



# Navigating Child Care and Early Education Systems: Challenges and Supports for New Family Child Care Providers

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This report describes findings from a 2025 survey of family child care (FCC) providers across localities in the United States about their experiences participating in public child care and early education systems and programs. The report focuses on the experiences of new FCC providers.

## Key Findings

- **New FCC providers participate in a range of child care and early education systems or programs.** The majority of new family child care (FCC) providers (84%) participate in at least one child care and early education (CCEE) system, most often a child care subsidy program (51%), a state licensing, certification, or registration system (45%), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP; 44%), or a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS; 29%).
- **Challenges vary by system or program.** Providers most frequently reported overwhelming paperwork and financial challenges as part of getting started in licensing, certification, or registration systems. New providers cited the process taking too much time as the most common challenge in getting started in a subsidy program, and the most common challenges starting in QRIS centered on navigating the system—knowing where to find information and understanding what to do.



- **New FCC providers reported more challenges and helpful supports when getting started with licensing, certification, or registration systems than established providers.** Compared with established providers' reflections on their experiences getting started, more new providers reported experiencing challenges and specifically identified more challenges with enrollment. New providers also reported more frequently accessing and benefitting from support with the process (e.g., accessing online information and being able to contact someone for help if needed) compared to established providers. There were no differences in the experiences of new and established providers around other CCEE systems or programs.
- **Supports matter.** Providers reported clear, available, online information and opportunities to connect with knowledgeable staff as the most consistently valued supports across systems and programs, along with financial support and peer support. Providers in a QRIS particularly valued system specialists, while fewer providers participating in subsidy programs reported that any particular support was helpful.
- **CCEE systems and programs may consider tailoring supports for new FCC providers.** Tailoring support strategies to address specific CCEE system challenges that new providers face may include offering information through multiple venues, including online resources, and offering start-up support that reduces burden and cost for new FCC programs.





## Introduction/Background

This brief focuses on the experiences and characteristics of new family child care (FCC) providers, defined as those operating FCC programs for less than five years, as they engage with child care and early education (CCEE) systems and programs (see Box 1). We use survey data from providers across the United States to compare new and established FCC providers on the challenges they experienced and supports they found most helpful when getting started in three types of CCEE systems or programs: (a) state licensing, certification, or registration; (b) child care subsidy or voucher programs; and (c) quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS).

Home-based child care (HBCC) has long been a cornerstone of CCEE in the United States, providing flexible, responsive, and community-centered options for millions of families (Bromer et al., 2021b; Schochet et al., 2022). HBCC, including FCC,<sup>1</sup> makes up a substantial share of CCEE settings (Datta et al., 2021). However, despite being included in many state CCEE systems, such as QRIS, FCC is often overlooked in the design and implementation of those systems and related supports (Doran et al., 2022; Hallam et al., 2017; Melvin et al., 2022). Further, the number of FCC providers has declined consistently over the past 20 years, though with some indication of a recent increase in FCC supply (Child Care Aware of America, 2025). These trends underscore the need to better understand how to support and strengthen this critical sector (Bromer et al., 2021a; Datta et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2017).

### Box 1. CCEE Systems and Programs

**Child care licensing, certification, and registration systems** regulate the threshold for the number of children in care, adult-child ratios and other features of the family child care home environment, and provider characteristics (such as age and education level) (Bromer et al., 2025).

**State child care subsidy programs**, funded by the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), offer publicly-funded payments for child care in the form of reimbursements for child care providers serving eligible low-income families (Johnson & Maxwell, 2024).

**Quality (Rating) and Improvement Systems** are state or county systems that facilitate or promote quality improvement through financial incentives and professional development and may rate child care settings on a variety of professional standards and practices.

<sup>1</sup> “Family child care” is defined in this brief as child care and early education that is delivered in a provider’s home and that may or may not be regulated by state or local licensing, registration, or certification policies. Participants had to respond, “Yes, I currently own and operate a family child care program” to proceed with the survey.



Participation in state and federal CCEE systems and programs—such as child care licensing, certification, and registration systems, subsidy programs, and QRIS—may improve FCC providers' financial stability and increase families' access to high-quality care. These systems may be critical pathways for HBCC providers seeking to operate in a more formal way, and they may encourage participation in Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy programs, QRIS, and other funding opportunities (Bromer et al., 2021a).

Recent federal policy changes have the potential to address the needs of FCC providers. The 2024 CCDF Final Rule directs states to implement policies that may reduce some challenges for FCC providers, including setting subsidy payment rates that better reflect the actual cost of care and strengthening state efforts to increase access to care, including consideration for subsidized nontraditional-hour care (Improving Child Care Access, 2024). At the same time, many CCEE systems and programs may pose challenges for FCC providers, as they were not originally designed with FCC in mind (Bromer et al., 2021a; Hallam et al., 2017). Factors contributing to the decline in FCC include challenges navigating CCEE system requirements and lack of access to professional, personal, and peer support (Bromer et al., 2021a). Additionally, operating as a sole proprietor navigating a complex system such as QRIS has been identified as a challenge to systems engagement (Hallam et al., 2017). Key gaps remain in understanding how systems participation and policies hinder or support HBCC supply, particularly for new FCC providers.

Although research-informed awareness of the importance of supporting FCC providers has increased across policy and system contexts since the COVID-19 pandemic (Adams & Dwyer, 2021; Erikson Institute & Home Grown, 2022; Porter et al., 2024), far less research has examined the specific supports and challenges shaping the experiences of new or prospective FCC providers. Understanding how new providers engage with CCEE systems can inform efforts to strengthen and increase the supply and availability of high-quality FCC.

The current brief explores the following research questions:

1. Which types of CCEE systems or programs do newly established FCC providers engage with?
2. What are the characteristics of new FCC providers who engage in CCEE systems or programs?
3. What challenges do new FCC providers encounter during their initial engagement in CCEE systems or programs?
4. What supports facilitate new FCC providers getting started and staying in CCEE systems or programs?

By addressing these questions, we aim to provide actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and support organizations seeking to build capacity with new providers and strengthen the HBCC sector. Understanding system-level differences in engagement can help inform more responsive policies and tailored supports.



## Methods

Data were collected in July 2025 through a web-based survey. The survey included questions about personal characteristics, professional background and experience, intent to remain in the field, and engagement with state programs and systems. For each state program and system participants endorsed, respondents were asked to report on the supports and challenges they experienced getting started in that program or system. The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), a professional organization supporting high-quality child care and early education in home-based child care settings, assisted with participant recruitment. NAFCC distributed the survey invitation to approximately 34,360 individuals nationwide via its member email distribution list; members include FCC providers, stakeholders, and partners. Because approximately 25% of NAFCC members are Spanish speaking, the survey, the survey invitation, and the reminder emails were distributed in both English and Spanish.

To be eligible for this study, participants had to be currently operating an FCC program in the United States. From the 1,019 initial responses, the final study sample comprised 262 FCC providers. Within this sample, 55 respondents reported operating for less than five years and were classified as “new,” while the remaining 207 respondents operating more than five years were classified as “established.” (For additional methods detail, see Appendix).

### ANALYTIC APPROACH

We conducted descriptive analyses to examine the characteristics and experiences of new and established FCC providers. To assess differences between new and established providers in their experiences with state CCEE systems and programs, we conducted Fisher’s Exact Tests due to small cell sizes in some comparisons. Statistical significance was assessed at the  $p < .05$  level.

## Findings

### SAMPLE

Table 1 presents the personal and professional characteristics of survey respondents, for both new and established providers. Most providers identified as White/Caucasian (47% of new providers, 52% of established providers), most reported English as their preferred language (86% of new providers, 84% of established providers), most reported being partnered or married (69% of new providers, 68% of established providers), and most reported owning their own home and paying a mortgage (74% of both new and established providers). New FCC providers were somewhat younger than established providers (44.04 years vs. 55.73 years).

Over half of responding providers reported holding at least an associate degree (57% of new providers, 53% of established providers). A smaller percentage of new providers reported holding a Child Development Associate credential compared to established providers (24% vs. 46%), while a greater percentage of new providers reported holding a teaching certification for



early childhood compared to established providers (26% vs. 10%). A greater percentage of new providers were currently enrolled or working toward a degree (24% vs. 11%) or a credential or certification (33% vs. 20%) compared to established providers. Close to half of new providers (44%) and a third (33%) of established providers reported no intentions of leaving the FCC field.

**Table 1. Personal and Professional Characteristics of Survey Respondents**

	New FCC Providers (N=55)	Established FCC Providers (N=207)
Age (years) Mean (SD)	44.04 (10.67)	55.73 (9.13)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	20%	26%
White/Caucasian	47%	52%
Hispanic/Latino/a	18%	16%
American Indian/Alaska Native	6%	4%
Asian	6%	3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%	1%
Other	2%	2%
Prefer not to answer	10%	4%
<b>Preferred Language</b>		
English	86%	84%
Spanish	12%	15%
Other	2%	1%
<b>Relationship Status</b>		
Single, never married	16%	10%
Partnered or married	69%	68%
Divorced or separated	12%	15%
Widowed	0%	6%
Other	2%	3%



<b>Own or Rent Home</b>		
Own home, pay mortgage	74%	74%
Own home, home is paid off	8%	17%
Rent home	16%	10%
Other	2%	0%
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
8th grade or less	0%	1%
9th-12th grade, no diploma	0%	1%
High school diploma/GED	11%	14%
Technical or trade school	9%	7%
Some college, no degree	24%	25%
Associate degree	13%	21%
Bachelor's degree	31%	23%
Graduate or professional degree	13%	9%
Currently enrolled or working toward a credential or certification	24%	11%
<b>Credentials or Certifications</b>		
Child Development Associate (CDA) credential	24%	46%
Teaching certification for early childhood	26%	10%
Teaching certification for another age	15%	8%
Other early childhood or child care certification or credential	24%	42%
Currently enrolled or working toward a credential or certification	33%	20%
<b>Intent to Stay in FCC</b>		
Less than 1 year	4%	2%
1-2 years	2%	8%
3-5 years	26%	19%
6-10 years	13%	20%
No plans to leave	44%	33%
I don't know	13%	20%

Note. Values represent percentages of FCC providers by new or established status. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Of the 262 providers, 34 (6 new and 28 established) did not complete the full survey and therefore did not respond to all of the above questions. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

**PARTICIPATION OF NEW AND ESTABLISHED FCC PROVIDERS IN CCEE SYSTEMS OR PROGRAMS**

Table 2 presents providers' participation in CCEE systems. Overall, 84% of new providers reported participating in at least one CCEE system or program. The most common systems or programs for new FCC providers were child care subsidy or voucher programs (51%), state licensing, certification, and registration systems (L/C/R; 45%), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP; 44%), and a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS; 29%). New providers were significantly more likely than established providers to report no participation in any CCEE system (16% vs. 7%,  $p=.033$ ). New providers were significantly less likely than established providers to participate in CACFP (44% vs. 69%,  $p<.001$ ).

**Table 2. FCC Provider Participation in State CCEE Systems**

Participation in Child Care and Early Education (CCEE) Systems	New FCC Providers (N = 55)	Established FCC Providers (N = 207)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Licensing, Certification, or Registration (L/C/R)	45%	57%	.171
Child Care Subsidy or Voucher Program	51%	61%	.168
Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)	29%	43%	.064
Publicly Funded Pre-K	4%	3%	1.000
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	44%	69%	<b>&lt; .001</b>
Head Start or Early Head Start Child Care Partnership	11%	6%	.247
Early Intervention	5%	10%	.430
Infant or Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	7%	9%	.793
FCC Network	22%	33%	.139
None of the Above	16%	7%	<b>.033</b>



## NEW FCC PROVIDER EXPERIENCES IN STATE LICENSING, SUBSIDY, AND QRIS

For the following sections, we focus on the experiences of new FCC providers in three CCEE systems: (a) licensing, certification, or registration (L/C/R); (b) subsidy or voucher programs; and (c) quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). These CCEE systems often work together and often serve as gateways for providers to participate in other CCEE systems and programs. Overall, we find that among the new FCC providers in our sample, 25% indicated they do not participate in either L/C/R, subsidy, or QRIS; 35% of providers reported they do participate in one of these systems; 29% reported they participate in two systems; and 11% reported they participate in all three of these state systems or programs.

### CCEE licensing, certification, and registration systems

#### — What are the characteristics of new FCC providers engaging in state CCEE L/C/R systems?

Tables 3 and 4 present the personal and professional characteristics of new FCC providers, separated by their participation in L/C/R systems. As shown in Table 3, new FCC providers participating in L/C/R were somewhat younger (41.77 years vs. 46.13 years), and a larger share identified as White/Caucasian (52% vs. 42%), while rates of preferred language were similar (87% vs. 85% English) compared with nonparticipating providers. A greater share of participating providers were single, never married (22% vs. 12%), and a smaller share were renting a home (9% vs. 23%) compared to nonparticipating providers.

— **Table 3. Personal Characteristics of New FCC Providers by Participation in State CCEE L/C/R Systems**

	Participating (N=23)	Not Participating (N=26)
Age (years) Mean (SD)	41.77 (8.43)	46.13 (12.17)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	22%	19%
White/Caucasian	52%	42%
Hispanic/Latino/a	9%	27%
American Indian/Alaska Native	4%	8%
Asian	4%	8%
Other	4%	0%
Prefer not to answer	13%	8%



Preferred Language		
English	87%	85%
Spanish	13%	12%
Other	0%	4%
Relationship Status		
Single, never married	22%	12%
Partnered or married	65%	73%
Divorced or separated	13%	12%
Other	0%	4%
Own or Rent Home		
Own home, pay mortgage	78%	69%
Own home, home is paid off	9%	8%
Rent home	9%	23%
Other	4%	0%

Note. Values represent percentages of new FCC providers by demographic characteristics. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Of the 55 new providers, six (two participating providers, four nonparticipating providers) did not complete the full survey and therefore did not respond to the above questions. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 4 shows that among new FCC providers, those participating in L/C/R had higher percentages of holding at least an associate degree (60% vs. 53%), were currently enrolled or working toward a degree (28% vs. 20%), held a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (42% vs. 26%), or were currently enrolled or working toward a credential or certification (36% vs. 30%) compared with their nonparticipating peers (see Table 4). A greater percentage of participating providers also reported an intention to leave the occupation within five years (48% vs. 17%).

**Table 4. Professional Characteristics of New FCC Providers by Participation in State CCEE L/C/R Systems**

	Participating (N=25)	Not Participating (N=30)
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
High school diploma/GED	4%	17%
Technical or trade school	12%	7%
Some college, no degree	24%	23%
Associate degree	12%	13%
Bachelor's degree	32%	30%
Graduate or professional degree	16%	10%
Currently enrolled or working towards a degree	28%	20%
<b>Credentials or Certifications</b>		
Child Development Associate (CDA) credential	42%	26%
Teaching certification for early childhood	37%	37%
Teaching certification for another age	26%	16%
Other early childhood or child care certification or credential	26%	42%
Currently enrolled or working towards a credential or certification	36%	30%
<b>Intent to Stay in FCC</b>		
Less than 1 year	8%	0%
1-2 years	4%	0%
3-5 years	36%	17%
6-10 years	20%	7%
No plans to stop	28%	57%
I don't know	4%	20%

Note. Values represent percentages of new FCC providers by professional characteristics. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.



### — What challenges do new FCC providers encounter during their initial engagement in state CCEE L/C/R systems?

Table 5 presents the percentages of new and established FCC providers endorsing the challenges they experienced when getting started in L/C/R, along with significance tests comparing the endorsement rates. The items listed are not mutually exclusive; providers could report experiencing multiple challenges.

The most common challenges reported by new providers getting started with L/C/R were overwhelming paperwork (44%), having to purchase expensive equipment or home repairs (40%), not having enough children enrolled (36%), not understanding what they needed to do (32%), not knowing where to find information (32%), and the process taking too much time (28%). Only 4% of the new providers reported experiencing none of the listed challenges getting started with L/C/R.

Comparisons between new and established providers indicate that new FCC providers were more likely to report not having enough children enrolled as a challenge to getting started with L/C/R compared to established providers (36% vs. 14%;  $p = .017$ ) and less likely to not have experienced any of the listed challenges compared to established providers (4% vs. 25%,  $p = .028$ ).

### — Table 5. Challenges Experienced by New and Established FCC Providers Getting Started in State CCEE L/C/R Systems

Challenge	New FCC Providers (N = 25)	Established FCC Providers (N = 117)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Paperwork was overwhelming	44%	52%	.513
Difficult to access and use technology	8%	20%	.248
Process took too much time	28%	32%	.815
Information wasn't in preferred language	8%	8%	1.000
No one to help me	24%	19%	.583
Didn't know where to find information	32%	24%	.449
Didn't understand what I needed to do	32%	20%	.188
Didn't have enough children enrolled	36%	14%	<b>.017</b>
Too expensive to meet the requirements	24%	13%	.210
Requirements didn't fit my program	8%	6%	.659
Requirements conflict with other programs I participate in	0%	1%	1.000
Required trainings	16%	18%	1.000
Requirements related to housing and insurance	16%	15%	1.000
Having to purchase expensive equipment or home repairs	40%	33%	.644
None of the above	4%	25%	<b>.028</b>

Note. Survey responses do not necessarily indicate what was specifically challenging about each item. For instance, challenges with "required trainings" could refer to content, frequency, and/or the number of requirements.



### — What supports facilitate new FCC providers getting started and staying in state CCEE L/C/R systems?

Table 6 presents the percentages of new and established FCC providers endorsing the supports they found helpful when getting started in L/C/R, along with significance tests comparing the endorsement rates. The listed supports are not mutually exclusive; providers could report experiencing multiple supports.

In L/C/R systems, new providers most frequently reported being able to contact someone with questions (64%), having information accessible on a website (56%), receiving informal help from other FCC providers in the system (44%), receiving grants or funding to get started (40%), being part of a FCC network or association (36%), and getting support from an L/C/R specialist (28%) as supports they found helpful when getting started in the system.

When comparing new and established providers on supports that helped them with L/C/R, significantly more new providers reported being able to access information on a website (56% vs. 27%;  $p = .009$ ) and being able to contact someone with questions (64% vs. 42%;  $p = .050$ ) as supports they experienced as helpful.

— **Table 6. Supports Experienced as Helpful by New and Established FCC Providers Getting Started in State CCEE L/C/R Systems**

Supports	New FCC Providers (N = 25)	Established FCC Providers (N= 117)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Specialist from this system	28%	25%	.801
Specialist from a different system	16%	12%	.524
Being able to access information on a website	56%	27%	<b>.009</b>
Easy-to-navigate website	12%	14%	1.000
Being able to contact someone with questions	64%	42%	<b>.050</b>
Grants or financial support to get started	40%	28%	.337
FCC network or association	36%	42%	.658
Informal help from other providers in the system	44%	42%	1.000
Short and easy-to-navigate application	4%	8%	1.000
Streamlined paperwork	8%	5%	.630
System is coordinated with other systems I participate in	12%	8%	.443
Standards make sense for my FCC program	12%	15%	1.000
Materials are available in my preferred language	20%	16%	.769
Materials are easy to understand	16%	13%	.746



## CCEE subsidy or voucher programs

### — What are the characteristics of new FCC providers engaging in state CCEE subsidy or voucher programs?

Tables 7 and 8 present the personal and professional characteristics of new FCC providers, separated by their participation in child care subsidy or voucher programs. Note that the group sizes become increasingly small for these sets of comparisons, relative to most other comparisons in this study.

New FCC providers participating in a child care subsidy or voucher program were similar in age to nonparticipating providers (44.25 years vs. 43.82 years) and in rates of preferred language (84% vs. 88% English). A larger share of participating providers identified as Black/African American (40% vs. 0%) compared to nonparticipating providers. Fewer participating providers reported being partnered or married (48% vs. 92%) and fewer reported owning a home that is fully paid off (0% vs. 17%) compared to nonparticipating providers.

### — Table 7. Personal Characteristics of New FCC Providers by Participation in State CCEE Subsidy or Voucher Programs

	Participating (N = 25)	Not Participating (N = 24)
Age (years) Mean (SD)	44.25 (8.82)	43.82 (12.59)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	40%	0%
White/Caucasian	24%	71%
Hispanic/Latino/a	16%	21%
American Indian/Alaska Native	4%	8%
Asian	8%	4%
Other	0%	4%
Prefer not to answer	8%	13%
<b>Preferred Language</b>		
English	84%	88%
Spanish	12%	13%
Other	4%	0%



Relationship Status		
Single, never married	32%	0%
Partnered or married	48%	92%
Divorced or separated	16%	8%
Other	4%	0%
Own or Rent Home		
Own home, pay mortgage	80%	67%
Own home, home is paid off	0%	17%
Rent home	20%	13%
Other	0%	4%

Note. Values represent percentages of new FCC providers by demographic characteristics. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Of the 55 new providers, six (three participating providers, three not participating providers) did not complete the full survey and therefore did not respond to the above questions. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 8 shows that among new FCC providers, those participating in a child care subsidy or voucher program had similar percentages of holding at least an associate degree (57% vs. 55%), being currently enrolled or working toward a degree (25% vs. 22%), and holding a CDA (35% vs. 33%) compared with their nonparticipating peers. Participating providers had higher percentages of being currently enrolled or working toward a credential or certification (39% vs. 26%) and a slightly lower percentage of intending to leave the occupation within five years (29% vs. 34%) compared to nonparticipating providers.





**Table 8. Professional Characteristics of New FCC Providers by Participation in State CCEE Subsidy or Voucher Programs**

	Participating (N=28)	Not Participating (N=27)
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
High school diploma/GED	4%	19%
Technical or trade school	7%	11%
Some college, no degree	32%	15%
Associate degree	18%	7%
Bachelor's degree	25%	37%
Graduate or professional degree	14%	11%
Currently enrolled or working toward a degree	25%	22%
<b>Credentials or Certifications</b>		
Child Development Associate (CDA) credential	35%	33%
Teaching certification for early childhood	35%	38%
Teaching certification for another age	29%	14%
Other early childhood or child care certification or credential	29%	38%
Currently enrolled or working toward a credential or certification	39%	26%
<b>Intent to Stay in FCC</b>		
Less than 1 year	4%	4%
1–2 years	4%	0%
3–5 years	21%	30%
6–10 years	21%	4%
No plans to stop	39%	48%
I don't know	11%	15%

Note. Values represent percentages of new FCC providers by professional characteristics. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.



### — What challenges do new FCC providers encounter during their initial engagement in state CCEE subsidy or voucher programs?

Table 9 presents the percentages of new and established FCC providers endorsing the challenges they experienced when initially engaging in child care subsidy or voucher programs, along with significance tests comparing the endorsement rates. The items listed are not mutually exclusive; providers could report experiencing multiple challenges.

The most common challenge new providers experienced when getting started in a child care subsidy or voucher program was that the process took too much time (36%). Just over a fifth (21%) reported not knowing where to find information as a challenge. Thirty-six percent of new providers reported not experiencing any of the listed challenges when getting started in a child care subsidy or voucher program. There were no significant differences between new and established providers.

— **Table 9. Challenges Experienced by New and Established FCC Providers Getting Started in State CCEE Subsidy or Voucher Programs**

Challenge	New FCC Providers (N = 28)	Established FCC Providers (N= 127)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Paperwork was overwhelming	14%	31%	.103
Difficult to access and use technology	18%	17%	1.000
Process took too much time	36%	23%	.158
Information wasn't in preferred language	0%	5%	.592
No one to help me	11%	18%	.416
Didn't know where to find information	21%	17%	.594
Didn't understand what I needed to do	18%	16%	.779
Didn't have enough children enrolled	11%	9%	.719
Too expensive to meet the requirements	0%	3%	1.000
Requirements didn't fit my program	4%	2%	.553
Requirements conflict with other programs I participate in	0%	2%	1.000
Required trainings	7%	6%	1.000
Requirements related to housing and insurance	0%	8%	.210
Having to purchase expensive equipment or home repairs	7%	9%	1.000
None of the above	36%	39%	.833

Note. Survey responses do not necessarily indicate what was specifically challenging about each item. For instance, challenges with "required trainings" could refer to content, frequency, and/or the number of requirements.



### — What supports facilitate new FCC providers getting started and staying in state CCEE subsidy or voucher programs?

Table 10 presents percentages of new and established FCC providers endorsing the supports they found helpful when getting started in child care subsidy or voucher programs, along with significance tests comparing the endorsement rates. The listed supports are not mutually exclusive; providers could report experiencing multiple supports.

In subsidy programs, new providers most frequently reported being able to access information on a website (29%) and being able to contact someone with questions (25%) as supports they experienced as helpful when getting started in the system. There were no significant differences between new and established providers.

— **Table 10. Supports Experienced as Helpful by New and Established FCC Providers Getting Started in State CCEE Subsidy or Voucher Programs**

Supports	New FCC Providers (N = 28)	Established FCC Providers (N= 127)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Specialist from this system	14%	24%	.326
Specialist from a different system	7%	9%	1.000
Being able to access information on a website	29%	19%	.302
Easy-to-navigate website	7%	9%	1.000
Being able to contact someone with questions	25%	32%	.506
Grants or financial support to get started	11%	14%	.768
FCC network or association	18%	30%	.248
Informal help from other providers in the system	18%	24%	.623
Short and easy-to-navigate application	4%	7%	.691
Streamlined paperwork	7%	6%	.666
System is coordinated with other systems I participate in	4%	6%	1.000
Standards make sense for my FCC program	11%	13%	1.000
Materials are available in my preferred language	4%	6%	1.000
Materials are easy to understand	18%	9%	.170



## Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

### — What are the characteristics of new FCC providers engaging in a state CCEE QRIS?

Tables 11 and 12 present the personal and professional characteristics of new FCC providers, separated by their participation in a QRIS. Again, it is worth noting that these comparisons involve relatively small group sizes.

New FCC providers participating in a QRIS were similar in age to nonparticipating providers (43.93 years vs. 44.09 years). A larger share of participating providers identified as White/Caucasian, and a smaller share identified as Hispanic/Latino/a (60% vs. 41% and 7% vs. 24%, respectively) compared to nonparticipating providers. Fewer participating providers reported Spanish as their preferred language (0% vs. 18%) compared to nonparticipating providers. A smaller share of participating providers were partnered or married (53% vs. 77%), and a similar percentage owned a home (80% vs. 83%) compared to nonparticipating providers.

### — Table 11. Personal Characteristics of New FCC Providers by Participation in a State CCEE QRIS

	Participating (N=15)	Not Participating (N=34)
Age (years) Mean (SD)	43.93 (12.54)	44.09 (9.96)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	27%	18%
White/Caucasian	60%	41%
Hispanic/Latino/a	7%	24%
American Indian/Alaska Native	13%	3%
Asian	0%	9%
Other	0%	3%
Prefer not to answer	7%	12%
<b>Preferred Language</b>		
English	100%	79%
Spanish	0%	18%
Other	0%	3%



Relationship Status		
Single, never married	33%	9%
Partnered or married	53%	77%
Divorced or separated	13%	12%
Other	0%	3%
Own or Rent Home		
Own home, pay mortgage	73%	74%
Own home, home is paid off	7%	9%
Rent home	13%	18%
Other	7%	0%

Note. Values represent percentages of new FCC providers by demographic characteristics. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Of the 55 new providers, six (one participating provider, five nonparticipating providers) did not complete the full survey and therefore did not respond to the above questions. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 12 shows that among new FCC providers, those participating in a QRIS had higher percentages of holding at least an associate degree (69% vs. 51%) and similar percentages of being currently enrolled or working toward a degree (25% vs. 23%) compared with nonparticipating providers. Fewer participating providers reported holding a CDA (22% vs. 38%), and more reported currently being enrolled or working toward a credential or certification (44% vs. 28%) compared to nonparticipating providers. A smaller percentage of participating providers reported intending to leave the occupation within five years (38% vs. 29%) compared to nonparticipating providers.





**Table 12. Professional Characteristics of New FCC Providers by Participation in a State CCEE QRIS**

	Participating (N=16)	Not Participating (N=39)
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
High school diploma/GED	0%	15%
Technical or trade school	6%	10%
Some college, no degree	25%	23%
Associate degree	6%	15%
Bachelor's degree	38%	28%
Graduate or professional degree	25%	8%
Currently enrolled or working toward a degree	25%	23%
<b>Credentials or Certifications</b>		
Child Development Associate (CDA) credential	22%	38%
Teaching certification for early childhood	44%	35%
Teaching certification for another age	33%	17%
Other early childhood or child care certification or credential	33%	35%
Currently enrolled or working toward a credential or certification	44%	28%
<b>Intent to Stay in FCC</b>		
Less than 1 year	13%	0%
1-2 years	0%	3%
3-5 years	25%	26%
6-10 years	19%	10%
No plans to stop	19%	54%
I don't know	25%	8%

Note. Values represent percentages of new FCC providers by professional characteristics. No inferential statistical tests were conducted to assess differences between groups. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.



### — What challenges do new FCC providers encounter during their initial engagement in a state CCEE QRIS?

Table 13 presents the percentages of new and established FCC providers endorsing the challenges they experienced when getting started in a QRIS, along with significance tests comparing the endorsement rates. The items listed are not mutually exclusive; providers could report experiencing multiple challenges.

When getting started with a QRIS, new providers most frequently reported overwhelming paperwork (31%), not knowing where to find information (31%), not understanding what they needed to do (31%), and required trainings (25%) as challenges they experienced. Twenty-five percent of new providers said that they did not experience any of the listed challenges when getting started with QRIS. There were no significant differences between new and established providers.

— **Table 13. Challenges Experienced by New and Established FCC Providers Getting Started in a State CCEE QRIS**

Challenge	New FCC Providers (N = 16)	Established FCC Providers (N= 90)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Paperwork was overwhelming	31%	37%	.782
Difficult to access and use technology	19%	17%	.733
Process took too much time	19%	32%	.381
Information wasn't in preferred language	6%	4%	.566
No one to help me	6%	12%	.688
Didn't know where to find information	31%	13%	.130
Didn't understand what I needed to do	31%	24%	.547
Didn't have enough children enrolled	0%	6%	1.000
Too expensive to meet the requirements	19%	10%	.386
Requirements didn't fit my program	13%	12%	1.000
Requirements conflict with other programs I participate in	6%	7%	1.000
Required trainings	25%	14%	.283
Requirements related to housing and insurance	19%	12%	.440
Having to purchase expensive equipment or home repairs	19%	20%	1.000
None of the above	25%	30%	.774

Note. Survey responses do not necessarily indicate what was specifically challenging about each item. For instance, challenges with "required trainings" could refer to content, frequency, and/or the number of requirements.



### — What supports facilitate new FCC providers getting started and staying in a state CCEE QRIS?

Table 14 presents the percentages of new and established FCC providers endorsing the supports they found helpful when getting started in a QRIS, along with significance tests comparing the endorsement rates. The listed supports are not mutually exclusive; providers could report experiencing multiple supports.

When getting started in a QRIS, new providers most frequently cited working with a QRIS specialist (56%), informal help from other FCC providers in the system (44%), being able to access information on a website (31%), being able to contact someone with questions (31%), FCC networks or associations (31%), and grants or financial support (25%) as supports they experienced as helpful. There were no significant differences between new and established providers.

— **Table 14. Supports Experienced as Helpful by New and Established FCC Providers Getting Started in a QRIS**

Supports	New FCC Providers (N = 16)	Established FCC Providers (N= 90)	Fisher's Exact Test p-value
Specialist from this system	56%	44%	.425
Specialist from a different system	19%	21%	1.000
Being able to access information on a website	31%	17%	.178
Easy-to-navigate website	19%	12%	.440
Being able to contact someone with questions	31%	32%	1.000
Grants or financial support to get started	25%	31%	.772
FCC network or association	31%	46%	.413
Informal help from other providers in the system	44%	26%	.145
Short and easy-to-navigate application	13%	11%	1.000
Streamlined paperwork	6%	8%	1.000
System is coordinated with other systems I participate in	6%	10%	1.000
Standards make sense for my FCC program	6%	19%	.297
Materials are available in my preferred language	6%	13%	.686
Materials are easy to understand	0%	17%	.119



## Discussion: Provider Experiences Across CCEE Systems and Programs

Some challenges for new FCC providers seem to be inherent to specific CCEE systems. Comparisons across CCEE systems suggest that new providers encounter the greatest challenges, particularly financial ones, when getting started in L/C/R systems. Of new providers, 40% reported having to purchase expensive equipment or home repairs when getting started with L/C/R, compared with 7% starting with subsidy and 19% starting with QRIS. Similarly, 24% of new providers reported challenges with expensive requirements when getting started with L/C/R, compared with 19% of providers starting with QRIS and no providers starting with subsidy. In contrast, challenges getting started in subsidy programs centered on the time burden (36%), and challenges getting started in QRIS were primarily related to navigating system expectations—finding information (31%) and understanding what to do (31%).

Findings also suggest that new FCC providers may have distinct experiences getting started compared with established providers when they first engaged with CCEE systems. Comparisons across systems indicate that more new providers reported experiencing challenges with L/C/R systems than established providers reflecting on their own experiences beginning with L/C/R. More new FCC providers reported specific challenges related to enrollment than established providers reported experiencing when they were getting started in L/C/R systems. In contrast, both groups reported similar patterns of challenges when beginning with subsidy and QRIS.

Comparing provider experiences across CCEE systems also highlights differences in the types of supports available and valued. For example, having a system specialist was endorsed heavily as a support in QRIS (56%) but less commonly cited in L/C/R (28%) and subsidy (14%). Grants and financial support to get started were more often reported as helpful in L/C/R (40%) than in subsidy (11%) and QRIS (25%). Access to peer support from other providers was consistently reported as a helpful support across L/C/R (44%) and QRIS (44%) but less so in subsidy (18%).

Findings again suggest that new providers may have distinct experiences with support when getting started. More new providers reported receiving helpful supports related to L/C/R compared with established providers reflecting on their own earlier experiences. In particular, more new providers indicated that they were able to access information on a website and contact someone with questions. No differences in related supports were found between new and established providers for other CCEE systems.

### LIMITATIONS

These analyses are based on a nationwide group of professionally engaged FCC providers, although they may not be representative of all FCC providers in the United States. We recognize that the experiences of new FCC providers who seek out a professional organization and join NAFCC may not fully reflect the HBCC/FCC community. However, understanding their challenges and supports is valuable for informing strategies for minimizing challenges and maximizing support for HBCC providers who want to become licensed or participate in other



CCEE systems. Additionally, it is possible that the new providers in this sample had only recently joined the identified systems and had not yet encountered challenges, and it is also possible that the providers might not have needed or had the supports available to them listed in the survey.

## Program and Policy Implications

The following offer considerations for program and policy implementation designed to support new FCC providers.

- **Tailor support to system-specific challenges:** While it is common for FCC providers to participate in L/C/R, subsidy programs, and QRIS, each system can present challenges for new FCC providers. Support strategies can be adapted to help new FCC providers navigate the demands of each system. For example, enrollment and financial challenges are most frequently cited as part of getting started in L/C/R, while subsidy challenges center on the time burden and QRIS challenges about systems navigation are more frequently reported. Policymakers and system leaders can strengthen support by aligning resources and guidance with the most pressing system-specific needs. For example, L/C/R systems might consider offering new providers information or resources related to marketing their programs and enrolling families as well as grants for program equipment.
- **Enhance use of key supports:** Clear and easy-to-use online information and the ability to contact a knowledgeable person emerged as two of the most consistently valued supports, particularly among new FCC providers. Expanding these supports, along with strengthening the role of FCC networks and associations, may help providers feel less isolated and better equipped to succeed.
- **Address cost and operational challenges directly:** Overwhelming paperwork, expensive equipment or home repairs, and burdensome application processes reflect obstacles that may discourage or slow participation in CCEE systems that could otherwise be beneficial for providers. Financial supports like start-up grants, streamlined paperwork, and coordinated applications across systems could reduce these burdens.
- **Consider provider degrees and credentials in program design:** Many new FCC providers are pursuing degrees or professional credentials. Systems can build on this momentum by aligning desired professional development opportunities with CCEE systems and offering support that connects career advancement with system participation.
- **Use cross-system insights to guide improvements:** Because new FCC providers face challenges across systems, opportunities exist to improve efficiency and coordination across CCEE systems. Policies that emphasize cross-system collaboration, streamline requirements, and share effective supports across programs may improve provider experiences.



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## Appendix: Additional Methods Detail

Upon accessing the Qualtrics survey link, participants reviewed a consent statement and answered eligibility screening questions. The full survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participants who completed the survey were invited to enter a raffle for one of 40 \$100 gift cards. The survey remained open for four weeks, with three reminder emails sent before the survey closed.

To ensure data integrity and minimize the impact of bot activity and inauthentic responses common in web-based survey research, researchers applied multiple data-cleaning steps.

1. Survey responses less than 60% complete were automatically excluded.
2. Survey responses flagged by a Qualtrics method for detecting bot or inauthentic responses (i.e., reCAPTCHA, bot detection, identification of duplicate responses, and identification of ballot box stuffing) were excluded.
3. Survey responses meeting two or more of the following criteria were excluded: invalid zip code, duplicate email address, duplicate IP address, non-U.S. location, multiple open-ended text responses identical to those of other submissions, or completion time less than 25% of expected.
4. As part of a manual review of the remaining responses, researchers examined program operations data (e.g., the number of children enrolled across age groups, the number of children cared for on a typical day, and the number of hours per day and days per week care is provided, taking into consideration state-specific enrollment requirements and whether anyone assists in the program) and excluded illogical, impossible, and improbable responses.