, or between the hours of 6pm and 6am during weekdays.⁴ The Pennsylvania DHS further clarifies that on weekdays, child care is considered non-traditional if at least five hours of full-time care, or three to five hours of part-time care, is provided between 6pm and 6am.⁵ NTCC includes sleep-time care for children whose parents/guardians work overnight shifts, weekend care for work on Saturday or Sunday, and evening care for working second shifts. Some providers offer sick care for times when children are ill, and others offer emergency/drop-in care for families' unanticipated child care needs.

2 All three types of child care have the same licensing requirements but are categorized by the type of facility and how many children are supervised. Child Care Centers include facilities in which out-of-home care is provided to seven or more children, 15 years of age or younger. Group Child Care include facilities in which out-of-home care is provided to more than six but fewer than 16 older school-age children or more than six but less than 13 children of any other age level. Family Child Care Homes provide care for four to six children who are not related to the provider and are 15 years of age or younger. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "The Pennsylvania Code. Title 55. Chapter 3270. Child Day Care Centers." <https://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter3270/chap3270toc.html>; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "The Pennsylvania Code. Title 55. Chapter 3280. Group Child Day Care Homes." <https://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter3280/chap3280toc.html>; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "The Pennsylvania Code. Title 55. Chapter 3290. Family Child Care Homes." <https://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter3290/chap3290toc.html>.

3 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. "Child Care Works Subsidized Child Care Program." <http://www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/childcareearlylearning/childcareworkssubsidizedchildcareprogram/index.htm>

4 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "The Pennsylvania Code. Title 55. Chapter 168. Section 2. Definitions." <https://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter168/s168.2.html>

5 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. "Manual Section '101 – Definitions'." http://www.dhs.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/d_010561.pdf



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RFA conducted a descriptive study of the status of non-traditional child care in Pennsylvania drawing on multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data about Pennsylvania's families, child care providers, and employers. Specifically, to assess the **need for NTCC** and the **characteristics of families and providers**, RFA analyzed the most recent data available:

- American Community Survey (ACS) 2012-2016;
- Current Population Survey (CPS) 2004;
- Child Care Works subsidy participant data (CCW) 2018;
- Provider self-reported data (PELICAN) 2018; and
- OCDEL's public data file of providers (PELICAN) 2018.

Families were identified as having potential non-traditional child care needs if: (1) a child under five resides in the home; and (2) all guardians of the child in the home work in occupations that typically require the following non-standard schedules:


- Evening shifts (2pm to midnight);
- Night shifts (9pm to 8am);
- Rotating shifts (changes days/evenings/nights);
- Split shifts (two distinct periods per day); and
- Irregular schedules arranged by employers.

To gather data on the **experiences of families**, RFA conducted six focus groups with a total of 37 parents in: North Central Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Allegheny counties. For quantitative analysis, North Central Pennsylvania is defined as the region that includes Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, McKean, and Potter counties. The families studied reflect the demographic and occupational characteristics of those in our quantitative analysis. Some of these families used CCW to pay for NTCC, while others were ineligible.

To understand the **perspectives of providers and employers**, RFA conducted 21 guided interviews with providers and workforce development board staff in the three communities. The providers operate Child Care Centers or Family Child Care Homes, offer an array of NTCC services, and largely serve low-income families. The workforce development board staff we interviewed work regularly with employers and families who rely on NTCC.

Regional differences. There are key differences in the geographic characteristics, demographics, and local economies of Allegheny County, North Central Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia. Where relevant, we discuss regional differences related to NTCC in our findings.

For more details about our data sources and methods, see Technical Appendix <https://www.researchforaction.org/projects/examining-the-status-of-non-traditional-child-care-in-pennsylvania/>





Who Are the Families Needing Non-Traditional Child Care in Pennsylvania?

For purposes of this study, families requiring NTCC are those with young children (i.e., under five years old) whose parents/guardians are employed and work in an occupation that typically demands a non-standard work schedule.⁶ Some families prefer to work non-standard hours because they can earn higher wages or find it more convenient for their family. For other working families, jobs with irregular hours and schedules may be their only option. This section provides a snapshot of the characteristics of families with non-traditional child care needs in Pennsylvania.

Nearly one in three Pennsylvania families with young children likely have non-traditional child care needs.

Based on analysis of five-year estimates (2012-2016) from the American Community Survey we found that nearly one in three (30%) Pennsylvania families with young children likely have non-traditional child care needs in some form—approximately 150,000 families total. This aligns with our national estimate that 29% of families with young children need NTCC.

The need for non-traditional child care affects both poor and non-poor families.

Families with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty line are somewhat more likely to need non-traditional child care than families with income above 200% of the poverty line (33% compared to 28%).

One in five families who have non-traditional child care needs earn incomes well above the federal poverty line.

Yet the vast majority (85%) of the families who are likely to need NTCC have incomes above the federal poverty line, and nearly one in five families with NTCC needs earn incomes 500% or more above the federal poverty line.

There is likely considerable unmet need for NTCC among Pennsylvania families.

OCDEL collects data on the number of child care seats offered by each regulated provider. This data shows that there are about 375,000 total regulated child care seats in Pennsylvania. However, OCDEL does not

⁶ See Technical Appendix for complete description of how we define families with need for NTCC and county-level analysis data tables. The analysis of ACS data was conducted at the household level. Throughout this report, we use the terms household and family interchangeably. <https://www.researchforaction.org/projects/examining-the-status-of-non-traditional-child-care-in-pennsylvania/>

verify the number of each provider's seats that are dedicated specifically for NTCC. Because it is common for some providers to offer both traditional and non-traditional seats, a precise counting of NTCC seats in Pennsylvania is not available.

However, if we assume that every provider that offers NTCC makes all of its seats available for NTCC, we still find that fewer than 50,000 seats (13% of all regulated seats) are available for non-traditional hour care. With over 150,000 families estimated to have likely NTCC needs, even this generous estimate leaves only one seat for every three families.

Many families rely on friends and relatives for NTCC, which can limit geographic mobility and economic opportunity.

Many families rely on relatives to provide child care during non-traditional hours. For some of these families, relative care is the only option. In focus groups, some working families in North Central Pennsylvania explained that the cost and availability of child care discourages them from moving away from relatives to pursue employment or higher wages. Families in all three regions noted their appreciation for the assistance from grandparents, siblings, and older children, but also expressed concerns about burdening their families without compensation. Some families live with the relatives that assist with child care, an arrangement that prohibits parents/guardians from using CCW to compensate relatives for the care they provide.

Fewer than 50,000 seats (13% of all regulated seats) are available for non-traditional hour care. With over 150,000 families estimated to have likely NTCC needs, even this generous estimate leaves only one seat for every three families.

Most families who need NTCC work in one of four major industries.

About half of employed families in Pennsylvania work in occupations that typically demand a non-standard work schedule.⁷ A quarter of these families work in the health care and social assistance industry. Between 10-15% work in each of the following: retail (14%), accommodation and food service (11%), or manufacturing (10%). Another 41% of employed parents/guardians with NTCC needs work in other industries with non-standard work schedules.⁸

Forty-four percent of families with NTCC needs are single-parent households.

Families with one adult caring for children are more likely to need non-traditional care than families with multiple adults in the household. In Pennsylvania, about 44% of families with likely NTCC needs are single-parent/guardian households. In addition, 14% of parents/guardians in families that likely NTCC live with a parent of their own (i.e., a grandparent of the child).

Most families that need NTCC drive to work.

Among the 95% of parents/guardians who travel to work, 90% use a personal vehicle, 5% use public transportation, and 3% walk or ride a bike. Most working families that likely need NTCC also travel to work using a personal vehicle (88%) but are slightly more likely to use public transportation (7%) or walk or ride a bicycle (4%).

⁷ Twenty-five percent of Pennsylvania's parents/guardians in families with young children are either unemployed or not in the labor force. Single parents with young children are somewhat less likely to be working as 37% reported being unemployed or not participating in the labor force.

⁸ See Technical Appendix for a description of the occupations in these industries. <https://www.researchforaction.org/projects/examining-the-status-of-non-traditional-child-care-in-pennsylvania/>

Buses were the most common mode of transportation used by families using public transit to travel to work. As discussed below, lack of proximity and access to reliable transportation to and from an NTCC provider was described as a significant barrier for many families.

Regional spotlight: Need vs. availability of NTCC

The counties in the mostly rural North Central Pennsylvania have far lower population density than the large urban communities in Philadelphia and Allegheny County. Allegheny and Philadelphia are also more racially diverse. In all three regions, families typically work in healthcare and social assistance, retail, and accommodation and food service, though manufacturing is more common in North Central Pennsylvania.

As shown in Table 1, proportionately there are relatively similar rates of estimated need for NTCC in each region, ranging from 28-35% of all families with young children. However, based on unverified provider-reported data, there appears to be significant regional variation in the availability of NTCC. For example, in Philadelphia there is one NTCC seat available for every 1.3 families with estimated likely need. In Allegheny County, there is one seat for every three families, similar to the state average. In North Central, there is less than one seat available for every eight families.

TABLE 1

Regional comparison of need and supply of non-traditional child care, Pennsylvania, 2018

	ALLEGHENY COUNTY	NORTH CENTRAL PA	PHILADELPHIA	PENNSYLVANIA
Number of families with young children	47,547	6,470	59,750	498,788
Families that are likely to need NTCC	13,600 (28%)	1,986 (31%)	20,970 (35%)	151,644 (30%)
Total number of seats available in regulated providers that report offering NTCC	4,150	242	18,516	47,702
Number of families that likely need NTCC for each NTCC seat	3.3 to 1	8.2 to 1	1.3 to 1	3.2 to 1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates; Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN, 2018.

Table 2 compares the characteristic of parents/guardians by region. Parents/guardians in Philadelphia and North Central Pennsylvania have lower levels of educational attainment and are more likely to be low-income than their peers in Allegheny. Philadelphia families are much more likely to live with a grandparent than families in Allegheny or North Central. Philadelphia families are much less likely to use a personal vehicle, likely influenced at least in part by the greater availability of public transportation.

TABLE 2

Characteristics of parents/guardians that likely need non-traditional child care by region, Pennsylvania, 2018

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS	ALLEGHENY COUNTY	NORTH CENTRAL PA	PHILADELPHIA	PENNSYLVANIA
Use personal vehicle to travel to work	85%	96%	57%	88%
Have a bachelor's degree	21%	16%	13%	17%
Earn below federal poverty line	14%	16%	21%	15%
Live with a parent (child's grandparent)	7%	9%	21%	14%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates.



How Do Families Find Non-Traditional Child Care Providers?

We learned that, while providers have little difficulty finding families, families often struggle to find providers. This further suggests that demand for NTCC in Pennsylvania exceeds supply.

Many families struggle to find affordable high-quality NTCC.

Focus group participants most frequently learned about non-traditional child care providers from family and friends' referrals. Families also learned about NTCC through child care provider signage, referrals from Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRC), and the state's provider search tool hosted on COMPASS. As discussed in the section below, providers we interviewed indicated that they had little difficulty filling their slots. These providers found no need to advertise, instead counting on word-of-mouth referrals. In contrast, families reported that it was often difficult to find affordable high-quality non-traditional child care.

The only way for a Pennsylvania family to verify whether regulated providers offer non-traditional care hours is to contact providers individually.

Families can learn about resources and child care providers in their community through a local ELRC.⁹ However, the main state resource available to families is an on-line provider search tool hosted on COMPASS.¹⁰ OCDEL verifies some indicators in the PELICAN data underlying the COMPASS search tool including providers' Keystone STARS level, a quality rating metric meant to offer families a way to measure the quality of their choice of child care provider. Yet other data, such as meal options, special accommodations, activities, transportation services, additional fees, and the financial programs accepted, are self-reported by child care providers and not validated by OCDEL or ELRCs. Of particular relevance to this study is the fact that a provider's hours of operation and care schedules are also self-reported and may contain inaccuracies. In other words, families must contact providers individually to verify whether they offer care that suits their families' needs.

⁹ According to PA DHS, "Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs) are the hub of child care information in your local area." There are 70 ELRCs distributed around the state of Pennsylvania. In addition to providing families and providers with information about early learning resources, they also administer the state's subsidized child care program, Child Care Works (CCW). Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. "Early Learning Resource Centers." <http://www.dhs.pa.gov/learnaboutdhs/helpfultelephonenumber/childcareinformationservices/index.htm>

¹⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. "Child Care and Early Learning." <http://www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/childcareearlylearning/index.htm>

04



How Do Families Pay for Non-Traditional Child Care?

Paying for child care costs can be challenging and complex for both families and providers.¹¹ Cost is generally the biggest barrier preventing families from accessing high-quality child care. In this section, we describe challenges of using child care subsidies to pay for both traditional and NTCC. Since data are only available for families eligible for subsidies, this picture is largely incomplete. As we suggest later in this report, more research is needed on how families that are ineligible for state support make ends meet.

Only 9% of eligible children use the Child Care Work subsidy to pay for NTCC.

Pennsylvania offsets child care costs via the CCW program. Typically, families earning less than 200% of the federal poverty line are eligible to receive CCW.¹² Under the Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, working families who meet income eligibility requirements can use CCW to compensate both regulated child care providers and relative caregivers, if the relative lives in a separate residence.¹³ Importantly, CCW is not an entitlement, and unmet need is significant. In spring 2016, the waiting list for subsidy topped 13,800 children.¹⁴

11 Moran, Della, Joshua Lin, Ashley Campbell, and David Lapp. "Child Care Funding and Finance in Pennsylvania: Budgeting for Survival or Paying for the True Cost of Quality?" *Research for Action*, 2017. <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/child-care-funding-finance-pennsylvania-budgeting-survival-paying-true-cost-quality/>

12 Families qualify for CCW if their family income is at or below 200% of the poverty threshold. Families can continue to receive child care subsidies if their income increases to exceed 200% until their income increases beyond 235%.

13 Montgomery County Early Learning Resource Center. "Subsidized Child Care." <https://www.montcopa.org/120/Subsidized-Child-Care>

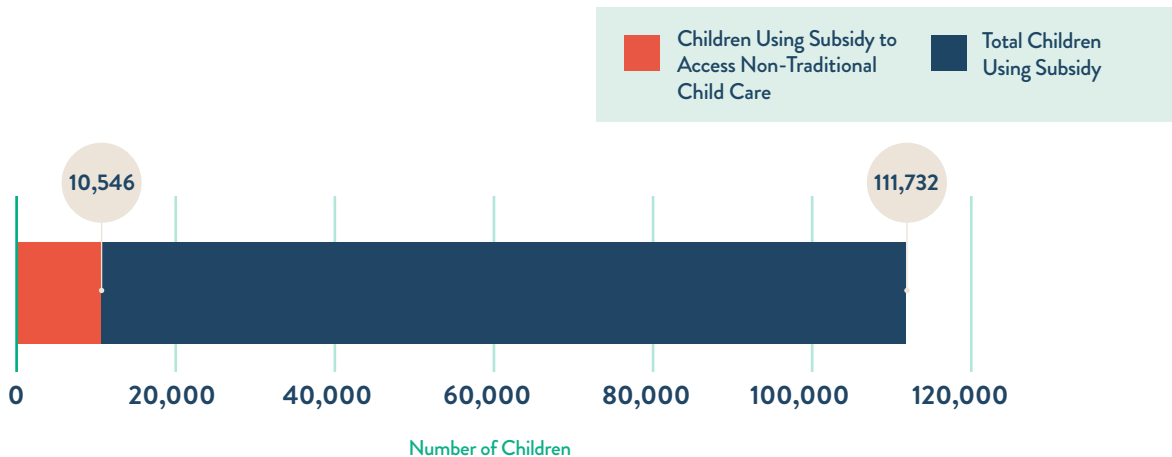
14 Moran, Della, Joshua Lin, Ashley Campbell, and David Lapp. "Child Care Funding and Finance in Pennsylvania: Budgeting for Survival or Paying for the True Cost of Quality?" *Research for Action*, 2017. <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/child-care-funding-finance-pennsylvania-budgeting-survival-paying-true-cost-quality/>

On average, child care in Pennsylvania costs \$887 for infant care and \$673 for preschool-age care per child each month.¹⁵ For eligible families, CCW lowers the cost of quality child care by reimbursing eligible child care providers up to the maximum child care allowance rate.¹⁶ In 2018, Pennsylvania increased the maximum daily child care allowances by 2.5%, which translates to a daily increase between \$0.33 to \$1.11 per child.^{17, 18} Pennsylvania requires that families pay a co-payment determined by family income level, as well as the difference between the subsidy payment and the amount providers charge to private pay families.¹⁹

Over 110,000 children in Pennsylvania currently receive CCW subsidies. Yet, **fewer than one in 10 use CCW to access non-traditional hour care.** As noted above, families at or below 200% of the poverty threshold are somewhat more likely to need NTCC than those above this threshold (33% compared to 28%). It is unclear whether so few families use their subsidy for NTCC due to lack of supply or out of personal preference. Figure 1 presents the total number of children receiving subsidies and using subsidies for non-traditional care.

FIGURE 1

Number of children using the Child Care Works subsidy and using the Child Care Works subsidy for non-traditional child care, Pennsylvania, 2018



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN & CCW Participants Data, 2018.

15 Bivens, Josh, Emma Garcia, Elise Gould, Elaine Weiss, and Valerie Wilson. “It’s Time for an Ambitious National Investment in America’s Children: Investments in Early Childhood Care and Education Would Have Enormous Benefits for Children, Families, Society, and the Economy.” Economic Policy Institute, 2016. <https://www.epi.org/publication/its-time-for-an-ambitious-national-investment-in-americas-children/>

16 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “Provider Payments.” http://www.dhs.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/manual/c_263528.pdf

17 The Pennsylvania Key. “Child Care Reimbursement Rates Increased and Rate Freeze Lifted!” <https://www.pakeys.org/child-care-reimbursement-rates-increased-and-rate-freeze-lifted/>

18 The maximum daily child care allowance varies by length of care, age of child and type of provider. For a complete county-level list of maximum daily child care allowances see: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “Maximum Daily Child Care Allowances.” http://www.dhs.state.pa.us/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/p_022773.pdf

19 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. “The Pennsylvania Code. Title 55. Chapter 3041. Subsidized Child Care Eligibility.” <https://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter3041/chap3041toc.html>

Limited funds from CCW put economic strain on eligible families and reduces choice.

In focus groups, families who qualified for and received CCW noted that it was inadequate to afford high-quality NTCC. They explained that, due to cost, the highest-quality providers are inaccessible to their children, because they either do not accept the subsidy at all or the difference between total cost and what is covered by the subsidy is still too large.

Working families that are not eligible for state child care support struggle to make ends meet.

Families that did not qualify for CCW described how the economic strain of child care costs can cause them to take off work before paying out of pocket for child care. Two parents who do not qualify for CCW described their dilemmas in this way:

“We tried [to find a Child Care Center] but they’re just expensive. Obviously with my income and then her income, I don’t know. We can afford it, but then we can’t afford it – if that makes any sense? Sometimes, I know I have to take my vacation time, so I could leave work early so I could come home and watch the kids, so she could go to school. I work third shift and she goes to school. So, I only get maybe three to four hours of sleep per day. We’re just trying to figure something out, then she goes to work on top of it.”

– NORTH CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA FATHER

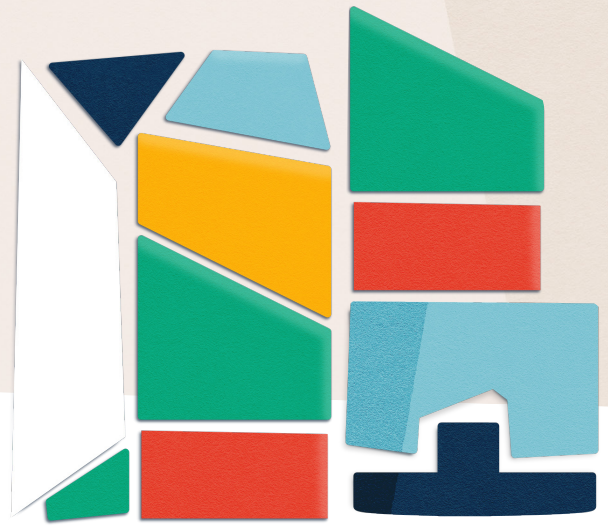
“They have [CCW] for parents who don’t make enough for daycare, but then there’s people like all of us who work full-time who can’t afford the daycare. That could cost us our job and then there we are back on unemployment and then the state is going to have to pay that. Why can’t they put something in place for full time parents? A discount or something along the lines to make it more affordable for full-time parents.”

– NORTH CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA MOTHER

Late pick-up fees, which are not covered by CCW, strain already tight budgets.

Many providers charge additional fees for early dismissal from school, transportation, and late pick-up, which can be especially burdensome for families working in industries that lack family-friendly policies. Roughly three-fourths of providers offering NTCC (74%) and providers used for subsidized non-traditional care (76%) report charging additional fees for late pick-up. One in four providers report charging additional fees for transportation services and about one in ten require families to pay an additional fee for early dismissal care. Importantly, CCW does not cover these additional fees. Focus group participants agreed that the financial burden created by these additional fees is significant. As expressed by one parent, “Every penny counts.”

Roughly three-fourths of providers offering NTCC (74%) and providers used for subsidized non-traditional care (76%) report charging additional fees for late pick-up.



How Do Families Get to Their Child Care Facilities?

NTCC providers are sometimes located inconveniently, resulting in lengthy and arduous commutes.

Families indicated that NTCC options conveniently located close to home, work, or along public transportation routes are scarce. As a result, many families experienced lengthy commutes to access their NTCC provider. Families described challenges due to a lack of reliable public transportation, especially when commuting with young children. One Pittsburgh parent described her daily commute with a pair of one-year old twins:

“You know how big a double stroller is? I got to fold down this big double stroller, carry two car seats, their diaper bag, my purse, and I show up onto the bus. It’s like, ‘you want me to put one baby on the bus then come outside, grab the rest of the stuff?’ That’s how I feel like transportation for these daycares needs to be a big thing.”

– PITTSBURGH MOTHER

Few regulated providers offer transportation services overall, but NTCC providers are more likely to do so.

When child care providers offer transportation services to and from home and/or school, it can significantly improve access for many families. Compared to 17% of all regulated providers, 24% of NTCC providers self-report offering transportation.

Regional spotlight

In Pittsburgh, families and workforce development board staff reported that families who depend on public transportation face difficulty accessing child care within close proximity to work, home, or a bus route. Many in North Central Pennsylvania’s rural communities live in child care deserts,²⁰ and according to our interviews, working families often endure significant commutes between work, home, and their respective child care provider.

²⁰ Center for American Progress. “Child Care Access in Pennsylvania.” 2018. <https://childcaredeserts.org/?state=PA>



What Are the Characteristics of Pennsylvania's Non-Traditional Child Care Providers?

As described earlier in this report, NTCC providers are those offering at least three hours of care between the hours of 6 am and 6 pm during weekdays or any amount of care on the weekend. Despite noted data limitations, we are able to estimate the characteristics of these providers based on self-reported data.

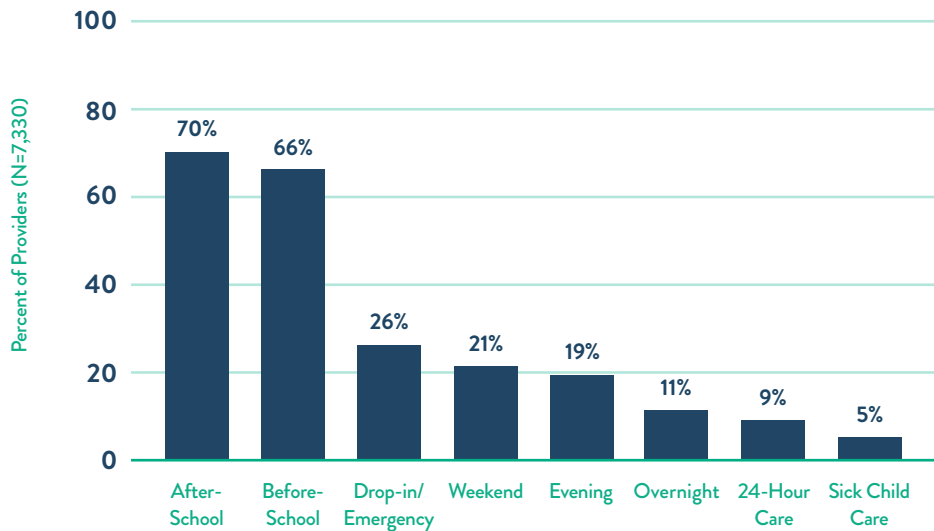
One in four regulated child care providers offer non-traditional care hours.

In total there are 7,330 regulated providers in Pennsylvania. Only 26% (1,881 providers) self-report that they offer NTCC hours. A smaller subset of 15% (1,116 providers) are used by families receiving CCW. As shown in Figure 2, most regulated providers report offering before or after-school care, and some (<30%) report offering drop-in/emergency, weekend, and evening care. Fewer providers offer other types of NTCC: Only one in 10 providers report offering overnight or 24-hour care and only 5% offer sick child care.

Only one in 10 child care providers report offering overnight or 24-hour care.

FIGURE 2

Percent of regulated child care providers that self-report offering various non-traditional child care schedules, Pennsylvania, 2018



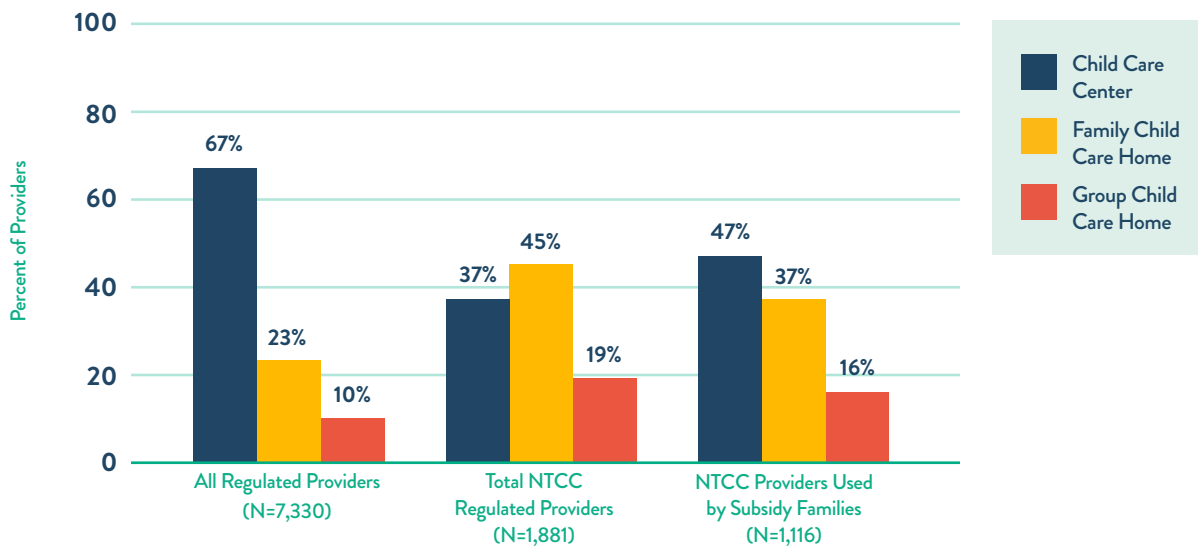
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN, 2018.²¹

Family Child Care Homes make up almost 50% of NTCC providers.

As discussed above, there are three kinds of certified child care providers in Pennsylvania: (1) Child Care Centers, (2) Family Child Care Homes, and (3) Group Child Care Homes. Figure 3 shows that Family Child Care Homes and Group Child Care Homes are more likely than Child Care Centers to offer NTCC.

FIGURE 3

Type of regulated child care providers by provider group, Pennsylvania, 2018



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN & CCW Participants Data, 2018.

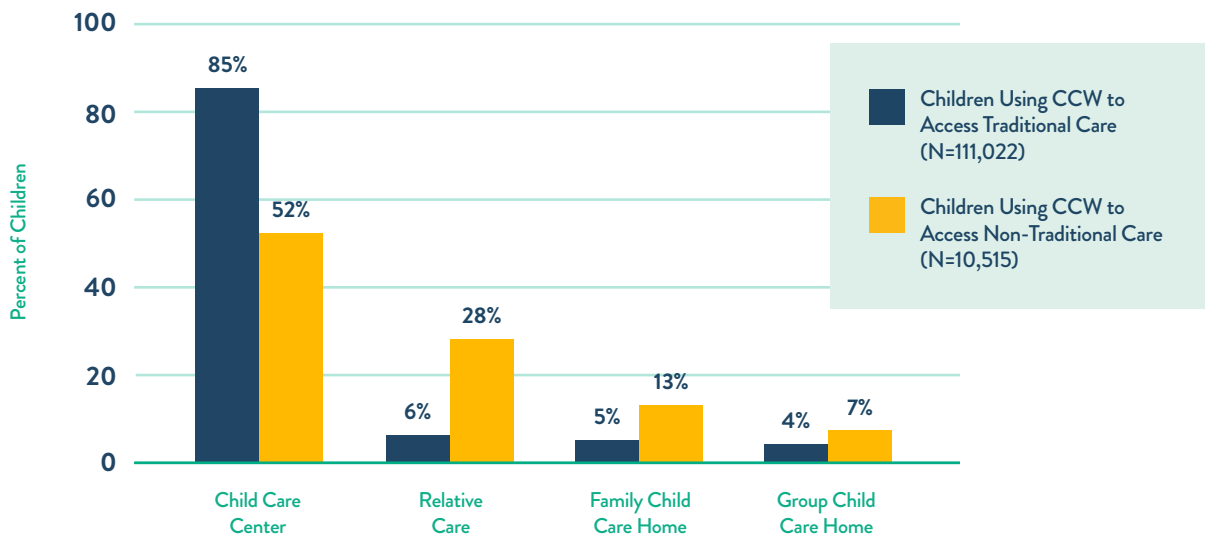
²¹ See Technical Appendix for more information about COMPASS definitions of provider schedules. <https://www.researchforaction.org/projects/examining-the-status-of-non-traditional-child-care-in-pennsylvania/>

Families using CCW are nearly five times more likely to rely on relatives for NTCC than for traditional care.

Many families rely on relatives to provide child care. Families receiving CCW can elect to use their subsidy to pay a relative to provide child care, but only if that relative resides in a different location.²² Only 6% of children receiving CCW who access traditional hour care use relative care compared to 28% of children receiving subsidy who access NTCC. In addition, families receiving CCW who need NTCC are more likely to use both Family Child Care Homes and Group Child Care Homes than traditional-care families. It is not clear whether this reflects a preference of families or merely differences in the supply of providers. Figure 4 displays how the distribution of provider type differs for children receiving CCW in accessing traditional and NTCC.

FIGURE 4

**Provider types used by children using the Child Care Works subsidy:
Traditional vs. non-traditional child care**



Source: Pennsylvania of Human Services, PELICAN & CCW Participants Data, 2018.²³

22 Relative Care providers can provide care for three or fewer children, not including their own children, and must complete required child abuse and State Police background clearances. Relatives must be 18 years of age or older and can include grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles or siblings. Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “Child Care Works Subsidized Child Care Program.” <http://www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/childcareearlylearning/childcareworkssubsidizedchildcareprogram/index.htm>

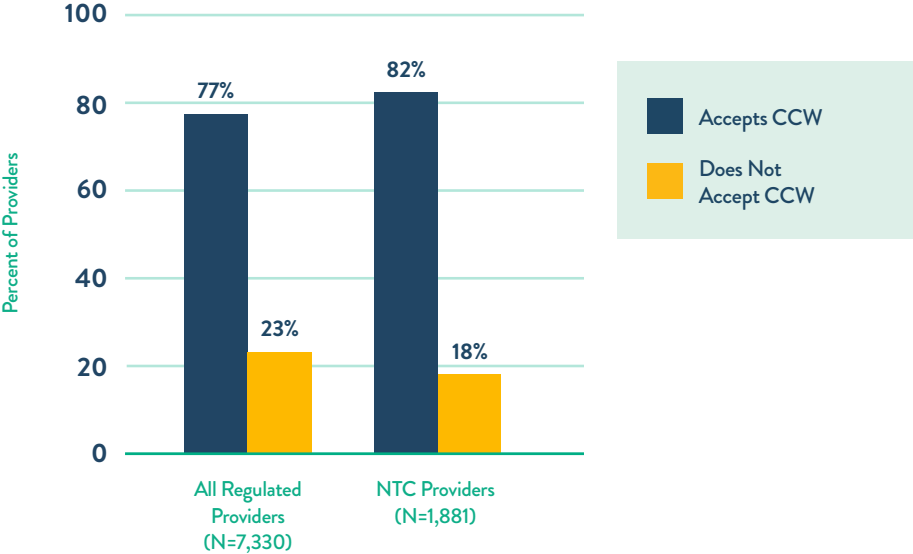
23 The sum of the N sizes of children accessing traditional and non-traditional care exceeds the total number of children using CCW because children receiving subsidy may access both traditional and non-traditional care.

Availability of NTCC providers may be even more limited for some families.

As shown in Figure 5, nearly one-fifth of child care providers that report offering NTCC do not accept CCW. Furthermore, 22% of NTCC providers do not offer special accommodations for children with disabilities or special health care needs.

FIGURE 5

Percent of child care providers that accept Child Care Works, Pennsylvania, 2018



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN, 2018.

Regional spotlight

As shown in Table 3, there are also regional differences in the overall availability of NTCC and in the features that NTCC providers offer families.

TABLE 3

Regional comparison of the availability of non-traditional child care

PROVIDERS OFFERING NON-TRADITIONAL CHILD CARE	ALLEGHENY COUNTY	NORTH CENTRAL PA	PHILADELPHIA	PENNSYLVANIA
Total number of regulated providers	669	91	1,743	7,330
Regulated providers that report offering NTCC	26%	15%	47%	26%
Providers of NTCC designated as high-quality under Keystone STARS (3 or 4 STARS)	4%	15%	9%	10%
Providers of NTCC that accept CCW	80%	93%	79%	82%
Providers of NTCC that offer special accommodations for children with disabilities or health needs	78%	93%	81%	78%
Providers of NTCC that offer transportation services	6%	0%	20%	21%
Providers of NTCC that charge additional fees for late pick-up	75%	79%	75%	74%

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN, 2018.

Table 4 also documents regional differences in the types of NTCC providers. North Central Pennsylvania has fewer Group Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers and more Family Child Care Homes. Meanwhile, there are also differences in the families using CCW on NTCC. In Allegheny County, 50% of CCW subsidies used for NTCC are used on non-regulated Relative Care, compared to only 28% in Philadelphia and 7% in North Central Pennsylvania. In this region, 78% of CCW subsidies are used for Child Care Centers.

TABLE 4

Types of NTCC providers by region and by families using the Child Care Works subsidy, Pennsylvania, 2018

Type of NTCC provider	ALLEGHENY COUNTY		NORTH CENTRAL PA		PHILADELPHIA		PENNSYLVANIA	
	Total NTCC regulated providers	NTCC providers used by subsidy families	Total NTCC regulated providers	NTCC providers used by subsidy families	Total NTCC regulated providers	NTCC providers used by subsidy families	Total NTCC regulated providers	NTCC providers used by subsidy families
Relative Care	N/A	50%	N/A	7%	N/A	28%	N/A	28%
Family Child Care Home	40%	9%	71%	15%	41%	13%	45%	13%
Group Child Care Home	30%	9%	7%	0%	16%	6%	19%	7%
Child Care Center	30%	32%	21%	78%	42%	53%	37%	52%

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN & CCW Participants Data, 2018.



What Does High-Quality Care Look Like in Non-Traditional Child Care Settings?

The benefits of high-quality child care and early education are well-supported by robust research.²⁴ A rich literature details the specific characteristics of high-quality child care.²⁵ Yet this research base is heavily slanted toward care provided during traditional work hours. While several studies have examined the relationships between non-standard or unpredictable work schedules and child care,^{26,27,28} less is known about the characteristics of high-quality care during non-traditional hours. In this section we offer the perspectives of families who access this care and examine the Keystone STARS ratings of NTCC providers.

24 Moran, Della, Joshua Lin, Ashley Campbell, and David Lapp. "Child Care Funding and Finance in Pennsylvania: Budgeting for Survival or Paying for the True Cost of Quality?" Research for Action, 2017. <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/child-care-funding-finance-pennsylvania-budgeting-survival-paying-true-cost-quality/>

25 Hamre, Bridget, Bridget Hatfield, Robert Pianta, and Faiza Jamil. "Evidence for General and Domain-Specific Elements of Teacher-Child Interactions: Associations with Preschool Children's Development." *The Science of Early Child Development* 85, no. 3 (2013). 1257-1274. doi:10.1111/cdev.12184

26 Stoll, Marica, David Alexander, and Christine Nicpon. "Chicago Mothers on Finding and Using Child Care During Nonstandard Work Hours." *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 17, no. 1 (2015). <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v17n1/stoll.html>

27 Rachidi, Angela. "Child Care Assistance in the United States and Nonstandard Work Schedules." *American Enterprise Institute*, 2015. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Nonstandard-Sch-and-Child-Care-Working-Paper-Nov-2015.pdf>

28 National Survey of Early Care & Education. "Provision of Early Care and Education During Non-Standard Hours." 2015. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/factsheet_nonstandard_hours_provision_of_ece_toopre_041715_508.pdf

Families have clear ideas about what constitutes a high-quality NTCC setting.

Focus group participants from across the state expressed clear opinions about the elements of high-quality care that they seek in NTCC providers. Specifically, focus group participants indicated the importance of the following factors:

- **Trust:** Families from focus groups cited trust as the first and most important trait they look for in a provider.
- **Staff:** Education, credentials, and professionalism of providers and their staff were cited as essential indicators of quality. Families similarly emphasized staff temperament and engagement with children as critically important when selecting a provider. Focus group participants were aware of the limited compensation child care staff receive and concerned that low child care staff wages are associated with low-quality care.
- **Cleanliness:** Families believe the cleanliness of the facility and the condition in which they found their children at pick-up were indicative of quality.
- **Safety:** Families were deeply concerned that their child care provider environment was safe and secure. Families want facilities equipped with security cameras in addition to staff that are trained in first aid, have child abuse clearances, and other credentials.
- **Communication:** Families seek out providers that encourage healthy and regular communication between staff and families.
- **Opportunities for Learning and Socialization:** Families value intentional educational experiences, as well as the opportunity for their children to socialize with others in a group child care setting.
- **Meals:** Families are concerned about children having access to healthy snacks and meals that align with their respective dietary needs and expectations. This is a particular concern for NTCC which occurs over the dinner and breakfast hours.

As discussed below, it can be challenging for some families to find all these characteristics in an affordable NTCC provider.

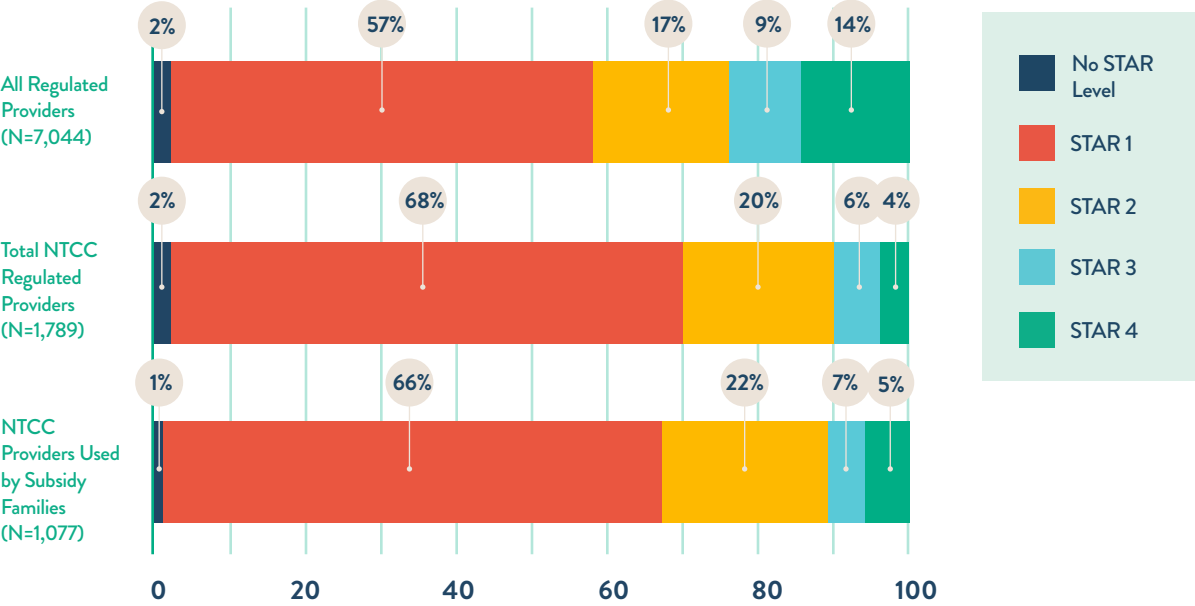
Compared to all providers, providers offering NTCC are half as likely to have STAR 3 or 4 designations.

The Keystone STARS system is Pennsylvania's Quality Rating Improvement System for early child care and education. As an indicator of the quality of child care providers, Keystone STARS is meant to help families make informed child care decisions.²⁹ STARS levels are awarded based on providers' compliance with a set of performance standards that address staff qualifications and professional development, early care and education programming, partnerships with families and communities, and leadership and management of the provider. Ratings range from the lowest level quality rating of one to the highest level of four.

²⁹ Moran, Della, and Katie Englander. "Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems in Early Childhood Education: Promising Approaches for Pennsylvania." *Research for Action*, 2016. <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/quality-ratings-improvement-systems-early-childhood-education-promising-approaches-pennsylvania/>

Figure 6 displays how STARS ratings vary for NTCC and traditional providers. Among all of Pennsylvania’s regulated child care providers, 14% have the highest STAR level and another 9% are STAR 3. Meanwhile, providers offering NTCC and those used for subsidized NTCC are half as likely to have STAR 3 or 4 designations.

FIGURE 6
Proportion of child care providers with Keystone STARS ratings of 3 or 4 by provider group, Pennsylvania, 2018



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, PELICAN & CCW Participants Data, 2018.

Many families report dissatisfaction with low-quality NTCC options.

Consistent with the Keystone STARS data, in each focus group participants reported significant challenges in securing high-quality NTCC for their children due to limited availability and substantial cost. Families shared no consensus about the best type of NTCC provider, and many expressed a general lack of trust for all provider types: Child Care Centers, Family Child Care Homes, and Group Child Care Homes. However, all of the negative first-hand experiences described in focus groups were about Child Care Centers.

For example, some families reported that their children repeatedly came home ill or with bumps and bruises that were not communicated through incident reports. Several said they witnessed child care staff interacting abrasively with children in their care. Multiple families reported that they had endured stolen diapers and wipes, children being exposed to foul language, and inadequate staffing.

Comments from the following four parents are illustrative³⁰:

“I’ve seen daycare centers where some of the staff was cussing around the kids, and the kids come home cussing.”

– PHILADELPHIA MOTHER

“I won’t recommend nobody put their kid in there. They have their kids sleeping on dirty mats.”

– PHILADELPHIA MOTHER

“So, everybody’s going to make a mess eventually. But, that I didn’t mind. I didn’t mind the messy clothes. But, I better not pick my son up and he’s got a diaper rash. Why would he have that? Because he was wet for too long. Don’t do that. And...if I’m sending you diapers...what I started doing, I started putting my sons initials on his diapers.”

–PITTSBURGH MOTHER

“Most of the daycares, you have to fill out a form for them to feed your kids. And then you come there, your kids are like ‘I’m hungry.’ So, are you feeding my kid, or what?”

–PITTSBURGH MOTHER

These comments are limited to the experiences of select focus group participants, however they reflect a general anxiety described by many Pennsylvania families who lack the financial means to afford high quality NTCC.

³⁰ It is common for families and providers to casually refer to all types of child care, including child care that occurs during non-traditional hours, as “daycare.” While many families spoke about their experiences with child care in general, they consistently expressed that the challenges they faced were amplified by their non-traditional child care needs.



Promising Practices and Challenges of Non-Traditional Child Care Providers in Pennsylvania

RFA interviewed six non-traditional child care providers and seven state and local agency staff familiar with the experiences of providers and families using NTCC. Interviewees shared six promising practices as well as significant challenges to providing high-quality NTCC.

Six promising practices of NTCC providers

Providers noted that while traditional child care and NTCC are “regulated the same,” there are differences related to common routines and activities, and in the level of vulnerability children may experience when they are away from home in the evening, overnight, or during weekends. The NTCC providers we interviewed identified six promising practices that address those differences. They include:

1. Creating a safe and nurturing environment;
2. Developing consistent pick-up, drop-off, and bedtime routines;
3. Providing healthy meals and snacks;
4. Creating opportunities for children to choose activities;
5. Accommodating families’ unanticipated child care needs; and
6. Adopting a model of whole family care.

Each is described in more detail below.

1. CREATING A SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

NTCC providers must be intentional about creating a safe and nurturing environment because children may feel vulnerable when away from home during the evening, overnight, or weekend. A Family Child Care Home provider explained that, “*Evening and night care and overnights...are sometimes a bigger transition [for children] than going somewhere for the daytime.*” Similarly, a Child Care Center provider reported that children are allowed to bring stuffed animals and it is normal for staff to rub a child’s back to encourage them to sleep: “*Anything that puts them in their comfort zone and makes them feel safe while they’re here. Especially for that second shift [when a] parent is normally tucking them in.*”

NTCC requires staff to be patient, well-rested, and knowledgeable about child social and emotional development. One Family Child Care Home provider stated:

“You can’t be tired. I work the night shift, and I pace myself throughout my day, and on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday mornings, Sunday mornings, I don’t do any training or anything else. I just rest so that my patience, I’m not short ... My tolerance level is different, because if you’re sleepy doing that in the evening, you can make a mistake, because you’re human.”

—FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME PROVIDER

The same provider explained the importance of training and experience with child development, social emotional development, transitions, and trauma: *“If you don’t have that underneath your belt, you can snap easily—yell at a child, grab a child the wrong way, because you’re frustrated and tired.”*

2. DEVELOPING CONSISTENT PICK-UP, DROP-OFF, AND BEDTIME ROUTINES

NTCC providers must work closely with families to develop plans for pick-up, drop-off, and bedtime routines that align to the days and hours children are in care. As occurs with traditional-hour care, NTCC providers should define rules associated with pick-up and drop-off times and practices.

For children in overnight care, providers noted the importance of making decisions with families about bedtime, bathing, and clothing routines. For example, families who work second shift might want their children put to bed in their street-clothes rather than pajamas, because they may be picked up in the middle of the night. As one provider noted:

“Parents work the 11 pm to 7 am I have some that work at 2 pm to midnight. I have some that work 7 pm to 7 am I have some that come in at 3:30 in the morning... As far as bedtime routine, I go over that information with the parent, whether we get our jammies on here or they come already in the jammies, that depends on what time they’re coming. Then I try to get everyone in bed around eight or nine. It depends on school-age. The school-agers, I really try to make sure that they’re in bed earlier, and then sometimes I get them on the bus. Sometimes their parents come before the bus.”

—FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME PROVIDER

3. PROVIDING HEALTHY MEALS AND SNACKS

Like traditional child care, providers indicated that healthy snacks and balanced meals were essential aspects of NTCC. The majority of providers reported that they participate in regional food programs. One provider complained that some families asked her to allow junk food, but another said that families were pleased with her approach to mealtime because children and provider staff eat together at a dining table where youth are introduced to new foods and table manners. For dinner, this provider reported:

“We pass the bowl, we share, take turns. Take two spoonfuls, take two ‘no, thank you’ bites... Eat your brussels sprouts. I try to make them good. We try to expose them to things that they may not typically get exposed to. I talked to my parents about that, I shared a menu with them, asked them is there anything that they would like for me to include on their child’s menu, or I’ll send a recipe card home, ‘Your child really liked those brussels sprouts...try this recipe.’”

–FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME PROVIDER

This provider keeps healthy foods onhand for snacking in between meals and, knowing that some families might only have time for the “drive-through at McDonalds,” she sends healthy snacks with children when they depart her care.

4. CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO CHOOSE ACTIVITIES

NTCC providers argued that when children are in care in the evening, overnight, or weekends, they should be given more opportunities to make decisions about their activities. Providers noted that they take a more relaxed approach with activity planning during non-traditional hours. One provider explained that weekend and evening care is not so “scheduled and structured” because she wants the children to have some control over their evening and weekend activities. She feels that “weekends should be fun time for the kids” and, while she schedules trips to a neighborhood nursing home and the playground, children deserve the opportunity to choose activities like an impromptu dance party or art project, just as they might if they were at home.

5. ACCOMMODATING FAMILIES’ UNANTICIPATED CHILD CARE NEEDS

The NTCC providers we interviewed attempt to accommodate the unanticipated child care needs of families currently in their care. Providers described accommodating unexpected child care needs (overnight or weekend) or adjusting operating hours when possible for the families currently in their care. One provider explained that she began opening at 5 am because “without it [families] can’t go to work.” Another reported that she adjusts her hours and days of operation to accommodate families, especially when a parent/guardian has the opportunity to earn higher wages working holidays, weekends, and second or third shifts. A couple of providers admitted taking care of children when they were ill because their parents/guardians would otherwise not be able to work.

6. ADOPTING A MODEL OF WHOLE FAMILY CARE

NTCC providers believe their services are meant to serve the entire family. The parents/guardians and children served during non-traditional hours were referred to as being “like family” and, providers described offering support beyond care-hours including financial literacy and advice around nutrition and diet, toilet training, early childhood development, and age appropriate literacy skills. Some providers shared that they give surveys to the families they serve to learn what they like and whether there are improvements they recommend.

One Family Child Care Home provider takes children on “field trips” to the grocery store and PetSmart – giving provider staff and children the opportunity to talk about fruits and vegetables or meet a veterinarian. She strives to create learning opportunities through activities that children might normally enjoy with their family.

When asked about best practices, a Child Care Center provider identified the importance of relationship-building with the families they serve, “...when you’re dealing with people and their children...you have to be connected. You can only be connected if you build relationships.” Another Family Child Care Home provider explained, that for her, NTCC was “an extension to what they have at home and better. You want to really, really work with parents on how they’re raising their children....”

NTCC Provider Challenges

The six NTCC providers we interviewed also described serious challenges to delivering high-quality non-traditional child care. Participants identified staffing—recruitment and retention of high-quality staff—as their greatest barrier to providing high quality NTCC. Other challenges include accommodating families with irregular schedules and complying with child care regulations.

1. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF NTCC STAFF

Staffing non-traditional hours is especially difficult. Child Care Center providers indicated that, for all hours of operation, low and stagnant wages make it difficult to attract and retain staff. However, when low wages are coupled with less desirable working hours, NTCC positions become especially unappealing. An Allegheny County provider reported:

“Here’s the thing with the non-traditional, which is probably the hardest to staff. [Child care] itself is hard to staff, period. Let’s just say that. So, you start at the bottom, the lowest. Probably like \$8 bucks an hour, at the minimum. And you can’t go anywhere. The ceiling doesn’t reach as high for child care as it does for some other professions. It’s bad enough trying to get them during the day, but trying to get them at night and overnight? Okay, good luck.”

—CHILD CARE CENTER PROVIDER

Providers also emphasized how critical it is to hire staff with the right temperament and training to work with children, especially during non-traditional hours when most children are accustomed to being at home.

Providers also emphasized how critical it is to hire staff with the right temperament and training to work with children, especially during non-traditional hours.

2. ACCOMMODATING FAMILIES WITH IRREGULAR SCHEDULES

Providing NTCC for families with irregular work schedules is especially challenging. Providers reported that they try to accommodate the unanticipated child care needs of the families they currently serve. However, families with unpredictable and inconsistent work schedules can impact a provider’s ability to reliably plan staffing, activities, meals and other arrangements. One Child Care Center provider said that while she serves families with non-standard work days and hours, she did not currently serve families with irregular schedules. While she can accommodate occasional unanticipated schedule changes and non-traditional child care needs, irregular schedules are problematic.

As she explained:

“[We need to] plan too, because we have to make sure who’s going to be working so we can make sure we got food to feed those kids. Because we feed them dinner, you know what I mean? They get a snack, so you want to make sure that you have everybody in that’s supposed to be in.”

3. SUSTAINABLY FULFILLING REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

The desire to maintain Keystone STARS ratings can provide additional staffing challenges and may prevent providers from extending their hours of operation. One government agency staff person explained this dynamic:

“I do think, as folks move up in the STARS system, an unintended consequence is that staffing becomes much more difficult, because you do have to have those folks with a degree. Our [workforce development board] is looking at the potential of having an apprenticeship program that would enable folks to get a degree while they’re working, and kind of that on-the-job training, so it would be kind of training the workforce that’s already in place, which I think is wonderful, but that is kind of one of the challenges. You [want] people that have high levels of education and training looking after children, so that there’s that win-win, so they’re getting the child care and they’re getting the education piece too, but the staffing is just really, really difficult.”

—GOVERNMENT AGENCY STAFF

Maintaining STARS ratings will become increasingly difficult. To become certified as a STAR 3 provider in 2019, 25% of lead teachers are required to hold a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education (ECE) or related field. To be certified as a STAR 4 provider, 100% of lead teachers are required to hold a minimum of an associate or bachelor’s degree in ECE or related field. Under newly-adopted performance standards, the proportion of lead teachers that must hold a bachelor’s degree is set to increase for both STAR 3 and STAR 4 in 2021, 2024, and 2028.³¹

Some providers predict that new regulations may discourage existing and prospective Family Child Care Home providers. One Family Child Care Home provider questioned the practicality of some requirements for providers operating in a home, citing the requirement to mount impact-absorbing materials in outdoor spaces. The provider also expressed concern that new proposed regulations for Family Child Care Homes that would increase the number of required staff and require staff to stay awake during night-time care, would make care more costly to provide.³²

31 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Child Development and Early Learning. “Pennsylvania Keystone STARS Program Performance Standards.” 2018. <http://www.pakeys.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Keystone-STARS-Performance-Standards-07-01-2018.pdf>

32 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “Proposed Rulemaking: 55 PA Code Chapters 20, 3041, 3270, 3280 AND 3290, Child Care Facilities.” 2018. <https://www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol48/48-41/1587.html>

Providers were hopeful that consensus between policymakers and providers can be established around the sustainability of high-quality NTCC. As a North Central provider reported:

“I haven’t had a whole lot of time to really look at some of those regulations very deeply, but from just listening to other people talking and being aware of some of the things that could be happening with non-traditional care, even though I know they’re trying to keep some providers from working so much and so hard. I think that you can find that balance and you can provide good care for children over the night and lots of hours and still be able to manage it just fine.”

—FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME PROVIDER

Regional spotlight

Despite some regional differences in population and characteristics of providers (as described above), families, providers, and workforce development board staff in each region reported many similarities, in both the practices and challenges they experienced related to NTCC. In each region, families reported that trust, quality, cost and proximity to home or work were the main factors in choosing a provider. Providers in each region described similar best practices, difficulties in accommodating families with irregular work schedules, and challenges recruiting and retaining child care staff due to low wages and difficult hours. Providers in each region also reported that they only needed word-of-mouth marketing. In each region workforce development board staff described a lack of family-friendly workplace policies and the lack of care options as barriers to employee recruitment and retention.



How Do Non-Traditional Child Care Needs Impact Pennsylvania's Non-Standard Hour Workforce?

The availability of high-quality NTCC is important for Pennsylvania employers in industries that demand non-standard work schedules. RFA interviewed eight staff employed by workforce development boards in Allegheny County, North Central Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia who work with both employers of non-standard hour industries and families that rely on NTCC. These staff explained that the combination of limited availability of NTCC that accommodates irregular schedules and rigid workplace policies exacerbate recruitment and retention challenges for employers.

Lack of available NTCC options create barriers to recruitment and retention for employers.

As discussed earlier in this report, non-standard hours are common in an array of occupations including nursing, healthcare aides, retail sales, food service wait staff, and manufacturing production workers. Many parents/guardians in workforce development training programs have limited job opportunities and many of the jobs they qualify for are low-wage and require non-standard hours. These occupations experience high turnover in general and **employees without flexible and reliable child care and advance work schedules are at risk of losing their jobs.**

Further, because the unemployment rate is so low, employers of non-standard hour jobs face greater than usual difficulty with recruitment and retention. As one workforce development board staff member explained, *“That is something that we do hear from employers regularly, that people have turned down jobs when they’re offered a position on a second or third shift...people have had to turn the job down because of child care.”*

Once employed, **the lack of flexible child care or an advance work schedule can put a worker's job at risk.**

As one parent noted:

“Being as I’m a CNA, being in a nursing home, you might be short-staffed or something like that, so you might need to stay longer than what you originally expected, and [CCW] does not give you leniency with that at all. ... I originally came in here thinking I was going to do an eight-hour shift, but the next shift nobody came in, so I can’t leave the residents, but I don’t have anybody to pick up my kids.”

–PHILADELPHIA MOTHER

Workforce development board staff indicated that they advise families to find back up providers of child care but acknowledged the challenge of finding care that is stable yet flexible. One said:

“A lot of our clients end up losing their jobs because they can’t take their kids [to child care]. You can’t take your kids [when they are] sick... We have a client who started a job and their kid is sick. They don’t have any vacation time, they can’t take the kid to daycare, they ultimately are in a bad position and can lose their employment because of it.”

–WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD STAFF

Meanwhile, staff also described how limited employment options cause some families to sacrifice child care quality:

“I don’t think there’s any [providers] locally here that would be able to meet those needs, and so [parents/guardians] end up not being able to take jobs that they would normally want to, or unfortunately relying on situations that are not the best for their kids, whether that’s leaving them home alone with another sibling or just by themselves, and that’s not what we would like for them to be doing.”

–WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD STAFF

Workplace policies often do not accommodate family needs.

As noted by providers, it is easier to accommodate the NTCC needs of professionals who work non-standard hours when workers receive their schedules in advance. Families who work with unpredictable, seasonal, and temporary work schedules have a more difficult time securing reliable quality child care.

Yet workforce development board staff stated that **many employers who operate with non-standard hours are not open to conversation about the needs of low-income working families**, let alone the development of family-friendly policies. As one staff person explained, many employers just want workers “to come in and [do] what they’re supposed to be doing,” and are not interested in talking about how to make it easier for people to work there and stay in their jobs.

Employers of non-standard hour jobs face greater than usual difficulty with recruitment and retention.



Another explained that some larger corporations may have greater capacity to accommodate child care needs of employees during non-standard hours, but that smaller businesses often refuse:

“And it’s almost a quality of life [issue] for their employees. But when you’re talking about retail or food service...they’re not always necessarily interested in making changes based on that. We have customers often say to us, ‘can you guys talk to these employers and help them understand where we’re coming from and why our needs might be a little bit different?’ So there certainly employers that are willing, but it’s not the large majority of them for sure.”

—GOVERNMENT AGENCY STAFF

Many employers who operate with non-standard hours are not open to conversation about the needs of low-income working families, let alone the development of family-friendly policies.

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Policy Considerations

More than 150,000 Pennsylvania families with young children have likely need for non-traditional child care. However, only one in four providers offer any form of NTCC and, even with generous estimates, there are over three families for every available NTCC seat. Only one in 10 families receiving CCW use those subsidies for NTCC. Thousands of Pennsylvania families remain on the waitlist for CCW and many of those families also have NTCC needs.

Meanwhile, cost has been identified as the largest barrier to accessing traditional child care and this is also the case for NTCC. Even though much remains to be learned, our analysis of available data coupled with targeted interviews provides new insight about the experiences and needs of families, providers, and employers impacted by the availability of NTCC in Pennsylvania. Below we identify several initiatives that policymakers could consider in light of these findings.

Create financial incentives for NTCC providers.

Low wages complicate the recruitment and retention of all child care staff, but this is particularly so for staff working in NTCC. In the past, the state awarded providers an additional per diem if they offered NTCC for families receiving subsidies.³³ Several providers recommended that the state or businesses operating with non-standard hours consider new initiatives to supplement NTCC staff salaries. Providers and workforce development board professionals also suggested funding for educational programs and start-up financing for entrepreneurs to increase the supply and quality of NTCC. A provider in Pittsburgh who operates a 24-hour, emergency drop-in Child Care Center that is subsidized by the Pittsburgh Housing Authority, was highlighted by multiple government agency staff and workforce development board staff as a model worthy of replication.

³³ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. "Manual Section '101 – Definitions.'" http://www.dhs.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/d_010561.pdf

Expand the size and eligibility of child care subsidies.

With an already limited supply of providers offering non-traditional child care, several families receiving child care subsidies expressed concern that subsidy cost-caps limit their options even further. In addition, restrictions only allow subsidies to be used on relative care if relatives live in a separate residence from the working family. Moreover, subsidies do not cover the additional fees charged by many providers for transportation, early school dismissal, or late pick-up. Finally, working families who are *not* eligible for subsidy recommended that the state consider at least partial subsidies to alleviate the impact on working families who barely miss current cutoffs.

Review whether Keystone STARS and current regulations capture the unique characteristics of high-quality non-traditional child care.

Providers offering NTCC and those used for subsidized NTCC are half as likely to receive STAR 3 or 4 designations. However, some of the best practices identified by providers, such as whole family care and the customization of care for children in care during the evening, overnights or weekends, are not reflected in Keystone STARS or other regulations.

Similarly, some Family Child Care Home providers expressed frustration with new regulations introduced during the fall of 2018 that they worry will discourage new providers from entering the field. For example, the proposed new regulations that a staff member stay awake during overnight care was viewed as a costly new mandate. In addition, the high number of families who rely on CCW to pay for relative care during non-traditional hours may suggest a need to reconsider current requirements that relatives live in a separate residence from the family. State regulators could review whether current regulations alleviate the challenges and reflect the best practices and unique characteristics of high-quality NTCC.

Improve overall data collection and reporting and verify the accuracy of data related to the services and hours that NTCC providers report offering.

Pennsylvania families are directed to use the COMPASS online child care search tool to identify providers to meet their child care needs. However, not all the information presented in the system, including hours and schedules offered, are verified. By verifying the data supporting the COMPASS provider search tool, OCDEL can help families identify available NTCC providers. In addition, because data is not collected regarding capacity of providers specific to NTCC, including the type and scope of a provider's NTCC seats, policymakers are not able to assess the supply and use of NTCC with precision.

Provide greater clarity on terms and definitions related to NTCC.

As discussed, there are several inconsistencies between the Pennsylvania State Code, DHS regulations, and even casual use by government agency staff regarding terms such as non-traditional care, night care, and sleep-time care. The state's COMPASS provider search tool also includes a number of terms to describe care schedules that are undefined, including before-school care, after-school care, and evening care. Providing clarity on these and other commonly used terms would help families and providers to better match need to what is provided. It would also provide more reliable data for assessing the impact of NTCC in the future.

Mandate or incentivize the adoption of family-friendly workplace policies.

Beyond the federal Family and Medical Leave Act³⁴ (FMLA), Pennsylvania employers have few legal mandates to accommodate the needs of working families. Neither are there requirements for employers to contribute to the costs of child care or provide on-site child care options. Yet working non-traditional schedules can be easier for families to balance if they are provided with flexible scheduling, advanced scheduling, and on-site or proximity to affordable child care. Better collaboration between employers, families, and providers would also be an improvement. There appears to be a lack of understanding among many employers about the steps they could take to relieve some of the stress of child care for families with NTCC needs. Irregular schedules and the lack of an advanced scheduling create barriers to employment for many families and also contribute to costly late pick-up fees. Proximity to care was important to all families, but especially so for parents/guardians who rely on public transportation in Pittsburgh and working families in North Central Pennsylvania's rural communities.

Some local communities,³⁵ employers,³⁶ and providers recognize the mutual benefits of flexible scheduling or schedule accommodations for the normal challenges families encounter, like a child's illness, school delays, or early dismissals. Likewise, some employers have recognized the mutual benefits of providing on-site care.³⁷ Additionally, some providers have seen the benefits of proximate-care to accommodate the needs of their families.³⁸ State policymakers could consider the benefits of statewide mandates or incentives to expand these kinds of family-friendly policies. In addition, providing space for better collaboration with employers to explore voluntary initiatives, may be mutually beneficial to families, providers, and employers.

34 Under some circumstances, FMLA allows employees of large employers to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a new child or ill family member. Pennsylvania is not a state that has enacted a paid family and medical leave program, though a recent report from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry Center for Workforce Information & Analysis found strong public support and documented that such a statewide program would yield substantial benefits to both working families and employers. Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Center for Workforce Information and Analysis. "Paid Family and Medical Leave in Pennsylvania: Research Findings Report." 2017. https://www.dol.gov/wb/media/Pennsylvania_Final_Report.pdf

35 In December, Philadelphia's Mayor Jim Kenney signed "The Fair Workweek" bill which will "require employers with more than 30 locations and 250 employees to give workers two weeks' advance notice of their schedules. If work schedules change after that timeframe, employers will need to offer predictability pay to employees." Councilperson Helen Gym explained, "In a city with such high poverty, I'm proud that Philadelphia's leading the way on addressing abusive practices like unstable schedules that wreak havoc on people's lives and leave them unable to predict their monthly incomes for rent or child care." City of Philadelphia. "Mayor Kenny Signs Fair Workweek and 21st Century Minimum Wage Bills." 2018. <https://www.phila.gov/2018-12-20-mayor-kenney-signs-fair-workweek-and-21st-century-minimum-wage-bills/>

36 In North Central Pennsylvania, workforce development board staff cited examples of "employee-centric" strategies adopted by a regional hospital which, to help with recruitment, recently began offering customized accommodations like shift and workday preferences that suit individual employee's needs.

37 Describing a bank that offers employees drop-in care when schools and other child care facilities are closed, a government agency staff person reported that the bank did not adopt the policy "to do a nice thing." Rather because "it makes sense, financially, for them to provide that care....It's just like [a company] providing other types of fringe benefits. Child care can be one of those."

38 A Family Child Care Home provider reported offering non-traditional child care on the weekend for families who work in retail or 24-hour retail distribution centers located within close proximity to her home. She began offering non-traditional child care hours because a 24/7 Child Care Center in her community struggled to maintain staffing, which caused panic for parents/guardians who worked evenings and weekends.

Expand research into the availability and quality of NTCC in Pennsylvania.

This study provides the most detailed information to date about NTCC in Pennsylvania, but much remains to be learned and many of our findings suggest the need for additional study. For example, the state would benefit from more precise study of the availability of NTCC, but such a study would require provider capacity data to be disaggregated by traditional and non-traditional hours. In addition, while OCDEL collects more detailed information about providers and families who receive CCW, less is known about families that are ineligible for state support. Further study into how these families pay for NTCC and make ends meet would help guide policymakers. Finally, additional research on the availability of public transportation would provide helpful context to the frustration we heard from families, providers, and workforce development board staff regarding transportation to and from NTCC facilities, particularly in Allegheny County and North Central Pennsylvania.

This report, along with a Bibliography and Technical Appendix, are available for download at:
<https://www.researchforaction.org/projects/examining-the-status-of-non-traditional-child-care-in-pennsylvania/>

