

Austin/Travis County Parents' Experiences with Nontraditional-Hour Child Care

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KEY FINDINGS

In Austin/Travis County, one-third of children with working parents—about 18,000 children—need care during nontraditional hours.

Only about 2,000 regulated child care spaces are available during nontraditional hours.

Austin/Travis County parents limit work and education because child care is not available during nontraditional hours.

Parents need more information about available nontraditional-hour child care, including backup child care and ways to engage informal networks.

Parents who work nontraditional hours—before 7:00 a.m. or after 6:00 p.m. on weekdays or anytime on weekends—need child care that is reliable and safe. Understanding the child care needs of parents who work nontraditional-hour schedules is a growing concern for parents, employers, and community leaders.

To learn about nontraditional-hour child care needs in Austin/Travis County, Urban Institute researchers interviewed parents, employers, child care providers, and community leaders.

This fact sheet presents findings relevant to parents. We interviewed parents who identified as racially and ethnically diverse, including parents who identified as Black, Hispanic, Native American, biracial, and white.

THE SUPPLY OF NONTRADITIONAL-HOUR CHILD CARE IN AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY IS INADEQUATE

Nearly one-third of children with working parents (or about 18,000 children) in Austin/Travis County have parents who work during nontraditional hours.

- The current supply of child care that is licensed to operate during nontraditional hours in Travis County covers only about 2,000 children.
- Many parents with nontraditional-hour work schedules experience stress finding child care that is available before 7:00 a.m., after 6:00 p.m., and on weekends.
- Many parents report creating a “patchwork” of child care, so their children are well cared for when they work during these nontraditional-hour periods.

PARENTS WANT AND NEED SAFE, RELIABLE CHILD CARE DURING NONTRADITIONAL HOURS

Parents in Austin/Travis County want reliable and safe child care to be able to work and go to school during nontraditional hours.

- Parents need child care they can count on. They also want someone they trust to care for their children very early in the morning, in the evening, overnight, and on weekends.
- When children are sleeping, most parents want care in their own home or the home of someone they know and trust.
- Parents who use regulated care during the traditional workday want the regular child care setting to offer slightly extended hours. Child care settings that are open even a few hours longer than the traditional workday can reduce stress for parents who have long commutes or need to work a bit earlier or later in the day.

PARENTS MOSTLY RELY ON FRIENDS AND RELATIVES FOR CHILD CARE DURING NONTRADITIONAL HOURS

- Parents mostly rely on relatives, *tías* (*tía* is the Spanish word for aunt), and friends to provide child care because regulated child care is not available during nontraditional hours.
- Some parents who lack access to trusted relatives to care for their children reduce their work hours.
- About half of the parents in the study use a combination of child care centers during the regular workday and informal child care during nontraditional hours. Some parents ask relatives and friends who care for their children during nontraditional hours to take their children to regulated facilities during traditional hours.
- Some parents believe care provided by relatives and friends is less reliable than licensed center or home-based care during nontraditional hours, but they feel this is the only care available to them. Some parents experience work stress because friends and family are not reliable.

PARENTS NEED INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO FIND AND PAY FOR NONTRADITIONAL-HOUR CHILD CARE

- None of the parents in the study knew that information is available about nontraditional-hour child care.
- None of the parents who have relatives or friends watch their children during nontraditional hours pay them using child care subsidies. However, many parents have some financial assistance to pay for the care they use during the traditional day.
- Parents said financial assistance vastly increases the child care accessible to them and allows them to maintain regular work and school schedules.

PARENTS NEED AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

- Making child care affordable for families during both traditional and nontraditional hours would allow parents to work in higher-paying jobs, work longer hours, and pursue educational opportunities.
- Providing parents with more detailed information about regulated care (including hours facilities are willing but not currently authorized to provide care) and in language that is accessible to parents would help them find care needed for their work schedules.
- Simplifying the process of applying for subsidies for nontraditional hours would help parents with their nontraditional-hour child care needs. The Texas Workforce Commission allows local workforce boards to approve subsidies for nontraditional-hour care provided by eligible relatives who are willing to become a regulated family home, undergo a criminal background check, and undergo checks against the sex offender registry and the central child abuse and neglect registry.
- Expanding child care subsidies and simplifying the subsidy process could help families pay relatives who care for young children during nontraditional hours.

SEE THE FULL REPORT AND ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Find the full report and additional publications at “Informing Policy Decisions about Nontraditional-Hour Child Care,” Urban Institute, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/projects/informing-policy-decisions-about-nontraditional-hour-child-care>.

PARENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH NONTRADITIONAL-HOUR CHILD CARE

Parents choose jobs and job schedules based on available child care. One parent said, “*Sometimes, it feels like I’m choosing between my kid and my career. I don’t really want to work as a school nurse, but it’s one of the only things that works with my daughter’s schedule.*”

Parents who patch together child care express concerns about their children. One parent shared, “*It’s difficult on the child to leave home and go to an unknown environment and have constant change and back and forward. It’s very taxing on a child.*”

Information about child care is not available to many parents. One parent said, “*Several times I went to Workforce [to get a subsidy for child care]. It was difficult to navigate.*”