

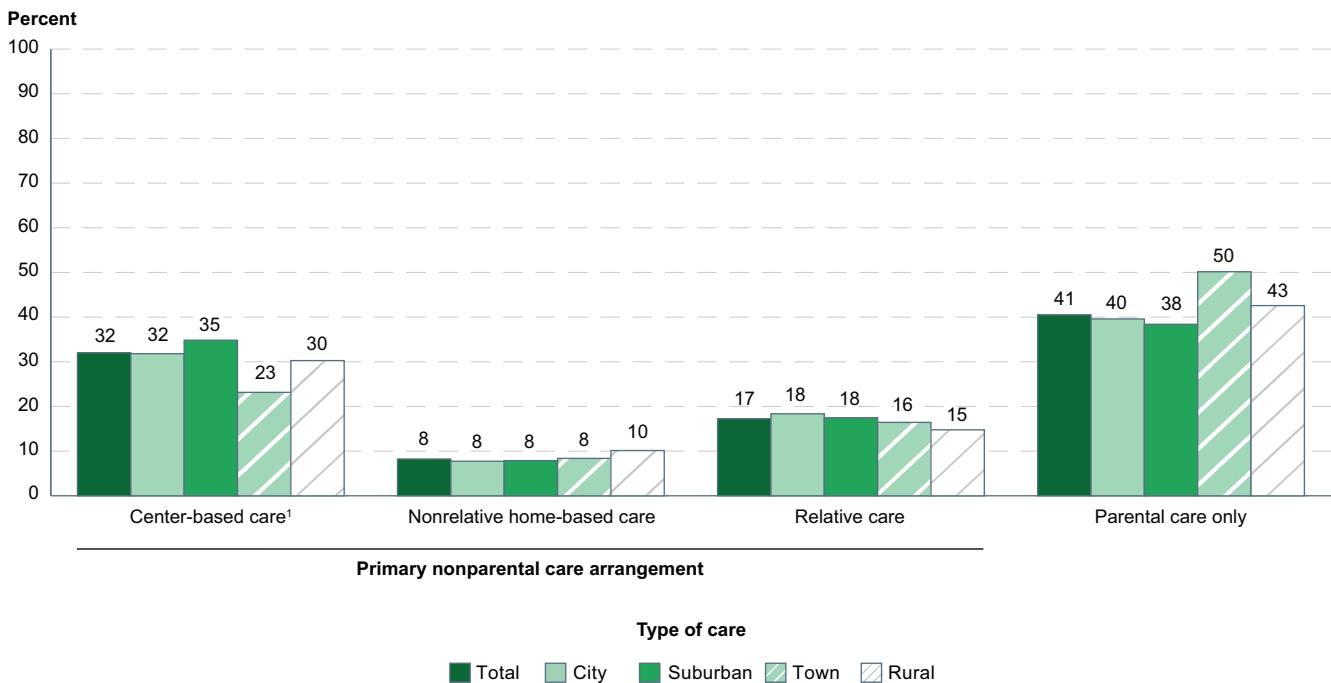
# Early Childhood Care and Education Programs in Rural Areas

Among children under 6 years old and not yet in kindergarten whose parents reported difficulty finding child care in 2019, “lack of open slots for new children” was more commonly cited as the main reason for the difficulty by parents of children in rural areas (31 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas (22 percent).

Young children participate in various types of early childhood care and education programs: some are enrolled in center-based programs,<sup>1</sup> while others are cared for in relatives’ or nonrelatives’ homes or are cared for only by their parents. Parents search for nonparental care to meet parental needs (e.g., employment) and support children’s development.<sup>2,3</sup> Experiences in early childhood care and education programs could be influential for a child’s development because in these programs children often learn skills that not only are important for kindergarten entry but also can have a lasting impact on

their development into adulthood.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Using data from the 2019 Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES:2019), this indicator explores differences, by household locale,<sup>7</sup> in young children’s participation in various types of early childhood care and education programs at least once per week, including relative care, nonrelative care, and center-based care arrangements. It also examines differences, by locale, in parents’ reporting of the primary reason for difficulty finding early childhood care or education.

**Figure 1. Percentage of children under 6 years old and not yet enrolled in kindergarten, by type of care and locale: 2019**

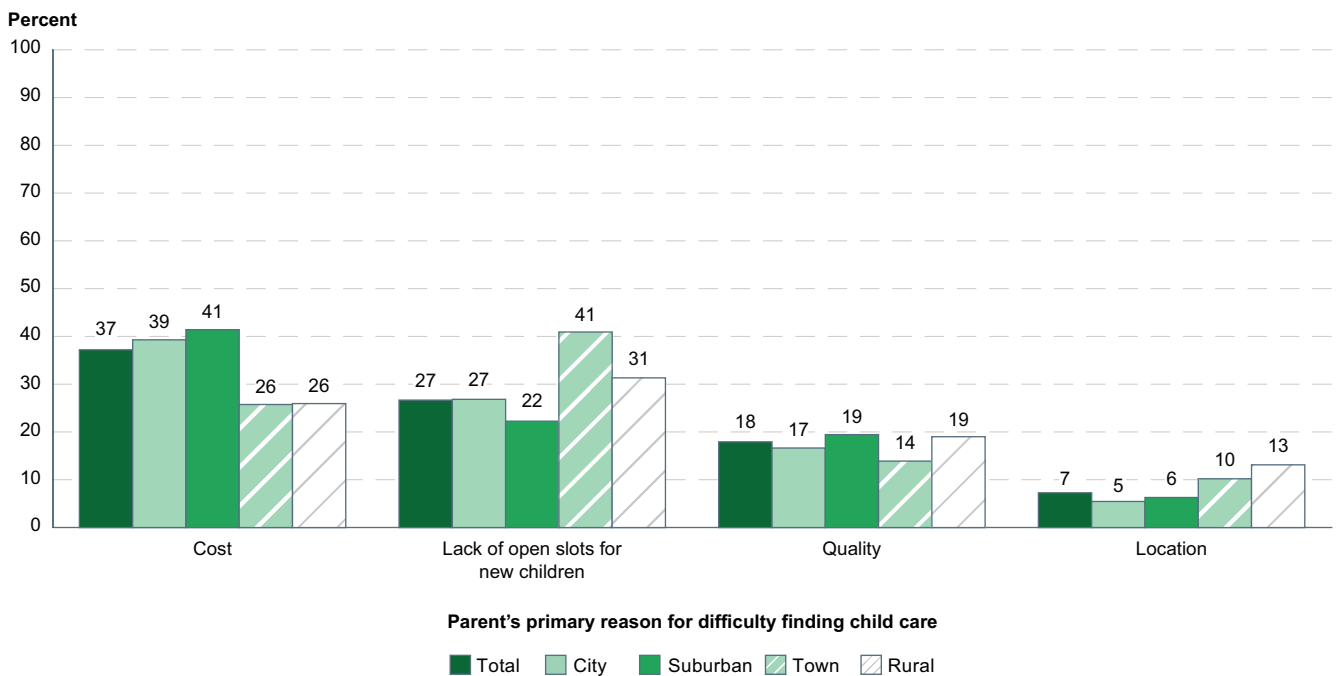


<sup>1</sup> Center-based arrangements include day care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, prekindergartens, and other early childhood programs.  
 NOTE: Data are based on parent reports. A child’s primary care arrangement is the regular nonparental care arrangement or early childhood education program in which the child spent the most time per week. “Multiple arrangements” is not shown in this figure. Although rounded numbers are displayed, figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES:2019). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.30.

In rural areas in 2019, 43 percent of children under 6 years old who were not enrolled in kindergarten did not have any regular nonparental care arrangements. The remaining 57 percent received some type of nonparental care on a regular basis:<sup>8</sup> about 30 percent in a center-based program, 10 percent in a nonrelative’s home-based care, 15 percent from relatives, and 2 percent from some combination of these arrangements.<sup>9</sup> Overall, there were no measurable differences in receipt of regular nonparental care between children in rural areas and children in cities and suburban areas. Only towns had a higher percentage of children who did not have any regular nonparental care arrangements than in rural areas (50 vs. 43 percent).

Children in rural areas spent around 29 hours per week in nonparental care, which was not measurably different from other locales. However, the specific types of nonparental care received varied by locale. For example, the percentage of children in center-based care was lower for those in rural areas than for those in suburban areas (30 vs. 35 percent). In contrast, the percentage of children in nonrelative home-based care was higher for those in rural areas (10 percent) than for those in suburban areas and cities (8 percent each).

**Figure 2. Percentage of children under 6 years old and not yet enrolled in kindergarten, by selected primary reason for parent’s difficulty finding child care and locale: 2019**



NOTE: Excludes children whose parent/guardian reported either “have not tried to find care” or “no difficulty” finding the type of child care or early childhood program wanted. Data are based on parent reports. Children whose parent/guardian reported that the primary reason for difficulty finding child care was that they “needed a program for children with special needs,” were “looking for specific hours/schedule,” or had “some other or more than one primary reason” are not shown because children represented by each category accounted for 6 percent or less of children. Due to categories not shown, detail does not sum to 100 percent. Although rounded numbers are displayed, figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES:2019). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.30a.

Among children under 6 years old and not yet in kindergarten whose parents reported difficulty finding child care in 2019, “lack of open slots for new children” was the most commonly cited reason in rural areas and towns. Cost was the most commonly cited reason in cities and suburban areas.<sup>10</sup> “Lack of open slots for new children” was more commonly cited as the main reason for the difficulty by parents of children in rural areas (31 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas

(22 percent). In addition, “location” was more commonly cited as the main reason for the difficulty by parents of children in rural areas (13 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas (6 percent) and cities (5 percent). However, “cost” was less commonly cited as the main reason for the difficulty by parents of children in rural areas (26 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas (41 percent) and cities (39 percent).

---

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Center-based arrangements include day care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, prekindergartens, and other early childhood programs.

<sup>2</sup> Gennetian, L.A., Datta, A.R., Goerge, R., Zannoni, W., Brandon, R., Witte, A., and Krishnamurty, P. (2019). How Much of Children’s Time in Nonparental Care Coincides With Their Parents’ Time at Work? *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 5: 1-10. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023119894848>.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, Z., Bali, D., Gebhart, T., Schaefer, C., and Halle, T. (2021). *Parents’ Reasons for Searching for Early Care and Education and Results of Search: An Analysis Using the Access Framework* (OPRE Report #2021-39). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/Search%20and%20Use%20of%20Care%20Snapshot%20508.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Flanagan, K.D., and McPhee, C. (2009). *The Children Born in 2001 at Kindergarten Entry: First Findings From the Kindergarten Data Collections of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (NCES 2010-005). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010005>.

<sup>5</sup> Heckman, J.J., Moon, S.H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P.A., and Yavitz, A. (2010). The Rate of Return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(1): 114-128. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272709001418>.

<sup>6</sup> Rathbun, A., and Zhang, A. (2016). *Primary Early Care and Education Arrangements and Achievement at Kindergarten Entry* (NCES 2016-070). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016070>.

<sup>7</sup> Please visit NCES’s [Education Across America website](#) for the definition of locale.

<sup>8</sup> This discussion focuses on a child’s primary nonparental care arrangement—that is, the regular nonparental care arrangement or early childhood education program in which the child spent the most time per week.

<sup>9</sup> Children could have more than one regularly scheduled type of care arrangement.

<sup>10</sup> Totals do not sum to 100 percent because of omitted categories—parents who reported difficulty finding care because they “needed a program for children with special needs,” were “looking for specific hours/schedule,” or had “some other or more than one primary reason.”

---

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.30a; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 202.30

**Related indicators and resources:** [Early Childhood Care Arrangements: Choices and Costs](#) [*Condition of Education*]; [Enrollment Rates of Young Children](#) [*Condition of Education*]

---

**Glossary:** Household; Locale codes