



Smart Start Child Care

Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Meeting #23

September 5, 2025

GOALS

- Connect and build community with one another
- Share findings from the family child care quality support co-design workgroup
- Provide updates about Smart Start Workforce Grants participation and impact, including data from narrative reporting and compliance audits
- Gather your feedback and reflections through discussions



AGENDA

- Welcome and introductions
- Smart Start Quality Support: Family Child Care Engagement
 - Co-design group
 - FCC inventory of supports
 - Discussion
- Smart Start Workforce Grants
 - FY 26 round 2 award updates
 - Impact and data sharing: narrative reporting and audit
 - Discussion
- Public comment

Public Comment Instructions

- We set aside dedicated time for public comment at the end of the meeting.
- If you would like to provide public comment, please send a private chat to Rosie Dorsey. We will take comments in the order Rosie receives the names.

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Build **understanding and alignment** on strategic intent and goals



Provide **input and feedback** throughout the design process



Review and pressure-test relevant cost analyses, potential policy options, and administrative options



Surface any **potential risks and opportunities**



Support overall plan development and to **champion it among stakeholder groups**



Common Themes

- Ad Hoc attendees are interested in seeing more **data that shows the impact of Smart Start Workforce Grants on wages and retention**, as well as **unintended consequences**.
- Ad Hoc attendees suggested **using surveys to understand provider experiences** with SSWG – including those participating and not participating.
- Participants shared a range of experiences with the Ad Hoc -- **some participants felt their engagement had been meaningful** and that their input informed decisions while **others felt that the input was not impactful**, leading only to minor changes.

Questions and Concerns

- Ad hoc attendees elevated **questions about the feasibility** of implementing environmental rating scale assessments and increasing the use of ASQ screening tools as part of the Smart Start Quality Support Program
- Participants **would like to learn more about:**
 - **SSWG uptake, awards, reach, and those not participating**
 - Programs that **do not renew participation** in SSWG
 - **SSWG audits**, particularly from the family child care perspective
 - Understanding how **braided or layered funding works with SSWG**
 - **Impact of SSWG in the broader system**

Smart Start Quality Support

Family Child Care Engagement



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Co-design workgroup was an opportunity to for family child care homes to identify the supports they need

- Group of 15, including 12 family home and family group home providers
- Charge was to elevate recommendations to the state to improve quality for FCCs
- Convened six times between May and August 2025
- Facilitation and engagement used human centered design principles
- Process led to deeper engagement and insights from family child care providers
- Participants were compensated for their efforts



Benefits of the Co-Design Process

- Participants reported feeling respected, heard, and valued through the process
- They appreciated the opportunity to share what makes family child care unique
- They appreciated the diversity of the group
- Some reported feeling more confident speaking up and engaging in self-advocacy
- The co-design process is an inclusive, replicable method by which to engage key stakeholders in decision making

“I appreciate the diversity of this group. So often decisions are made without the people at the table who will be impacted.”

“This helped to **build my confidence** to share my opinion.”

“I feel **heard and recognized.**”

“Thank you for creating this platform. It is **so important that family child care providers have someone listen** to them. I’m very proud to have been a part of this.”

The co-design workgroup shared their perspectives to inform key insights about existing resources and supports

Key Takeaways

- Numerous entities provide training and support for family child care providers, but opportunities are not always tailored specifically for FCC
- FCC providers often struggle to navigate state and/or intermediary systems and supports, including quality initiatives and PD opportunities
- Coaching, mentorship, and peer supports are highly valued among FCC providers
- Associations connect FCC providers to state systems, move providers toward licensure, and support sustainability
- Family child care providers would like more opportunities relevant to immediate needs in their programs, including mental health and special needs-related trainings

Afton conducted interviews to understand the landscape of professional development and continuous quality improvement for family child care settings

Entity	Representative
Child Care Resource & Referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hollie Hoole, Program Development and Quality Improvement Manager at IDEC Kayla Miller, Assistant Director at Community Child Care Connection
National Louis University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yvonne Williams, Associate Director of Family Child Care Professional Learning at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
Licensing Navigators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Janet O’Connell, Owner & Consultant
Family Child Care Associations and Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DeCarla Burton, Director of Supporting Professionals Network Association (SPNA) Lenore Johnson, Former Member of SPNA Ruth Kimble, Executive Director of Austin Childcare Providers’ Network Martina Rocha, Director of Together for Childhood Malia Owens, Director of SAL Home Child Care Network and Tanisha Harris, SAL VP of Early Childhood
SEIU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evelyn Osorio, Child Care Division Coordinator Brynn Seibert, Director, Child Care & Early Learning Division
Erickson Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juliet Bromer, Research Professor

Several organizations provide support for family child care homes to enhance quality

CCR&R system	Family Child Care Associations	SEIU (Union)	Other (Higher Education Systems, Consultants, Advocacy orgs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trainings (in-person and virtual)• Quality specialist support - ExceleRate• Higher ed navigation• TA coordination• Communities of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trainings (in- person and virtual)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer-led• Guest speaker/trainer• Mentorship• Peer support• System navigation• Leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trainings (in- person and virtual)• Mentorship• Coaching• System navigation• Communities of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trainings• Postsecondary courses and degrees• Coaching• System navigation• Cohort-based postsecondary programs• Communities of practice• Leadership development

Family child care providers sometimes encounter barriers to taking advantage of available resources

- **Lack of Incentives:** FCC providers lack incentives to engage in ExceleRate as well as formal credential training/systems
- **Language barriers:** Supports and trainings are not consistently available in other languages
- **Time and provider capacity:** FCC providers have limited time, especially during the hours they care for children, to engage with training and system supports
- **Communication and awareness:** FCC providers are not aware of all of the resources available or how/where to access them
- **Cost to provider:** Some supports have cost barriers including tuition (higher education), membership fees (associations), or participation fees (training or consulting fee)
- **Relevance:** Trainings available via CCR&Rs and Gateways/iLearning are not to FCC context or aligned to pressing training needs
- **capacity:** FCC Associations vary in capacity, engagement

“Home providers aren't always getting the information if they aren't connected to certain resources.”

– CCR&R interviewee

“There are a lot of resources but in many different places. If they were in one place that would be helpful.”

-- FCC provider & Co-design workgroup participant

Each organization provides different types of support for family child care providers

“[Local FCC Association] coaching has helped providers increase their ExceleRate credentials.”

-- FCC provider and Co-design workgroup participant

"We [Local FCC Association] have a good partnership with our CCR&R. Once per quarter they send a rep to our meeting to share what is happening and they ask for our opinion on trainings and guest speakers."

-- FCC provider and Co-design workgroup participant

- **Coordination and partnership:** Some CCR&Rs and FCC associations have strategic partnerships and longstanding relationships
- **Relevance:** Provider-run associations, networks, and SEIU are offering culturally responsive supports and tailored FCC resources, fostering collective growth and learning
- **Peer-to-peer support:** Organic mentorship and coaching models have emerged within associations and SEIU to support higher standards of care
- **Cohort models:** higher education institutions, CCR&Rs, networks and SEIU have successful models of cohort-based or community of practice approaches to engaging FCC providers in training and PD

Increased coordination and communication across system partners can maximize existing resources and improve access to support.

Opportunity	Impact
Strengthen collaborations between CCR&Rs and Family Child Care Associations	Facilitate FCC engagement in the current infrastructure of quality supports.
Promote sustainability of existing mentorship and/or cohort models	Support quality improvement
Streamline communication about available trainings and other resources	Help providers connect to relevant supports
Proactively share a list of all Family Child Care Associations in the state	Increase awareness among FCC providers looking for peer support
Increase digital support and multilingual trainings	Improve access to existing resources.
Include FCC providers in future co-design efforts	Systems and resources are relevant and accessible for FCC

We have more to learn and anticipate additional conversations around these opportunities.

Small group discussion

1. What is missing from the landscape and analysis of supports offered to family child care providers?
2. What resonates with you from the opportunities to improve access to support for family child care providers?
3. What questions do you have?

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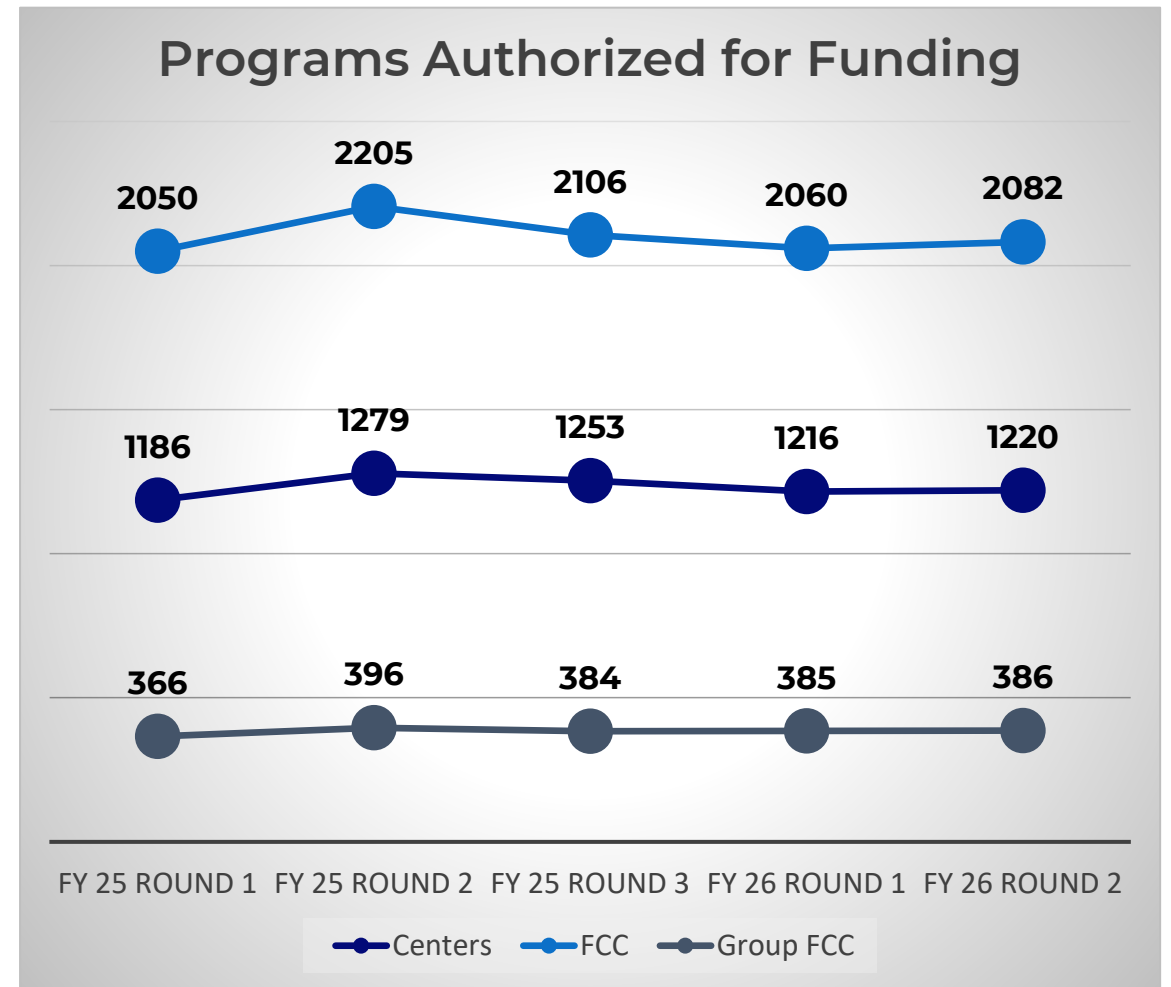
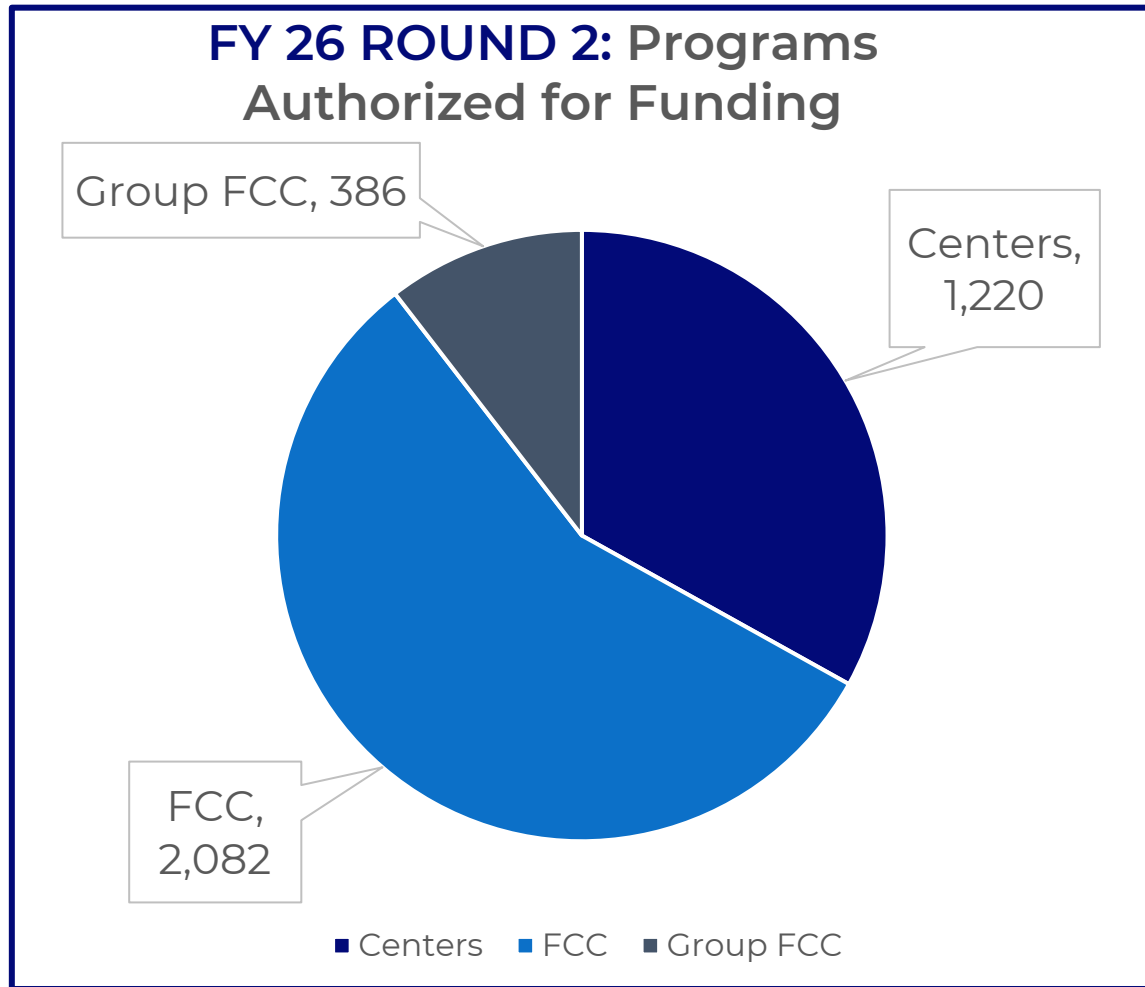
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Smart Start Workforce Grants



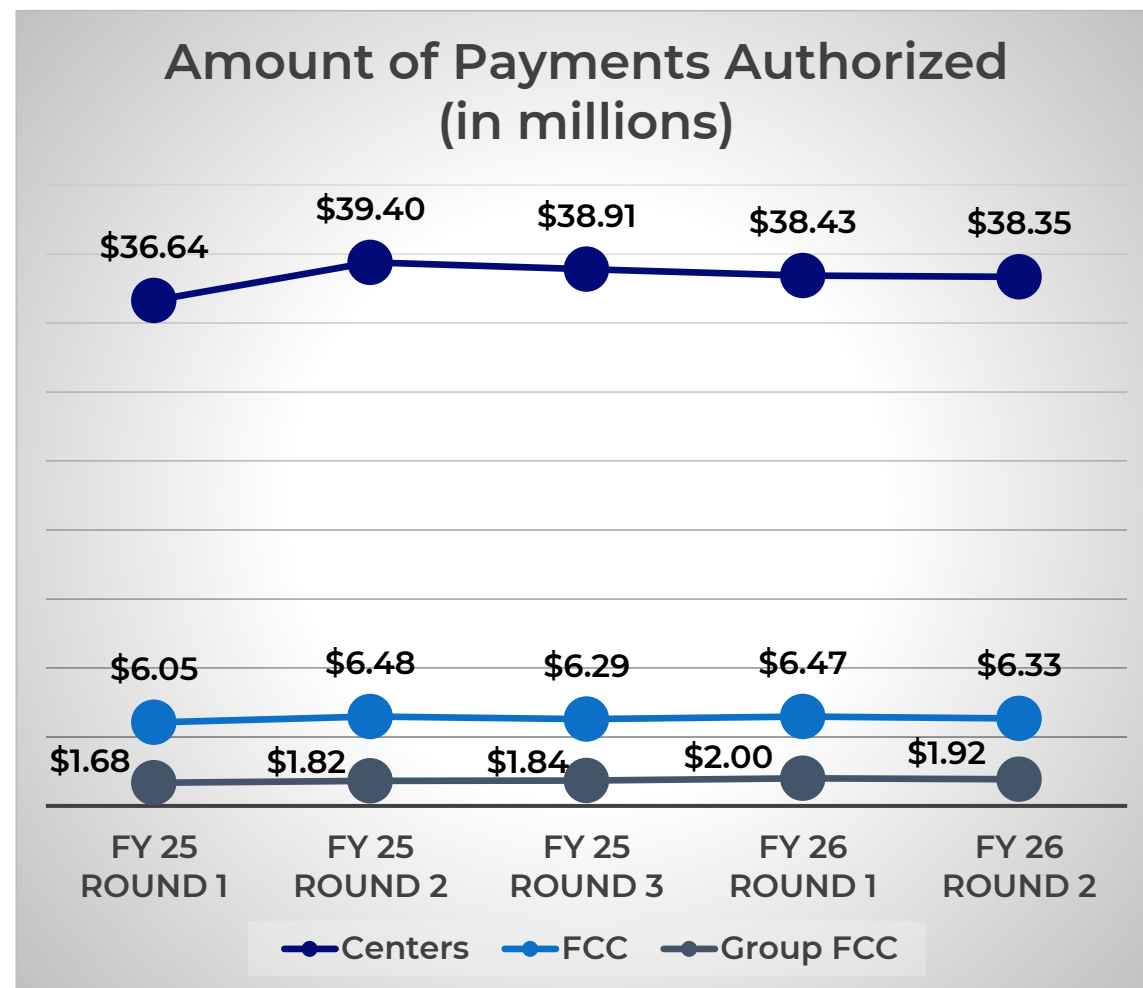
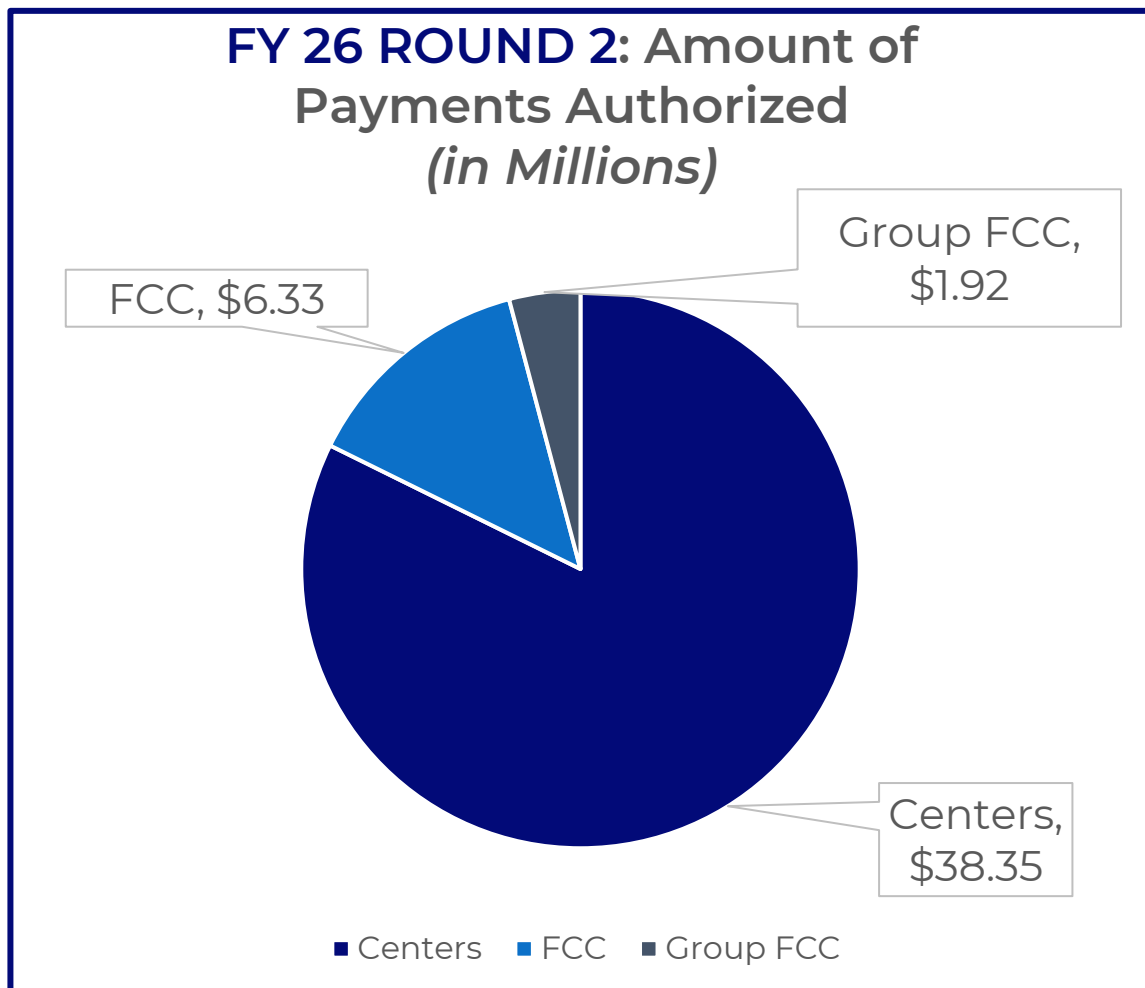
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3,688 programs have been awarded Smart Start Workforce Grants for FY 26 Round 2.



**Some appeals still pending as of Sept. 2, 2025*

Spending for Smart Start Workforce Grants continues to be on target with budget projections, with \$46.6 million awarded in FY 26 Round 2.



**Some appeals still pending as of Sept. 2, 2025*

Program Reach

Areas of exploration:

- Is the program reaching the majority of programs and is participation in the program equitable statewide?
- What is the uptake compared to Smart Start Transition Grant (SSTG) recipients?
- Compared to participation in SSTG are any groups underrepresented?



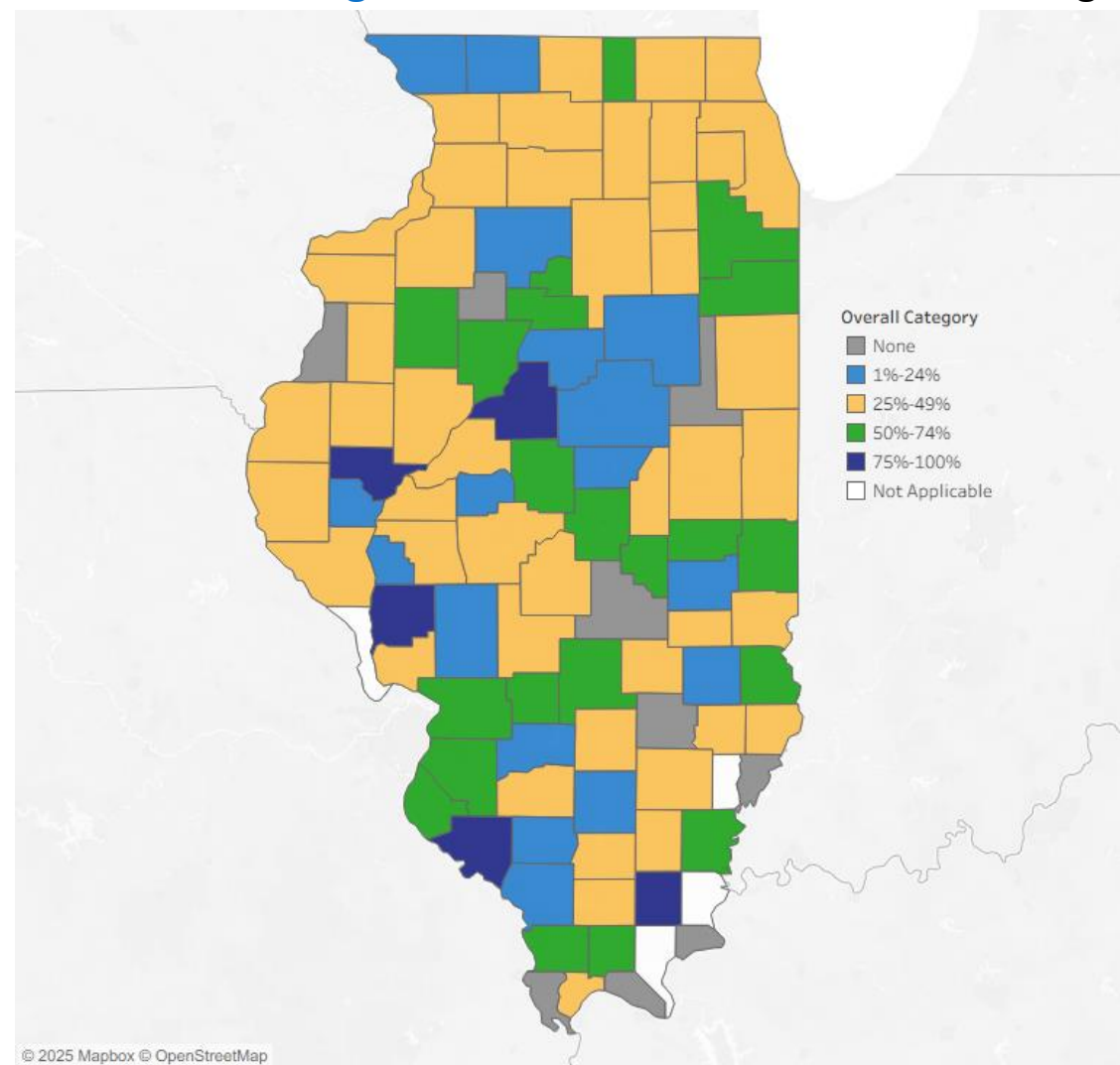
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Smart Start Workforce Grants serve nearly every community in Illinois, reaching 45% of all licensed programs in FY 26 Round 1.

Data notes:

- All licensed programs means the number of licensed providers on CCR&R database as of 4/1/25. Excludes providers if they were marked as any of the following:
 - Before/After School Only;
 - Head Start/Early Head Start Only;
 - Preschool for All Only;
 - Park/Recreation Only;
 - School Age Program

Round 1 Funded **Programs** as a Percent of All Licensed Programs



Reach by program type

Centers	Family Child Care	Family Group Child Care
48% (+1% since 11/24)	43% (no change since 11/24)	53% (+2% since 11/24)

Over 85% of Smart Start Transition Grant Round 4 recipients were awarded Smart Start Workforce Grant funding in FY 25.

Program Type	Number of Smart Start Transition Grant (SSTG) Round 4 recipients	Number of Programs Authorized for Funding in any FY 25 SSWG Round	Percent of SSTG Round 4 recipients receiving SSWG
Child care centers	1529	1239	81%
Family child care	2266	1998	88%
Family group child care	445	378	85%
Total	4240	3615	85%

Uptake varies based on program type and community characteristics, with family child care most likely to successfully transition to Smart Start Workforce Grants.

- Family child care and family group child care consistently had higher transition rates than child care centers.
- Family child care in areas with high SVI had an even higher likelihood of transitioning to Smart Start Workforce Grants

Transition (to SSWG) Rate
by Facility Type and SVI quartile

SVI range	Child Care Center	Family Child Care	Family Group Child Care
0.00 – 0.42	86.3%	87.3%	88.4%
0.42 – 0.69	78.8%	89.6%	83.5%
0.69 – 0.84	79.1%	88.3%	89.9%
0.84 – 0.99	76.7%	87.6%	77.0%

Raising ECEC wages

- Are providers able to meet the wage floor requirement with the funds they receive?
- Are programs spending funding on pay increases for other staff?

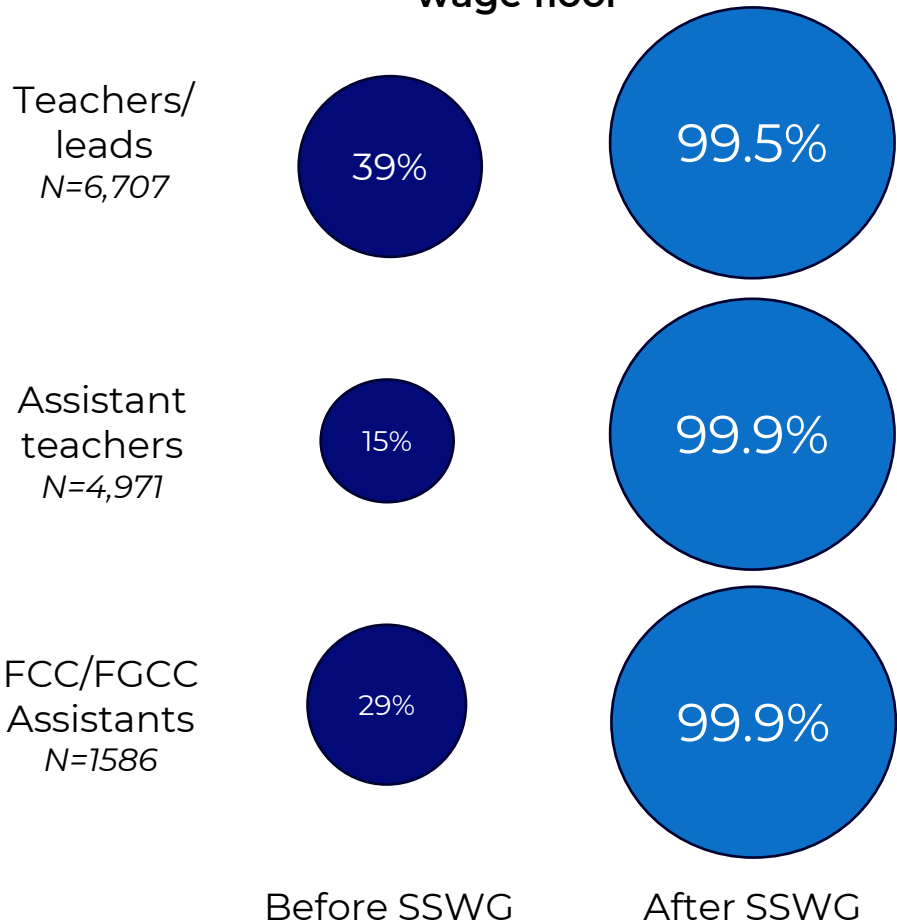
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For FY 25 Round 1, wages exceeded the wage floor across all groups for lead teachers, assistant teachers and family child care assistants

ECE professionals in SSWG classrooms earning wages that meet or exceed the wage floor



Group	Teachers/Leads		Assistant Teachers		FCC and FGCC Assistants	
	Wage floor (hourly)	Avg. Hourly wages Round 1	Wage floor (hourly)	Avg. Hourly wages Round 1	Wage floor (hourly)	Avg. Hourly wages Round 1
Group 1A	\$19.25	\$21.18	\$18.00	\$18.47	\$18.00	\$18.40
Group 1B	\$18.50	\$19.83	\$17.25	\$17.53	\$17.25	\$17.88
Group II	\$18.25	\$19.24	\$17.00	\$17.24	\$17.00	\$17.61

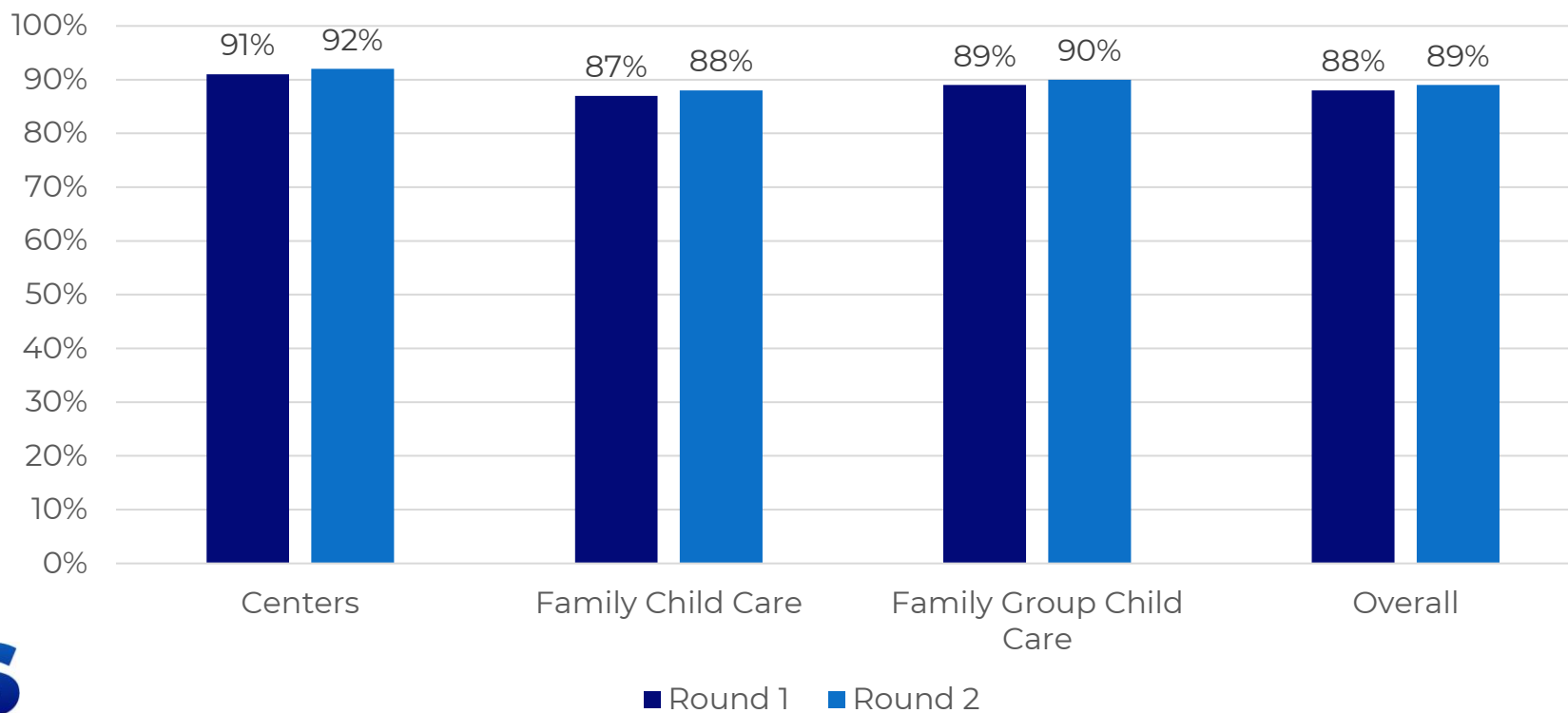
Group 1A: Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, and McHenry counties.

Group 1B: Boone, Champaign, Kankakee, Madison, McLean, Monroe, Ogle, Peoria, Rock Island, Sangamon, St. Clair, Tazewell, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago, and Woodford counties.

Group 2: all counties not listed in Group 1A or 1B

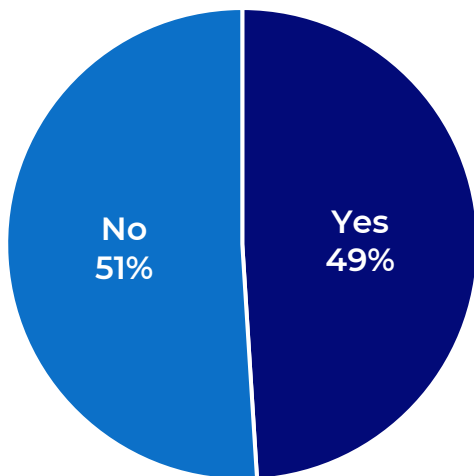
89% of participants report that the grant award amounts are adequate to cover the cost of raising wages to the required wage floor.

Percent of SSWG participants who agree the grant award amounts cover costs

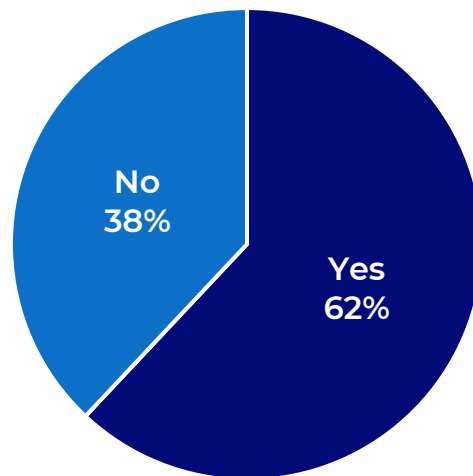


Many grantees are able to raise wages for staff beyond those working in Smart Start Workforce Grant-funded classrooms.

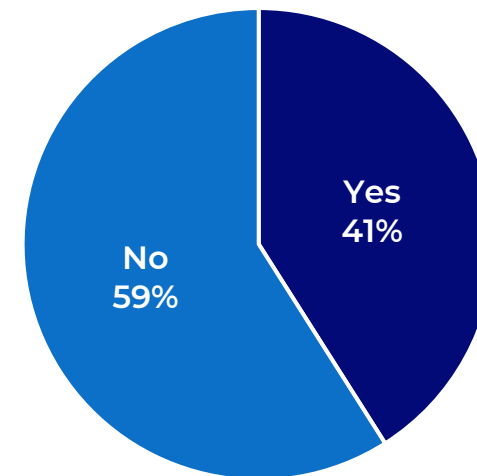
Centers:
Did you raise wages for non-required staff?



Family Child Care:
Did you raise your own income as an owner?

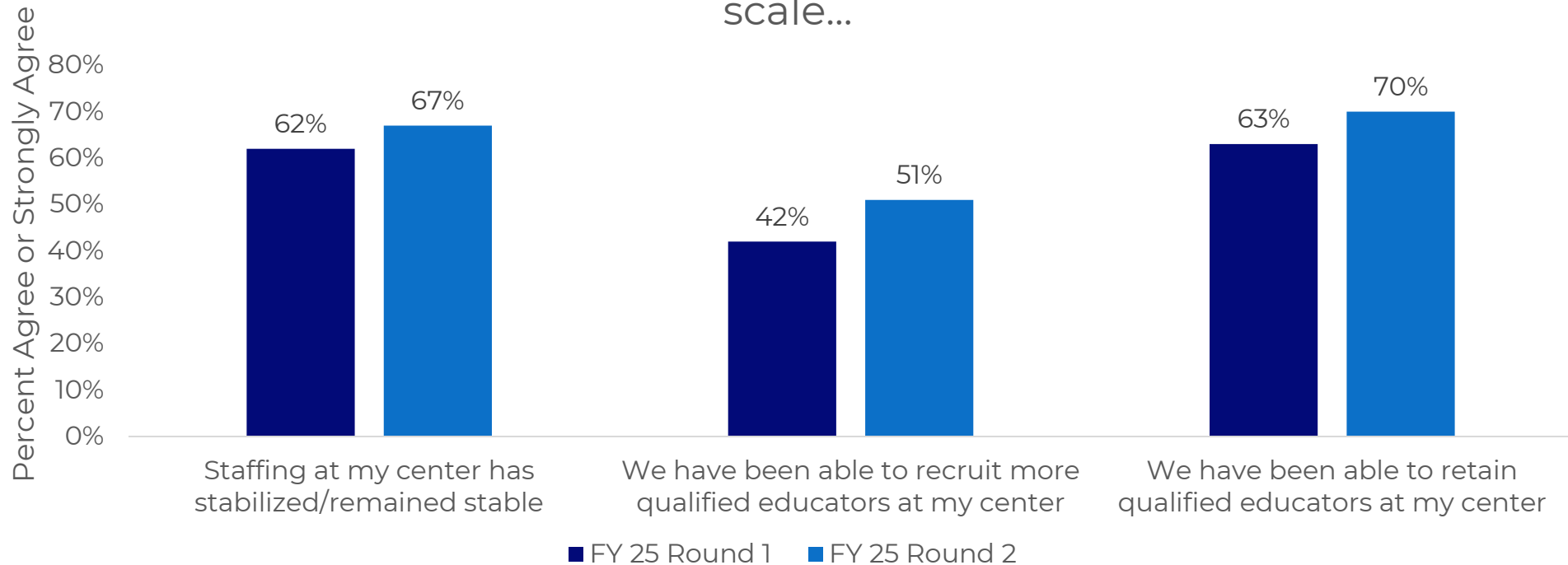


Family Group Child Care:
Did you raise your own income as an owner?



Smart Start Workforce grants have improved recruitment and retention efforts and stabilized staffing for most participating centers.

Since implementing the Smart Start Workforce Grant wage scale...



Every Smart Start Workforce Grant participating program will be audited at least once annually.

Programs are audited in three categories to ensure program funds are used for the intended purpose.

- Category 1: Minimum classroom enrollment
- Category 2: Number of grant-funded classrooms*
- Category 3: Wage floor compliance and classroom staff**

**All FCC and FGCC marked as “clean”*

***FCC and FGCC with base grant marked as “clean”*

By the numbers:

- 1,893 programs have been audited
- About 475 programs audited each month since March
- 96.5% of all audits were “Clean” (no findings)

Most Smart Start Workforce Grant participants resolve issues within the audit period and end with no findings.

Program type	Centers	Family Child Care	Family Group Child Care
Clean audit rate (March – June)	96.2%	97%	96.1%

- Participating programs are offered support and opportunities to resolve any findings identified in the audit.
 - *Ex.* Payroll reporting is incomplete → resolved by sharing additional payroll documentation
 - *Ex.* Staff not paid the wage floor → resolved with proof of backpay for staff
 - *Ex.* Provider paid staff in cash → resolved by sharing bank statement or other documentation to verify amount
- Unresolved findings are most frequently in the “wage floor compliance and staff” category

Small group discussion

1. What stands out to you about the Smart Start Workforce Grant data shared today thinking about:
 - a. Round 2 awards,
 - b. Comparison to transition grant recipients
 - c. Impact to wages
 - d. Audits
2. What are your overall impressions so far from the first year of Smart Start Workforce Grant implementation? What key insights or lessons learned would you highlight?

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Public Comment

FY 26 Meeting dates

- *Friday, Sept. 5, 2025, 11 AM – 1 PM*
- **Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025, 6 PM – 8 PM**
- **Friday, March 6, 2026, 11 AM – 1 PM**
- **Tuesday, May 5, 2026, 6 PM – 8 PM**

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IDEC Workforce Listening Sessions

- Tuesday, September 16, 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM
- Thursday, September 18, 6 PM – 7:30 PM
- Monday, September 22, 1 PM – 2:30 PM

IDEC Workforce Listening Sessions



Please join one of our upcoming IDEC Workforce Listening Sessions to discuss support, training and professional development, compensation, work environments, and well-being for Illinois' early childhood education and care workforce.

In these sessions, you'll have the opportunity to share successes, challenges, and opportunities, as well as provide input on the state's priorities related to the early childhood workforce. This feedback will be used to inform the state's work and opportunities as the early childhood programs and services transition from DCFS, IDHS, and ISBE to IDEC. We're particularly looking for input from the **frontline early childhood workforce** (i.e. teachers, assistant teachers, home visitors, therapists, etc.), though anyone is welcome to join.

Please register for a session here. Content at all sessions will be the same.

- Tuesday, September 16th 5:30-7:00PM [here](#)
- Thursday, September 18th 6:00-7:30PM [here](#)
- Monday, September 22nd 1:00-2:30PM [here](#)

Spanish translation will be available.

Next Smart Start Child Care Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, December 2, 2025
6 PM – 8 PM

Open Survey for Feedback:

<https://forms.gle/3DPPyPUcPQiTgbwX9>



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Thank you!