



First 5
MENDOCINO

Report

Early Learning Landscape

in Mendocino County
2025



Prepared by

Applied Survey Research



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Executive Summary

The 2025 *Mendocino County State of the Child Survey* reveals a vibrant portrait of young children growing, families engaging, and educators rising to meet the evolving needs of their communities. Led by [First 5 Mendocino](#) and the [Mendocino County Office of Education](#) (MCOE), this second wave of countywide surveys builds on the 2023 baseline and reflects progress in strengthening family-school connections, early services, and community supports. Together, the findings offer a deeper, more holistic understanding of the conditions shaping early childhood development across the County.

KEY STRENGTHS AND INSIGHTS

Children Bring a Strong Developmental Foundation

Caregivers and educators observed consistent strengths in motor skills, self-regulation, early academic skills, and social expression, reflecting the impact of nurturing home routines, inclusive classrooms, and access to enriching spaces.

Families are Deeply Engaged in Supporting Learning and Well-Being

Caregivers reported that they support readiness through consistent routines, home learning, and cultural sharing. Many families indicated they actively communicate with schools and feel welcomed and respected. Educators acknowledged these efforts, pointing to growing trust and stronger transitions into school.

Community Resources Foster Learning and Belonging

Families are accessing parks, libraries, early learning programs, and healthcare services at high rates. Caregivers who engage with community spaces and maintain strong school communication were more likely to report that their children are developmentally ready for school.

Educators are Committed to Growth, Inclusion, and Connection

Educators reported high participation in professional development, with strong value placed on training in social-emotional learning, inclusive instruction, and cultural responsiveness. They reported that these experiences enhance daily practice and deepen their connection to their role as educators.

Community Voices are Shaping a Shared Vision for Equitable Systems

Both caregivers and educators identified core priorities for improving early learning systems: access to affordable care, support for dual-language families, stronger cross-sector coordination, and expanded neighborhood infrastructure. Their lived experiences form a powerful foundation for guiding future investments, policies, and collaborative initiatives.

SUMMARY

The 2025 findings reinforce that children's development is shaped not only by schools, but by the experiences they have at home, in the community, and in early learning settings. Compared to 2023, the data reflects signs of progress in family-school partnerships, access to developmental supports, and use of community spaces that support early learning and belonging. These positive patterns suggest that local efforts are taking root. Children are growing up in homes, classrooms, and neighborhoods where they feel safe, supported, and seen.

As early learning systems continue to evolve, this study offers a strong foundation for future collaboration. It highlights areas where existing strengths can be deepened and sustained so that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Introduction

*In Mendocino County, **school readiness reflects the broader State of the Child**, a holistic view of how children are growing, learning, and supported in the earliest years of life.*

The early learning landscape is built through everyday moments—families reading together, educators guiding exploration, and communities offering spaces to learn and belong. When children begin kindergarten, they bring with them the results of these collective efforts: curiosity, persistence, and the confidence to engage with the world around them. These early strengths, nurtured in homes, early learning programs, and community spaces, create the foundation for lifelong success.

This report is part of a growing, multi-year effort to understand and strengthen early childhood experiences across the County. In 2023, [First 5 Mendocino](#) and the [Mendocino County Office of Education](#) (MCOE) launched a countywide survey to better understand the conditions supporting young children and families.

In 2025, that commitment continued with a second round of surveys—refined to better align across caregiver and educator perspectives, and to deepen insights into children's development, access to services, and the early learning workforce.

In this latest survey cycle, First 5 Mendocino and MCOE continued their partnership to elevate the voices of families, early care and education (ECE) professionals, and Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten (TK/K) teachers. Through these countywide surveys, families and educators shared their perspectives on children's development, family engagement, educator well-being, and access to supportive community resources.

Together, these perspectives paint a vibrant and grounded picture of the *State of the Child* in Mendocino County—revealing how children are growing, thriving, and stepping into school with the support of the people and systems around them.



STUDY PURPOSE

This report builds on the foundation laid in 2023, when First 5 Mendocino and MCOE launched the first countywide *Mendocino County State of the Child Survey*. That initial effort provided valuable insight into how children and families were navigating the post-pandemic landscape. In 2025, this second round of data collection continued that work by refining the survey tools, improving alignment between caregiver and educator responses, and focusing more deeply on key areas like family engagement, educator well-being, and equitable access to care.

Together, the 2023 and 2025 surveys contribute to an evolving understanding of the *State of the Child* in Mendocino County. Rather than offering a one-time snapshot, this growing body of data reflects an ongoing commitment to listen, learn, and act in partnership with those closest to young children. While the primary focus of this report is on 2025 findings, comparisons to 2023 are included where relevant to highlight trends, shifts, and continued areas of strength.

The purpose of this work is not only to understand the early learning landscape, but also to celebrate the collaboration and resilience shaping Mendocino County's youngest learners. By capturing insights from families and educators, this study offers a shared portrait of early development. It reveals where children, families, and programs are already thriving, and where targeted investments can build on those strengths.

This report is organized around five interconnected objectives that reflect First 5 Mendocino's priorities around children entering school ready to succeed:

	Understand children's developmental strengths and transitions Highlight the skills—such as self-regulation, social expression, motor, and early academics—that children demonstrate as they enter school, and identify the transition supports that help them step confidently into kindergarten.
	Highlight equitable access to care and community resources Understand how families experience child care, preschool, and essential community supports and identify opportunities to expand access so every family can rely on high-quality, affordable options.
	Celebrate family engagement and resilience Recognize the ways families sustain routines, communicate with educators, and share culture and language, all of which enrich children's development and strengthen school connections.
	Elevate the early childhood workforce Acknowledge the resilience, professional growth, and commitment of ECE professionals and TK/K teachers who create safe, nurturing, and creative learning environments.
	Guide planning and policy with community voices Provide a countywide perspective, grounded in the lived experiences of caregivers and educators, to inform program planning, funding decisions, and policy investments that build on what is already working well.

These objectives ensure the findings are not only descriptive but actionable by offering a roadmap for how educators, policymakers, and families can continue to build a strong foundation for every child in Mendocino County.



METHODOLOGY

To understand the State of the Child in Mendocino County, First 5 Mendocino and the MCOE conducted a set of countywide online surveys in fall 2025. The 2025 surveys invited three key groups to share their experience and perspectives:

- **Caregivers** of children ages three to six
- **Educators**
 - ECE professionals working with children ages three to five in center-based programs and family child care programs
 - TK/K teachers across Mendocino County school districts

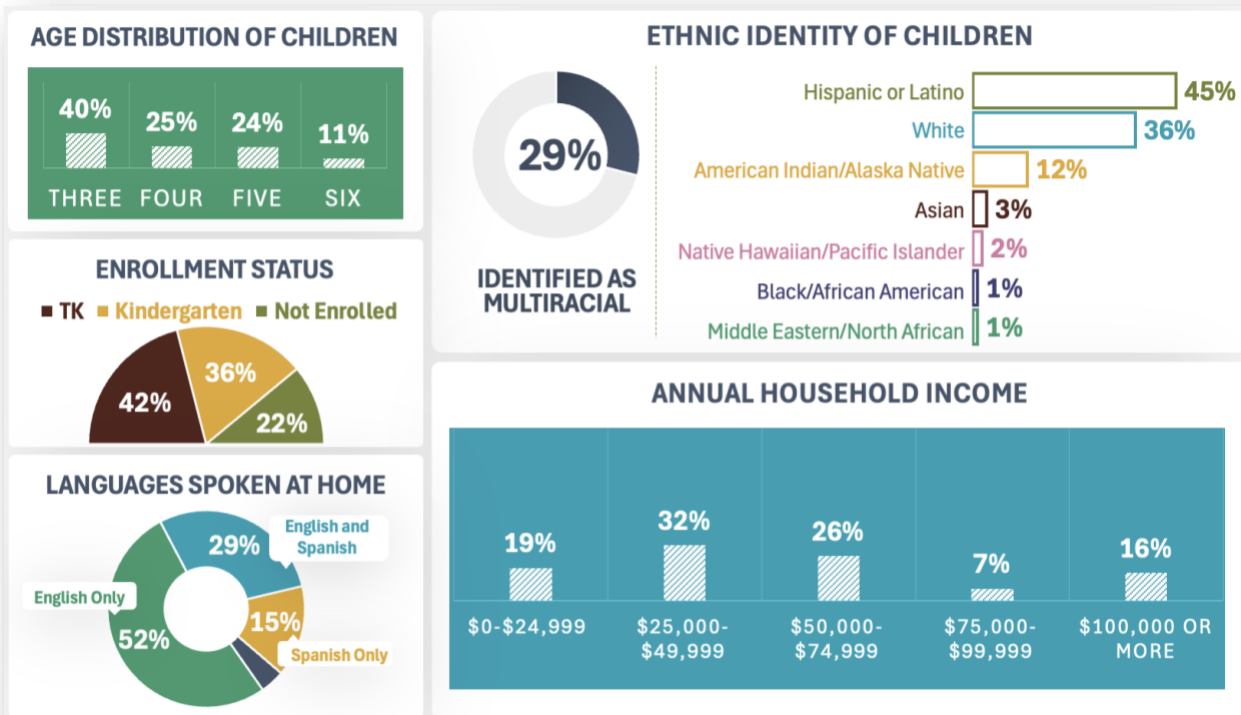
The surveys were open from September 22 to October 17, 2025, and available in English and Spanish. Dissemination occurred through trusted First 5 Mendocino and MCOE networks. All eligible respondents received a \$20 gift card in appreciation of their participation. Where possible, results are compared with the 2023 survey to reveal promising trends and highlight areas of growth.

To ensure the caregiver and educator survey results more accurately reflect the geographic distribution of young children in Mendocino County, data were weighted based on the proportion of children under age five residing in each ZIP code. This method corrects for over- or under-representation of certain regions in the sample relative to the County's actual population of young children.

Profile of Families and Children

The 2025 Mendocino County State of the Child Survey gathered data from 130 caregivers of children between the ages of three to six. Caregivers were asked to answer questions based on their child who was currently or most recently in TK or Kindergarten; if they had no child in TK/K, they were directed to reflect on their oldest child between the ages of 3 and 6. More than three in four caregivers (78%) had a child who had either recently attended or was currently enrolled in TK or Kindergarten at the time of the survey.

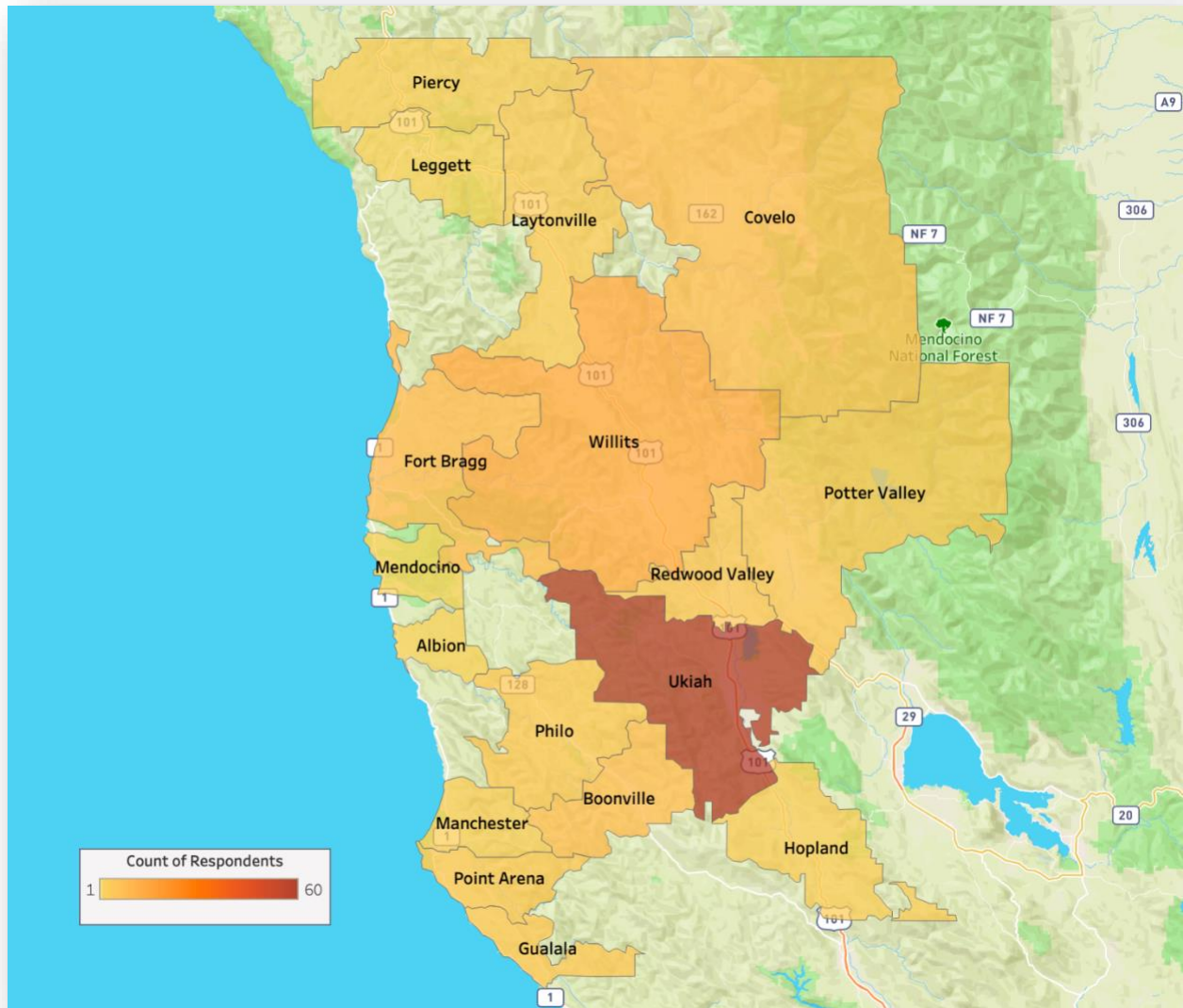
Exhibit 1. Family Sample Characteristics



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 130. Multiple selections were allowed for child's age, ethnicity, and language items. The "another language" category (represented in dark grey) includes Cantonese, Mandarin, and other Chinese languages; Pomo; American Sign Language (ASL); Portuguese; Tagalog or other Filipino languages; and Hindi, Punjabi, or other South Asian languages.

The map below illustrates the participation of caregivers in the study, by the city of the child's residence. Caregiver responses came from across Mendocino County, with strong representation in the Ukiah area, where nearly half of all survey respondents reside (47%).

Exhibit 2. Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents, Caregivers 2025



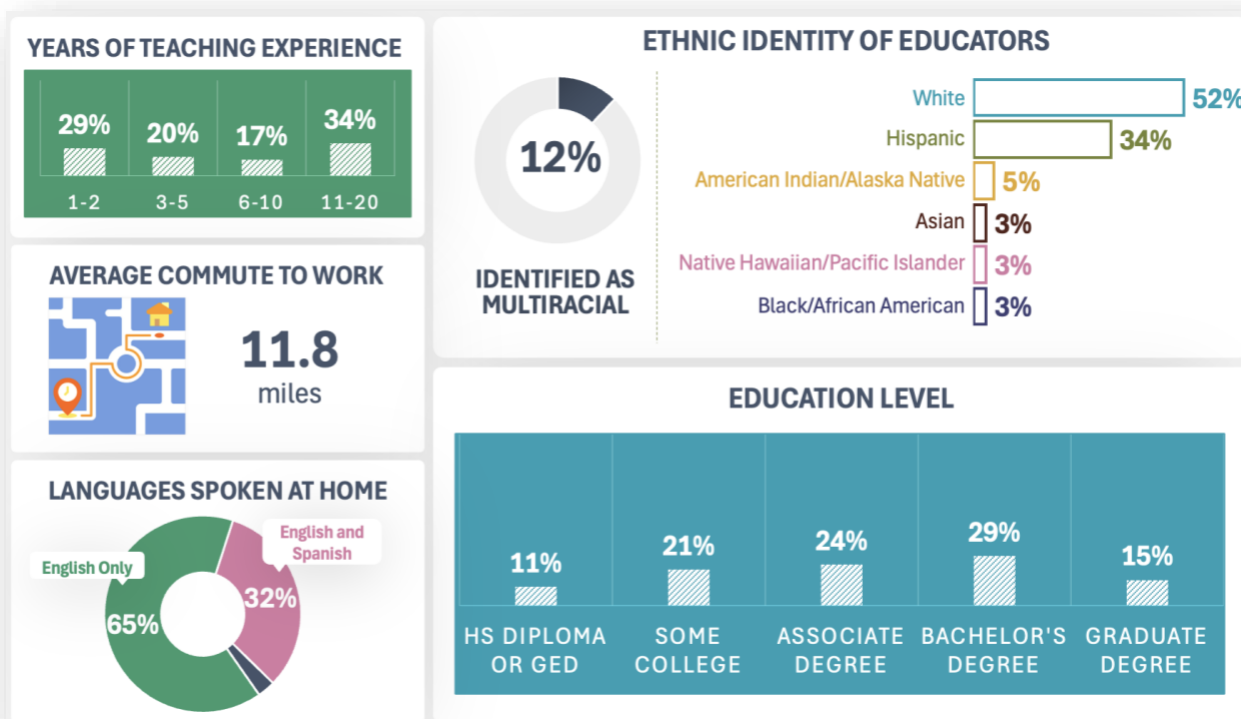
Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 130. Darker shading indicates higher response volume by city.

Profile of Educators

The 2025 Mendocino County State of the Child Survey gathered data from **35 early childhood educators**, including 29 ECE professionals and six TK/K teachers.¹ On average, educators had been working in early care and education or TK/K classrooms for 7.4 years, with experience levels ranging from 1–20 years.

Among ECE professionals, 57% held a current California Child Development Permit issued by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC).

Exhibit 3. Educator Sample Characteristics

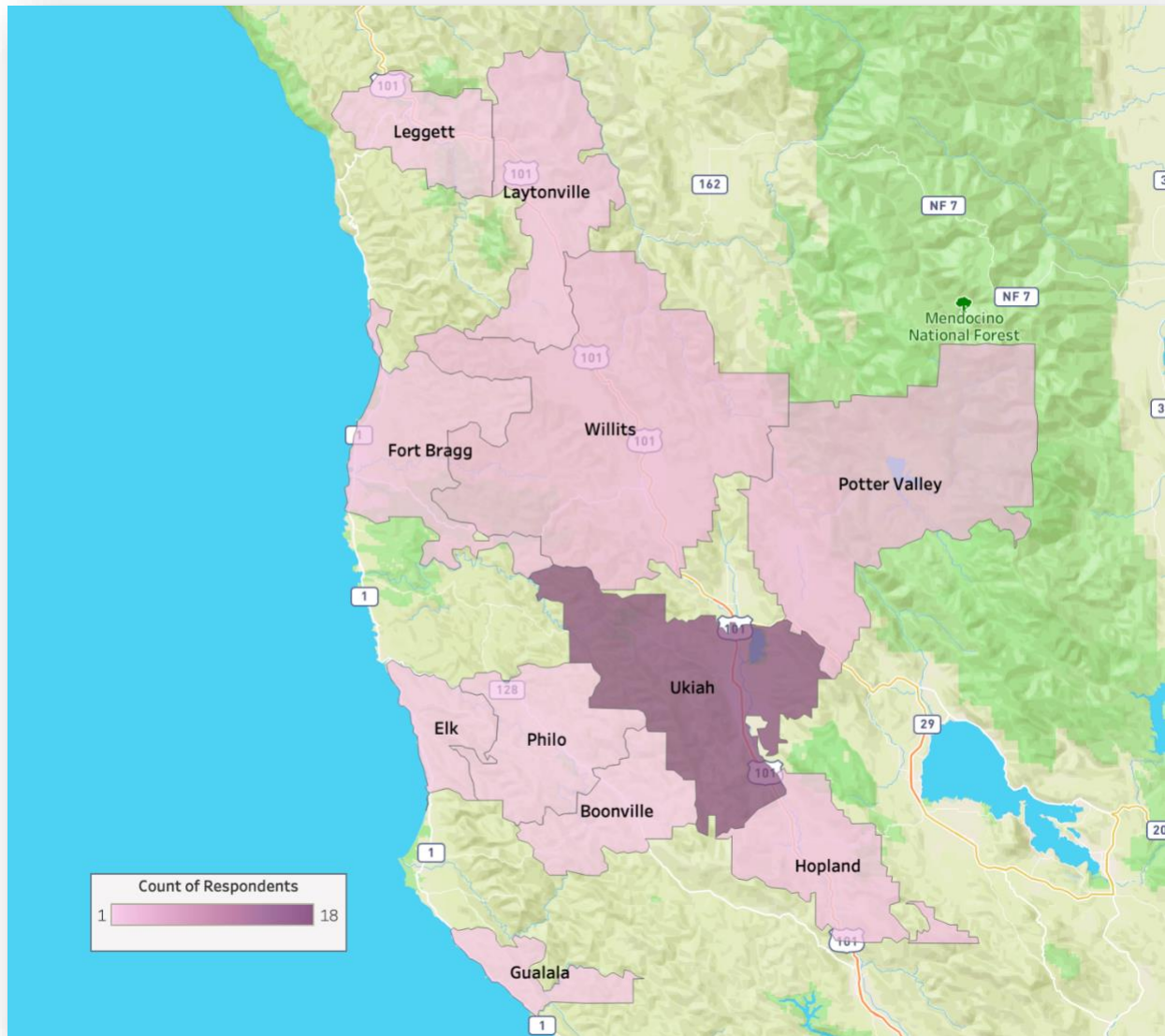


Source: Mendocino County Survey, Educators 2025. N = 35. Multiple selections were allowed for ethnicity and language items. The “another language” category (represented in dark grey) includes ASL and Tagalog or other Filipino language.

¹ Due to the small number of TK/K teachers in the 2025 sample (n = 6), all educator data have been combined for this year’s reporting. While the 2023 report included comparisons between educator groups (ECE vs. TK/K), this level of disaggregation was not possible for 2025.

The map below illustrates the participation of educators in the study, based on the city of their school or site location. Educator responses were distributed across Mendocino County, with the highest concentration in the Ukiah area, which accounted for just over half of all educator respondents (51%).

Exhibit 4. Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents, Educators 2025



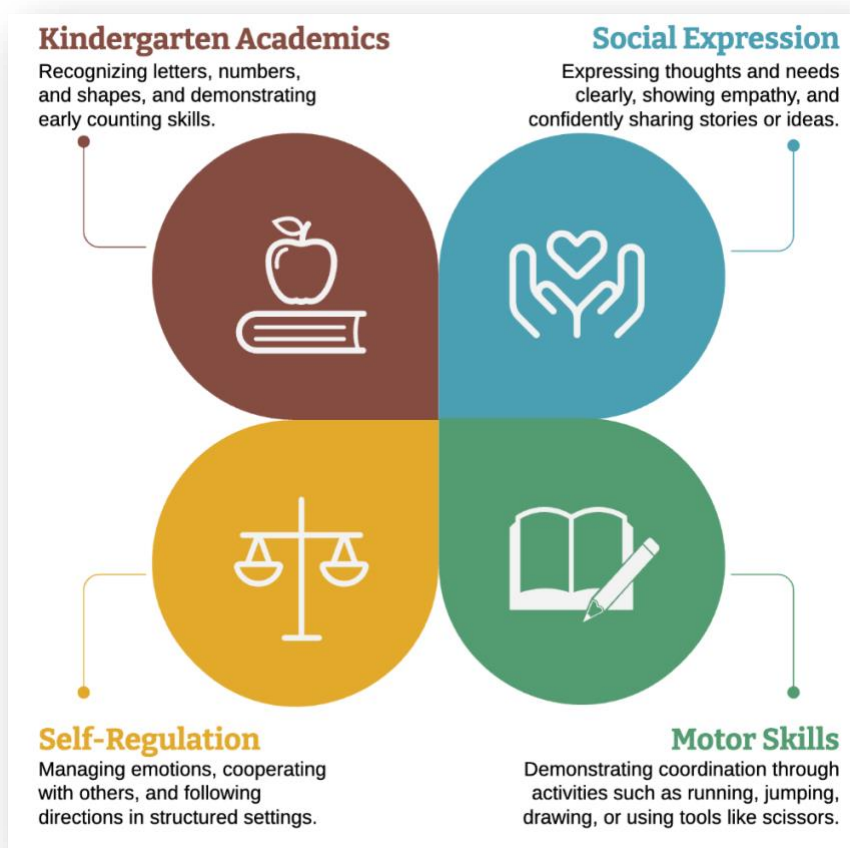
Source: Mendocino County Survey, Educators 2025. N = 35. Darker shading indicates higher response volume by city.

Developmental Strengths of Children

Children enter school with a rich blend of abilities that extend far beyond traditional academic markers such as recognizing letters or numbers. They bring curiosity, creativity, emotional awareness, social confidence, and growing physical coordination. These strengths are continuously nurtured through daily interactions at home, in early childhood programs, and across community environments.

At the beginning of the 2025–26 school year, both caregivers and educators were invited to assess children’s developmental strengths. Caregivers evaluated the development of their own child, while educators provided perceptions based on the general development of children in their classrooms.

The State of the Child was Evaluated Across the Following Four Key Domains:



Caregivers and Educators rated children’s skills on a four-point scale:

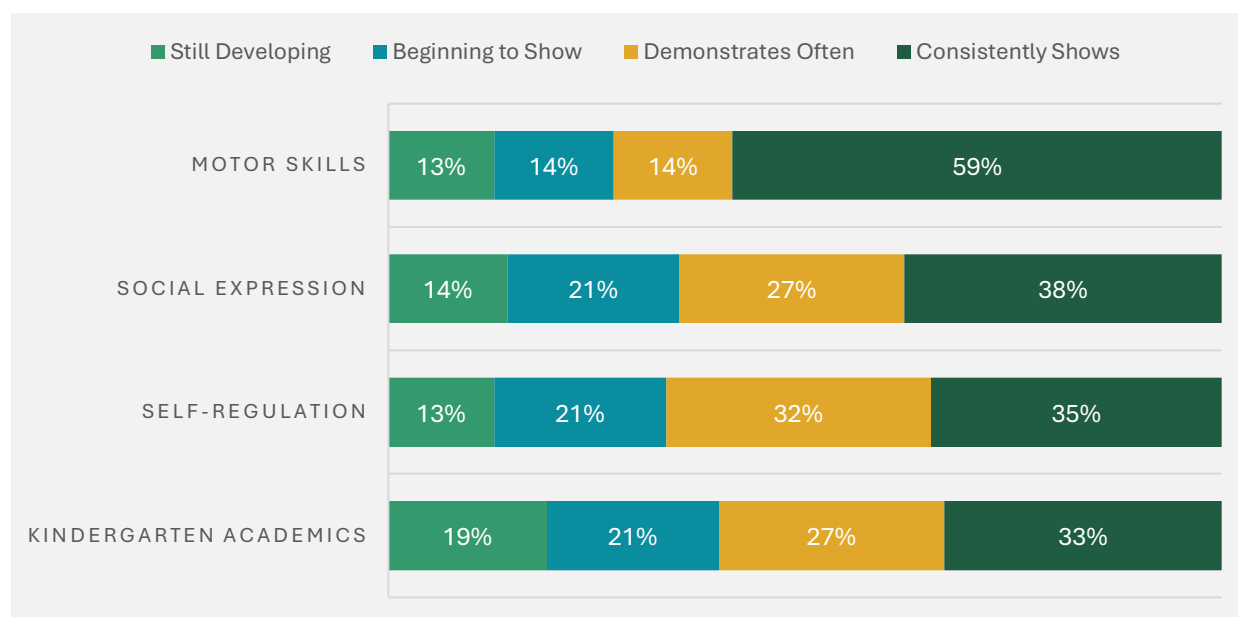
1. **Still developing** or just starting to explore this skill
2. **Beginning to show** skill with support
3. **Demonstrates skill often**
4. **Consistently shows skill** on their own

These perceptions offer valuable insight into the developmental strengths children bring with them as they enter school.

CAREGIVER PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

Caregivers in Mendocino County reported that children are entering school with a strong foundation of developmental skills across all key developmental domains. The most commonly reported area of strength was *Motor Skills*, with 59% of caregivers saying their child "consistently shows" these skills—suggesting a strong perception of physical skills. Additionally, over one-third of caregivers reported their children "consistently show" skills in *Social Expression*, *Self-Regulation*, and *Kindergarten Academics*, indicating many children are perceived as ready to engage socially, emotionally, and cognitively with early learning environments. Across all four areas, most caregivers reported their children were at least "demonstrating often," reflecting a broad base of perceived strengths as children enter school.

Exhibit 5. Developmental Strengths by Domain, Caregivers 2025



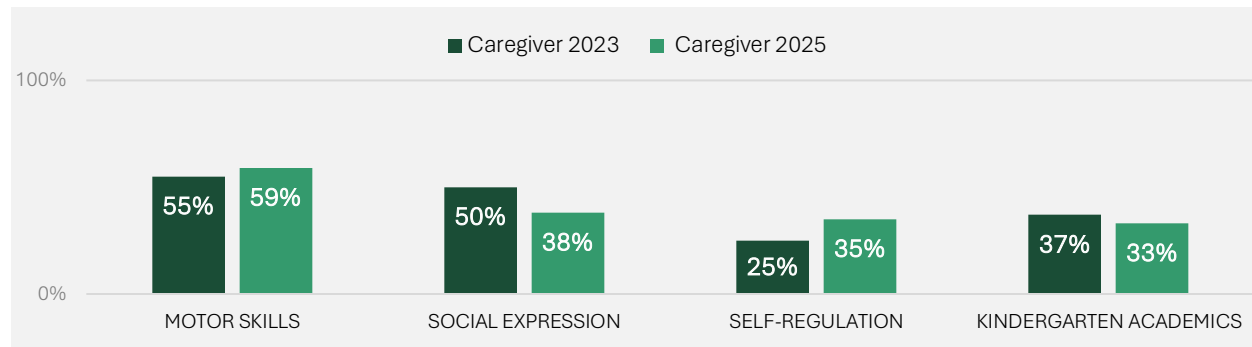
Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 130. Scores based on a scale where 1 = *Still Developing*, 2 = *Beginning to Show*, 3 = *Demonstrates Often*, 4 = *Consistently Shows*.

Comparison to 2023 Caregiver Perceptions

Across 2023 and 2025 samples, caregivers consistently recognized strengths in young children across all developmental domains. In both years, *Motor Skills* were the most consistently recognized area of strength, with over half of caregivers reporting strong physical abilities. In 2025, more caregivers observed their children showing strength in *Self-Regulation*, while in 2023, higher shares noted consistent strengths in *Social Expression* and *Kindergarten Academics*. Together, these responses reflect the diverse and evolving ways caregivers perceive children's developmental strengths at school entry.



Exhibit 6. Comparison of Developmental Strengths, by Domain for “Consistently Shows”, Caregivers 2023 and 2025

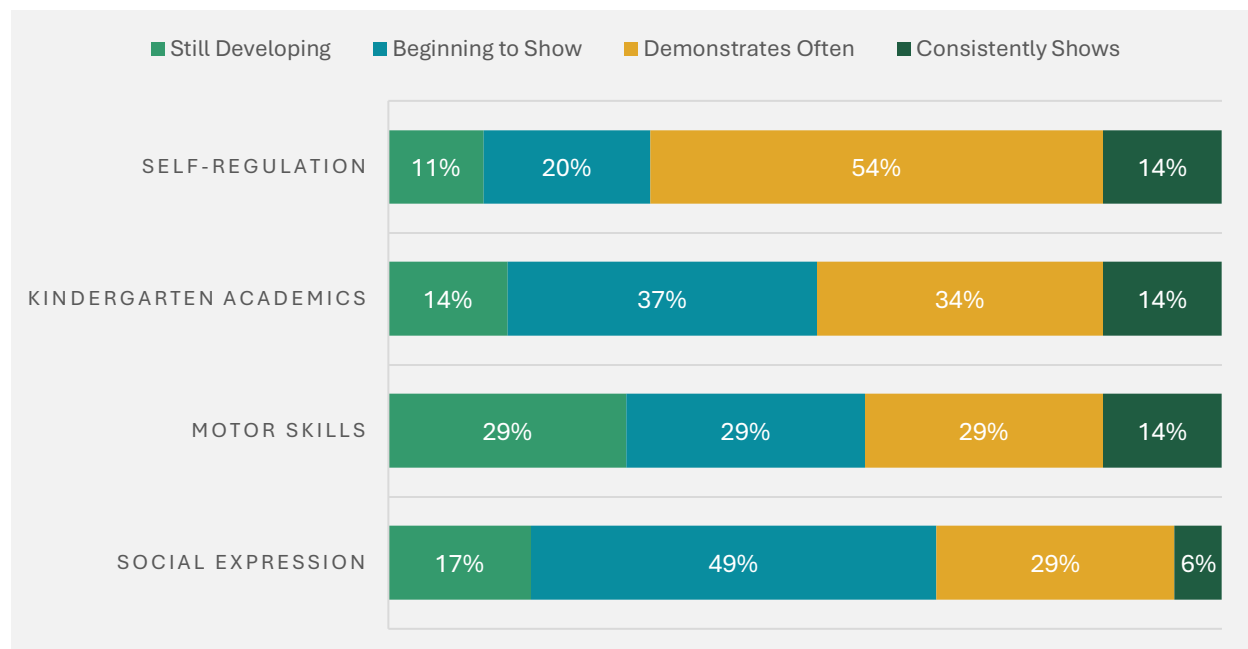


Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers. 2025 N = 130; 2023 N = 117-118.

EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

Educators in Mendocino County shared that children entered the 2025–26 school year with developing strengths across all areas of development. A smaller share of students were seen as consistently showing skills independently, with this most commonly observed in *Self-Regulation*, *Kindergarten Academic*, *Motor Skills*. In these areas, some children were already managing emotions, following directions, and demonstrating early learning concepts on their own. Fewer students were consistently demonstrating *Social Expression* at the start of the year, though many were seen as beginning to show or were often demonstrating these abilities. These observations reflect the early stages of growth that educators support as children adjust to classroom routines and expectations.

Exhibit 7. Developmental Strengths, by Domain, Educators 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Educators 2025. N = 35. Scores based on a scale where 1 = *Still Developing*, 2 = *Beginning to Show*, 3 = *Demonstrates Often*, 4 = *Consistently Shows*.

KEY FACTORS ON CAREGIVER PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENTAL STRENGTHS

This analysis highlights how multiple **family and community factors are linked to higher overall developmental ratings**. Rather than looking at development as a single trait, it reflects the combined influence of what happens in homes, schools, and communities.

- **Children from higher-income families** were more likely to be rated as developmentally ready to engage in learning.
- **Families who used more community resources** (e.g., parks, libraries, recreational activities, or sports programs) tended to have children rated as more developmentally ready.
- **Children without a diagnosed special need** had higher developmental scores—highlighting the importance of strong early intervention and inclusion supports.
- **Positive communication between families and schools** in their preferred language was highly beneficial for strong developmental scores.
- **Family contributions and support for learning at home** were also positively associated with developmental scores. Specifically, children whose families reported that they maintain consistent routines, bounce back from challenges, and share their culture or language with the school were more likely to be rated as ready.

These results show that development is influenced by what is happening at home, in the community, and in schools. Strong communication, access to resources, and family involvement all matter, especially for families facing greater challenges. These findings reinforce that early investments in supports and community connections make a clear difference in children’s preparation for school.

Exhibit 8. Family and Community Factors Predicting Caregivers Perceptions of Development (in Order of Strength)



Source: Mendocino County Parent Survey. N = 63. Scores based on the average developmental score across four domains: self-regulation, social expression, motor, and kindergarten academics.

96%

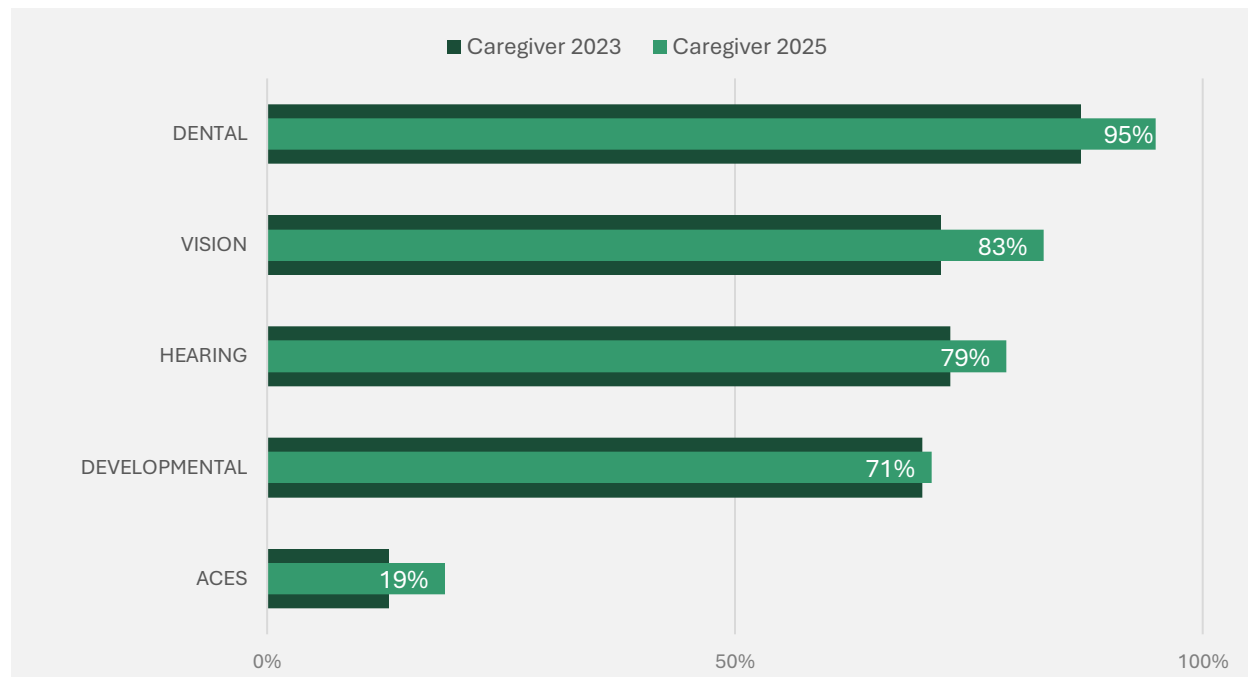
of children in this study received a well-child visit

Child Health and Supports

GROWTH IN ACCESS TO CHILD SCREENINGS

Families of young children reported high rates of participation in early screenings, helping to support children's healthy development and early identification of potential needs. Between 2023 and 2025, more caregivers reported that their children received important developmental and health screenings, reflecting continued efforts to support early identification and intervention.

Exhibit 9. Families Accessing Health Screenings, Caregivers 2023 and 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers. 2025. N = 115; 2023 N = 168.

SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

A total of 100% of children with a diagnosed special need were receiving the professional support needed.

Among families who reported having a child with a diagnosed physical, developmental, or social-emotional delay (18%), 100% shared that their child was able to receive the professional support they needed. This response rate underscores the importance of early identification and access to services—and reflects the combined efforts of families, health providers, and educators to ensure young children with special needs receive timely support.

Access to Early Care and Education

This section highlights families' experiences accessing early learning and care in Mendocino County. It explores the types of care families use, the conditions that support access, and the ways early care and education contribute to family well-being. Perspectives from both caregivers and educators offer insight into how early learning systems are supporting children's development while helping families manage work, parenting, and daily life.

ENROLLMENT IN PRESCHOOL AND EARLY CARE

In 2025, families continued to access a range of early care experiences that supported their children's development. Licensed preschool and child care centers remained the most widely used option, with more than six in 10 families reporting this experience. Compared to previous years, fewer families reported using informal care, licensed family child care homes, or other settings such as co-ops or recreation programs.

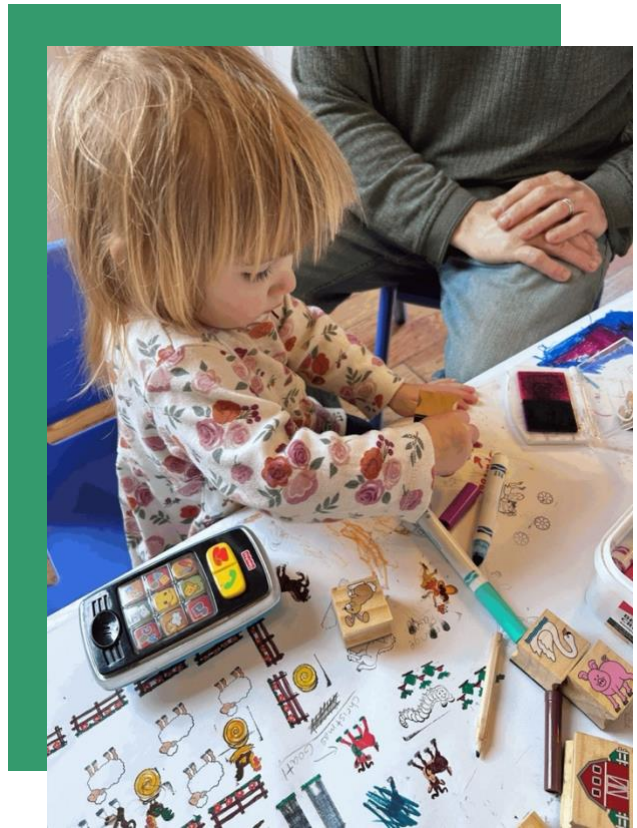
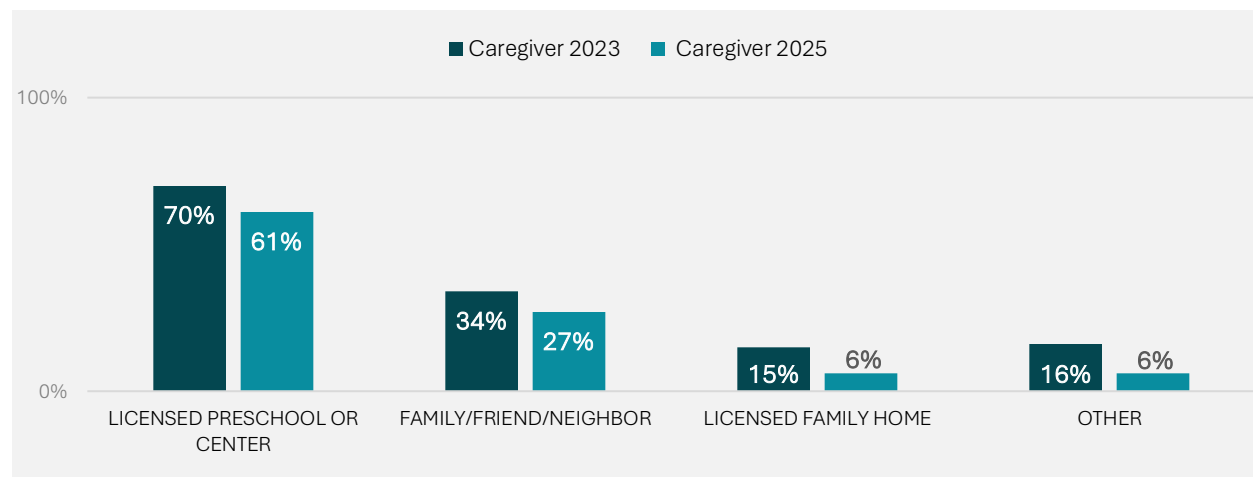


Exhibit 10. Enrollment in Early Care, Caregivers 2023 and 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers. 2025 N = 125; 2023 N = 168. Multiple-select item.

“ Our child has grown so much thanks to the support from his child care center. ”

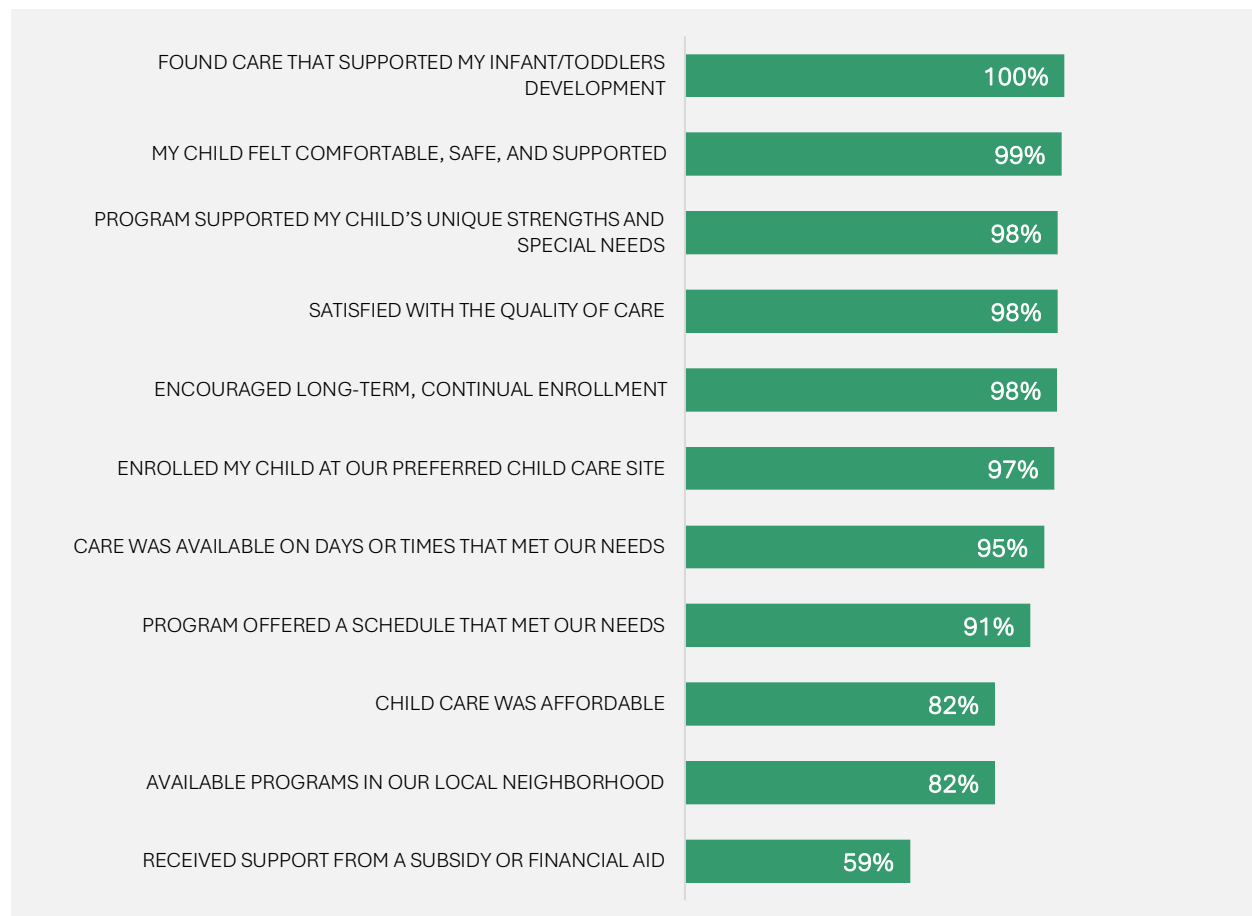
- Caregiver 2025

EXPERIENCES ACCESSING EARLY CARE

In 2025, families overwhelmingly reported positive experiences with early care and education. Nearly all caregivers said their children felt safe, supported, and well cared for, and they were able to find programs that aligned with their children's needs. Families shared that:

- 100% found care that supported their infant or toddler's development
- 99% said their child felt safe and comfortable
- 98% were satisfied with care quality and felt programs supported their child's individual strengths

Exhibit 11. Positive Conditions for Accessing Early Care and Education, Caregivers 2025

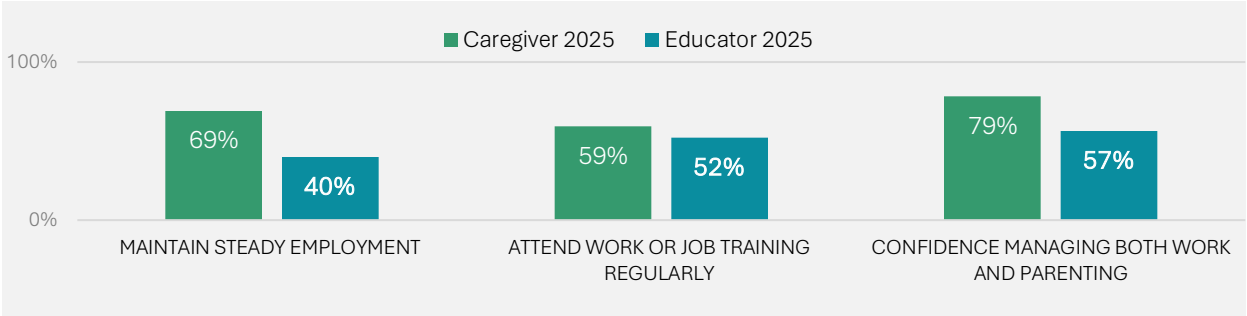


Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 87-119. Multiple-select item. Percentages shown reflect valid responses only.

BENEFITS OF ACCESS: FAMILY AND ECE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Families and ECE Professionals described meaningful ways ECE supports not only children’s development, but also the well-being of households. Caregivers shared that access to child care made it easier to stay employed, manage work and parenting responsibilities, and pursue new opportunities like school or job training. Educators echoed these observations, often seeing families grow in confidence and stability as a result of consistent care. Together, these perspectives highlight how ECE plays a vital role in helping families build balance, opportunity, and long-term security.

Exhibit 12. Impact of Ealy Care Access on Families, Caregivers and Educators 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, 2025. Caregiver N = 130. Educator N = 25.



Kindergarten Transition Supports

A smooth transition into kindergarten helps children feel secure, confident, and ready to learn. It also builds early trust between families and schools. This section highlights how families and educators in Mendocino County are working together to support successful kindergarten transitions through preparation activities, collaboration, and shared relationships.

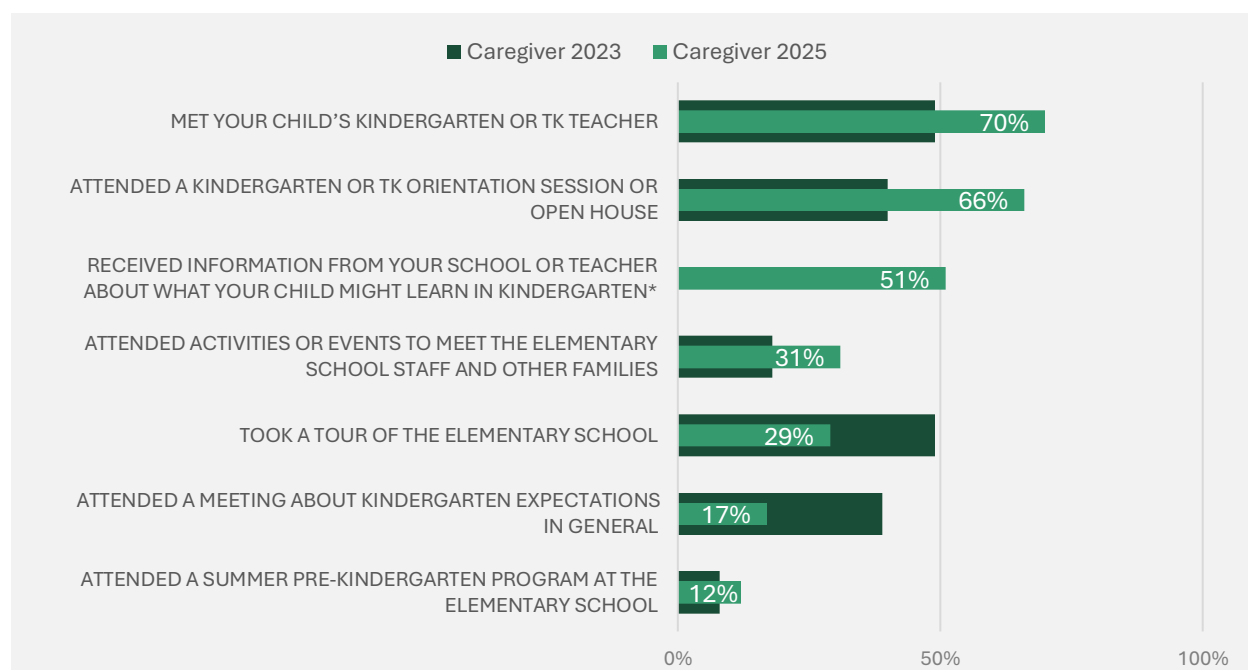
PREPARATION ACTIVITIES USED BY FAMILIES

Caregivers in 2025 reported greater involvement in kindergarten transition activities compared to 2023, suggesting growing opportunities for engagement and stronger connections between families and schools.

- More families reported meeting their child’s kindergarten or TK teacher (70% in 2025 vs. 49% in 2023) and attending an orientation or open house (66% vs. 40%), both of which foster early connections with educators.
- Participation in events to meet school staff and other families also increased from 18% to 31%, supporting stronger school-community ties.
- A new 2025 item showed that over half of caregivers (51%) received information from the school about what their child might learn in kindergarten, highlighting improved communication around expectations.

While fewer families reported touring the school or attending general kindergarten information sessions compared to 2023, overall trends point to more personalized, school-based engagement opportunities that support strong starts.

Exhibit 13. Family Participation in Preparation Activities, Caregivers 2023 and 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers. 2025 N = 63; 2023 N = 168. Multiple-select item. * indicates a new item in 2025.

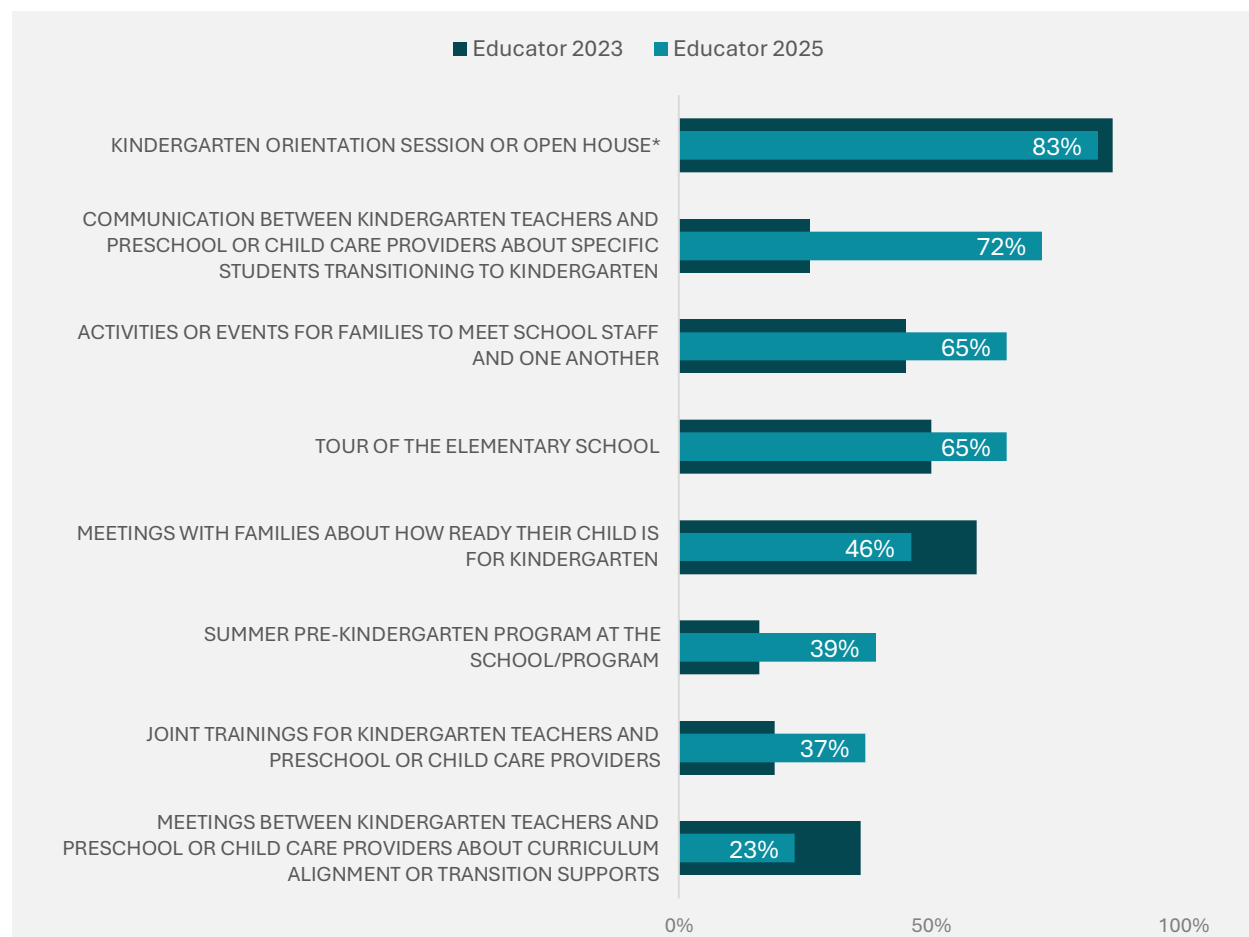
TRANSITION SUPPORTS, EDUCATORS 2023 AND 2025

Educators in 2025 described more frequent communication and collaboration with early learning providers to support children’s transition into kindergarten.

- Reports of communication about specific children rose from 26% in 2023 to 72% in 2025, suggesting stronger coordination between preschool and kindergarten teachers.
- Orientation sessions remained widely reported, with 83% of educators continuing to offer this opportunity for connection and information sharing.
- A greater share of educators said their programs offered tours of the elementary school and events for families to meet school staff and one another—both increasing to 65% in 2025.
- More educators in 2025 also reported offering summer pre-kindergarten programs (39% vs. 16%) and participating in joint training with early learning providers (37% vs. 19%), pointing to broader alignment in professional practices across settings.

At the same time, fewer educators reported holding general readiness meetings or curriculum alignment discussions, possibly reflecting a shift toward more individualized, relationship-based supports.

Exhibit 14. Transition Supports, Educators 2023 and 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Educators. 2025 N = 35; 2023 N = 22-53. Multiple-select item. * indicates TK/K teacher only item.

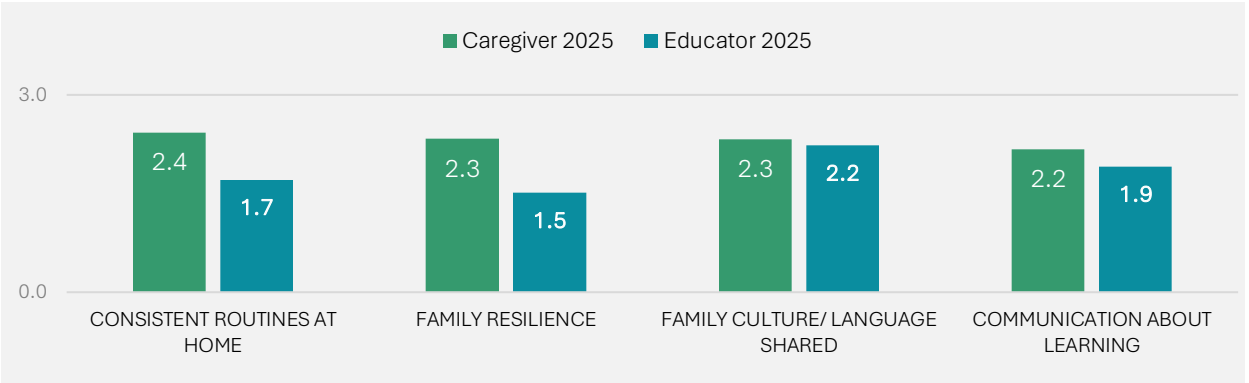
Family-School Connections

Family-school connections are foundational to child success. In 2025, both families and educators overwhelmingly reported strong partnerships marked by mutual respect, frequent communication, and cultural celebration. These connections are protective — fostering a sense of belonging that helps children thrive.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

In the area of family engagement and support, caregivers emphasized strengths such as maintaining routines, resilience, and sharing culture or language with schools. Educators also recognized these contributions, though with lower average ratings, suggesting some may not fully observe or engage with these efforts in daily practice.

Exhibit 15. Family Engagement and Support, Caregivers and Educators 2025

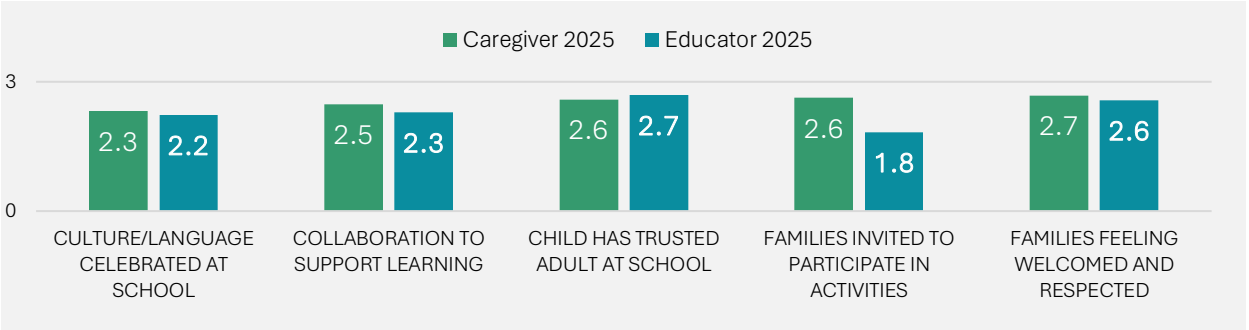


Source: Mendocino County Survey, 2025. Caregiver N = 63. Educator N = 35. Scores based on a scale where 0 = *Never*, 1 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Often*, 3 = *Always*.

FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

For family-school relationships, both groups reported stronger perceptions overall. Caregivers expressed especially high agreement around feeling welcomed, trusted relationships, and being invited to participate. Educators also recognized areas of strong connection, particularly around trust and respect for culture. As both groups continue to partner, there is an opportunity to build on areas of shared strength and ensure family contributions are seen, supported, and celebrated across settings.

Exhibit 16. Relationships Among Caregivers and Educators in Early Learning Settings, 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, 2025. Caregiver N = 63. Educator N = 35. Scores based on a scale where 0 = *Never*, 1 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Often*, 3 = *Always*.

2.7

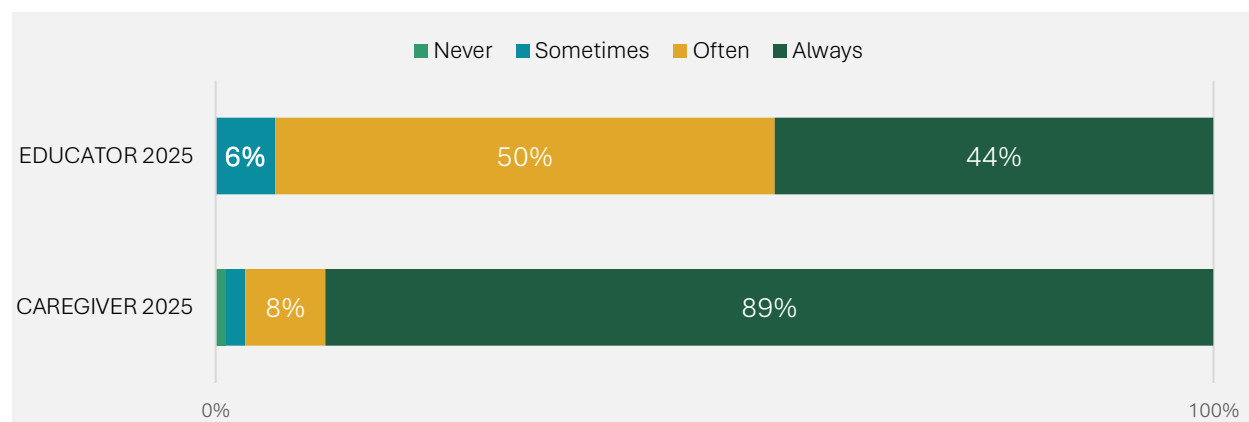
parent-teacher
conferences offered
annually

COMMUNICATION IN PREFERRED LANGUAGE

Caregivers overwhelmingly reported positive experiences communicating with program or school staff in their preferred language, with nearly nine in 10 saying this was “always” easy, and only a small percentage of caregivers reporting challenges. Educators similarly described strong language access, with most reporting that they are “often” or “always” able to communicate with families in the language families prefer.

While most families felt supported, a small number of caregivers who speak South Asian or East Asian languages—such as Hindi, Punjabi, Cantonese, or Mandarin—shared that communicating in their preferred language was only “sometimes” or “never” easy.

Exhibit 17. Ability to Communication in Families’ Preferred Language, Caregivers and Educators 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, 2025. Caregiver N = 63. Educator N = 34.



Community Resources and Supports

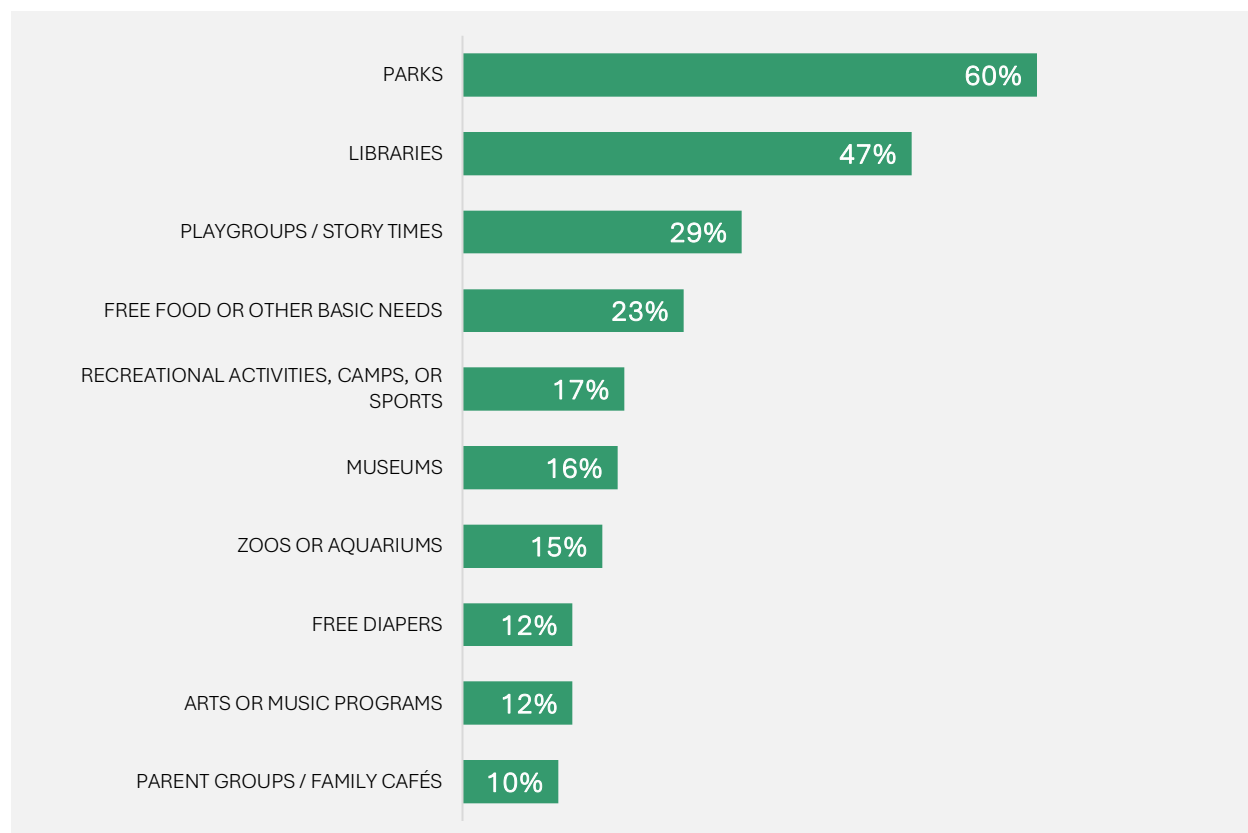
In Mendocino County, families of young children are engaging with a broad network of local resources that support learning, wellness, and connection.

USE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Families reported high use of accessible community spaces, with 60% visiting local parks and nearly half using libraries. Many also engaged in early learning supports like playgroups or story times (29%). Use of basic needs services (e.g., food, diapers) and enrichment opportunities (e.g., camps, museums, music programs) reflect how families are leveraging a mix of resources to support children's development, connection, and well-being.



Exhibit 18. Top Community-Based Resources Accessed by Families, Caregivers 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 130. Multiple-select item.

ACCESS TO NEIGHBORHOOD FACILITIES

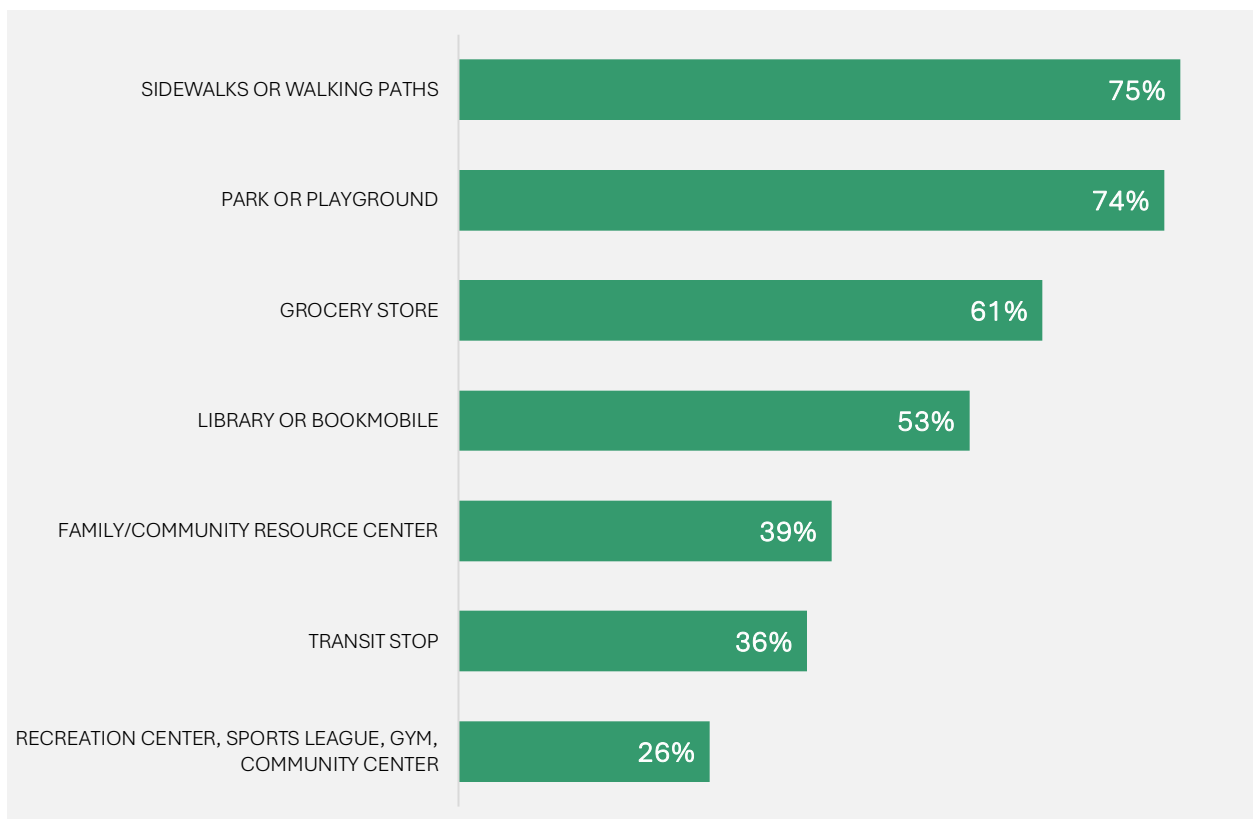
Most families reported access to core neighborhood features that support child development, physical activity, and daily life. Three-quarters of caregivers said they had sidewalks or walking paths and a park or playground nearby.

Other common assets included grocery stores, libraries or bookmobiles, and family or community resource centers, supporting learning and well-being.

Fewer families reported access to transit stops or recreation centers and youth programs pointing to opportunities to expand community infrastructure that promotes connection and active lifestyles.



Exhibit 19. Neighborhood Facilities Available to Families, Caregivers 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 118. Multiple-select item.

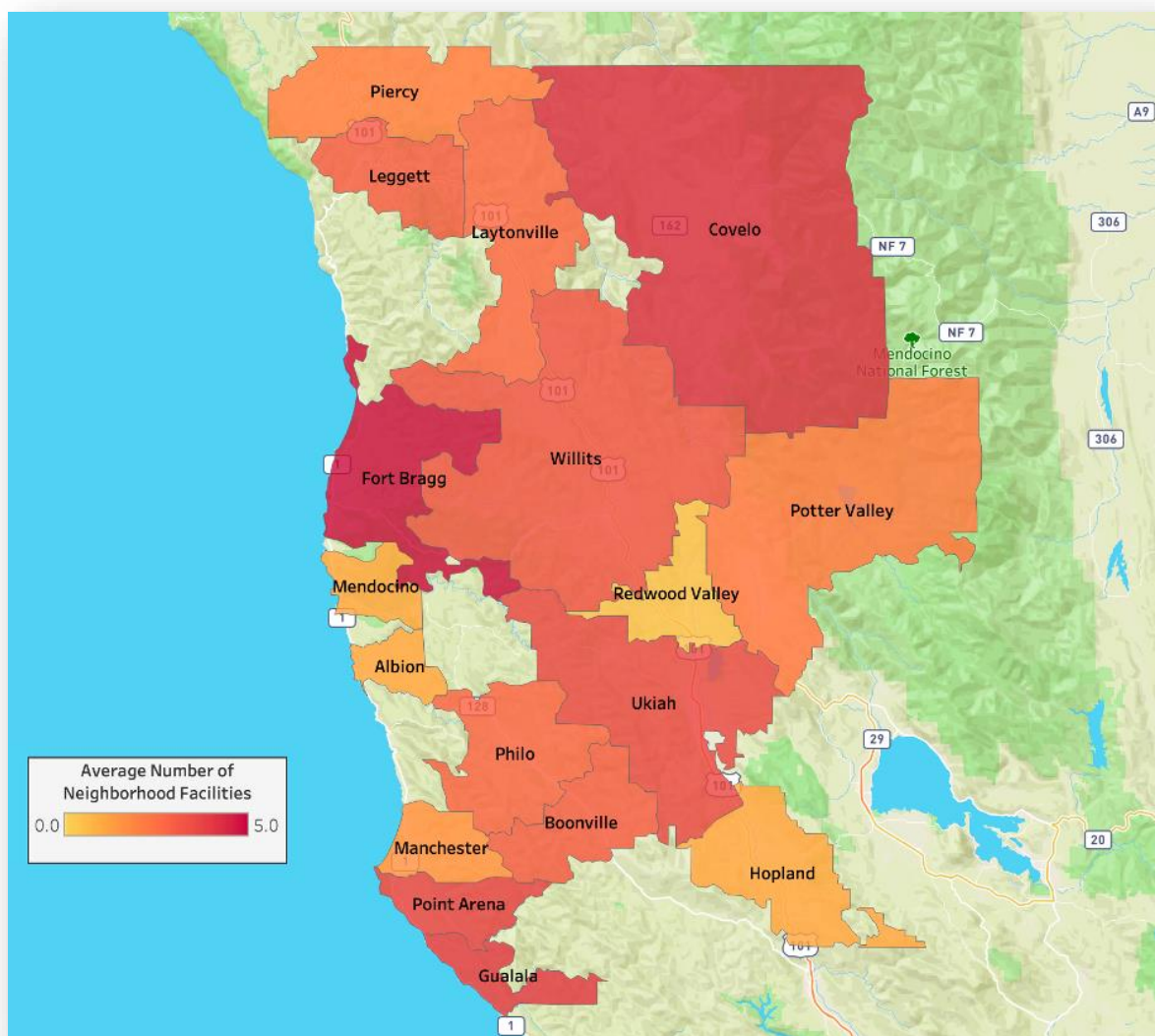
Caregivers reported an average of three to four neighborhood facilities.

These patterns varied by location, with some communities offering a rich mix of resources and others reporting more limited access. Fort Bragg families reported the widest range of local amenities, including parks, sidewalks, grocery stores, libraries, transit stops, and youth recreation centers. Other communities like Covelo, Gualala, and Point Arena also had a strong mix of family-friendly infrastructure.

Families in Ukiah and Willits described several key supports, such as parks, grocery stores, libraries, and family resource centers. Boonville and Philo were also noted for offering a variety of neighborhood features, including transit options and community programs. In contrast, caregivers in some areas reported limited access, such as only a library in Albion or a park and sidewalk in Hopland.

These patterns highlight strengths already present across the County and reveal opportunities to expand equitable access to enriching community environments for all families.

Exhibit 20. Geographic Distribution of Reported Neighborhood Facilities, Caregivers 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Caregivers 2025. N = 130. Darker shading indicates a higher average number of neighborhood facilities reported by city.



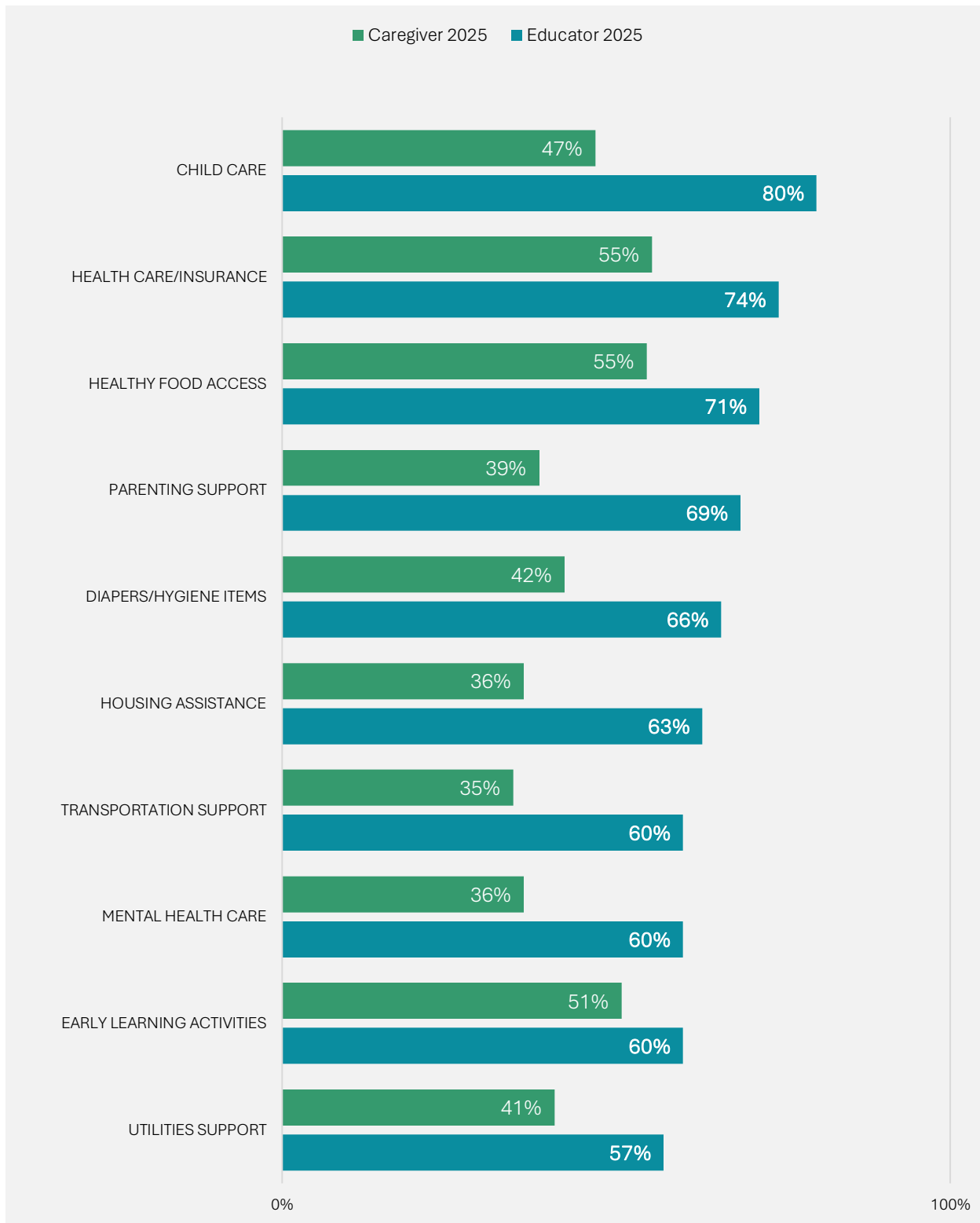
COMMUNITY SUPPORTS FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS SAY MATTER MOST

Families and educators also identified a broad range of community supports they see as “very helpful/important” for helping children and families thrive. While priorities varied somewhat by role, there was strong alignment around basic needs and opportunities that support children’s development and family well-being.

- Both groups prioritized healthcare, child care, and access to healthy food, with 70% or more educators and over half of caregivers rating these as very important.
- Affordable child care topped the list for educators (80%) and was also a key need for families (47%).
- Early learning activities, parenting support, and mental health care also ranked highly, highlighting the value of supports that promote both child development and family well-being.
- Caregivers placed added emphasis on housing, utilities, and transportation, pointing to ongoing pressures on family budgets.

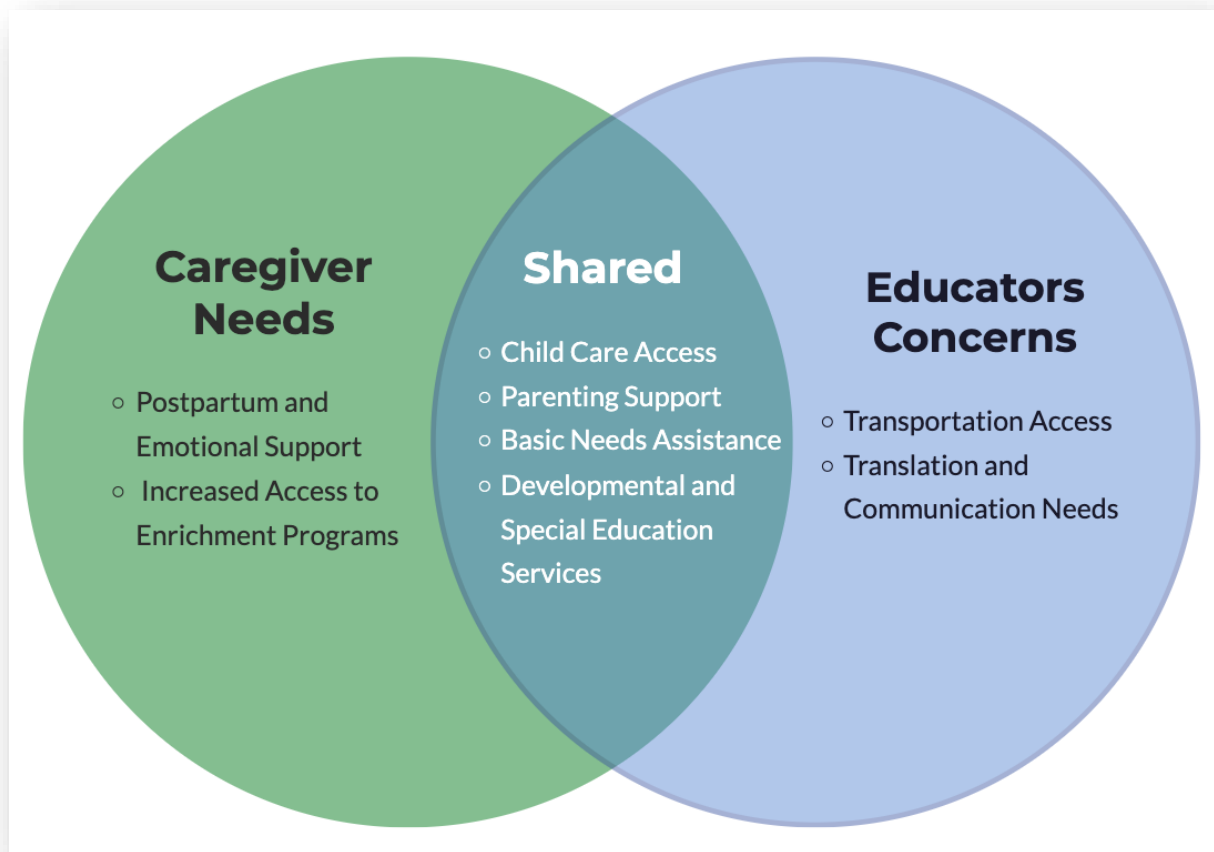
Together, these priorities paint a picture of what families and educators see as most helpful right now: supports that promote health, ease in caregiving responsibilities, enrichment of learning opportunities, and the fostering of family stability. This shared direction offers a roadmap for community partners and policymakers to focus efforts where they are most meaningful to families and schools.

Exhibit 21. Community Supports Helpful for Families, Caregivers and Educators 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, 2025. Caregiver N = 130. Educator N = 35. Scores based on the percentage of caregivers who selected *Very Helpful* and educators who selected *Very Important*.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT NEEDS: PERSPECTIVES FROM CAREGIVERS AND EDUCATORS



A thematic analysis of open-ended responses from 103 caregivers and 30 educators revealed both aligned and divergent perceptions of community support needs for families with young children.

Shared needs included:

- **Child care** that is affordable and accessible to families
- **Parenting support**, including classes and behavioral resources
- **Basic needs supports**, including food, housing, and utility assistance
- **Developmental and special education services**, such as speech therapy and IEP assistance

Caregiver-specific needs centered on:

- **Postpartum and emotional support** (e.g., counseling, mom groups)
- **Increased access to enrichment programs** and local arts

Educator-specific concerns included:

- **Transportation access** as a barrier to school and services
- **Translation and communication needs**, particularly for non-English-speaking families

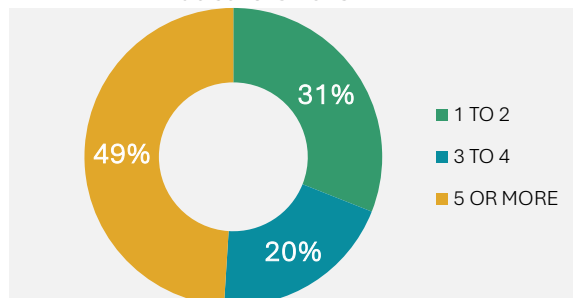
These distinctions underscore the need for community systems to integrate both logistical and relational supports, ensuring families not only *access* services but *feel supported* in doing so.

Professional Development of Educators

NUMBER OF TRAININGS AVAILABLE

Educators in 2025 reported broad access to professional learning opportunities, with nearly half participating in five or more professional development or training sessions per year. Another almost one-third of educators attended one to two sessions annually. These trainings help deepen educator knowledge, support responsive teaching, and build stronger classroom communities.

Exhibit 22. Available Trainings Annually, Educators 2025

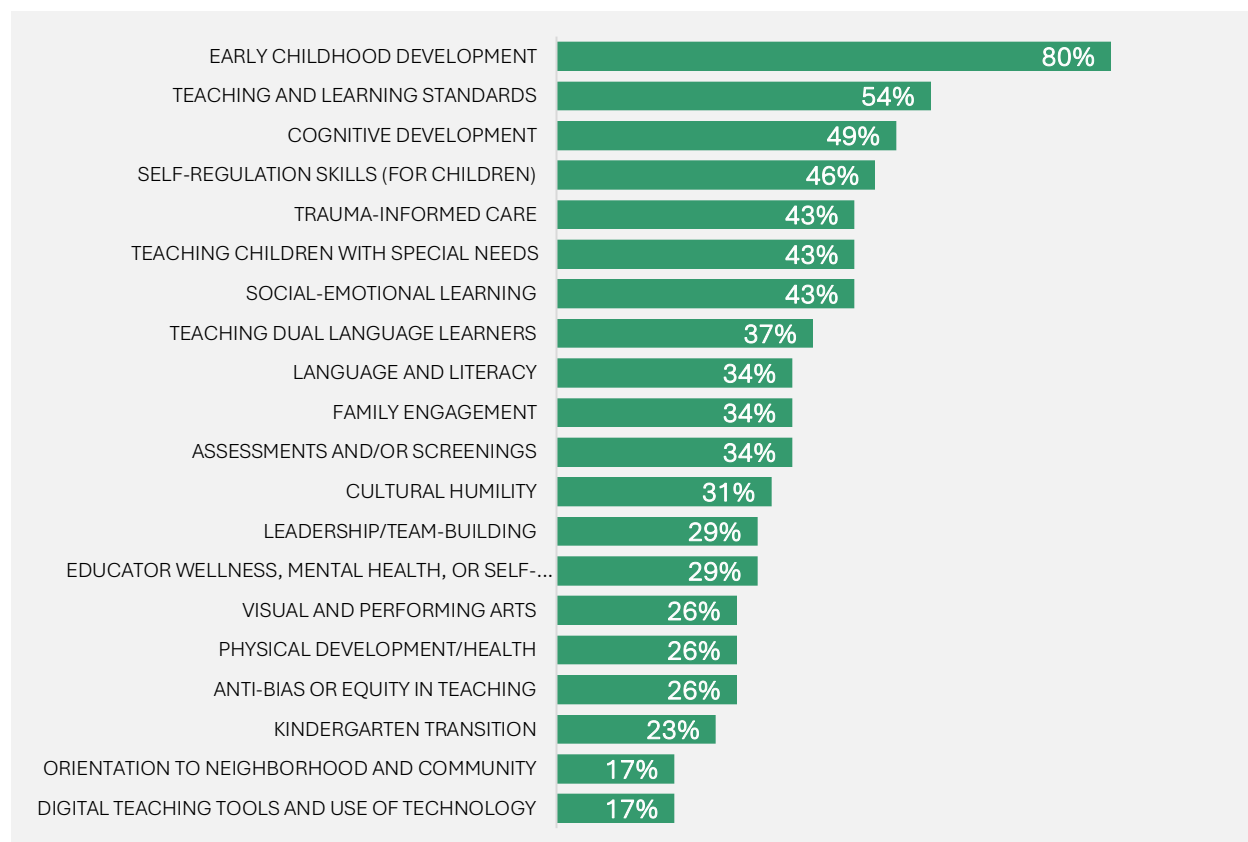


Source: Mendocino County Survey, Educators 2025. N = 35.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAININGS RECEIVED

Educators in Mendocino County reported participating in a wide variety of professional development over the past three years. **The most common professional development training received was focused on early childhood development**, with the majority of educators receiving training that deepened their understanding of developmental stages and needs. More than half had also engaged in sessions focused on teaching and learning standards.

Exhibit 23. Professional Development Trainings Received in Past Three Years, Educators 2025



Source: Mendocino County Survey, Educators 2025. N = 35. Multiple-select item.

WHAT EDUCATORS FOUND MOST VALUABLE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Educators shared rich reflections on which professional development experiences had the greatest impact on their teaching. Their insights reflect a deep commitment to understanding children's development, supporting emotional well-being, and creating inclusive classrooms where all children and families feel seen, safe, and supported.

Social-Emotional Learning & Trauma-Informed Practice

Educators overwhelmingly valued professional development focused on children's emotional well-being, self-regulation, and trauma-informed care. The Teaching Pyramid was repeatedly highlighted for its relevance and team-wide application. Educators expressed a growing need to support children experiencing behavioral challenges and early trauma with compassionate and practical strategies.

“ Teaching Pyramid made me understand a lot a child can go through that we don't even realize. It helped me be more understanding. ”

- Educator 2025

Early Childhood Development Foundations

Foundational training in child development, observation, and assessment was highly valued for providing context on children's behavior and developmental stages. Educators appreciated these trainings for helping them respond appropriately to diverse needs and for building a professional knowledge base grounded in developmental science.

“ Early childhood development has been important because I can understand children's behavior and how early experiences affect the rest of their lives. ”

- Educator 2025

Inclusive Teaching Practices and Professional Collaboration

Educators highlighted the growing need for inclusive teaching strategies—particularly for dual language learners—and valued training that supported cultural responsiveness, family engagement, and home language inclusion. Additionally, professional development that fostered collaboration, peer learning, and creative engagement was seen as energizing and professionally meaningful. These experiences not only equipped educators with tools for diverse classrooms but also helped sustain their connection to the work.

“ Teaching dual language learners, I have seen many more students that are dual language learners in my classroom. ”

- Educator 2025

Policy Vision

Families and educators across Mendocino County voiced clear, experience-driven priorities for improving early childhood systems. Their collective vision centers on affordable care, enriched learning environments, and equitable support for both children and the early childhood workforce.

CAREGIVER POLICY PRIORITIES

- **Affordable, Flexible Child Care:** Families need access to full-day, subsidized care, including for infants, toddlers, and those with non-traditional work hours.
"Affordable child care for those that work swing shifts, graveyard shifts, or weekends."
"Extended preschool hours. In our rural community... limited hours of child care drastically affect our work schedules and wallets."
- **Safe, Enriching Activities:** More accessible indoor and outdoor programs are needed to support children's social, emotional, and physical development.
"More activities and more places appropriate for children."
"More places to take kids that are free... splash pads, working parks with bathrooms, indoor play centers."
- **Cost-of-Living Relief:** Rising expenses for food, housing, and utilities are straining families, even among those working full-time.
"People are having difficulty feeding their families and paying bills."
"Make food and living costs affordable."
"More nutritious and fresh foods in schools."

EDUCATOR POLICY PRIORITIES

- **Improved Staffing & Lower Ratios:** Classrooms lack sufficient adult support, particularly for younger learners and those with special needs.
"We need more staff."
"The 4-year-olds need A LOT more support... having 20 kids and only two adults is a big challenge."
"More one-on-one support for IEPs."
- **Living Wages & Workforce Support:** Early educators need fair compensation, benefits, and recognition to ensure stability and quality.
"Preschool staff are not able to make a living wage."
"We need higher pay for teachers and site supervisors to keep quality care."
"Officials need to understand how much work we put into teaching 3–5-year-olds."
- **System Alignment & Access:** Stronger coordination between preschool, TK, and K–12 systems is essential, along with expanded services like speech therapy and safe learning spaces.
"We need more speech therapists... some children have to do Zoom speech which I don't find beneficial."
"We need support in providing more safe outdoor spaces for children."





Educator-Identified Impacts of Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK)

Beginning in 2025–26, all four-year-olds are eligible for TK in California.

As UTK expands, educators report significant shifts in preschool enrollment, classroom composition, and collaboration between early education systems. The table below outlines the most commonly mentioned benefits and challenges educators identified through open-ended responses, offering insight into the evolving early learning landscape.

Strength-Based Opportunity	Educator-Identified Benefits	Educator-Identified Challenges
Expanding Access to Early Learning	TK sometimes offers longer instructional hours, which better support working families' schedules.	Preschool programs are losing four – year olds, resulting in lower enrollment and impacting staffing.
Earlier Entry, Earlier Support	Educators are gaining experience supporting younger learners earlier in their development.	Classrooms now include more 2–3 – year olds, requiring additional toileting and emotional support.
Opportunities for Collaboration	Some educators report positive partnerships with TK, including shared spaces and planning.	Shared use of rooms and playgrounds has led to scheduling strain and space constraints.
Broadening Participation in Early Education	TK has made early learning more accessible to a wider range of families.	Some TK classrooms are not developmentally appropriate, raising concerns about safety and teacher readiness.

Conclusion

The 2025 Mendocino County State of the Child Survey offers a rich, community-driven picture of how children are growing and how families, educators, and systems are working together to support that growth. It reflects not just a single moment in time, but a shared commitment to continuous learning, equity, and collaboration.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



Children are bringing vibrant strengths to early learning settings.

Educators and caregivers observed developmental growth across all domains, especially in *Motor Skills*, *Kindergarten Academics*, and *Self-Regulation*. These strengths reflect what's possible when children are supported by safe environments, consistent routines, and trusted adults.

Family routines and relationships are powerful drivers of growth.

The findings revealed that children with strong home routines, emotionally resilient caregivers, and engaged school relationships were more likely to be seen as thriving. These everyday acts of care were foundational to early developmental ratings.

Communities play a key role in development.

Families with access to parks, libraries, playgroups, and nearby resources reported greater confidence in their children's development. These public spaces support learning while simultaneously fostering joy, connection, and belonging.

Educators are leading with care and commitment.

Educators reported high engagement in professional learning and a deep commitment to inclusion, trauma-informed care, and cultural responsiveness. They are creating environments where children feel safe, seen, and capable.

Stronger transitions reflect stronger relationships.

More families reported they are meeting teachers, attending orientation events, and connecting with schools in ways that reflect their language and culture. These early connections build trust and ease children's transitions into school.

Community resources play a critical role in child development.

Caregivers in communities with stronger local infrastructure, like parks, libraries, and enrichment programs, reported more developmental strengths in their children. Local investment in these resources made a measurable difference.

FINAL REFLECTION

The findings in this report tell a hopeful and grounded story. Since 2023, Mendocino County has taken meaningful steps to strengthen early childhood supports. Families are more connected to schools, more children are accessing developmental services, and communities are creating spaces where children and caregivers can learn, grow, and connect.

Children are growing up in homes, classrooms, and neighborhoods filled with care, creativity, and support. Their development is nurtured every day by caregivers building strong routines, educators creating inclusive environments, and communities providing resources like parks, libraries, and early learning programs.

To build on current momentum, five priorities emerged:

1. **Expand access to parks, libraries, and public spaces** that support families and child development.
2. **Sustain early screenings and inclusive services** to identify and respond to children's needs early.
3. **Strengthen family-school partnerships** by offering welcoming, language-accessible, and culturally inclusive transition activities.
4. **Support educator well-being and retention** through fair pay, planning time, and mental health resources.
5. **Address child care affordability and access**, especially for infants, toddlers, and families in rural areas.

Mendocino County has a strong foundation to build on, one rooted in relationships, local wisdom, and shared purpose. With continued collaboration and investment, the County can ensure every child begins their learning journey with confidence, connection, and the support they need to thrive.

