



2026

CODINGTON COUNTY CHILD CARE SURVEY

Results - March 2026



TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	Introduction Background
04	Methodology
05	Demographics
06	Quantifying the Need
07	Child Care Arrangements
08	Utilization of Care
10	Accessibility of Care
12	Affordability of Care
13	Quality of Care
16	Sources Partnerships

INTRODUCTION | BACKGROUND

In 2022, child care was identified as one of the top five social service concerns to be addressed in Codington County, leading to a collaborative working group led by Codington County Welfare Office (CCWO) and the Child and Family Resource Network (CFRN) at South Dakota State University. Recognizing that child care needs evolve over time, Codington County redistributed the Child Care Survey in 2026 to ensure that the voices of families and providers are meaningfully reflected in the county's strategic plan. Understanding these perspectives helps us identify current needs and guide our work across four key priorities: strengthening community commitment to early childhood, expanding access to quality services, supporting thriving families and neighborhoods, and promoting responsive policies.

The mission of the CCWO resolves to administer poor relief equitably and efficiently to provide the necessary resources to those most in need. The mission of the CFRN is to promote the quality care of children through educating, supporting, and connecting the individuals in their lives as part of the South Dakota Early Childhood Enrichment System.

Individuals attended:

Sara Foust, Codington County Community Services; Cam Corey, Lake Area Technical College; Audrey Rider, SDSU Watertown Extension; Emily Hatton, Watertown School District; Mayor Ried Holien, City of Watertown; Ambuer Jaacks, DSS Child Care Licensing; Julia Tate, HR Executive Partners; Tim Sheehan, Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce; Rachel Bausmann, Child & Family Resource Network; Angela Yahne, Watertown Development Company; Brandi Hanten, City of Watertown; April Flemming, Child & Family Resource Network; Liz Brownell, Boys and Girls Club of Watertown; Sara Hanson, Persona Triangle; Marissa Sobeski, Northeast South Dakota SHRM; Karen Rector, Lake Area Technical Institute; Kathy Delong, Codington County Community Services; Barb Younger, Benedictine Sisters of Mother of God Monastery/Our Little Village Learning Center; Chris Clifton, Watertown Development Company; Alana Huck, ICAP Headstart; Wendy Meek, Lake Area Technical College

The survey's purpose was to reevaluate the child care needs in Codington County and obtain data and information to guide community-based decisions and policy-making around these needs. This survey targeted parents or guardians working or living in Codington County, SD to help support planning and critical conversations for the Codington County Social Services Advisory Council. This report summarizes findings from the responses of approximately 240 individuals within Codington County.

METHODOLOGY

Great effort was made to gather as much data as possible to obtain a valid sample size. The survey was administered through Qualtrics and advertised utilizing both paid (print and social media) and unpaid (email distribution) methods. The survey was opened from January 28, 2026 to March 1, 2026 with a total of 402 responses with most questions averaging 240 responses.

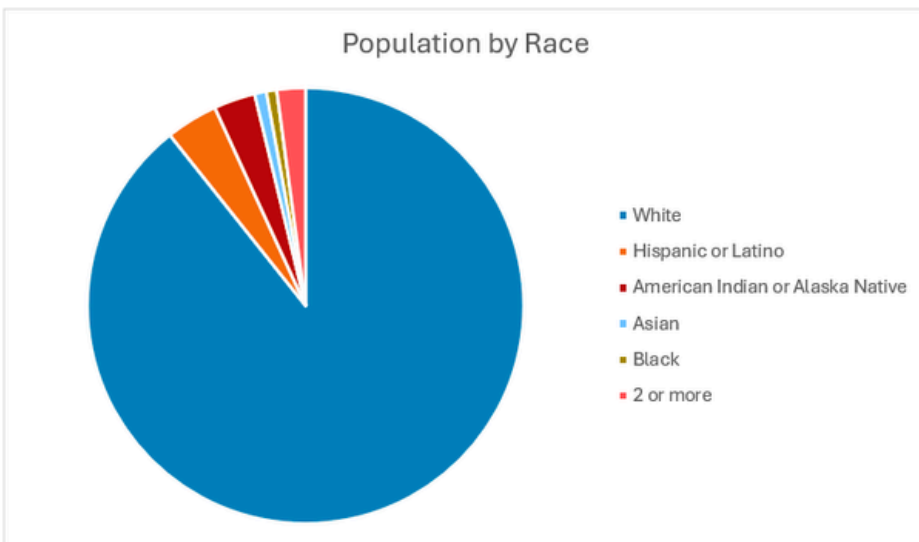
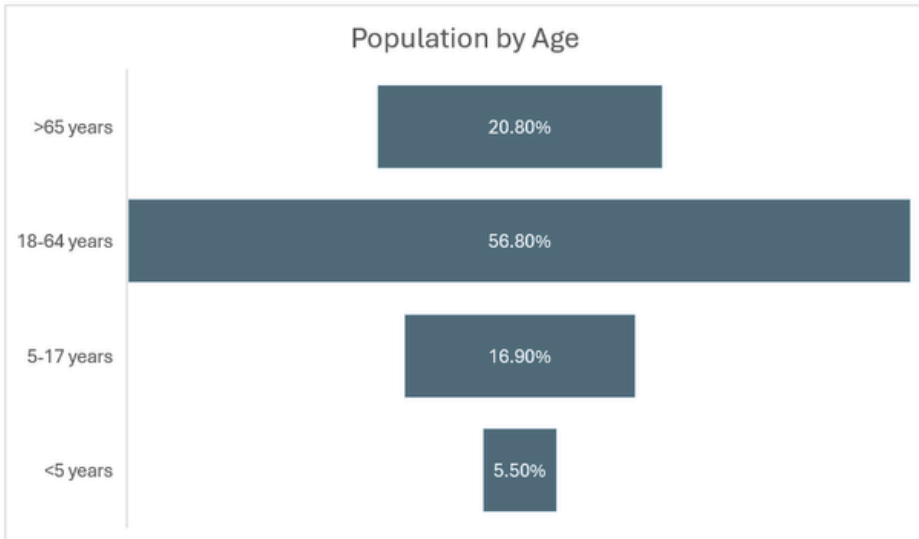
Based on the answers provided, not all questions were asked of all participants. For instance, those who indicated they did not currently utilize child care were asked a specific list of questions that others were not. The data in this report includes the number of participants who responded to the questions. While this survey provides good information executed in a precise way, it cannot be considered scientific.

Targeted Population

The main audience for the survey was anyone who lives and/ or works within Codington County or surrounding areas including parents or guardians in Codington County, SD.

CODINGTON COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

As of 2024, Codington County has a population of 29,278 with a median household income of \$72,727. Racial and age distributions are displayed below, as well as the industry employment distribution in Codington County.



Industry	Percentage
MANUFACTURING	18.9%
RETAIL TRADE	14.96%
HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	11.94%
ACCOMODATIONS AND FOOD SERVICES	9.19%
CONSTRUCTION	6.25%
WHOLESALE TRADE	5.47%
FINANCE AND INSURANCE	3.92%
TRANSPORTATION AND WAREHOUSING	2.96%
OTHER SERVICES (EXCEPT PUBLIC SERVICES)	2.81%
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES	2.28%

Sources: US Census Bureau and South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulations

QUANTIFYING THE NEED

Child Care in Codington County

According to the 2024 data from Kids Count South Dakota, Codington County has 1,939 children under the age of 6. The majority of children under 6 years old have both parents in the labor force, and approximately 87% of children in Codington County rely on some form of child care.

According to Kids Count Data Center, parents pay an average of \$5,824 per year for a child to attend a registered family home. While parents pay an average of \$7,862 for their child to attend a licensed facility.

Cost for a Typical South Dakota Family Household to Secure Child Care

Approximate Household Annual Income for Codington County (2024)

Under \$10,000	3.9%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	3.3%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	6.3%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	7.6%
\$35,000 to \$49,000	12.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	17.7%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	15.6%
\$100,000 to \$149,000	21.5%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	6.7%
\$200,000+	4.8%



What would 9% be for each family?

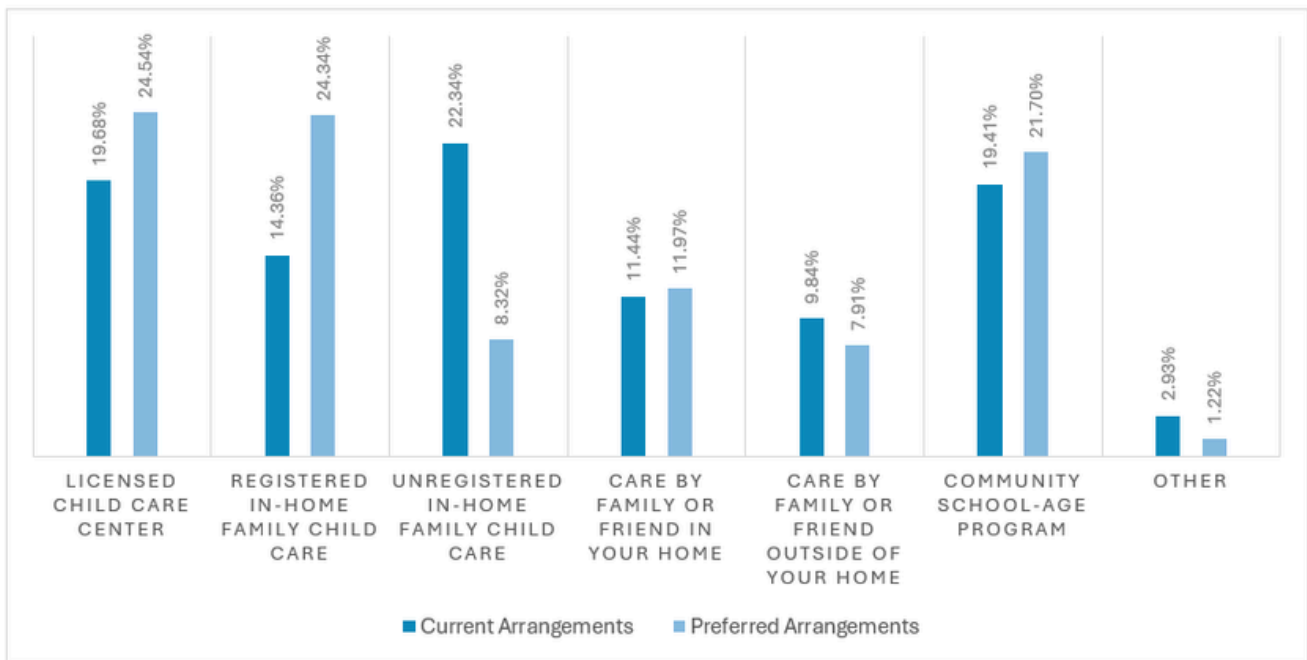
\$0 - \$17	\$0 - \$900
\$17 - \$26	\$901 - \$1,349
\$26 - \$43	\$1,349 - \$2,249
\$43 - \$61	\$2,250 - \$3,149
\$61 - \$87	\$3,150 - \$4,499
\$87 - \$130	\$4,500 - \$6,749
\$130 - \$173	\$6,750 - \$8,999
\$173 - \$260	\$9,000 - \$13,499
\$260 - \$345	\$13,500 - \$17,999
\$346+	\$18,000+

Child care can make up about an average of 9% of a typical South Dakota family's income.

SOURCE: 2024 Kids Count Data Center

CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

The current use of unregistered, in-home child care providers received the highest number of responses (84 out of 376). While the highest number of responses for the preferred child care arrangements is a licensed child care center. With the data collected for this survey, it can be said that a majority of respondents are not able to spend the money per year to have their child(ren) attend their preferred child care arrangement, a Licensed Child Care Center, and there is increased interest for more community programs.



-
- Regulated Family Day Care:** care of no more than 12 children in the provider's home and must comply with federal and state standards for maintaining minimum health and safety.
- Group Family Day Care Home:** group care for 13-20 children in any facility, including the provider's home and must meet federal and state regulations.
- Unregulated Family Day Care:** care of no more than 12 children in the provider's home and are not required to meet any federal or state standards nor can they receive child care assistance payments or other federal funds unless they become registered.
- Day Care Center:** group care for 21 or more children in the provider's home or a separate facility and must meet federal and state regulations.
- Before or After School Care:** care of school-age children before or after regular school hours, including full-time during school breaks and must meet federal and state regulations.

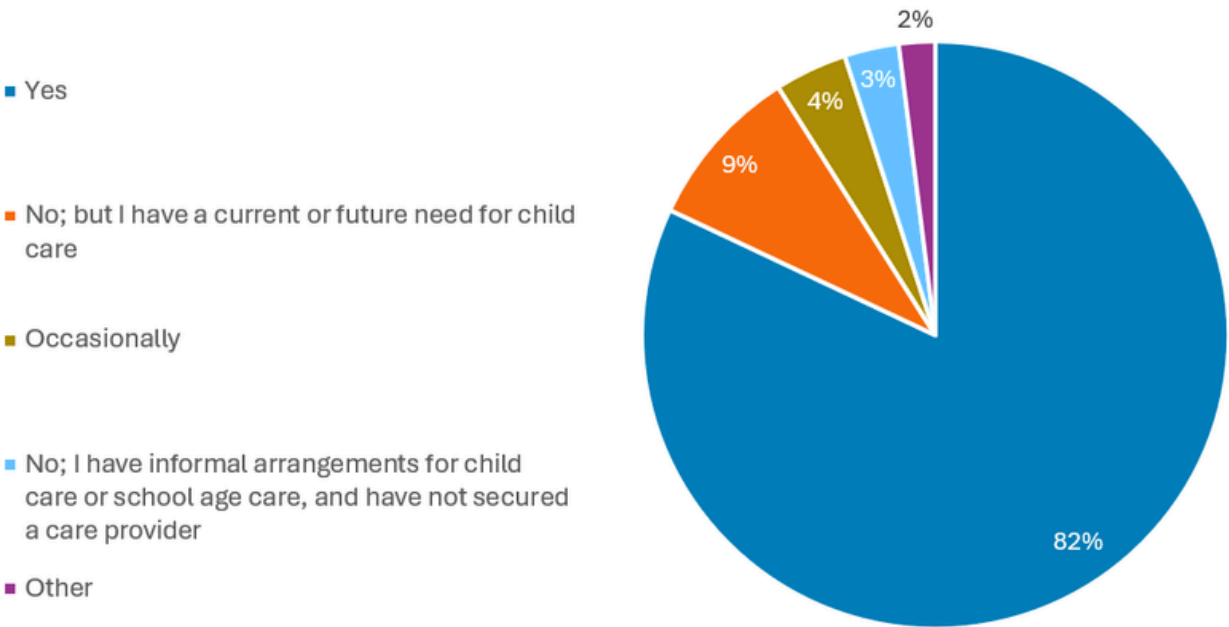
For more information go to <https://dss.sd.gov/childcare/licensing/>.

CHILD CARE UTILIZATION

Current Utilization of Child Care Services

The current need for child care is increasing rapidly as many children have a reliance on some form of child care. 89% of survey participants are currently utilizing child care, while nearly 9% of respondents have a future need or are currently looking to secure child care for their children.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	217	82%
Occasionally	10	4%
No; but I have a current or future need for child care	24	9%
No; I have informal arrangements for child care or school age care, and have not secured a care provider	8	3%
Other	5	2%
Total	264	100%



Type of Child Care Being Utilized

Unregistered, in-home child care received the highest number of responses with 84 out of 326.

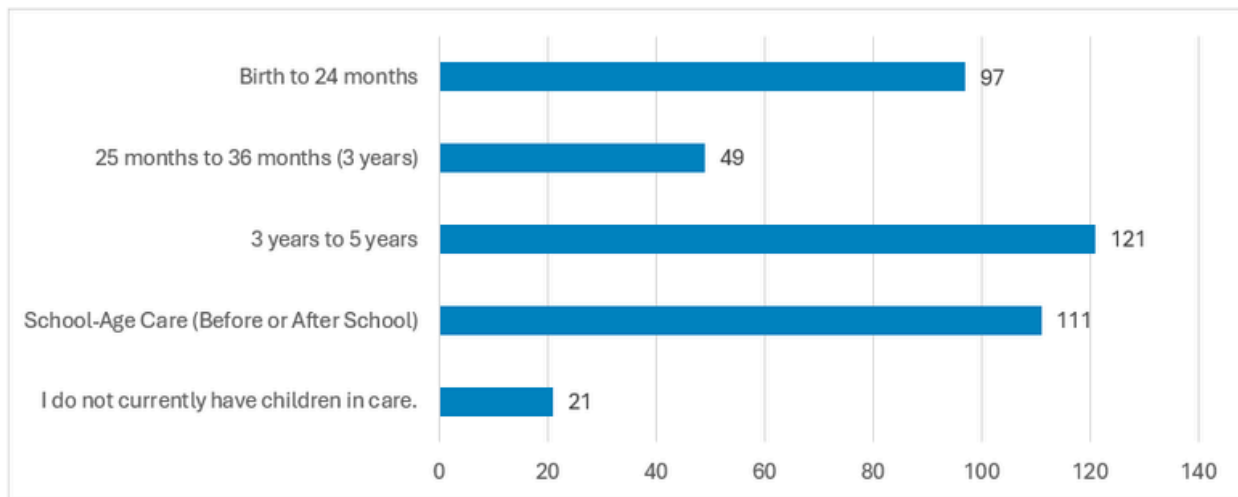
Answer Choices	Responses	
Licensed Child Care Center	74	22.70%
Registered In-home Family Child Care	54	16.56%
Unregistered In-home Family Child Care	84	25.77%
Care by family or friend in your home	43	13.19%
Care by family or friend outside of your home	37	11.35%
Community School-Age program	73	22.39%
Other	11	3.37%
Total	326	

"South Dakota law defines a Family Day Care Home as providing care and supervision of children from more than one unrelated family, in a family home, on a regular basis for part of a day as a supplement to regular parental care, without transfer of legal custody or placement for adoption. A family day care home may not be registered for care and supervision of more than 12 children at any one-time including children under the age of six who are living in the home."

SOURCE: South Dakota Department of Social Services

Number of Children Currently Enrolled in Child Care

Of the 266 respondents there were a total of 399 children represented in the following age categories.



ACCESSIBILITY OF CARE

Amount of Providers Contacted in Most Recent Child Care Search

Based on survey responses, 53% of respondents had to connect with 3 or more providers before securing child care for their child.

Answer Choices	Responses	
1-2	81	30%
3-5	87	33%
6+	52	20%
Cannot Recall	46	17%

About 45% of the 266 respondents said it took more than 1 to 2 months to secure child care. 24 % of respondents stated they secured child care less than a month, while 21 % found care immediately in Codington County.

Sufficient Child Care Options in Watertown

68.79%

of respondents believe there is **NOT** a sufficient number of child care options in Codington County.

Watertown lacks care for an entire age group, kindergarten. They are too old for daycare and don't qualify for [other options].

2026 Survey Participant

Schedule Needed for Child Care by Respondents

Among individuals that participated in the survey, 42% of individuals are in need of child care during daytime hours from 7:00AM to 6:00PM. Other individuals are in need of after school care for their children (22%), while 18 participants seek weekend care.

513 Respondents	Answer Choices	Responses	
	<i>Weekdays, day time hours (7am-6pm)</i>	169	42.46%
	<i>Weekdays, early morning care (5am-4pm)</i>	37	9.30%
	<i>Before school care (5am-8am)</i>	23	5.79%
	<i>Weekdays, evening care (6pm to midnight)</i>	12	3.02%
	<i>Weekdays, overnight care (6pm to 7am)</i>	5	1.26%
	<i>After school care (3pm-6pm)</i>	89	22.36%
	<i>Weekend care (Saturday/Sunday)</i>	18	4.52%
	<i>Summer care only</i>	39	9.80%
	<i>Other</i>	6	1.51%

Parent Perspectives Need for varying child care schedules:

" ... the lack of options that open before 6:30am and that are actually affordable has forced us into quitting my job to stay at home because nothing opens early enough that is actually affordable."

2026 Survey Participant

"Would like to see more options for before and after school care for school-aged children."

2026 Survey Participant

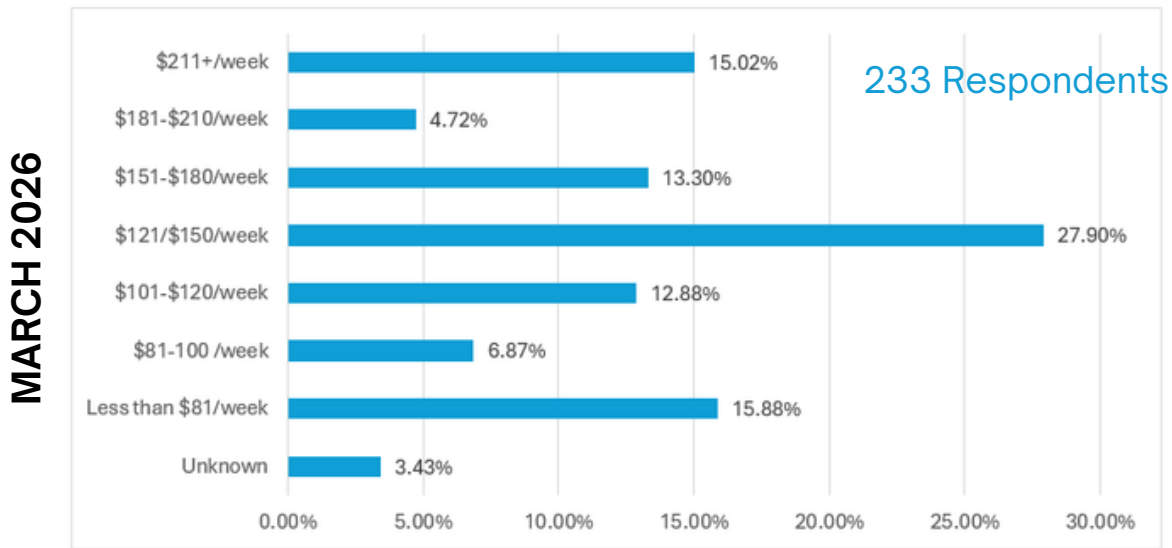
"It would be nice to see more child care for when there is no school and/ or due to bad weather or ... more summer child care."

2026 Survey Participant

AFFORDABILITY OF CARE

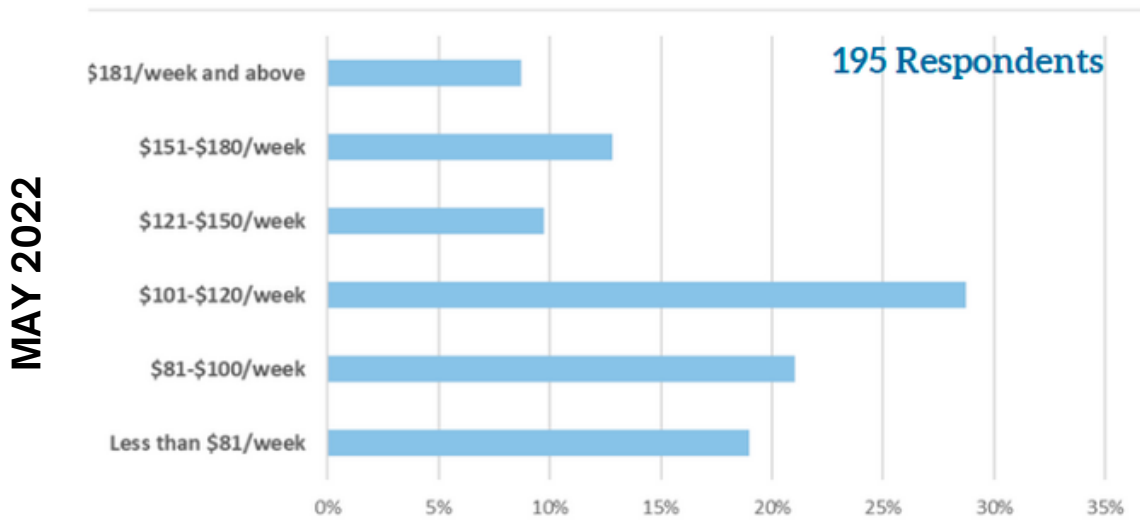
Child Care Spending per week, per child

In terms of child care costs, **27%** of respondents are paying between **\$121 to \$150** per week, per child for their current care services. Additionally, **33%** of survey respondents are paying \$150 or more per week, per child to their current child care provider



Child Care Spending Comparison

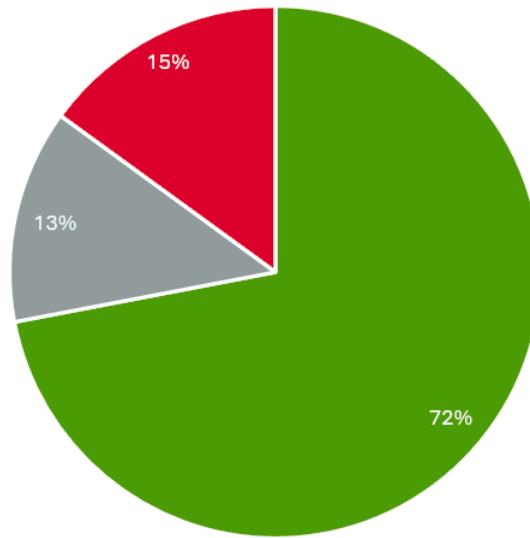
In 2022, **22%** of respondents were paying between **\$150 or more** per week, per child for their child care. In 2026, this percentage jumped to **33%**, signally a growing number of people using licensed care, but also increasing prices of child care as a whole.



QUALITY OF CARE

Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement

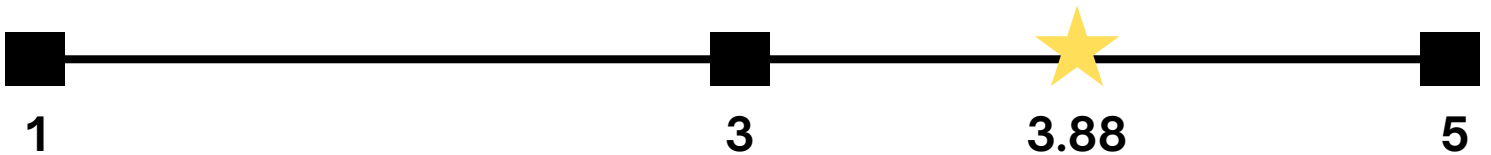
About 72% of survey respondents say they were very satisfied or satisfied with their current child care arrangements in Codrington County. On the other hand, 15% of respondents say they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their current child care arrangements. 13% of respondents were neither satisfied or dissatisfied.



■ Satisfied ■ Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied ■ Dissatisfied

Child Care Quality Rating (1-5, with 5 being the highest quality)

Most survey respondents are happy with their current child care provider in terms of overall quality with the average rating being a 3.88 out of 5.



Areas the Quality of Care can be Improved for your Child(ren)

When individuals were asked to indicate what areas their current care provider could improve on, the highest areas implied was to see more education/learning opportunities for their children and more staff to meet children's needs

Other areas of improvement are as follows in the figure below:

443 Respondents

More educational/learning opportunities	18.28%
More staff to meet the children needs	17.16%
Better communication between provider and my family	14.22%
Better ratio of indoor to outdoor play (weather permitting)	13.09%
More nutritional meals/snacks	11.06%
Provider (staff) that has ongoing child care training and CPR certification	11.06%
A safer and well-maintained environment	7.67%
More age-appropriate toys available	7.45%



The Department of Social Services, Child Care Services contracts with the South Dakota Early Enrichment (ECE) System to meet the growing demand for early childhood and school-age training, and to help recruit and retain quality child care providers, as well as to encourage and support program quality across the state of South Dakota. South Dakota's ECE programs offer a systematic approach to providing early childhood and school-age education services and technical assistance.

The Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) offices across the state deliver a variety of services focused on parents, family child care providers, childcare center staff, youth development professionals, and other early childhood education professionals throughout South Dakota.

The ECE System collaborates with Quality Care South Dakota to support early childhood and school-age care programs in their continuous quality improvement efforts towards child centered care.

For more information on trainings, resources, and supports, go to www.sdstate.edu/cfrn

Most Important Area Relating to Your Child Care Needs at the Time

216 Respondents

1. FINDING TEMPORARY CARE
2. ACCESS TO MORE REGISTERED FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS
3. EXTENDED HOURS OF CARE
4. ACCESS TO MORE LICENSED CHILD CARE PROVIDERS
5. LOCATION OF CARE
6. QUALITY OF CARE
7. SAFETY OF CARE

Did you Know?

Families can apply for Child Care Assistance with the Department of Social Services, which supports low-income families in paying for child care.

<https://dss.sd.gov/childcare/childcareassistance/>

*The 211 Helpline Center serves thousands of people every year by connecting individuals to resources and support. To reach the Helpline, dial **211** or visit*

www.helplinecenter.org

*For help locating a registered or licensed child care provider or school age program in South Dakota, visit **<https://olapublic.sd.gov>***

SOURCES | PARTNERSHIPS

Satisfaction with Current Child Care Arrangement

- South Dakota Department of Social Services
- Kids Count Data Center
- South Dakota Department of Health - Office of Health Statistics
- Codington Connects
- South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation
- United States Census Bureau

Partnerships

