



Steps to Family Child Care Success

International Rescue Committee
Year 5: 2 Cohorts of Dari-Speaking Providers
Evaluation Report | November 2025

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Table of Contents

04	<u>Partners</u>
05	<u>Introduction</u>
06	STEPS Program Features
10	Program Objectives
11	Evaluation Methodology
13	<u>Program Demographics</u>
16	Provider Business Characteristics
20	<u>Impact Data</u>
21	Needs Assessment
22	Training Series
30	Business Coaching
31	Overall Impact
36	<u>Key Findings & Recommendations & Reflections</u>



Partners

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has 24 years of experience in refugee and immigrant microenterprise development, and over the last five years, has successfully assisted over 500 refugees and immigrants in establishing, sustaining, or growing their FCC businesses throughout San Diego County. The IRC has built strong and longstanding partnerships with key stakeholders in the FCC licensing realm, including the State of California’s Division of Community Care Licensing and the YMCA of San Diego County’s Childcare Resource Service. For the past five years, IRC has partnered with Chicano Federation, Horn of Africa and CEED to design and implement the STEPS program.



Situated within San Diego State University, the Center for Excellence in Early Education (CEED) is a transdisciplinary, research-based training facility with a holistic approach to supporting early childhood development, mental health, and early childhood education. CEED faculty conduct applied research and engage in evaluation efforts aimed at the identification of promising practices that can be scaled up and shared with the broader research and educational community. For the past five years, CEED has helped design, implement, and evaluate the STEPS program, while also conducting research on the impact of the cultural navigators (Garrity et al., 2024).



Introduction

The Steps to Family Child Care Success (STEPS) program was founded on the premise that Family Child Care (FCC) providers should be valued as entrepreneurs and small business owners and that supporting them not only improves their economic security, but can also increase the economic security of the families and communities they serve by providing high-quality, affordable childcare to working families. The goals of the STEPS program include helping FCC providers improve their financial literacy, knowledge of banking and credit systems in the United States, digital literacy, and increase their skills related to running a successful business. An additional goal is to increase provider enrollment and economic stability.

Originally funded in January 2020, the STEPS project is led by a partnership of three ethnic community-based organizations, Chicano Federation, Horn of Africa, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), multiple community-led philanthropic organizations and a team of researchers at The Center for Excellence in Early Development (CEED) at San Diego State University (SDSU). Together these organizations have served over 300 providers throughout San Diego County focusing on neighborhoods in City Heights, Barrio Logan, East County, and South Bay.

In 2023, the County of San Diego funded the Shared Service Alliance (SSA), joining together the STEPS partners and the YMCA Child Care Resource Service and Child Development Associates. The SSA and STEPS program share similar goals and desired outcomes including supporting child care providers by helping them strengthen the sustainability of their businesses. In cooperation, the STEPS program continued alongside the SSA and additional efforts were created to matriculate STEPS providers to the SSA for continued support.

In October 2024, IRC received funding from JPMorgan Chase and Blue Shield of California Foundation to implement the STEPS program to two cohorts of primarily Dari-speaking FCC providers located in San Diego County. CEED was contracted to create the evaluation plan, data collection process and compile the final report. In July 2025, the SSA leaders secured additional funding to expand the program providing resources for IRC to increase their SSA enrollment from 20 to 50 providers. At the conclusion of the STEPS program, IRC matriculated providers that completed the STEPS program into the SSA.



STEPS Program Features

Cultural Navigator

A key feature of the STEPS program is the use of cultural navigators hired by ethnic community-based organizations (ECBO). A cultural navigator was hired by IRC to lead the FCC providers through the program. The cultural navigator represents the communities served in the program and is responsible for recruiting and enrolling providers, serving as a resource in child enrollment and parent relations, and acting as liaisons between providers and agencies responsible for subsidized care and licensing. Importantly, the cultural navigator also provides translation as needed and provides culturally and linguistically responsive services to support FCC provider success. The cultural navigator acts as an advocate for the providers by ensuring they complete the STEPS training and take advantage of the personalized business coaching component of the program.

Training Series

As part of the STEPS program, providers are given a Chromebook and attend a 14-week comprehensive training series (14 sessions, 2-3 hours each) provided in a virtual format. A list of training topics are listed in the table on the following page. Each training series covers core topics to support best business practices such as financial literacy, marketing, and tax preparation. Supplemental courses are additional training topics that are selected based on an assessment of the provider needs, such as understanding challenging behavior and brain development in infants and young children. All courses were offered in Dari, or English with Dari translation, the providers' primary language.

Business Coaching

Following the completion of the training series, providers continued to receive support from the cultural navigator. The cultural navigator, with the support of the resources at IRC, helped the providers with best business practices including support with completing a business plan, assessing their credit, and applying for capital funding to support their business.

SSA Partnership

At the conclusion of the STEPS program, providers could enroll in the SSA if space was available. The STEPS program is a cohort-based training and coaching model that STEPS leaders have identified as a supportive precursor to the SSA. STEPS, as a proven concept, builds a foundational knowledge base that lends itself to the highly individualized coaching that SSA coaches provide.





STEPS Program Features

Course Name	Description
Orientation – Introduction to Program	Introduction to the STEPS program. Expectations and documents required for participation are reviewed.
Digital Literacy 101 & 102	Introduction to Gmail and how to use Google Drive for their child care business. Chromebook use including how to use the touchpad, keyboard, shortcuts, locating and using settings, locating apps, email set up, and sending and replying to emails.
Finance 101: Budgeting and Banking & 102: Credit	Overview of business bank accounts and the different features offered. Budgeting process is introduced including how to calculate monthly income and expenses to for monitoring purposes. Overview of the US credit system, including what is credit, why it is important, how to access a credit report and the dos and don'ts of the credit system.
Business Management	Review of strong business practices such as SWOT analysis, use of a business plan, SMART goals, Unique Value Proposition, and Elevator Pitch – Ascent Speech.
Marketing Smart Plan or Tootris	Introduction to essential marketing strategies and tools and the creation of a marketing plan. Introduction to digital marketing including how to promote provider's business using social media. An understanding of branding basics such as choosing consistent colors, logos and messaging. Tips for creating engaging content, use of hashtags and stories to expand reach and increase engagement.
In-Home Child Care Licensing Regulations into Practice	A review of in-home child care licensing requirements and regulations and discussion of how regulations can be put into practice, including health and safety of the children, recordkeeping, reporting requirements, inspections, disaster and fire safety, and rights of the children.
Child Care Provider-Parent Contract	Introduction to components of contracts and policies for child care providers and why both are crucial for protecting the provider and their clients. Providers learn key elements of a strong contract, including hours of operation, payment terms, holidays, and termination clauses. Recommended policies included sick child policies, late pick-up procedures, behavior guidance and emergency protocols.
Tax Ready Business	Introduction of tax practices specific to child care providers, further explanation of the use of an EIN number, accounting methods for tax purposes, forms needed for businesses, and how to select a paid tax preparer.

STEPS Program Features

Course Name	Description
Food Nutrition	Introduction to the California Child And Adult Food Program (CACFP) that reimburses child care providers for serving nutritious and balanced meals to the children in their care.
Effective Bookkeeping Practices for Child Care Providers	Introduction to accounting practices specific to FCC providers, including how to categorize financial transactions, the importance of having a financial system, identifying business deductions, claiming expenses and calculating the time-space percentage for using their home as a business.
SDQPI Quality Journey Orientation	Introduction to best practices of quality environments for child development. An explanation and the benefits of the SDQPI program is provided and participation requirements are presented.
YMCA – Child Care Resource Service	Introduction to the important role of the YMCA Childcare Resource Service (CRS), including information on how they support child care providers and families in the community. Providers were presented with information on accessing resources such as training, licensing support, and professional development. Information was presented about how YMCA CRS helps providers improve the quality of care, stay informed about regulations, and connect with families who need their services.
Child Development	Review of the importance of developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate practices and an overview of how early childhood experiences affect lifelong health and learning.
California Early Care and Education Workforce Registry	Overview of the California Early Care and Education Workforce Registry, including information about why child care providers should enroll and utilize the service to help track and verify their qualifications, training, and experience. The Registry supports career growth, simplifies job applications, and provides access to professional development opportunities and financial incentives. Additionally, it is often required for licensing, funding, and participation in quality improvement programs.
Labor Law	Review of labor law specific to family child care businesses, including types of business entities, recruitment of employees, employee rights and the provider’s obligations as employers.

Program Objectives

Program objectives were created to establish activities and services completed by IRC. STEPS objectives were developed based on prior STEPS reports and using success indicators suggested by the grant makers.

The project period for IRC’s STEPS cohort was October 2024 to November 2025.

Program Objective	Description	Evidence of Achievement
STEPS Participation	Enroll 40 providers to complete the 14-week STEPS training series and follow-up business coaching.	40 providers enrolled and completed the 14-week STEPS training series. 40 providers continued participating in 1:1 business coaching.
Business Plans	Complete a business plan with each provider.	100% (n=40) of providers completed a business plan.
Training Assessments	Monitor providers understanding of content with pre and post assessments for each course.	The average increase in assessment scores was 13% . 72% of providers indicated their understanding of course objectives increased.
Credit Score Established or Increased	Support providers with establishing or improving credit scores	1 provider established a credit score. 2 providers worked to improve their credit score.
Capital Funding	Support providers with assistance in applying for capital funding to support revenue generation.	100% (n=40) of providers applied for a grant to support their child care.
Provider Confidence in Business Practices	Assess provider’s confidence in business practices before and after the STEPS program.	83% (n=33) of providers were confident in implementing best business practices.
Provider Enrollment	Monitor provider’s enrollment in their child care business.	73% (n=29) of providers increased or sustained their child care enrollment.

Evaluation Methodology

SDSU’s CEED created an evaluation plan that included tools for data collection, such as intake forms and surveys to assess provider expectations and satisfaction. Program implementation is measured using pre and post-program data collection tools.

Phase	Timeline	Activities
Intake & Pre Program Data Collection	Oct-Nov 2024 & Jan-Feb 2025	Pre-program data is collected at the beginning of the program: Intake Survey (demographics), Budget & Taxes Survey, Provider Pre-survey.
Mid-program Data Analysis	Dec 2024 & Mar 2025	Provider demographic data and pre-survey was summarized in a mid-program report.
Progress Monitoring	Dec 2024 - Oct 2025	Enrollment quick checks are ongoing and cultural navigator tracks implementation of business practices. Pre and post assessments are completed at the beginning and end of each training session.
Post Program Data Collection	Oct 2025	Post program data is collected at the end of the program: Provider Satisfaction Survey and Post Program Survey.
Reporting	Nov– Dec 2025	Full data analysis is completed, and report is generated.

Evaluation Methodology

Tool	Timing	Purpose
Baseline & Need Assessment Measures		
Intake Survey (pre-program data)	Beginning of program year	Measures provider demographic data, baseline of provider business characteristics, ongoing provider needs.
Budget & Taxes Survey	Once per program year	Measures budget and tax data for each provider.
Provider Pre-Survey (Needs Assessment)	Once per program year	Surveys the needs, expectations and confidence of the providers prior to program implementation.
Program Implementation Measures		
Quick Check	2-3 times over project period	Measures provider enrollment data.
Cultural Navigator Report	Throughout program	Cultural navigator tracks implementation of business practices.
Pre and Post Training Assessments	Before and after each course.	Measures provider knowledge of course content before and after the training session.
End of Training & End of Business Coaching Measures		
Post-Training Survey	End of 14-week training series	Surveys provider satisfaction of training series, provider's perception of social support and business practices knowledge using reflective ratings.
Open-Ended Questions	End of 14-week training series	Providers are encouraged to share stories, successes and how the program can be improved.
Provider Satisfaction Survey	End of program year	Surveys provider satisfaction with the STEPS program and is used to gain feedback from the providers on program effectiveness.
Post Program Survey (post-program data) and Cultural Navigator-Reported Data	End of program year	Measures any changes in provider business characteristics.



Program Demographics

This section presents and summarizes self-reported demographic data on the FCC providers, their business, and the children served during the projection period.

A total of 40 providers were enrolled in the STEPS Year 5 training program and completed the 14-week training series. All 40 providers participated in business coaching after the completion of the training and received and 1:1 support from the cultural navigator. Fourteen providers joined the SSA program at the completion of STEPS.



Provider Demographics

40 child care providers completed the 14-week STEPS training series.

Ethnicity and Primary Language

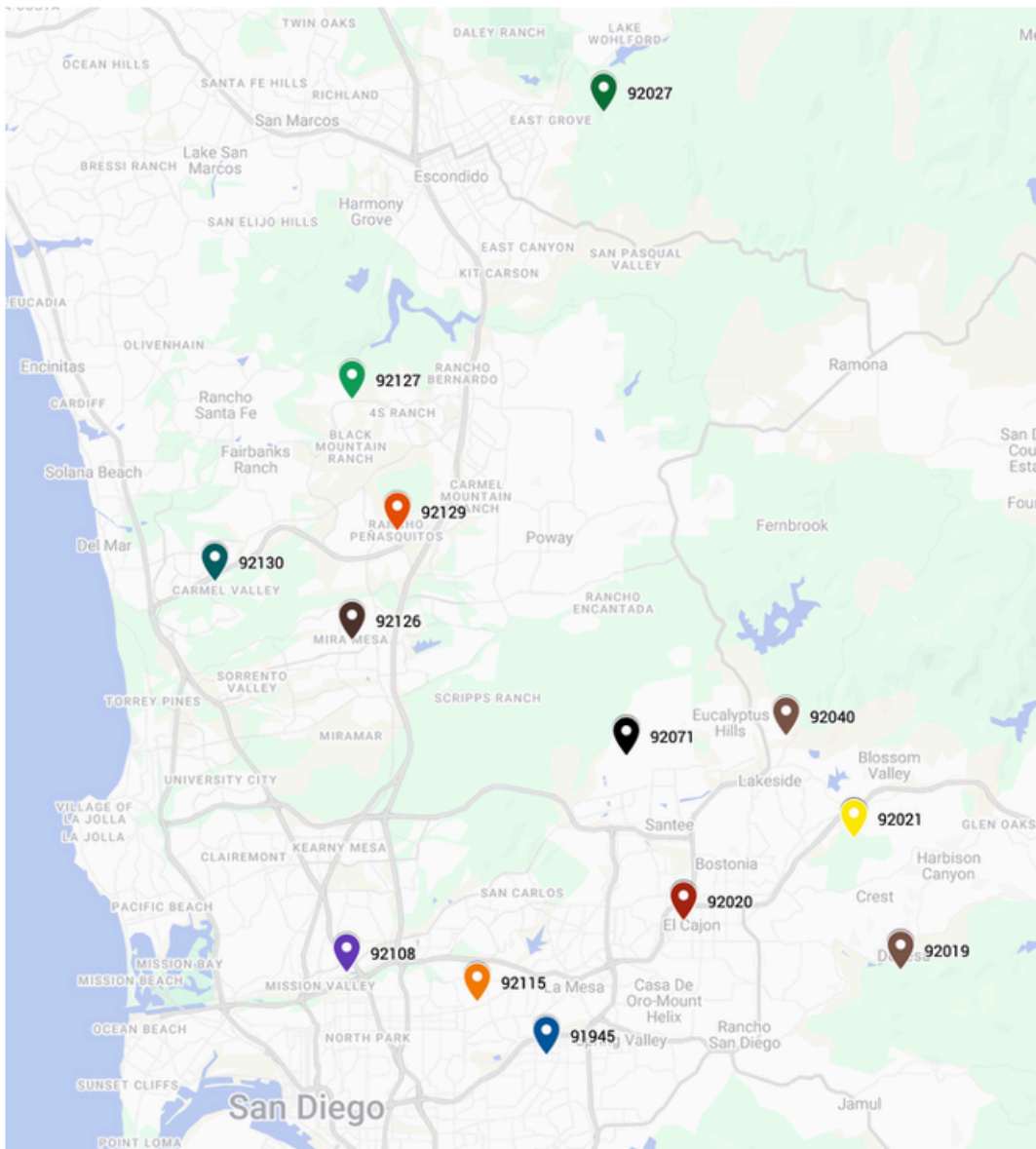
- All 40 providers identify as Afghan.
- 35 providers reported Dari as their primary language; 4 providers reported Pashto as their primary language and 1 provider reported Farsi as their primary language.

Service Capacity.

- 30 providers have a small license, with a service capacity of 8.
- 10 providers have a large license, with a service capacity of 14.
- Total service capacity is 380 child care slots.

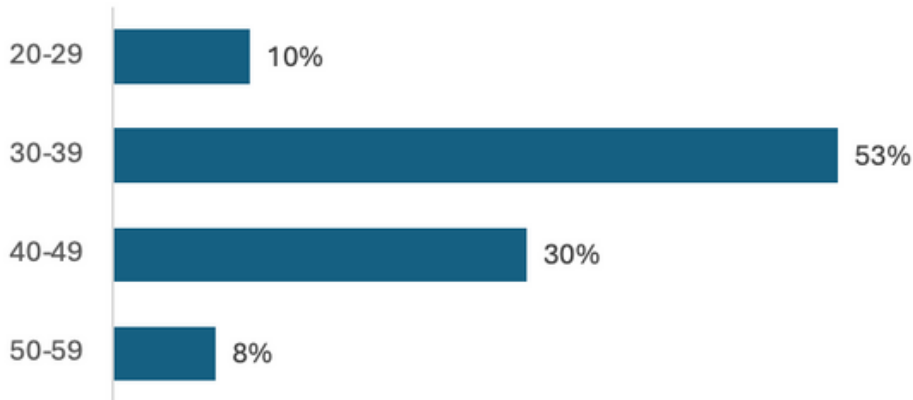
Service Region.

- 13 providers reside in 92020.
- 7 providers reside in 92021.
- 5 providers reside in 92129.
- 4 providers reside in 92019.
- 2 providers reside in 92071 & 92027.
- 1 provider resides in 92127, 92126, 92115, 92040, 92130, 91945 and 92108.

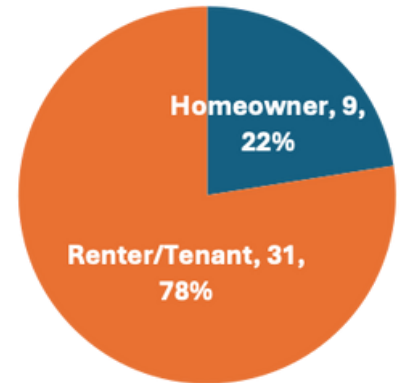


Provider Demographics

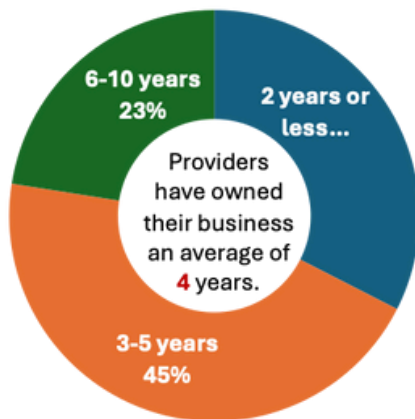
Provider Age Range



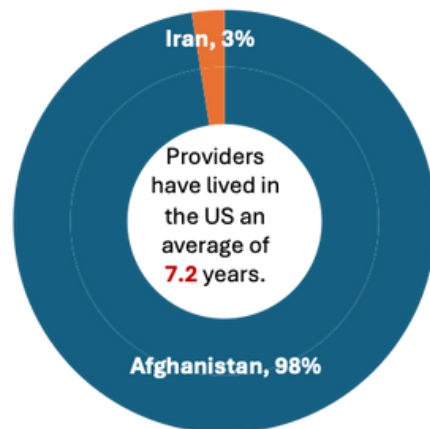
Homeowner Status



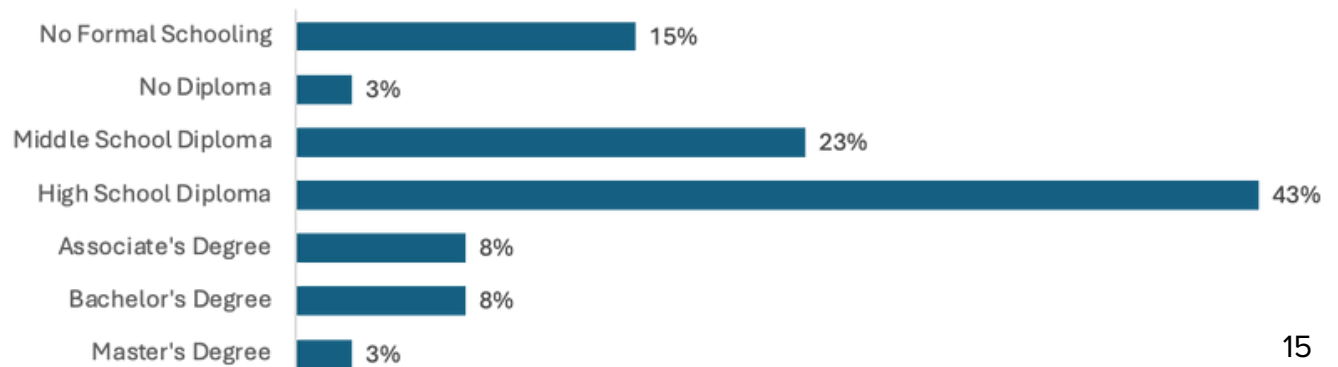
Years of Experience as a Provider



Provider's Country of Birth



Highest Level of Education



Provider Business Characteristics

Providers report working an average of 42 hours per week caring for children and another 14 hours per week on their business beyond caring for children. Examples of the work that they do beyond caring for children includes cleaning, preparing learning activities and meals, managing finances, grocery shopping, and sending invoices.

FCC providers often offer care during non-traditional hours to meet the needs of the families they serve. 80% (n=32) of STEPS providers offer care during non-traditional hours. For this report, non-traditional hours were defined as 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. weekdays and any hours on the weekend.

With the long hours caring for children and operating a business, providers employ full-time and part-time staff or often have unpaid volunteers. Volunteer staff are typically family members that help with the program until there is sufficient growth to hire and pay staff members. Employing staff is an indicator of business growth and development of the program. One provider employs a full-time staff member and 40% (n=16) of providers have unpaid volunteers that work an average of 22 hours per week to help with the provider's child care business.

Provider participation in programs and networks for FCC providers offer support, resources and can be important for income generation. The Child and Adult Child Food Program (CACFP) is a reimbursement program for the cost of food served to children. The San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI) is the local Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) that helps providers develop their programs to meet early childhood education standards. The local union provides resources to keep providers informed of policy initiatives and child care provider advocacy efforts. The California Early Care and Education (CA ECE) Workforce Registry is a platform that tracks and promotes professional development training of early childhood educators. Provider participation percentages at intake are reported in the following table.

Participation in Provider Programs and Networks	
CACFP	3%
SDQPI	10%
Union – Child Care Providers United	20%
CA ECE Workforce Registry	18%

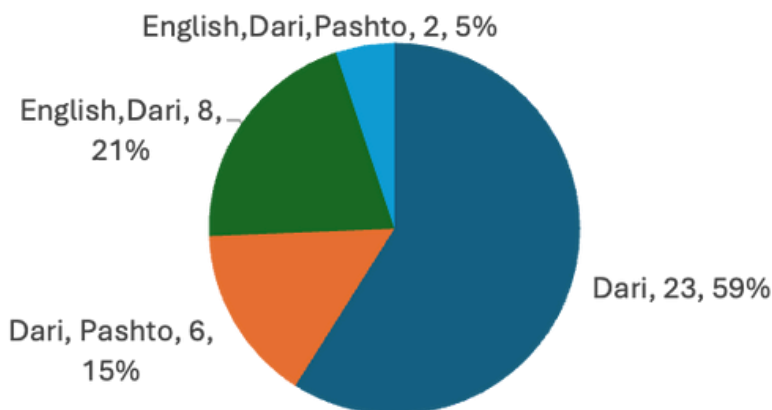
Provider Business Characteristics

Families often choose FCCs because of their flexibility in their hours of care, however, families also choose FCCs because the provider often shares a language and culture that is similar to their clients. All 40 providers offered care in a language other than English with most providers (59%; n=23) operating their program in Dari.

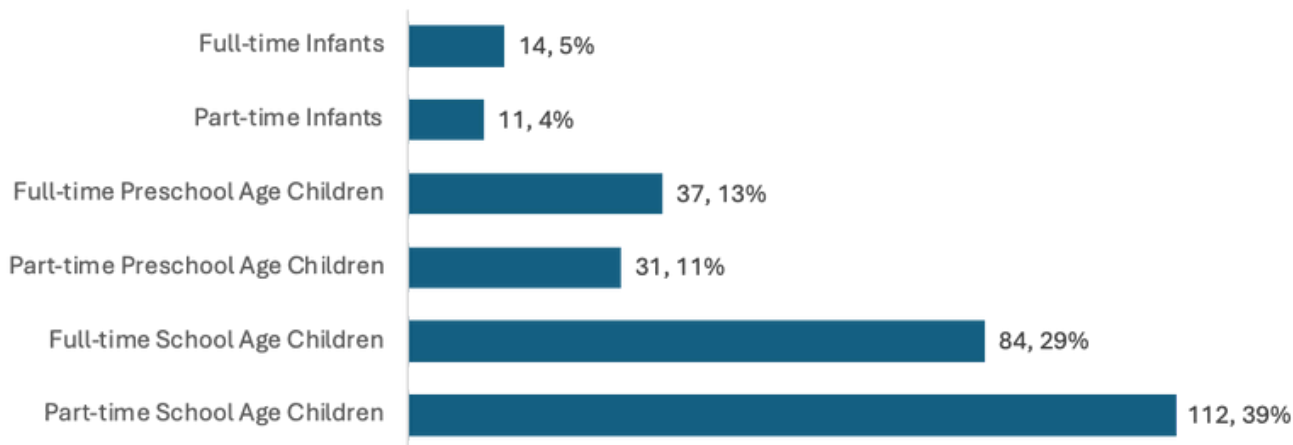
The majority of providers (95%; n=38) had children enrolled in their FCC home at intake. Providers reported child enrollment by age category and part-time and full-time status. They also reported the number of children that share their same ethnicity and primary language. Below is a snapshot of child demographic data at intake. Change in enrollment is reported in the impact data.

- 47% of children enrolled attend full time, a minimum of 25 hours per week.
- The largest age group enrolled by providers is school age children (68%).
- On average, 97% of children enrolled share a language with their provider’s primary language.
- On average, 97% of children enrolled share an ethnicity with their provider.

Language Program Operates In



Enrollment at Intake by Age Group



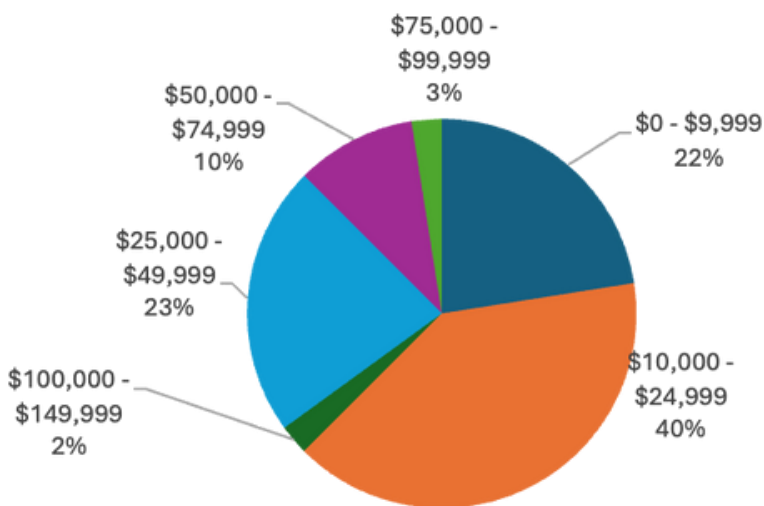
Provider Business Characteristics

Providers reported their personal income level in the previous tax year. Sixty-two percent of providers reported that their personal income level was less than \$25,000 per year.

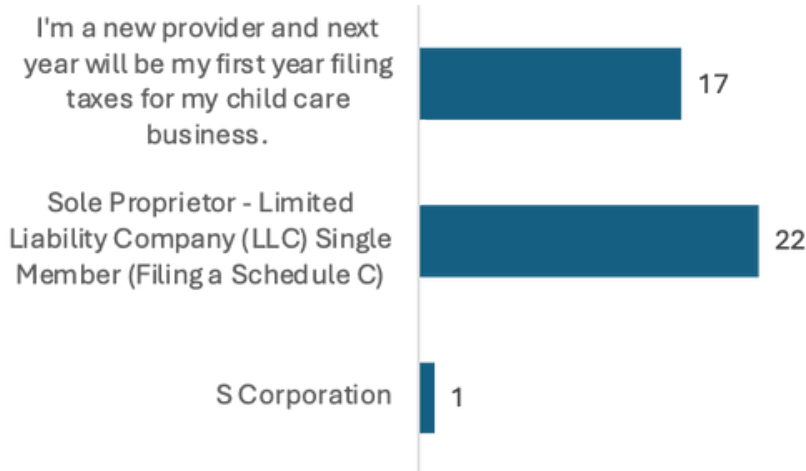
Provider filing status was also reported and is an indicator of strong business practices. Most providers begin their business filing as a sole proprietor and may later move towards filing as an S Corporation if there are advantages to protecting their personal liability and assets as their business grows. Fifty-five percent (n=22) of providers filed as a sole proprietor in 2023.

FCC providers are either paid privately by the family receiving care, or they are paid by agencies that disperse government funded subsidies for families that meet income qualifications. Providers reported that 100% of their families qualify for subsidies. The providers did not have any families enrolled that pay privately.

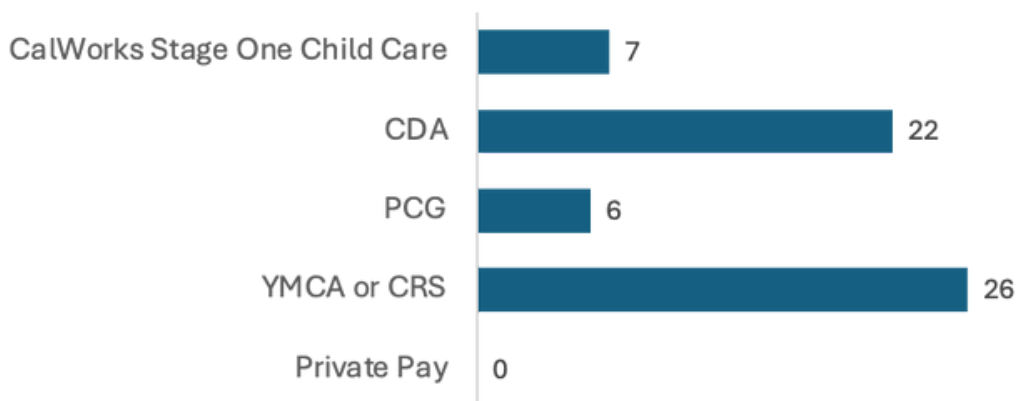
2023 Personal Income Level



Tax Filing Status



Providers Participation with Subsidy Contractors



Provider Business Characteristics

The table below displays the estimated annual average income and expenses for all 40 providers. The information is self-reported by the provider in the Taxes and Budget Survey. The three largest expenses for providers are Mortgage Payment, Rent and Food and Utilities. Gasoline was another notable expense for providers.

Estimated Annual Income (Average)	
Tuition from Subsidy Payments	\$ 41,172
Total	\$ 41,172.22
Estimated Annual Expenses (Average)	
Insurance	\$ 412.74
Salaries and Wages	\$ -
Accounting	\$ -
Mortgage Payment or Rent	\$ 24,202.56
Services & Internet	\$ 1,145.26
Marketing & Advertising	\$ 392.11
Food	\$ 9,540.63
Materials	\$ 2,193.75
Repairs & Maintenance	\$ 1,667.62
Total Utilities	\$ 3,859.35
Taxes	\$ 660.00
Licenses & Permits	\$ 77.76
Other Expenses - Gas	\$ 3,569.33
Total	\$ 47,721.11



Impact Data

The impact of the training series was measured using a provider needs assessment survey, training content assessment data, a post-training satisfaction survey, a post-program satisfaction survey, and pre and post-program data. Enrollment and best business practices were also tracked to measure how the providers' business was impacted over the course of the project period.



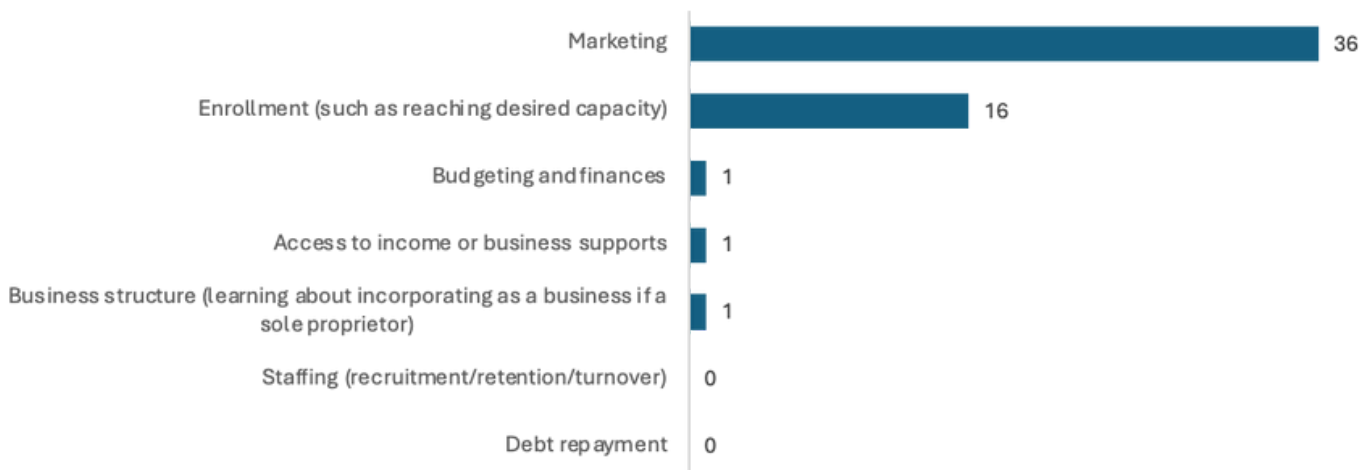
Needs Assessment: Provider Pre-Survey

Providers completed a pre-survey to understand their expectations of the STEPS program and topics that are of interest to them. Providers were asked to indicate which scheduled courses they were most looking forward to. The top three answers were In-Home Child Care Licensing Regulations into Practice, Food Nutrition, and Child Development. Providers were also asked to select the top three challenges they face as child care providers that could be supported during coaching. Marketing was selected by 90% of providers as their top concern.

Top Courses Anticipated by Providers



Provider Reported Biggest Challenges



Training Series: Assessment Data

To assess the provider’s knowledge and skills acquisition, providers were asked to answer a series of questions related to the course topic prior to the start of each training session. They then answered the same questions at the end of the training session to measure knowledge acquisition. On average, providers increased their assessment scores by 13%.

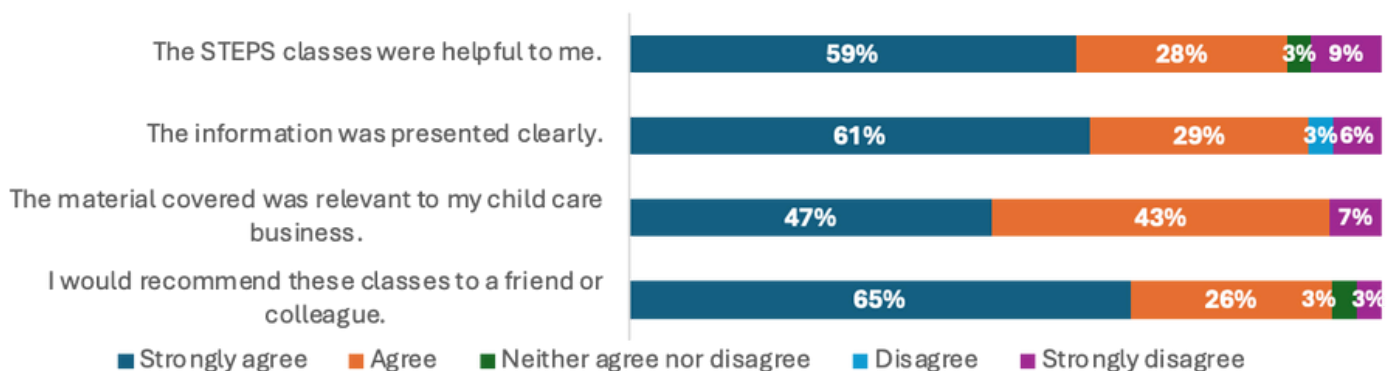
Average Increase in Pre and Post Assessment Scores	
Course	Average Increase
Digital Literacy 101 & 102 (n=34)	11%
Financial Literacy 101: Budget & Banking) & 102: Credit (n=29)	10%
Business Management: Business Practice & Growth (n=32)	-2%
Marketing Smart Plan or Tootris (n=37)	17%
In-Home Child Care Licensing Regulations into Practice (n=34)	11%
Child Care Provider - Parent Contract (n=37)	11%
Tax Ready Business (n=35)	18%
Food Nutrition -Chicano Federation (n=36)	30%
Effective Bookkeeping Practices for Child Care Providers (n=34)	15%
Labor Law (n=15; cohort 1 only)	13%
Child Development (n=28)	4%
SDQPI Quality Journey Orientation (n=30)	16%
Total Average Increase	13%

Training Series: Post-Training Surveys

At the end of the 14-week training series, providers were asked to complete a survey rating their satisfaction with the course and the relevance of the course content. Overall, 90% of providers “strongly agree” or “agree” with the satisfaction statements. Providers were also given the opportunity to give open-ended feedback. Many comments highlight the variety of business practices that were covered throughout the training series.

- “I did not know anything about Tax, Bookkeeping, marketing but now I have a google account and know how to keep my documents.”
- “I really appreciated the structure and clarity of the STEPS training. The materials were easy to follow, and the real-life examples made the concepts more practical. I would love to see more hands-on activities or case studies in future sessions. Also, it would be helpful to have access to the slides or materials afterward for reference. Thank you for offering this valuable training.”
- “Yes, there were several lessons and best practices I will apply to my business. One key takeaway was the importance of clear communication with both children and parents. I also learned more effective strategies for managing challenging behaviors in a positive and respectful way. The training emphasized the value of consistent routines, which I plan to strengthen in my childcare setting. Additionally, I gained a better understanding of licensing requirements and documentation practices, which will help me stay organized and compliant.”
- “Absolutely! Key lessons include listening to customer feedback, staying consistent, trusting your team, making data-driven decisions, and maintaining consistent branding.”
- “Yes, I learned the importance of budgeting, planning ahead, and choosing quality materials that support both learning and safety.”
- “I learned about collecting documents that are necessary for my business and I am using that knowledge. I also learned about my taxes and my rights, and I am making good use of that information.”
- “Yes, the lessons we learned in this class are being used to improve our business, such as properly filing taxes, keeping related documents, better advertising methods to attract more children, learning about taxes and child food programs, becoming familiar with the business plan website, how to properly interact with children with disabilities, and many other useful things we learned in this class that we will apply in the future.”

Provider Satisfaction with STEPS Training (n=32)

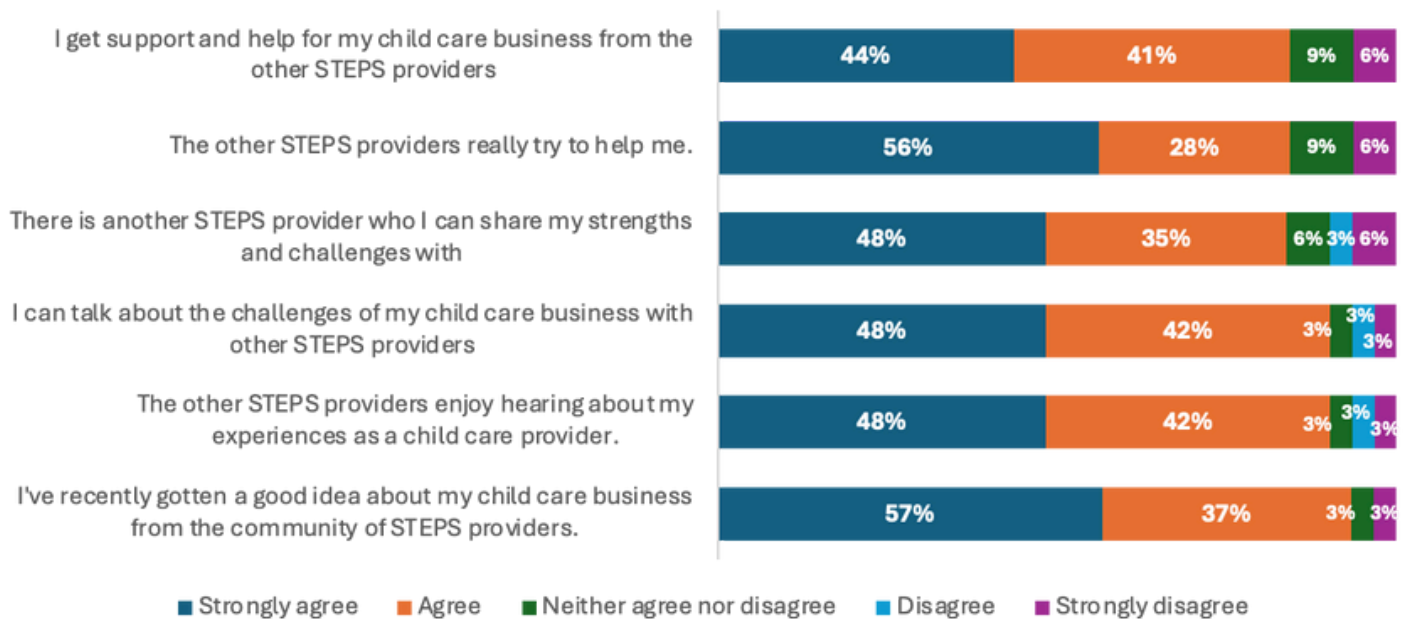


Training Series: Post-Training Surveys

The STEPS program is a cohort-based learning model. Providers take courses with a cohort of providers that share the same culture, ethnicity and language. Prior STEPS reports have highlighted the continued need for training and professional development in a provider’s primary language, reinforcing the need for continued language supports. Additional questions were included in the survey this year to understand how social support contributes to learning in shared cultural communities.

Providers were asked to rate six social support statements. Overall, 88% of providers strongly agree or agree that social support is beneficial to them as child care providers.

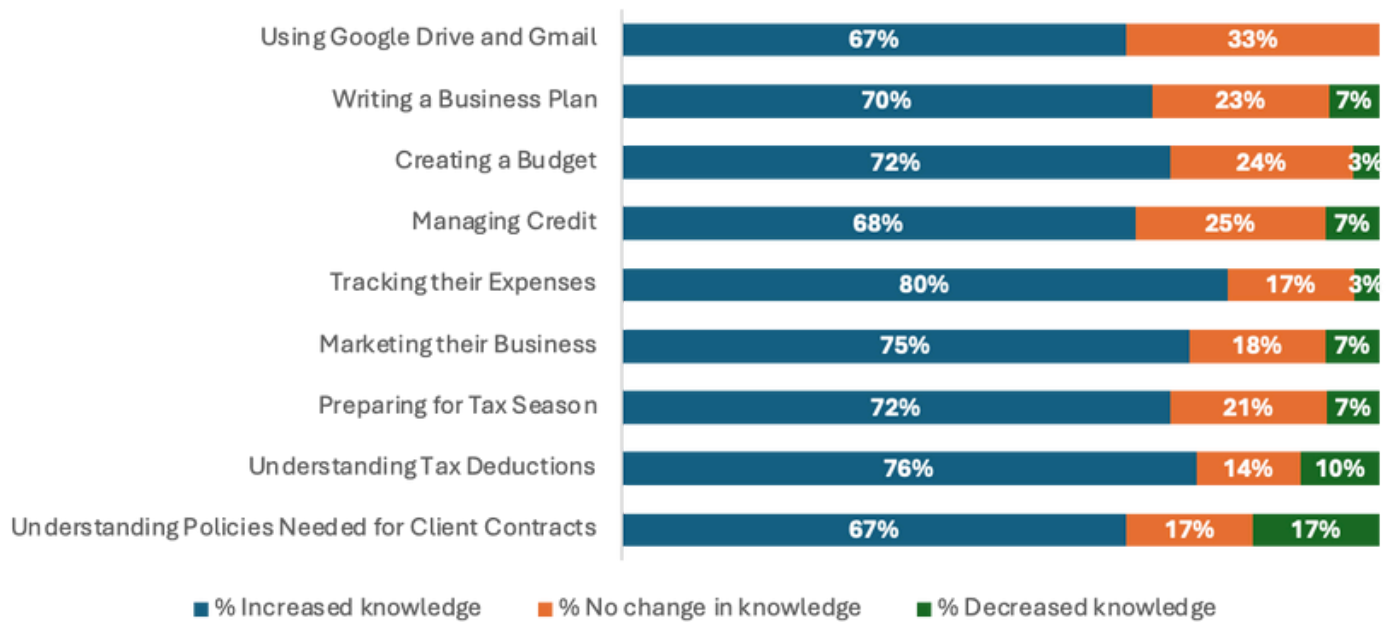
Provider Social Support (n=32)



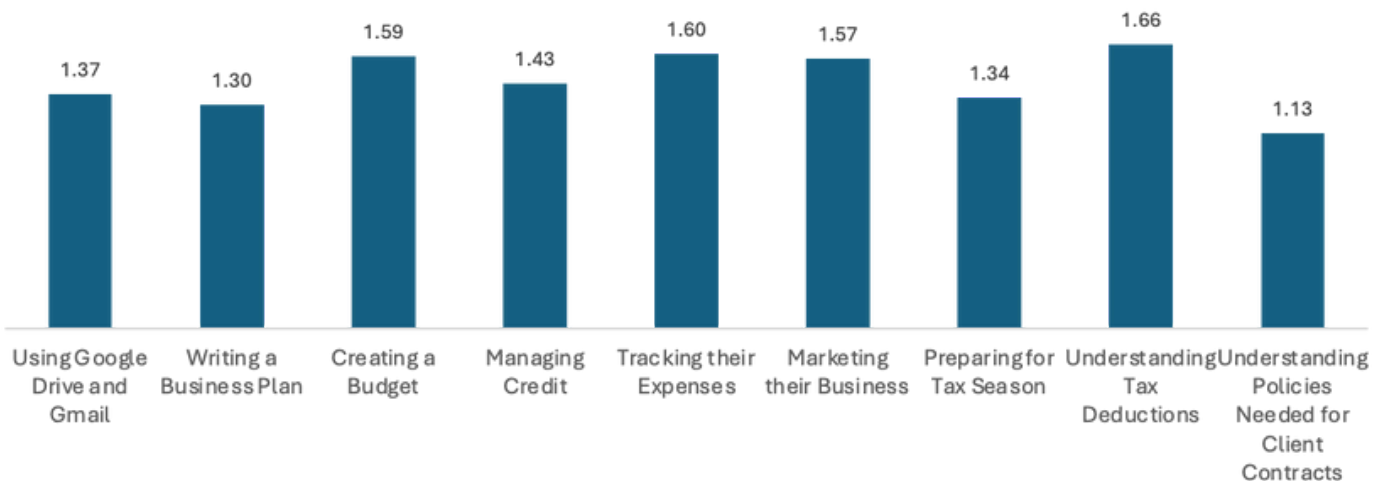
Training Series: Post Training Surveys

After the training series, providers were asked to reflect on their knowledge of the course content and rate their perceived knowledge before and after the training series on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest. On average, 72% of providers indicated that their knowledge increased after the training series and perceived knowledge increased by an average of 1.44 points (based on a 5-point scale).

Provider Perception of Knowledge Before and After STEPS Training (n=30)



Increase in Perceived Knowledge (n=30)



Training Series: Open-Ended Feedback

At the end of the 14-week training series, IRC hosted a graduation ceremony, where providers received a certificate, came together as a community, and brought food to share. The initial evaluation plan included an opportunity for a focus group at the graduation, however, the cultural navigator shifted the questions to an online format as she believed the providers would be hesitant to share in an open forum. Providers were asked open-ended questions to better understand what they learned during the training series, what additional support is needed and the importance of a cohort-based model. Their answers were recorded, summarized and some of their unique perspectives are highlighted below.

What is one thing you learned from the STEPS training series that you now use in your FCC business? Or want to use in your FCC business?

Business Practices:	Communicaiton with Families:	Teaching and Learning:
"Marketing, creating a Google account, good cost management, proper scheduling to achieve business goals, information about children's nutrition, and tax filing."	"importance of building strong, intentional relationships with families."	"I learned how to create a daily schedule for children, and I use it in my FCC business now."
"The one thing important thing I learned is how to do my tax. It is necessary to know how to prepare for tax season and organize necessary information for it."	<p>"One key takeaway from the STEPS training series that could be applied to an FCC (Family Child Care) business is the importance of creating a structured yet flexible environment for both children and parents. The series emphasizes building strong communication channels with families, which helps in understanding their needs and establishing clear expectations.</p> <p>In my FCC business, I would implement regular check-ins with parents and develop tailored learning plans for each child based on their development and interests. This approach fosters a stronger partnership between caregivers and families, ensuring a more personalized and effective care environment."</p>	<p>"One key lesson I gained from the STEPS training series that I now actively use in my FCC business is the importance of establishing consistent routines and transitions. I've seen firsthand how having a structured routine helps children feel more secure and reduces anxiety, which leads to smoother days overall. I've made it a priority to implement clear, predictable routines and use visual aids to help guide transitions, especially for the younger children in my care."</p>
"We learned new programs that we had less information about before, such as creating a folder for each child separately"	"Regular updates with the child's family and building trust and confidence with the parents."	<p>"Through the STEPS training, I learned how to create a more structured and engaging learning environment for the children in my care.</p> <p>The program introduced me to valuable resources, like guides and activity plans, that help me support early childhood development"</p>

Training Series: Open-Ended Feedback

What additional training would you like for IRC to offer? What classes from the training would you like to have additional training on? What business coaching support do you still need to help your business grow?			
Teaching and Learning:	Licensing Regulations & Business Operations	Marketing & Business Growth	Financial Management & Recordkeeping
"I would like IRC to offer additional training on behavior guidance and social-emotional development."	"We want to have more information about filling out forms related to children to avoid any problems."	"I would like IRC to offer additional training on how to manage and grow a small business, especially focused on marketing, budgeting, and using technology to stay organized."	"I would like additional support and practice with using Microsoft Excel and other digital tools to help with recordkeeping and planning."
"I would love for IRC to offer additional training on supporting children with special needs, particularly in recognizing early signs and implementing inclusive strategies in a home child care setting. I'd also appreciate a deeper dive into behavior management techniques from the STEPS training, especially with real-life examples and tools we can use daily."	"We want educational classes to inform us about children's attendance and also about the paperwork related to children."	"How to grow my business even more"	"Business classes and money management classes."
"I would also appreciate more in-depth training on child development and behavior management for different age groups."	"We need more classes about time sheet."	"I would love grants opportunities and additional training on business management for FCC providers, especially on budgeting and marketing to grow my childcare business."	"Financial planning and budgeting to ensure long-term sustainability and smart growth."
"One area I find valuable for further training in the IRC program is the focus on managing challenging behaviors and conflict resolution strategies. While the STEPS training covers general guidelines for child development and behavior, more in-depth sessions on how to address specific issues, such as aggression or social difficulties, can be really helpful."	"Completing the documents and how to prepare a business plan."	"I still need support with marketing and setting prices for my services."	"Additionally, coaching in financial management—such as budgeting for growth, setting rates, and planning for future investments—will be helpful. Balancing quality care and sustainability without a clear financial direction can be difficult. Are there specific areas you are focused on to grow your business?"
"More training on child development and how to implement them in daily activities, as well as educational classes on managing their challenging behaviors, would be beneficial."	"Expanding the license to large license."	"I would benefit from more business coaching on financial planning, marketing, and securing grants or funding opportunities. Learning how to attract more families and manage expenses effectively would help my FCC business grow and remain sustainable."	
"I also found the child development sessions valuable and would appreciate deeper training on supporting children with special needs. These topics would help me improve both the quality and sustainability of my FCC business."	"I need classes about making a good contract and having a good and clear communication with parents."	"I would benefit from continued business coaching in areas like marketing my FCC program, managing finances, and creating a strong online presence. Support with setting goals, tracking progress, and building partnerships with local families and organizations would also help me grow my business more effectively."	

Training Series: Open-Ended Feedback

Was it helpful to attend class with other family child care providers that share the same language and are from a similar cultural background? Why or why not?

<p>“Yes, having both a common language and culture in one class was useful, and we discussed issues and problems better and understood each other because our culture, customs, and language are the same, making it more comprehensible and easier, and more beneficial.”</p>	<p>“Yes, it was very helpful to attend class with other family child care providers who share the same language and cultural background. It made the learning environment more comfortable and supportive. We could easily share experiences, ask questions without hesitation, and learn from each other’s perspectives. It also helped build a sense of community, which is so important in this field.”</p>	<p>“Yes, participating in a class with people who speak the same language and have a similar cultural background is beneficial. Better understanding of concepts: speakers of the same language can explain complex concepts to each other in simpler terms. Comfort in expressing questions: students feel more comfortable expressing their problems and questions. Shared experiences: since they have similar cultural and professional backgrounds, they can better share experiences and solutions with each other. Increased self-confidence: in a familiar and supportive environment, learners are more confident in participating.”</p>
<p>“Yes it is very helpful to been with other providers that share same language and similar cultural backgrounds. It is helpful because providers can build communication without any language barrier and we can solve common problems more easier.”</p>	<p>“Yes, it was helpful to attend class with other family child care providers from a similar cultural background. It created a sense of community, making it easier to share experiences, challenges, and solutions that are culturally relevant and specific to our needs. It also fostered a supportive learning environment where we could relate to each other more deeply.”</p>	<p>“Yes, it was very useful. Sharing the same language and cultural background led to better understanding and collaboration. We can relate our experiences and challenges to each other, making the learning process more relevant and supportive.”</p>
<p>“Yes, attending class with other family child care providers who share the same language and cultural background was very helpful. It created a supportive learning environment where we could openly share experiences, ask questions, and learn from one another. It also made it easier to understand the material and apply it to our businesses in a way that fits our communities’ needs.”</p>	<p>“Yes, attending class with other family childcare providers who share a similar language and cultural background can be very helpful because it allows for deeper understanding and connection around common experiences, facilitating better communication.”</p>	<p>“Yes, because we got to know other ladies and were able to solve our problems.”</p>





Business Coaching: Cultural Navigator

Reported Data

Over the course of the program, providers had multiple opportunities to participate in 1:1 business coaching. Providers were encouraged to seek support for the business practices they wanted to strengthen and to work with the cultural navigator on strategies to achieve their business goals.

The cultural navigator helped all 40 providers apply for the San Diego Foundation (SDF) grant and complete a business plan as part of the application process. SDF has funded prior STEPS programs and has been a member of the STEPS leadership team. Providers were eligible to apply for up to \$3500 for their child care business, and the intended use of the funds was detailed in their business plans. At reporting time, grant approval was still pending.

The business plans were analyzed and similar themes were found. Providers described short-term goals that included immediate needs to enhance their child care environment. These needs included furniture, car seats, educational toys, outdoor equipment, and computers and printers for their personal office. Providers also discussed the need for more resources to help them market their business, including the ability to print business cards and flyers. Long-term goals often included increasing enrollment and expanding their license capacity. To support the expansion of their business, providers noted that they will also need to hire an assistant and move to a larger home or apartment.

The cultural navigator also helped four providers successfully complete the process to increase their license capacity from eight children to 14 children and four providers were in the process of increasing their license capacity at report time. Additionally, two providers applied and received a business credit card to help establish their credit and one provider improved their credit score.

The cultural navigator also encouraged providers to participate in the local FCC network programs. By the end of the program, two more providers signed up to receive CACFP benefits, 12 providers joined the SDQPI program and 33 providers joined the CA ECE Workforce Registry. Unfortunately, in October 2025, the CA ECE Workforce Registry experienced significant federal funding cuts and the statewide system is no longer operating. This is a significant loss to the 33 providers that joined and were taking advantage of the professional development available to them. Additionally, the providers joined because they were anticipating future stipend opportunities, however there is no immediate plan to renew the stipend programs.

Provider Network Participation (n=40)

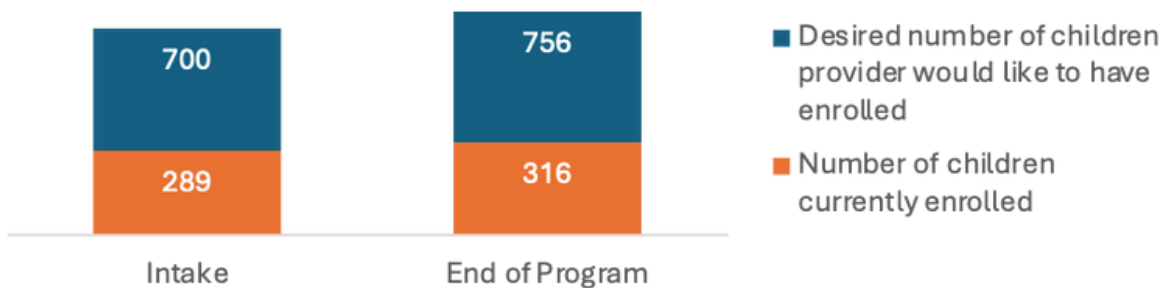
	Intake	End of Program
CACFP	1	3
SDQPI	4	16
Workforce Registry	7	40
Union	8	8

Overall Impact: Pre and Post-Program Data

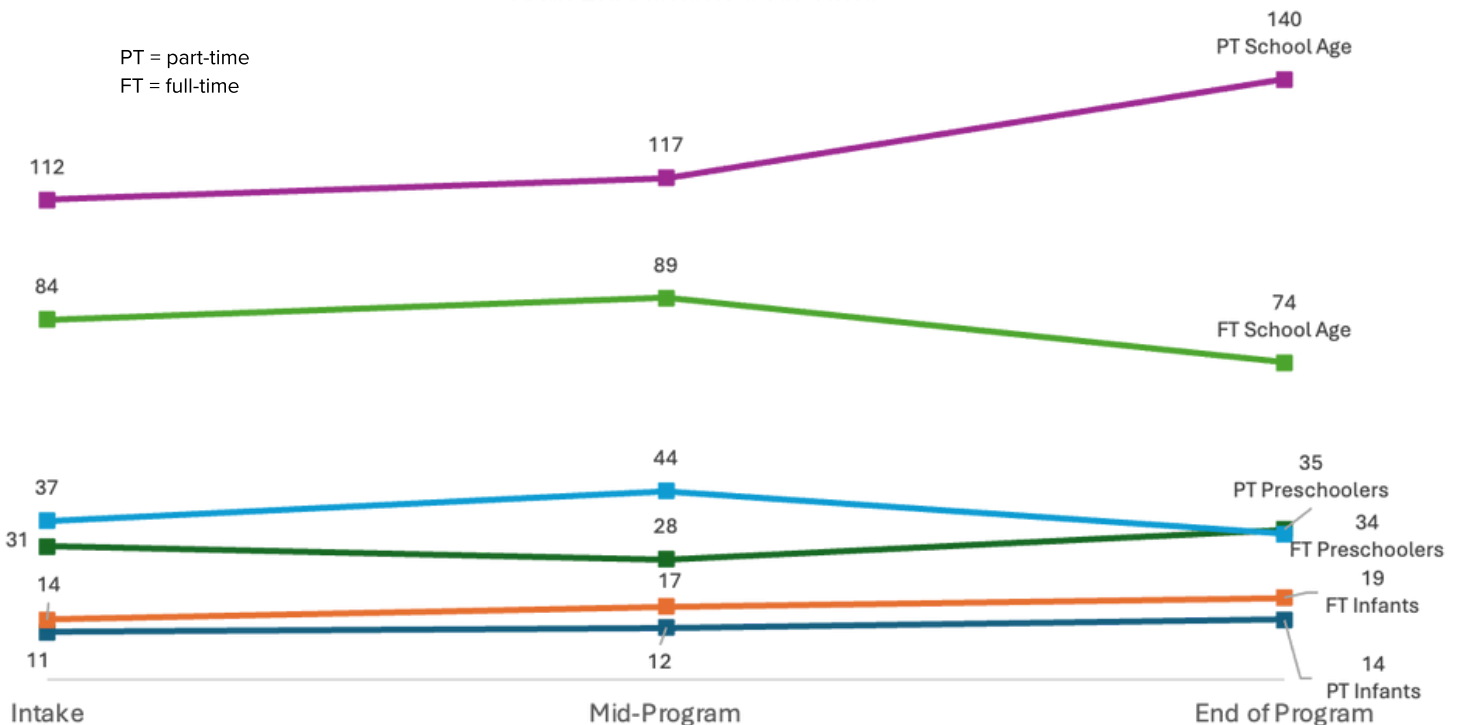
Provider enrollment was measured periodically throughout the program. Providers reported their current enrollment and the desired number of children they would like to have enrolled. Ninety-five percent (n=38) of providers reported their desired capacity above their license capacity indicating that most providers want to maximize enrollment with multiple shifts of children throughout their day.

Thirty-eight providers had children enrolled at intake. Two providers did not have children enrolled at intake and did not enroll any children during the program period. From October 2024 through November 2025, enrollment increased by 9%. Sixteen providers (42%) increased their enrollment and another 13 (39%) sustained their enrollment. Providers increased the number of children across four age groups, part-time school-age children, part-time preschoolers, part-time infants and full-time infants. The total number of full-time (FT) children decreased by 6% and the total number of part-time (PT) children increased by 23%.

To understand the impact of enrollment on provider income, the average monthly estimated tuition income was calculated at intake and at the end of the program using the maximum reimbursement rate for FCCs in San Diego County. The change in enrollment from intake to the end of program equated to an estimated increase in average monthly tuition income of \$384.67, or an average increase in yearly tuition income of \$4,615.99 per provider.



Total Enrollment Over Time



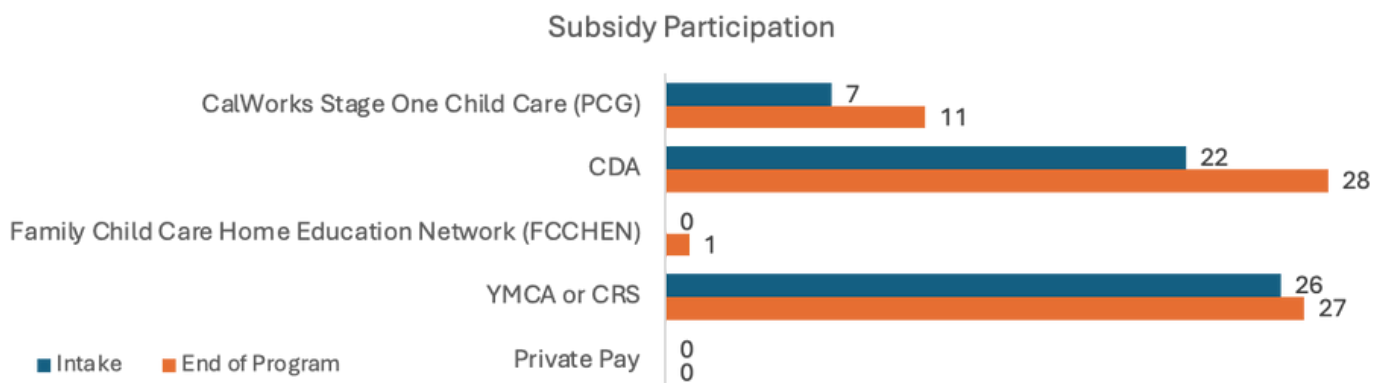
Overall Impact: Pre and Post-Program Data

Provider business characteristics were again collected at the end of the program. Pre and post program data was compared to show changes to provider business practices.

All 38 providers that had children enrolled participated in the local subsidy programs and did not have families enrolled that paid privately. By the end of the program, participation in the local subsidy programs increased.

Providers were asked at intake and at the end of the program if their income would increase, decrease or stay the same. Overall, the majority of providers said their income would increase, both at intake (95%; n=38) and at the end of the program (83%; n=33). There was no change in the number of providers that filed taxes for their business, one additional provider had a system for budgeting and cashflow, providers did not report taking on any bad debt and two providers had financial reserves or a savings account.

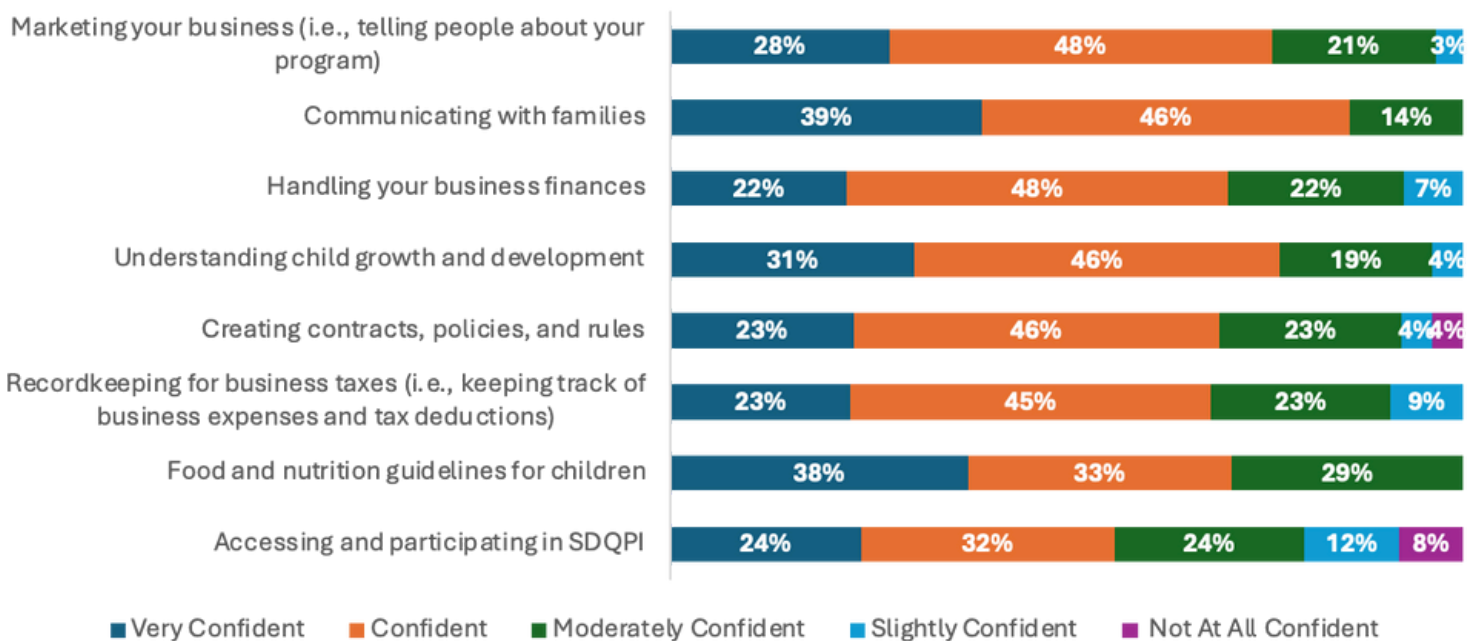
Child Care Management System (CCMS) is a software application that helps child care providers automate their business operations. At intake, 67% (n=27) of providers use CCMS and at the end of the program, 65% (n=26) of providers use CCMS. Some of the local subsidy contractors use CareConnect to manage child attendance and receive subsidized reimbursements. Providers are required to submit timesheets using CareConnect, but must pay additional fees to use other features of the software and these fees are often cost prohibitive. Providers that use CCMS for payroll are using the free feature needed for the subsidy reimbursements.



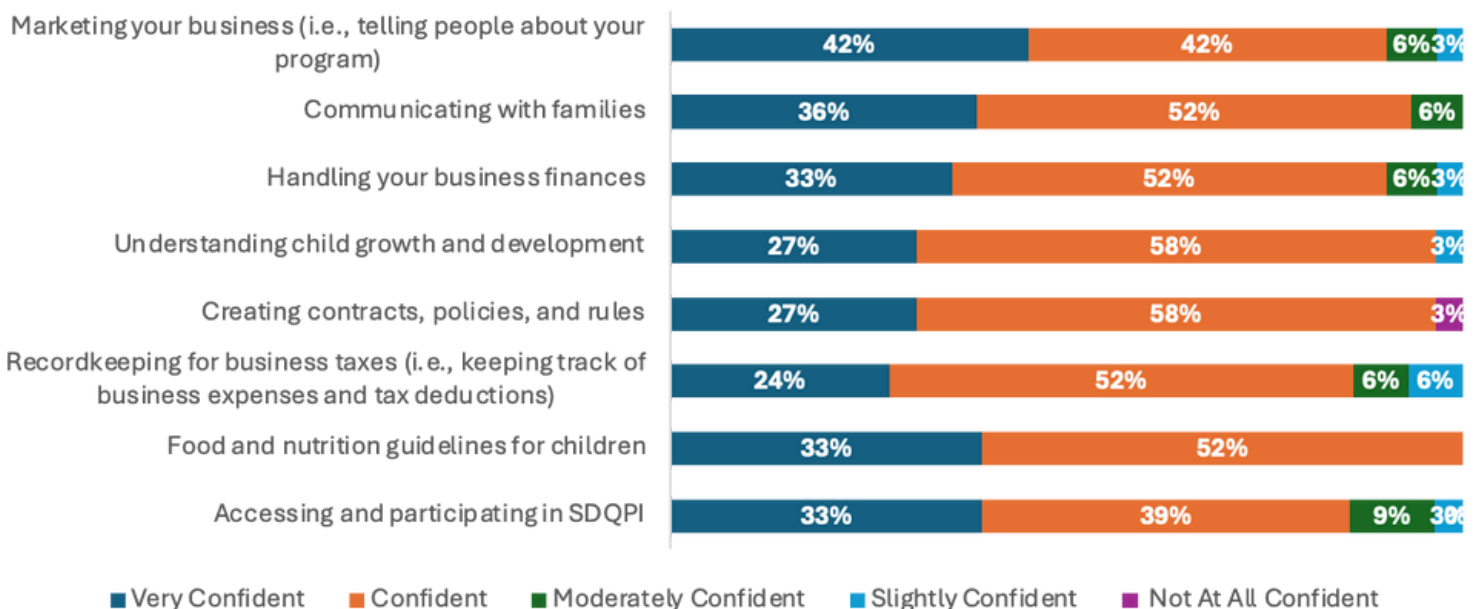
Overall Impact: Pre and Post-Survey Results

Providers were asked to rate their confidence in implementing business practices prior to the start of the program in the needs assessment survey and at the end of the program in a post satisfaction survey. Overall, the percentage of providers that were "very confident" or "confident" in each of the measured business practices increased. At post program, on average, 83% of providers were "very confident" or "confident" on all business practices. Sixteen percent more providers were "very confident" or "confident" in creating contracts, policies, and rules and 17% more providers were "very confident" or "confident" in accessing and participating in SDQPI.

Pre Program: How confident do you currently feel about the following? (n=29)



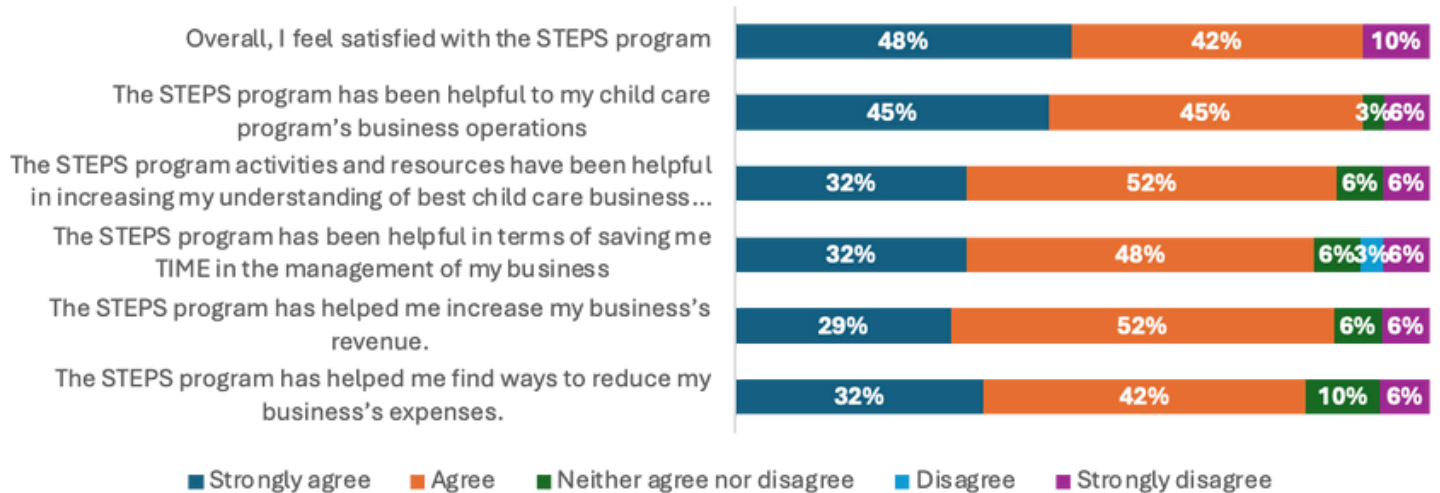
Post Program: How confident do you currently feel about the following? (n=33)



Overall Impact: Post-Satisfaction Survey

The post satisfaction survey also asked providers to rate their satisfaction with STEPS and provide open-ended feedback about their experience in the program. Overall, the providers were satisfied with the help they received. On average, 83% of providers "strongly agree" or "agree" with the below satisfaction statements.

Provider Satisfaction with STEPS (n=31)



Overall Impact: Post-Satisfaction Survey

Providers were also asked a series of questions allowing for open-ended feedback. The providers described what they learned from the program, their ongoing needs to improve their business and their overall satisfaction with the content of the training series and the cultural navigator that led them through the program.

If you feel that the STEPS program has had an impact on your business, please share an example	Do you have any suggestions about ways to improve the STEPS program? If yes, please share them.	Are there any future coaching needs that you have or topics that you would like to see incorporated?	Is there anything that you would like to share about your experience?
I have learned more about child nutrition, creating a business plan, and the ways I can do marketing for my business.	I really appreciate the support, the STEPS program provides. One suggestion for improvement would be to offer more one on one guidance for new participants to help with understanding paperwork, grant requirements or business development steps. Also, it would be great to have more flexible training times or online sessions for those with busy child care schedules.	I would like to see more coaching on business management topics such as budgeting, marketing, and expanding enrollment. It would also be helpful to learn more about grant opportunities, licensing updates, and staff development. Training on how to improve parent communication and quality ratings would be great too	Ms. Marzia ran this program properly, and I like to participate in programs that Marzia manages because everything is understandable.
It was a very good program. I learned so many things about my small business, for example keeping our records, marketing, time management, tax filing, and so many other things.	The STEPS program has been very helpful overall. One suggestion for improvement would be to include more interactive sessions or practical examples that relate directly to our daily work with clients. This would make the learning even more applicable.	I would like to receive coaching on leadership and time management skills, particularly on how to balance multiple client cases efficiently while maintaining quality service. Training on effective communication and conflict resolution with clients and coworkers would also be valuable.	My experience with the STEPS program has been wonderful. The support and guidance I've received have really helped me grow both personally and professionally. I've learned a lot about improving my child care business, and I truly appreciate how kind and encouraging the staff have been throughout the process.
It taught me so much more information and helped me improve myself with my business. For example, now I know about laws and information regarding what to do so I can have a better business.	I would like to take child development classes through your office. And these classes must be held through your office.	I learned a lot from this STEPS program and I would definitely like to participate again because the topics discussed were very interesting and I learned a lot.	Professional and Appreciative: Overall, my experience has been very positive. I've learned a great deal through direct client interaction and collaboration with my team. I appreciate the support and guidance I've received, which has helped me grow both personally and professionally.
The STEPS program has had a positive impact by helping me strengthen my organizational and communication skills. It provided tools and strategies that improved how I manage my daily workload and support clients more effectively.	Increase number of grants for providers in order to improve our facility.	A little more information should be provided about the photos and advertisements for finding children.	My experience with STEP program was incredible. The advisor was very knowledgeable and helpful. The courses were excellent and easy to follow and understand.



Key Findings

Reflections & Recommendations





Key Findings

- All 40 providers wrote a business plan and applied for the SDF Grant. At reporting time, grant approval was still pending.
- Enrollment increased by 9%.
- 76% of providers increased or sustained their enrollment (2 providers are still working towards enrolling their first child).
- Provider reported desired capacity was 700 at intake. Provider capacity based on the type of license held at intake is 380. Almost all of the providers (95%; n=38) reported a desired capacity that exceeded their license capacity and given that 80% of providers work non-traditional hours, providers want to maximize their schedules and enroll children in multiple shifts to increase revenue.
- 90% of providers strongly agree or agree that the training was helpful, information was presented clearly, and material was relevant.
- Overall, 88% of providers strongly agree that social support is beneficial to them as child care providers.
- 72% of providers reported their knowledge increased on the course objectives.
- 83% of providers strongly agree or agree that they were satisfied with the STEPS program.
- 12 providers joined SDQPI. This is the largest single increase in participation of SDQPI from a cohort of STEPS participants.
- 33 providers joined the ECE Workforce Registry. Although the workforce registry website and online support are no longer in operation, the providers' strong interest in participating demonstrates their commitment to their roles as a child care providers and their dedication to continued learning through professional development.

Reflections & Recommendations

Program Implementation

- The cultural navigator focused on helping the providers complete business plans and the application for capital funding. Future business coaching could include helping providers strengthen their financial health by encouraging the use of an operating budget and encouraging the provider to open savings and retirement accounts.
- The 40 providers in the Dari-speaking STEPS cohort provided rich and forthcoming open-ended responses to the surveys they completed. The providers took time to reflect on what they learned, what they hope to gain from future programs, and how they can apply the skills and business practices the program taught to them to strengthen their child care business. Based on these responses, along with the goals and ambitions in the business plans, it is recommended that, if funding is available, IRC should continue to provide business supports to these providers and use the post-survey tools to measure the impact of IRC's business coaching. Although progress during the program period was evident, more time and resources are needed to see substantial long-term sustainability and business growth. As evaluators of STEPS and SSA over the last six years, the enthusiasm and determination from this cohort of providers is unique.
- Child Care Management Systems help providers streamline their business practices. Sixty-five percent of providers use CCMS, but only use the feature for subsidy reimbursement. Future STEPS programs should consider requesting funding for CCMS subscriptions that allow the provider to use all of the features of the software. Provider training on how to use CCMS would also benefit the providers.

Data Collection

- The cultural navigator prefers to submit enrollment data less frequently. It was burdensome to ask for enrollment data monthly and therefore the number of enrollment data check-ins was reduced to three over the course of the project. It is recommended that enrollment is assessed at intake and at the end of the program. Enrollment data can be collected at additional intervals if the cultural navigator and providers are not inconvenienced with the additional task.
- Evaluators should confirm with the cultural navigators if providers are hesitant to provide any of the demographic data collected given the current political climate.
- It is recommended that future evaluations use the Family Child Care Strength and Sustainability Index (FCC-SASI). The SASI tracks the use and need for best business practices for FCCs. It is possible that providers completed additional business practices that were not summarized in the evaluation. For example, providers may have learned what expenses to record during the Tax Ready Business Course, but an assessment of best business practices in use was not established. The SASI can be used to help providers identify and implement business practices for their child care program.
- Qualtrics was used for the first time to collect and manage intake data, survey data and end of program data. The evaluator and cultural navigator worked together to ensure the system was not more burdensome on the cultural navigator and provider. Individual provider links generated by Qualtrics were used to streamline data collected at the end of the program. The individual provider links prevented the cultural navigator from having to input the data manually. Instead, the cultural navigator only made changes to the data if changes occurred. It is recommended that the evaluators continue to use Qualtrics and utilize the platform for data entry and analysis.