

THINKING BIGGER FOR A BETTER TEXAS

ANALYSIS OF TEXAS CHILD CARE PROVIDER EXPERIENCES & POLICY IMPLICATIONS ACROSS EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

In the fall of 2025, CHILDREN AT RISK (C@R) distributed a statewide survey to Texas child care providers and parents, gathering input from more than 1,300 respondents representing all 28 Local Workforce Development Boards to better understand the realities shaping the provider experience. These findings help inform our recommendations for the ongoing Texas Sunset Commission process, as well as the Quad-Agency Child Care Initiative and the Governor's Taskforce on Governance of Early Care and Learning and the 90th Texas Legislature, supporting efforts to strengthen public policy and the early childhood workforce.

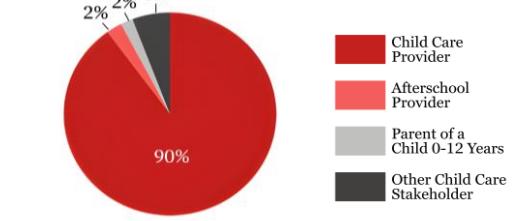
The findings from this survey strongly reinforced what CHILDREN AT RISK heard during their [Fall 2025 Texas Tour](#), where providers, educators, and community leaders across 12 communities described many of the same systemic challenges. Taken together, both the Texas Tour conversations and this statewide survey reveal a consistent picture of fragmented oversight, inconsistent regulatory practices, outdated technology systems, and persistent barriers that limit access to child care. This alignment underscores the urgency for coordinated, statewide solutions that reflect both community experience and provider voice.

This analysis synthesizes insights from four qualitative datasets capturing provider experiences:

- Challenging Regulations
- Background Check Challenges
- Improving Communication
- Provider & Other Suggestions

Providers described a system that is disconnected, administratively burdensome, technologically outdated, and insufficiently supportive. These conditions undermine staffing and retention efforts, limit family access, and weaken the overall stability of Texas' essential child care infrastructure.

Almost all survey respondents (90%) were child care providers in Texas. The total sample represented every Local Workforce Development Board and provided services in almost every major metropolitan area.



Cross-Cutting Insight: Providers Feel Overwhelmed & Burdened by Systems Not Designed for Them

Across all survey responses, one message was unmistakable: child care providers care deeply about children and are committed to offering high quality care, but the systems surrounding them make that work harder than it needs to be. Child Care Regulation requirements, background checks, Child Care Services processes, data platforms, and communication channels are often slow, confusing, or disconnected from one another. Instead of supporting programs, these systems create barriers that providers must navigate daily. **The impact is significant. Providers described:**

- facing increased turnover in staff,
- experiencing turnover of Child Care Regulation representative
- facing financial instability
- reducing program capacity
- feeling deep frustration with state systems

Ultimately, these challenges limit family access to reliable, high quality child care across Texas & hinder child care providers' stability or resilience to remain operational.

CHILDREN AT RISK's analysis of responses defined actionable and cost-effective steps that state agencies and policymakers can take to strengthen early childhood systems. Providers consistently emphasized **five areas where targeted improvements would make the most meaningful difference** for program stability, workforce capacity, and family access.

Key Recommendations

I. DESIGN A PURPOSEFUL UNIFIED GOVERNANCE WITH SYSTEMWIDE COORDINATION TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY

Providers report fragmented oversight, inconsistent rule interpretation, and competing regulatory structures across the Health and Human Services Commission's Child Care Regulation (CCR), the Texas Workforce Commission's Child Care Services (CCS) and Texas Rising Star (TRS), and Texas Education Agency-administered Pre-K. Without coordinated leadership, rules often shift without aligned communication or clear rationale, forcing providers to navigate conflicting expectations with limited guidance. In response, providers are calling for a unified early childhood governance structure with a lead agency or decision-making authority to reduce fragmentation; standardized interpretation of TRS and Child Care Regulation standards across Local Workforce Development Board regions; and parity in expectations and accountability between public school Pre-K and private early childhood programs serving young children.

II. SYNTHESIZE KEY REGULATIONS TO REDUCE CONFUSION AND IMPROVE REGULATORY ALIGNMENT

Regulatory burden emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent themes across the dataset. Providers described excessive paperwork, constantly changing regulations, and variances in interpretation of standards. Addressing these challenges will require clearer guidance, uniform training and calibration for regulatory staff, and a shift toward supportive, partnership-based oversight rather than punitive enforcement.

III. IMPROVE OVERSIGHT OF CONTRACTED SERVICES TO ENSURE QUALITY PERFORMANCE

Providers highlighted significant challenges, including delayed and inaccurate Child Care Services (CCS) payments, confusing contracting requirements, and family waitlists that in some cases exceed two years. Survey results show that providers often feel they bear the full weight of accountability while state agencies and Local Workforce Development Boards face limited consequences for errors or delays. In response, providers are calling for stronger accountability for state agencies and LWDBs to ensure accurate and timely CCS payments, clear and transparent timelines for family waitlists and application processing, and the creation of a public-facing, centralized information hub that consolidates rules, forms, contacts, and grant opportunities across HHSC and TWC for both families and providers.

IV. UPDATE TECHNOLOGY AND DATA SYSTEMS TO AID IN TRANSPARENCY AND RELIABILITY

Across every dataset, providers reported that HHSC and TWC systems are outdated, unreliable, and difficult to navigate. Managing multiple portals, with unclear interfaces, delayed or opaque background check statuses, and inconsistent communication about rule changes, creates daily operational challenges for child care programs. In response, providers are calling for a shared eligibility system that allows families to apply once for multiple child- and family-serving programs, a streamlined background check process that reduces delays and coordinates across systems to meet workforce needs, and proactive, statewide communication of rule changes through a common portal with a predictable, consistent announcement cadence.

V. SIMPLIFY & STREAMLINE CHILD CARE SERVICES SYSTEM APPLICATION/ONBOARDING PROCESS TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY FOR PROVIDERS AND SERVE MORE FAMILIES

Respondents described significant delays in subsidy access, inconsistent eligibility requirements, and a cumbersome intake and application process that strain providers and families alike. These barriers reduce program capacity, further weaken an already fragile workforce, and limit families' access to reliable, affordable high-quality child care. To address these challenges, providers are calling for a coordinated, end-user-focused system that integrates family eligibility, provider applications, and compliance tasks; family-facing navigation support through local navigators or technology tools; and a review of required paperwork to simplify or consolidate duplicative administrative tasks across agencies.



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