

FAMILY CHILD CARE

ESSENTIAL, YET DECLINING & UNHEARD

INTRODUCTION



Despite decades of advocacy and research, Family Child Care (FCC) in Massachusetts is experiencing a decline that predates the COVID pandemic and has worsened because of it. (See Figure 1). In response to clearly noted challenges facing the field of early childhood education (ECE) in 2009, a CAYL Institute analysis offered recommendations for change aligned with legislative benchmarks¹. (See: CAYL 2009 FINDINGS). Recognizing that FCC programs are an essential component of ECE in Massachusetts, this paper examines those 2009 findings and suggests solutions to support FCC programs in 2021 and beyond.



MESSAGE FROM THE FIELD

Seeking to better understand the 2021 state of FCC in Massachusetts, the CAYL Institute interviewed key stakeholders, convened several workgroups with practitioners, reviewed available workforce data, and conducted a literature review. Two key messages emerged:



FCC Educators have worked hard to improve their practice since 2009 (see Figure 3). However, their hard work has not resulted in a rise in wages, nor is their compensation equivalent to public school teachers with comparable credentials and experience who teach similar age groups.

Immediate and intensive efforts are needed to strengthen state policies around FCC, in order to address the steep decline in licensed programs and increase family access to this essential ECE program model.

CAYL 2021 FINDINGS

- MEETING FAMILY NEEDS** - FCC is an essential and preferred part of the ECE landscape for many families.
 - Parents prefer ECE programs with qualities characteristic of FCC. When seeking care for their children, parents reported "... small group sizes, location close to home, flexible hours, flexibility and understanding regarding drop-off and pick-up times, true affordability..."² were desirable features of an ECE program - all typical features of FCC.
 - The demand for Family Child Care is strong. As of March 2021, FCC made up about 18% of the state's overall licensed capacity and 66% of programs that serve low-income families through the subsidy program³. Nationally, the number of children 0-6 receiving care in unlicensed homes has remained steady, though there has been a decline in licensed programs over the same time period⁴.



2. DEMAND & DECLINE - Though demand for ECE in home-based settings remains steady, the number of licensed FCC programs is declining. Nationally, there was a 25% decline in the number of licensed FCC providers from 2012-2019⁴. Massachusetts mirrors that trend in the following way:

- In Massachusetts, census records over the past ten years reveal a steady, and slightly increased, demand for ECE. (See Figure 1).
- However, despite this demand, the number of licensed FCC programs has declined by 57% since 2010. (See Figure 2).

Fig. 1 Total Number of Licensed Child Care Slots & Children Needing Care Under 6 Years Old in MA

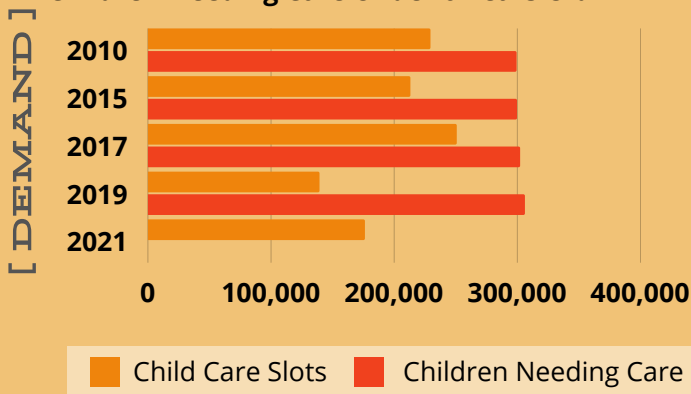
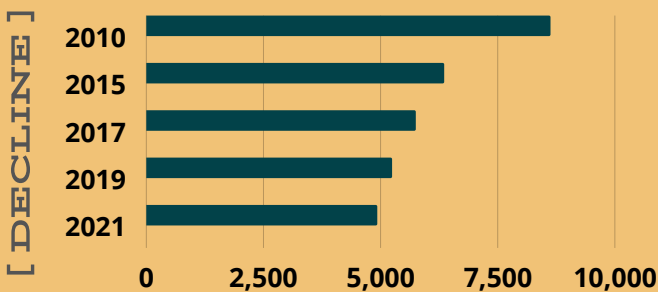


Fig. 2 Number of Licensed FCC Programs in MA



3. UNADDRESSED CONCERNS - Practitioners indicate that FCC public policy and practice offer a weak platform for addressing their concerns.

- There is a persistent gap in FCC workforce data to inform policy. Consistent with our 2009 findings, important workforce data such as the average annual income of FCC practitioners and cost drivers unique to the sector are not regularly collected in Massachusetts.
- Financial support policies grant FCC programs limited access. FCCs are unique microbusinesses with limited income streams, which uses the owner's homes for both personal and business use. How well policy-makers understand the business structure of FCC can affect programs' ability to access financial support.
- For example, many FCC depend on state programs such as the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CAFPC) as a source of income. Accepting a grant or loan, even emergency COVID stabilization funds, could risk a provider's continued eligibility for public assistance⁵. Moving forward, greater insight into FCC sources of income may lead to policy solutions, which could expand practitioner access to financial support from the state.
- Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS)⁶ do not reflect or reward the unique structure of FCC. Interview participants emphasized that how quality is measured in FCC should recognize the unique strengths of the home-based program model, such as the mixed-age cohort, in order to increase its relevance to their operations.

Fig. 3 Level of Education of FCC Providers in MA

Level of Education Achieved	2008	2021	+/-
Advanced Degree	3%	7%	+4%
Bachelor's Degree	15%	21%	+6%
AA Degree in ECE or related field	9%	11%	+2%
Some College Courses	26%	22%	-4%
H.S. or GED	34%	26%	-8%
Less than H.S. / GED	6%	5%	-1%

OUR RECOMMENDATION

As in 2009, our findings indicate that FCC plays an important and central role in advancing children's access to ECE; however, these providers must be intentionally included in the recovery and reimagining of the sector, in order to address the sharp decline in licensed programs. Thus, we recommend that:

The Department of Early Education and Care should create a FCC Advisory Committee to give focused attention to the voices and perspectives of this sector.



CONCLUSION

Federal, state and local actors have pulled together with unprecedented unity to support ECE in response to the COVID pandemic. However, the sector’s efforts to rebound have been undercut by the exclusion of Family Child Care from the public policy arena. As you can see our findings closely mirror our 2009 analysis results (See CAYL 2009 Findings). Practitioners are themselves best able to speak to their programs’ unique needs, and the FCC Advisory Committee can elevate the concerns of FCC practitioners, and integrate them into timely, relevant, and immediately actionable solutions for the field.



PROPOSED AREAS OF FOCUS

While the commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and the FCC Advisory Committee will ultimately determine its agenda, we identify several areas for its focus:

- 1. **PRIORITIZE** the regular collection of data about the FCC Workforce.
- 2. **REVIEW** financial support policies in the context of FCC.
- 3. **ARTICULATE** a target salary scale designed for FCC programs and practitioners that ties professional qualifications and years of experience to compensation, supported through a system of tiered reimbursements.
- 4. **CREATE** an initiative to support non-licensed programs becoming licensed.
- 5. **REVIEW** and **STUDY** the impact of FCC systems development and their effect on outcomes for programs and children.

CAYL 2009 FINDINGS

- 1. **INADEQUATE ATTENTION & INNOVATION**
Statewide professional development initiatives, state policy, regulation, and licensing standards do not regard FCC as an essential part of the ECE delivery system, and fall behind the innovations of other states.
- 2. **OVERLOOKED VALUE**
The economic, social, and educational value of FCC is often overlooked in efforts to advance learning opportunities for young children in Massachusetts.
- 3. **LACK OF DATA**
The substantial lack of data regarding the FCC educator workforce obscures the importance of this delivery model and contributes to degrading stereotypes implying unprofessionalism.
- 4. **NO RECOGNITION, VOICE, OR FUNDING**
The Massachusetts FCC workforce does not have statewide representation, a strong voice in the public policy arena, or inclusion in funding initiatives within the field of ECE.

Hmm ... have there been any changes since 2009?



ENDNOTES

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ABOUT CAYL

The CAYL Institute, or Community Advocates for Young Learners, is a non-profit organization with the vision of a nation where the right to high-quality early care and education is embedded in public policy, professional practice, and family engagement.

