



CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY



AUGUST 2023

BRIEF 1, PAGE 1

INTRODUCING THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY

The Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey is a comprehensive, citywide project led by the [Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative](#) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) in collaboration with the [Cambridge Office of Early Childhood](#).

As the City of Cambridge implements a system of universal preschool, families with young children will need clear information about the types of early childhood programs available to them. The Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey supports the city's efforts to describe its early care and education options by mapping the composition of its early childhood programs, as well as the makeup and experiences of the city's early care and education workforce.

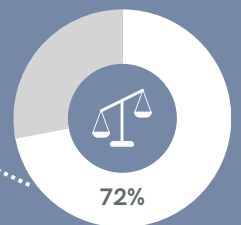
The Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey has two main objectives:

1. To chart the composition of the city's early care and education workforce.
2. To describe and share early educators' experiences.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A high-quality system of early care and education is essential to the stability of a community's workforce and a vital part of its economy. As the pandemic laid bare, access to affordable child care for working families is crucial to their financial well-being and a central component of any community's infrastructure. Without access to consistent, affordable, high-quality child care, many working families—and particularly working mothers—are pushed to either exit the workforce or make tough decisions weighing child care providers' cost, quality, and availability.

When the Zaentz Initiative [surveyed parents and guardians](#) of young children across Massachusetts in Spring 2020, just after the widespread COVID-19 shutdowns, 72% said they worried about balancing work and family responsibilities.



Other estimates from Massachusetts indicate that lack of access to early care and education during the pandemic resulted in lost earnings for individuals, lower worker productivity, added costs for employers, and lost tax revenue for the state—roughly \$2.7 billion lost funds for the Commonwealth overall.

By systematically documenting and describing who makes up the early care and education workforce, as well as their experiences and needs in and out of the classroom, findings from the Pulse Survey can help surface existing strengths and areas in need of increased support for early educators— thus supporting higher-quality care for children and a more stable and productive local economy.



DESCRIBING AND SHARING OUR PROCESS

The Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey can serve as a model for other communities seeking answers to similar questions about the composition, experiences, and quality of life of their early education workforce. Here is an overview of our approach to creating and completing the Early Childhood Pulse Survey in the City of Cambridge:

A ROAD MAP TO BUILDING A PULSE SURVEY

PARTNER & PLAN

1

DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND ALIGN STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

BUILD THE SAMPLE

2

POOL THE KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES OF PARTNERS TO CO-CREATE A SAMPLE OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

SEEK FEEDBACK

3

FIND AND ASK KEY STAKEHOLDERS FOR INPUT ON THE ISSUES THAT FEEL MOST PRESSING TO CAPTURE, AND ON THE BEST WAYS TO REACH POTENTIAL RESPONDENTS.

CREATE THE SURVEY

4

USE FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS TO INFORM SURVEY DESIGN AND PLANS FOR DISSEMINATION.

DISSEMINATE

5

TAILOR OUTREACH TO THE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF THE EDUCATORS IN THE COMMUNITY.

NEXT STEPS INCLUDE CLEANING, ANALYZING, AND SHARING THE DATA.



Below we describe in detail how we applied these five steps to design and complete the Cambridge Pulse Survey over the course of just six months.

STAGE 1 (JANUARY-FEBRUARY)—PARTNER & PLAN

1

The Cambridge Pulse team partnered with the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood. Pooling the resources and aligning the goals between COEC and the Cambridge Pulse team was important for building trust and commitment to the survey effort among Cambridge's community of early childhood educators. The Pulse Team designed the Cambridge Pulse Survey to align with OEC's goal of conducting a comprehensive landscape analysis as it prepares to implement the Cambridge Preschool Program (universal pre-k).

STAGE 2 (FEBRUARY-MARCH)—DEFINE THE SAMPLE

2

After initial planning, the Pulse & OEC teams co-created a comprehensive list of programs to include in the sample. For this round of the survey, we limited our sample to formal, group-based child care settings.* This involved consolidating information gathered from OEC's databases, a citywide search tool called [Find It Cambridge](#), and the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care's licensed [child care search](#) feature.

STAGE 3 (MARCH)—SEEK INPUT

3

To ensure that the Pulse Survey accurately captured the experiences of early educators working in the city, and that it was framed in a way that would invite early educator participation, the Pulse Team conducted three focus groups with family child care leaders, center directors, and early educators. In each focus group, we posed the following questions:

- What should we ask early educators in the City of Cambridge about their experience?
- How should we ask these questions?

We thoroughly documented the responses, capturing both broad themes and specific feedback. Seeking input from early educators about the survey's design and dissemination also built awareness of the survey and community buy-in.

STAGE 4 (MARCH-APRIL)—CREATE THE SURVEY

4

Drawing on feedback from the focus groups, as well as design inspiration from the [Early Learning Study at Harvard](#) (ELS@H), the Pulse Team developed and programmed a survey to capture early educator experience across seven categories: Program Information, Classroom/Enrollment, Program Operations, Professional Development, Data Collection, Compensation/Benefits, and Teacher Wellbeing.

STAGE 5 (MAY-JULY)—DISSEMINATE

5

In addition to building educator awareness of the survey through focus groups prior to survey launch, the Pulse team led an extensive outreach effort consisting of mass mailers, personalized messages, in-person visits, and phone calls. The survey was open for just over two months and yielded responses from nearly 70% of programs in the sample.

Briefs 2-5 of this series will outline who responded to the survey, and what we learned from their responses.

*Child care programs licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), or programs embedded in larger (EEC licensed-exempt) k-8 schools.