

---

Thinking Matters Symposium

2021 Thinking Matters Symposium

---

Apr 30th, 12:00 AM

## Access to Quality Childcare

Diane Hancock

*University of Southern Maine*, [diane.hancock@maine.edu](mailto:diane.hancock@maine.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

---

Hancock, Diane, "Access to Quality Childcare" (2021). *Thinking Matters Symposium*. 17.  
<https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium/2021/poster-sessions/17>

This Poster Session is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking Matters Symposium by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu](mailto:jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu).

# Equal Access to Quality Childcare: A Rural Outlook

Diane Hancock, University of Southern Maine, Dr. Joyce T. Gibson, University of Southern Maine

## Abstract

Equal access to quality child care is not a reality for all families. Oftentimes the high cost of care prevents those from disadvantaged backgrounds from having the option of quality. This study explored the barriers to quality child care access in rural Maine. In addition, the researcher attempted to define quality child care from the perspectives of families who are accessing childcare as well as providers who are serving those families. There are almost 1800 licensed child care programs in Maine that vary in size, location, setting and quality. It is important that all families have equal access to the quality care that will support their families' needs in addition to positive child development and growth.

## Introduction

Access to quality child care is vital to child development, but many families are not granted that privilege (AAP, 2017). Studies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics study (2017) have shown that access to quality early childhood education can have substantial benefits for children, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Throughout the world, the idea that quality care in early childhood can have a positive impact on children's development, is supported by a variety of organizations. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2017) tells us that access to quality care improves cognitive and behavioral outcomes and can improve school readiness as well. In fact, Araujo, Dormal and Schady (2019) state that "the association between the quality of care and child outcomes is significant throughout most of the distribution of child development, and largest at the bottom of it" (p.1). The barriers to accessing this quality care are an important piece to supporting positive outcomes for children.

## Methods

The research was designed as an explanatory sequential mixed methods design

- An initial survey of 50 childcare providers and 50 families was distributed electronically throughout the state
- Interviews were held with 5 childcare providers and 5 family members via phone

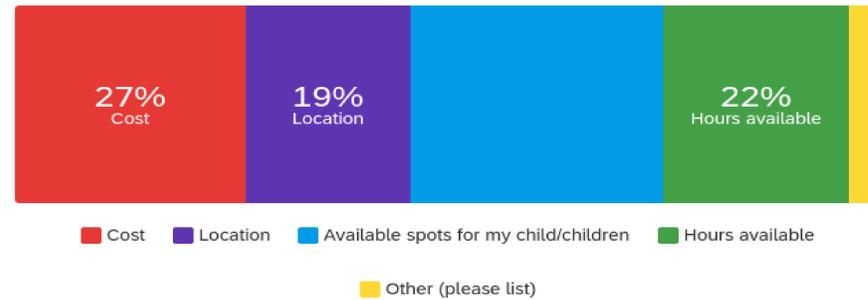


Figure 1. Barriers to Access: families

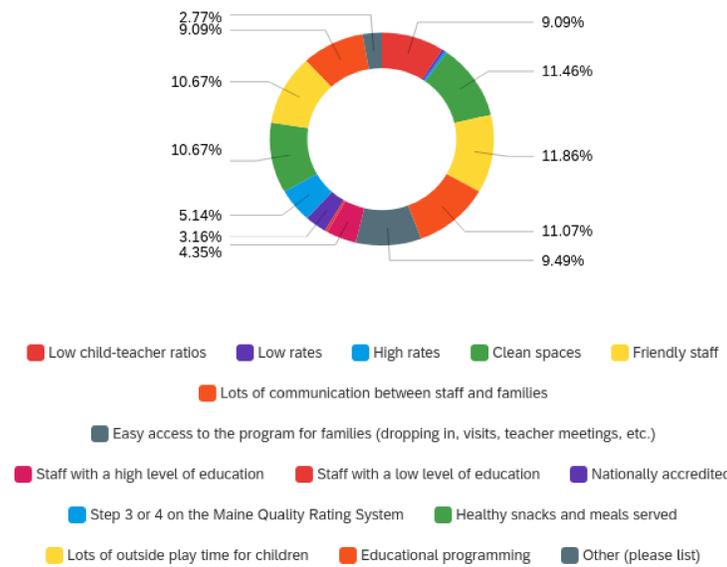


Figure 2. Quality defined by providers

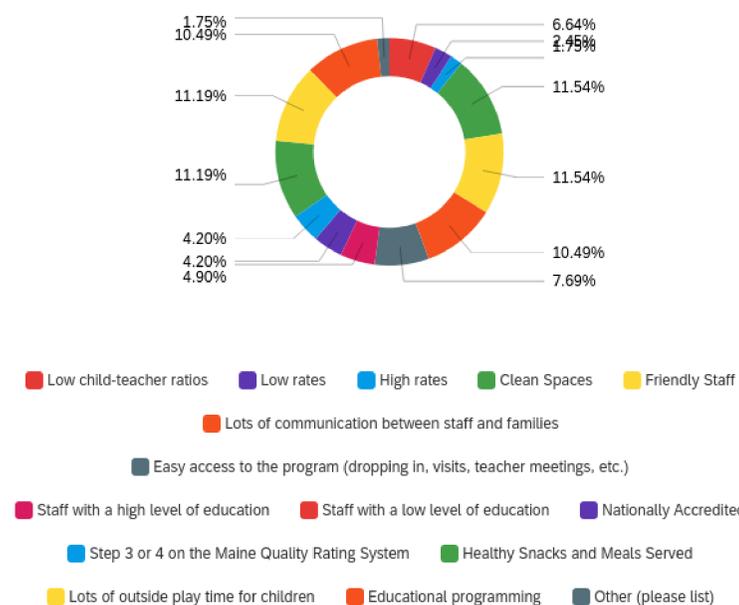


Figure 3. Quality defined by families

## Research Questions

Do families in rural Maine lack access to quality childcare?  
 What are the barriers to quality childcare access in rural settings?

## Results

Forty surveys were collected from families and thirty-four from providers. Providers and families were all located in one of thirteen counties within Maine. Cumberland, York and Androscoggin were excluded due to their more urban/suburban population. Five providers and four parents/guardians were also interviewed to gather anecdotal information that could fill in the gaps and explain more clearly the results obtained through surveys. Participants were distributed throughout eleven of the remaining counties with a majority located in Aroostook, Washington, Kennebec and Somerset counties.

Figures 2 & 3 show us how participants viewed quality in child care. Families' top three areas included friendly staff, healthy meals and snacks and lots of outside time, and providers' top three areas included friendly staff, clean spaces and lots of communication with families. Overall, results show a similar view of quality in child care between providers and families.

Initially, this researcher expected driving distance to be a primary barrier to child care access. Results, as seen in Figure 1, have shown that, though there are many barriers, distance is only a minor one. In fact, families indicated that available spots for children and cost were overwhelmingly the top barriers to accessing quality child care.

## Conclusions

Families in Rural Maine DO lack access to quality child care. Some of the barriers include lack of programs/space for children, access to funding to support quality improvements, and cost of care (Figure 1). Subsidy funding access for families could be increased, support, both financial and technical, for providers who wish to improve quality and access to qualified staff are all important pieces of increasing access to quality child care in rural areas of Maine.

The state of Maine, through access to federal Child Care Block Grant funds, has the ability to provide all of the necessary supports to meet the needs and challenges of the child care community in rural Maine. Families in rural areas need and deserve access to quality care for children at all stages

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my classmates, mentors, professors and colleagues who supported this work.

### References

AAP (2017), Araujo, Dormal and Schady (2019)