



Childcare Needs and Challenges in Northern and Central New York *Public Opinion Resident Survey*

Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, and St. Lawrence Counties, New York

August 10, 2026

The Study – What is being investigated, and why is it important?

The Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College, located in Watertown, New York, annually completes two separate regional surveys of adult residents of the “North Country”, which for the purposes of this study have been defined as the four Northern and Central New York Counties that are closest to the campus (Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, and Oswego Counties). Each fall, the Center completes an annual Quality-of-Life survey, longitudinally tracking over twenty-five community indicators and other resident attributes. Each spring, the Center completes a regional community survey that has a primary focus of investigating current important and emerging issues in the North Country, right here and right now, creating more of a snapshot in time of life in the North Country. To address this Current Issues research objective in the spring of 2026, the professional staff at the Center for Community Studies enlisted leaders and representatives of all four counties to assist in the creation of the survey instrument by identifying a wide variety of current local, regional, statewide, and national/global issues. This survey development group included individuals from the College, local government, county leadership, education, healthcare, non-profit agency heads, and the local media. A very wide variety of topics (survey questions) intended to support the data needs of community leaders and agencies was determined after brainstorming and identifying multiple important current issues. The overall goal of this exercise is to scientifically and representatively sample and measure local public opinion to better understand our communities and their residents and to assist local leaders and elected officials in making the best data-informed decisions.

One very significant current issue in the North Country that has been emphasized in the spring 2026 version of the Current Issues community survey is Childcare Needs and Challenges. This childcare emphasis was identified and selected as a topic for deeper investigation largely due to past data collected by the Center in the region. Since 2015, “Availability of Childcare” has been included as one of the community indicator quality-of-life survey questions in the annual quality-of-life survey. When first included in this annual study, and for the first three years of tracking, the typical response distribution among North Country residents was that approximately 40% of adults rated the availability of childcare as “Excellent or Good”. Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the very dramatic and significant decrease in satisfaction with availability of childcare among North Country residents over the past decade. The rate of responding “Excellent or Good” has decreased to only about one-third of what it was a decade ago, with a regional four-county average of 10% responding “Excellent or Good” in October 2025, and Oswego and St. Lawrence County having rates both below 10%.

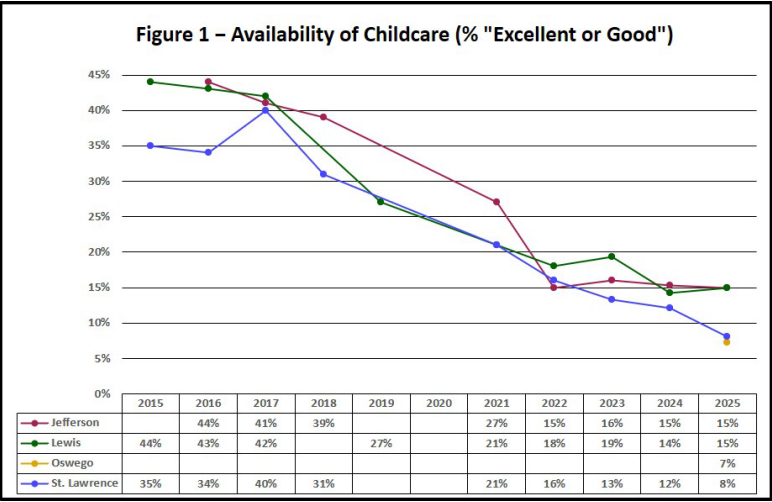
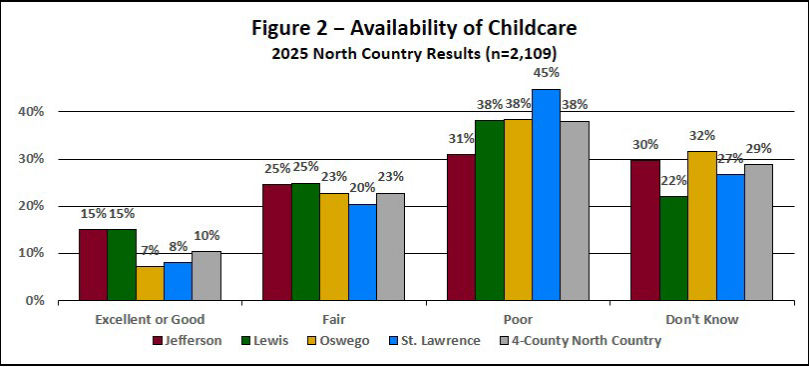
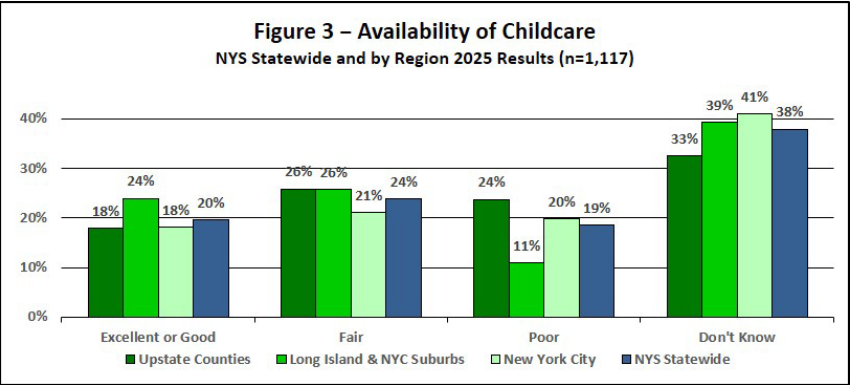


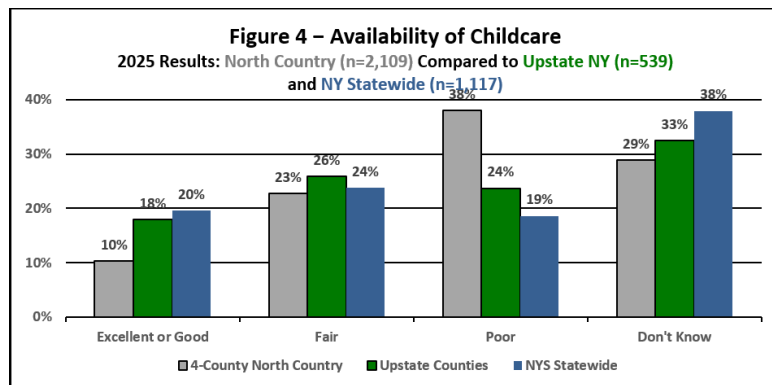
Figure 2 shows the county-specific distributions of satisfaction with “Availability of Childcare” found in the October 2025 annual survey, where notably the most common opinion expressed in each of the counties is to rate this community attribute as “Poor”.



In November 2025 the Center for Community Studies, for the first time since inception in 1999, completed a statewide study, with survey respondents representing every one of the 62 New York counties included. The same longitudinal quality-of-life community indicator survey instrument that has been employed for 25+ years locally, was employed last fall statewide. This data provides rich statewide perspective and comparison to the resident attitudes that have been measured locally for a quarter-century. Note that in Figure 3 on the following page, New York State has been subdivided in the conventional way that is often used for statewide polling: New York City as a subgroup (5 boroughs/counties), Long Island and NYC Suburbs (6 counties), and Upstate (the other 51 NYS counties, including the four North Country counties). Figure 3 again illustrates a level of dissatisfaction with “Availability of Childcare” statewide with nearly twenty percent of state resident rating the characteristic as “Poor,” particularly in the Upstate counties, where a rating of “Poor” (24%) is more common than elsewhere in the state.



To summarize and demonstrate the severity of the childcare availability issue in the North Country, Figure 4 illustrates the local North Country results found in the annual study in October 2025 plotted along with the November 2025 statewide results found in the statewide study described earlier in Figure 3. Clearly, dissatisfaction with childcare availability is much more severe in the North Country than has been found statewide. The statewide rate of “Excellent or Good” satisfaction with the availability of childcare was reported to be 20%, double the North Country rate of 10%. Further, the statewide rate of “Poor” satisfaction with the availability of childcare was reported to be 19%, approximately one-half of the North Country rate of 38%.



Both the North Country trend data and the statewide comparison data suggest that childcare is a very critical current issue in the North Country. Therefore, a task force of child care experts in the four-county North Country was convened in March 2026, and this group developed a very thorough set of approximately 80 childcare related questions, mostly designed for current parents of children aged 12 or under. These childcare-related questions are intended to collect information (data) from residents that is much more detailed than simply an assessment of “Availability of Childcare.” Local agencies and businesses involved in the childcare industry have the ability to provide facts such as number of children, number of slots, and other attributes; however, these facts do not address the opinions and behaviors of adults and parents. The goals of this study are to add adult and parent opinion and behavior to the conversation of future improvement of childcare services in the North Country. The 80 survey items in this study have been organized into the seven following sections of childcare issues, attributes, needs, choices, challenges, and impacts essentially addressed defining the over-arching research questions for the study:

- (1) What percentage of adults in Northern and Central New York need childcare?
- (2) What are parents using now for childcare, and what are the typical costs paid?
- (3) What are the most important factors for parents in making childcare choices?
- (4) How satisfied are parents with their current childcare arrangements?
- (5) What needs do parents have for non-traditional childcare?
- (6) How has the need for childcare impacted parents’ and their family’s employment situations?
- (7) How common is it among adults in the region to provide free childcare services to friends and family members, and what is the corresponding impact upon individuals’ employment situations?

The Results of this Childcare Study – Summary of Topline Study Findings

Readers can find a brief topline summary of the results for the seven previously identified research questions in this section of the report. A total of a dozen topline study findings have been identified. Additionally, readers are directed to the figure within this report for more information.

1. Approximately one-in-five adults in the North Country (20%) have at least one child aged 12 or under living in the household. One-in-five represents 57,000 adults in the four-county region needing to arrange childcare services at this time. (Figure 5)
2. The most common way that North Country parents are currently addressing childcare needs is by a stay-at-home parent or use of other family members to provide care. (Figure 6)
3. The mean cost per child per week among those parents of children aged 12 or under in the region is \$185. (Figure 7)
4. The most important factors when making childcare choices among parents are safety and security, followed closely by availability and staff qualifications. (Figure 11)
5. Parents were asked the types of non-traditional childcare hours that they need, and clearly “summer hours” emerges as the most in need (53% of parents need this). Significant need has been expressed for other types of non-traditional childcare hours in the North Country region as well, with 36% needing “early mornings”, 28% needing “evenings”, 22% needing “weekends”, and 12% (one-in-eight parents) needing “overnight”. (Figure 17)
6. The average amount that parents are willing to pay per night per child for overnight childcare is \$81. (Figure 23)
7. Parents are overwhelmingly more likely to need childcare services to facilitate their employment (83% of parents) rather than for education (12% of parents). (Figure 24)
8. A majority of parents in the last two years indicate that lack of childcare has caused them or their spouse/partner to miss work (58%); additionally, a majority (50%) have needed to change their work schedule due to childcare issues. (Figure 25)
9. More than one-in-five parents or their spouse or partner (21.9%) in the region have declined a job or left a job in the past two years due to lack of childcare, which represents 8,761 potential added members to the local workforce. (Figures 26-27)
10. Providing childcare for family and/or close friends is not rare in the North Country – approximately 17% of adults report to do so at least one hour per week. (Figure 28)
11. A notable percentage of adults or their spouse or partner in the region (2.0%) have declined a job or left a job in the past two years due to providing childcare for family and/or close friends, which represents 3,963 potential added members to the local workforce. (Figures 29-31)
12. A combined 12,724 adults in the region have left a job or declined a job due to childcare issues (either lack of childcare among parents or leaving to provide for others among the population of adults). This number of potential additions back into the workforce (12,724) is a notable 4.5% of the adult population of 283,000 in the North Country region – one-in-sixteen adults. (Table 32)

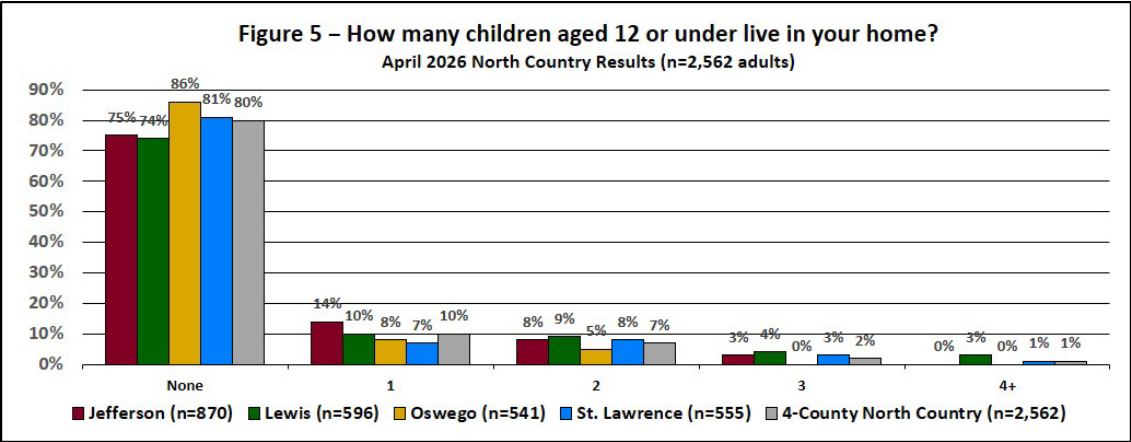
The Detailed Study Results – Childcare Needs and Challenges in the North Country Including County-specific Comparisons

This section of the report provides a more detailed look at the specific questions included in the survey instrument as part of this study addressing the seven overarching research questions defined previously. In addition to the summary figures included in this section, readers are encouraged to observe the cross-tabulation presentations of results for this survey question, and every following survey question, in Appendix I.

Research questions (1) and (7) utilize survey questions posed to the full sample of n=2562 adults with the results from these questions being presented in Figure 5 and Figures 28 -31. The results for research questions (2) – (6) that are illustrated in this section of the report in Figure 6 – Figure 27 are based on analysis of the overall combined sample of n=623 North Country parents in need of childcare services. Additionally, the combined employment impact of research questions (6) and (7) is included in Figure 32.

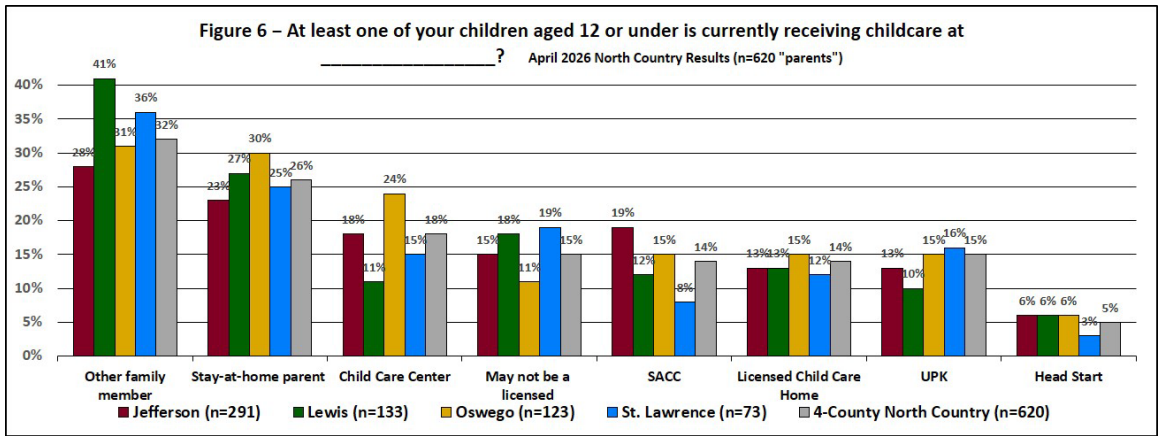
(1) What percentage of adults in Northern and Central New York need childcare? (Table 1)

The results from the initial random sample of n=2,562 North Country adults provides a prevalence estimate of the percentage of adults in the region who have at least one child aged 12 or under living in their home. Results for the number of children aged 12 or under per household are summarized in Figure 1, with an estimate of 20% of adults meeting the definition of being a “parent” used in this study (1+ child aged 12 or under in the household). There are approximately 283,000 adults in the four sampled counties combined, therefore, it may be extrapolated and estimated that about 57,000 adults in the North Country currently have childcare needs that they must address in some fashion. In Table 1 in the cross-tabulations one may easily identify Jefferson and Lewis Counties as the two among the four sampled counties with the highest rates of having children aged 12 or under in the home (25% and 26%, respectively), and that those adults who report to have a member of active duty military stationed at Fort Drum living in the household are very likely to have children aged 12 or under in the home (37% among this subgroup). Table 1A further reveals that among the parents in need of childcare almost one-half (n=621, percentage=46%) have just one child under the age of 12 in their household. (Figure 5, Table 1 and Table 1A, in Appendix I)

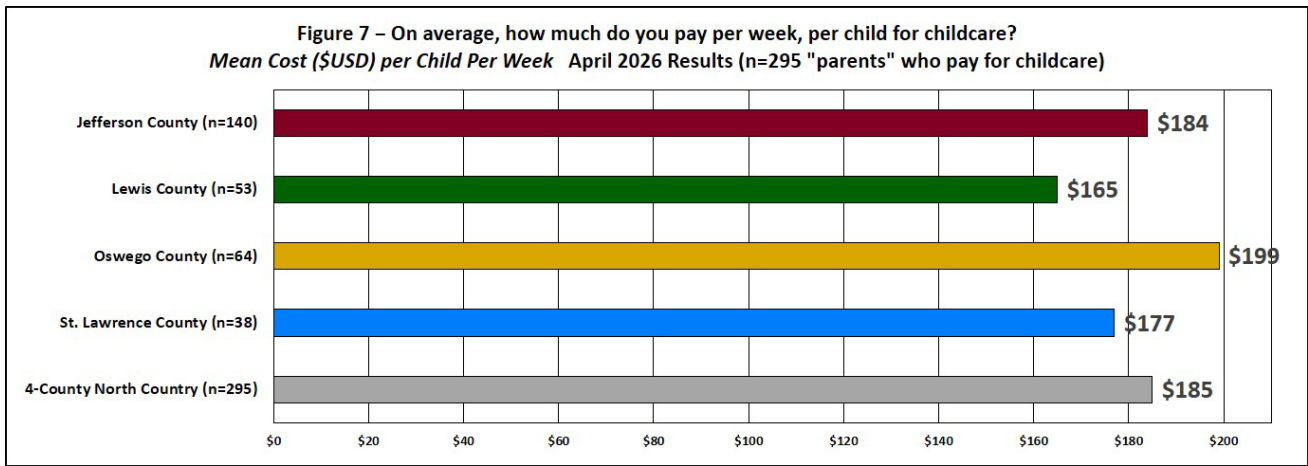


(2) What are parents using now for childcare, and what are the typical costs paid? (Tables 2-6)

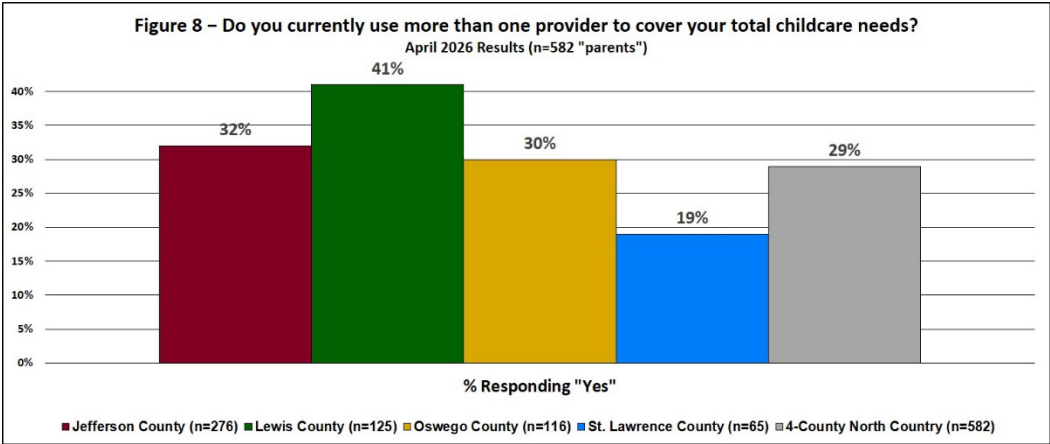
Using non-paid childcare arrangements such as “other family members” or “stay-at-home parent” are most commonly used by parents in the North Country, with differences apparent between the specific counties. For example, use of “other family members” is particularly high in Lewis County and St. Lawrence County, whereas use of “Child Care Center” is comparably very high among Oswego County parents. (Figure 6, Table 2 and Tables 2.1 – 2.8, in Appendix I)



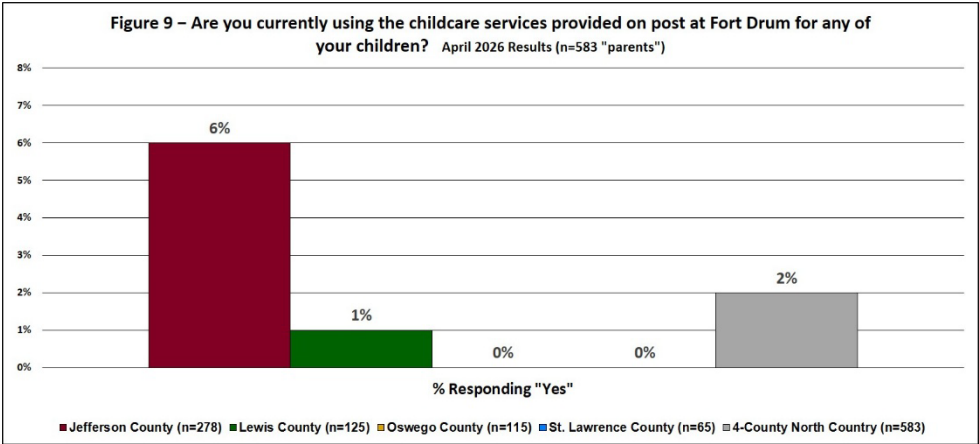
Those parents who currently pay for childcare services were asked, “On average, how much do you pay per week, per child for childcare?” The average across the region is \$185 per child per week, with Oswego County the most costly (\$199) and Lewis County the least (\$165). (Figure 7 and Table 3 in Appendix I)



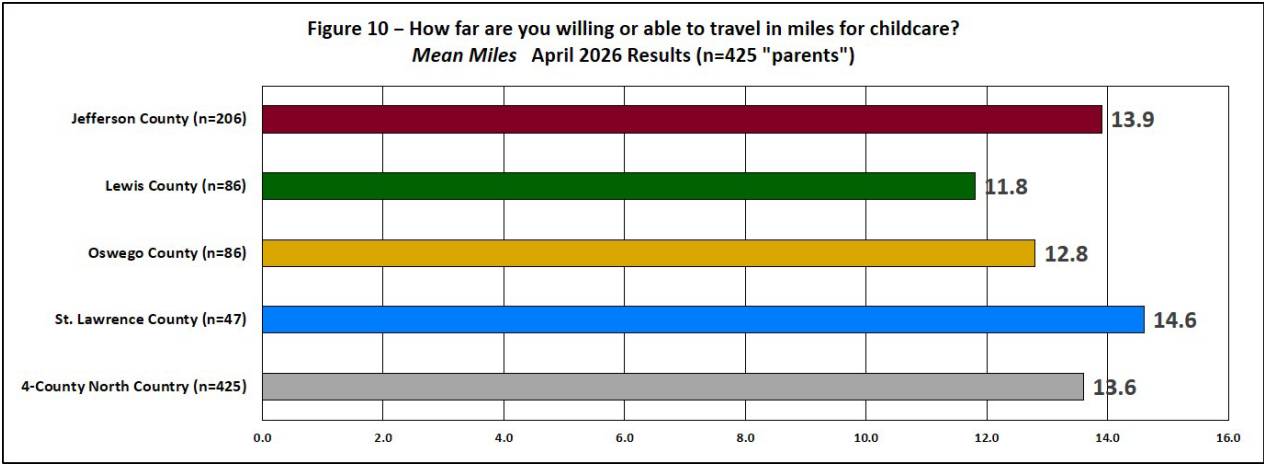
Approximately three-in-ten parents (29%) currently use more than one provider to cover their total childcare needs (as high as 41% in Lewis County, and as low as 19% in St. Lawrence County). (Figure 8, and Table 4 in Appendix I)



Not surprisingly, use of childcare services provided on post at Fort Drum is most common among Jefferson County parents (6%). (Figure 9, and Table 5 in Appendix I)

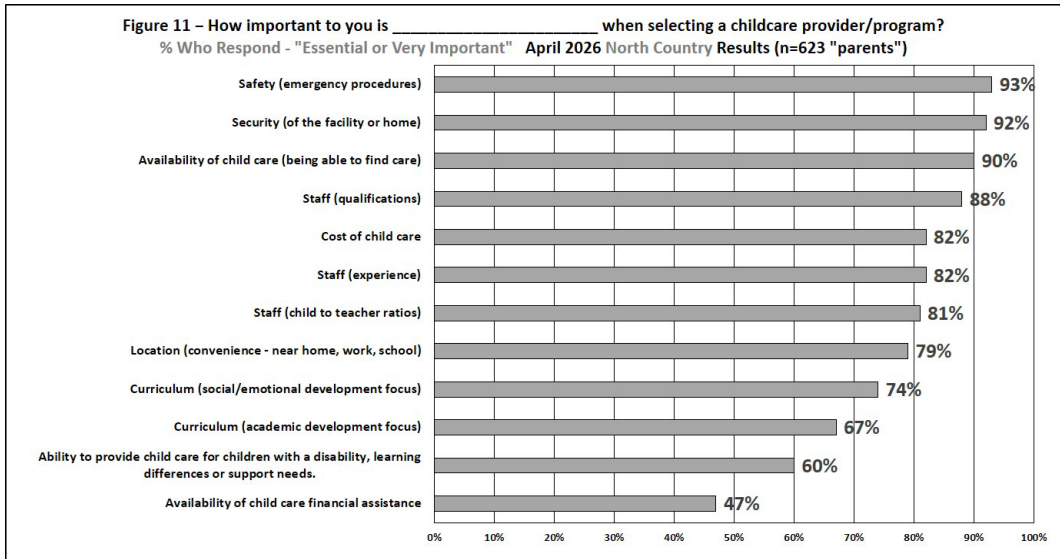


Parents were asked how far they would be willing to travel for childcare; the regional average is 13.6 miles, ranging from a high of 14.6 miles in St. Lawrence County to a low of 11.8 miles in Lewis County. (Figure 10, and Table 6 in Appendix I)

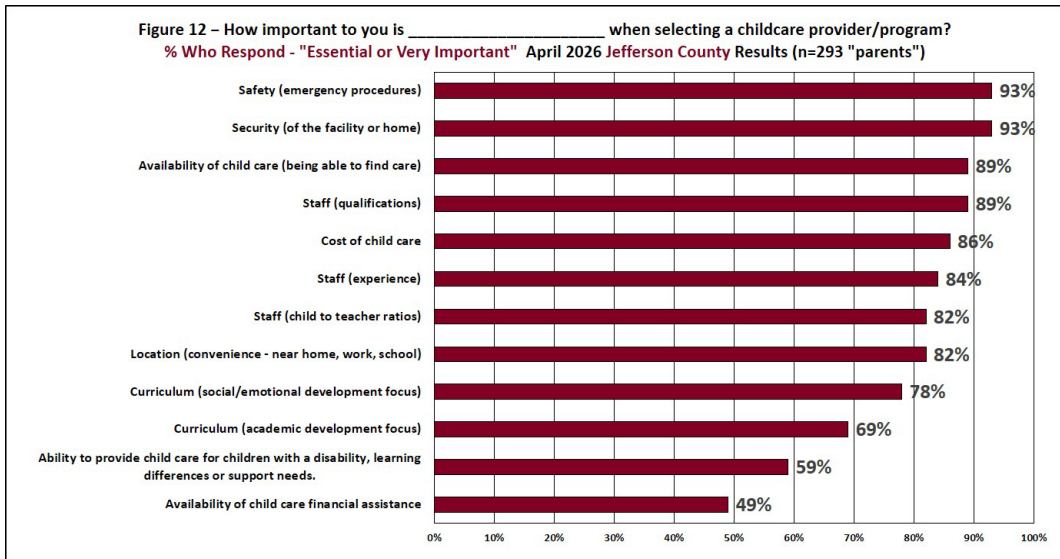


(3) What are the most important factors for parents in making childcare choices? (Table 7)

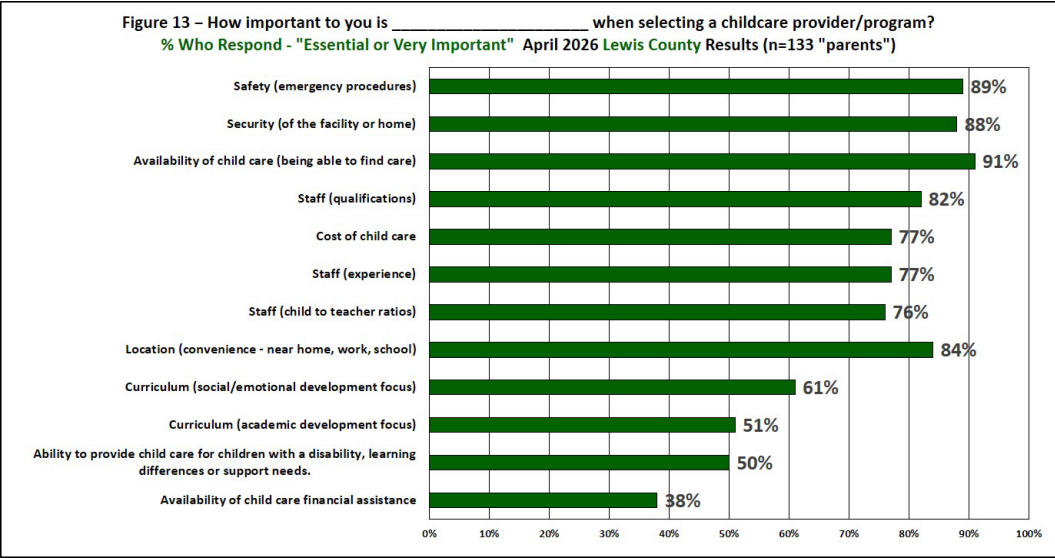
Parents were asked to rate the *importance* of each of 12 different factors, or characteristics, of child care services in making their childcare choices. Figure 11 shows the results for the combined regional sample of n=623 parents, with the factors sorted from most important to least important (sorted by the % of parents who evaluated each factor/characteristic as “Essential” or “Very important”). The three characteristics that rise to the top as most important (each with at least 90% of parents rating as “Essential” or “Very important”) are: Safety and emergency procedures (93%), Security of the facility (92%), and Availability of childcare defined as being able to find care (90%). (Figure 11, Table 7 and Tables 7.1 – 7.12 in Appendix I)



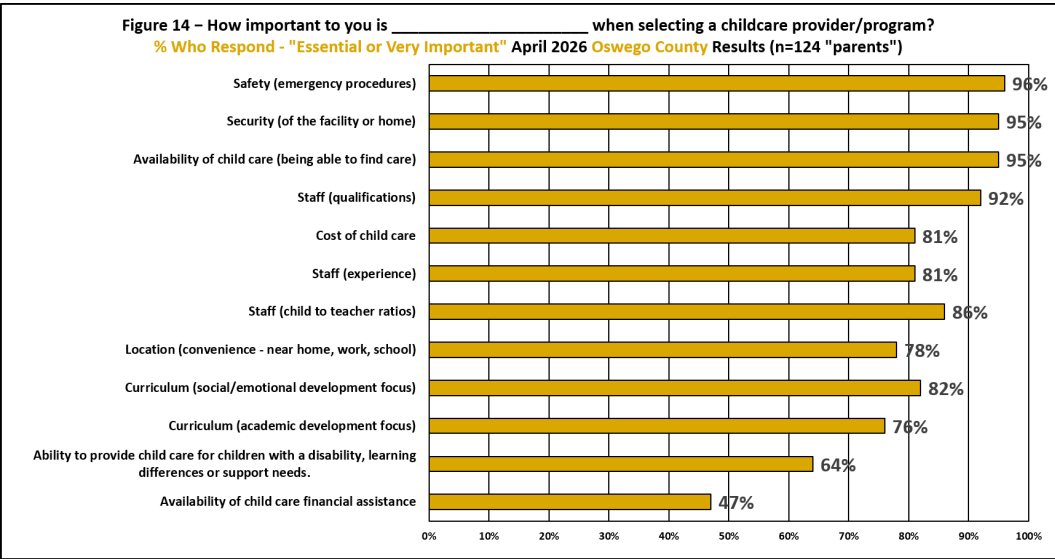
Jefferson County parents’ results for perceived importance of various childcare service characteristics are illustrated in Figure 12. Jefferson County parents’ perceived importances of characteristics almost identically parallel (note that Figure 12 is very similar to Figure 11) those of the combined regional group. (Figure 12, and Tables 7.1 – 7.12 in Appendix I)



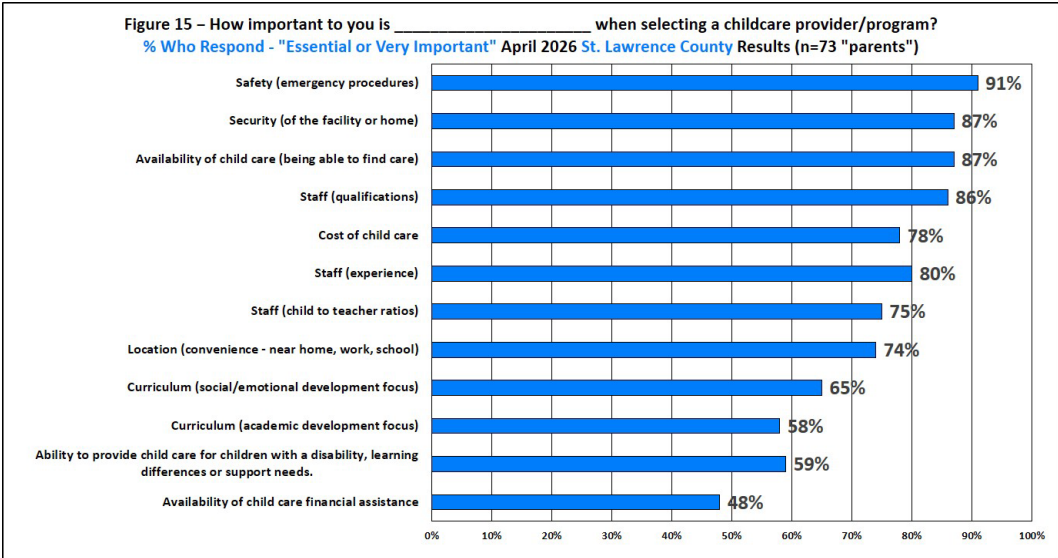
Lewis County parents’ results for perceived importance of various childcare service characteristics are illustrated in Figure 13. Lewis County parents’ perceived importances of characteristics show two distinct differences from the overall combined regional group results in that in Lewis County “Availability of childcare” (defined as being able to find care) is the most important factor (91% is the largest rate of “Essential” or “Very important” among the 12 studied factors), and in Lewis County “Location” stands out of the regional pattern as being more important to parents (Lewis=84%, 4th highest, Region= 79%, 8th highest). (Figure 13, and Tables 7.1 – 7.12 in Appendix I)



Oswego County parents’ results for perceived importance of various childcare service characteristics are illustrated in Figure 14. Oswego County parents’ perceived importances of characteristics are relatively similar to those of the combined regional group, however, two notable differences emerge. Oswego County parents perceive the “Staff, child-to-teacher ratios” as particularly important (86% rate as “Essential” or “Very important”, while the regional average rate is only 81%), and they also perceive “Curriculum, with social/emotional development focus” as particularly important (82% rate as “Essential” or “Very important”, while the regional average rate is only 74%). (Figure 14, and Tables 7.1 – 7.12 in Appendix I)

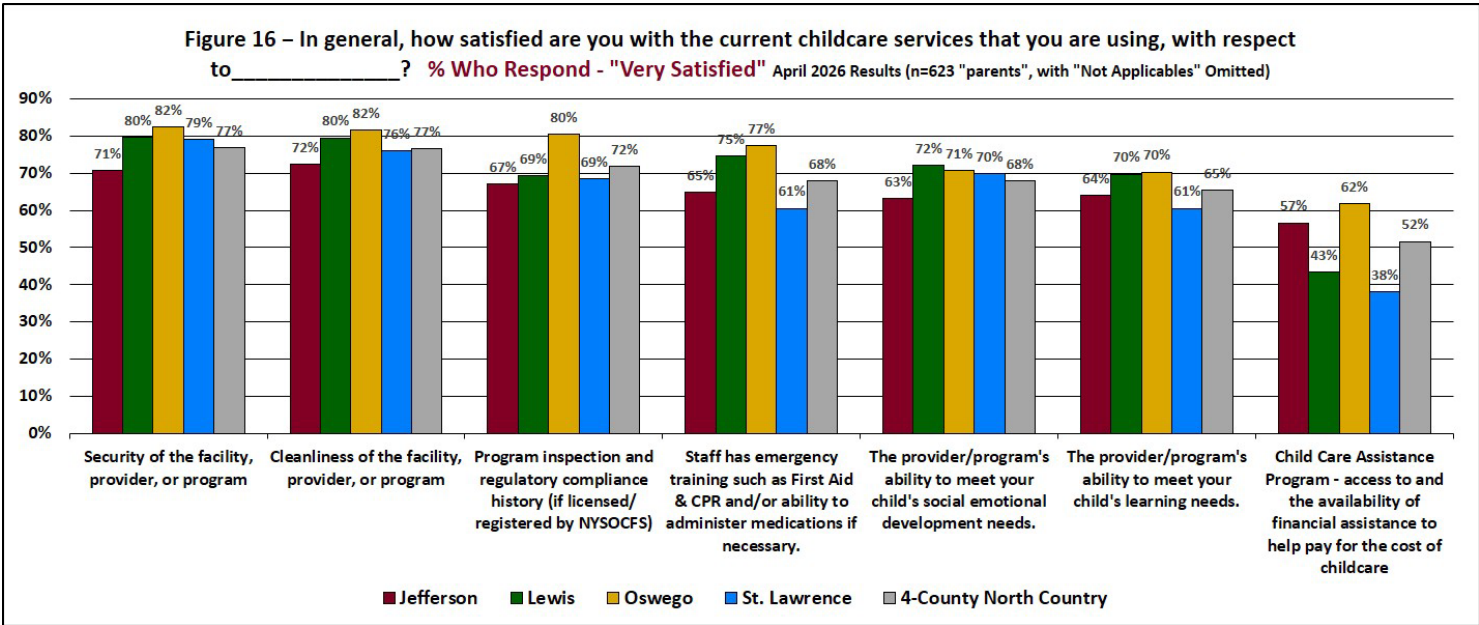


St. Lawrence County parents’ results for perceived importance of various childcare service characteristics are illustrated in Figure 15. St. Lawrence County parents’ perceived importances of characteristics almost identically parallel those of the combined regional group (note that Figure 15 is very similar to Figure 11) with only “Staff experience” being more highly rated than “Cost of childcare.” (Figure 15, and Tables 7.1 – 7.12 in Appendix I)



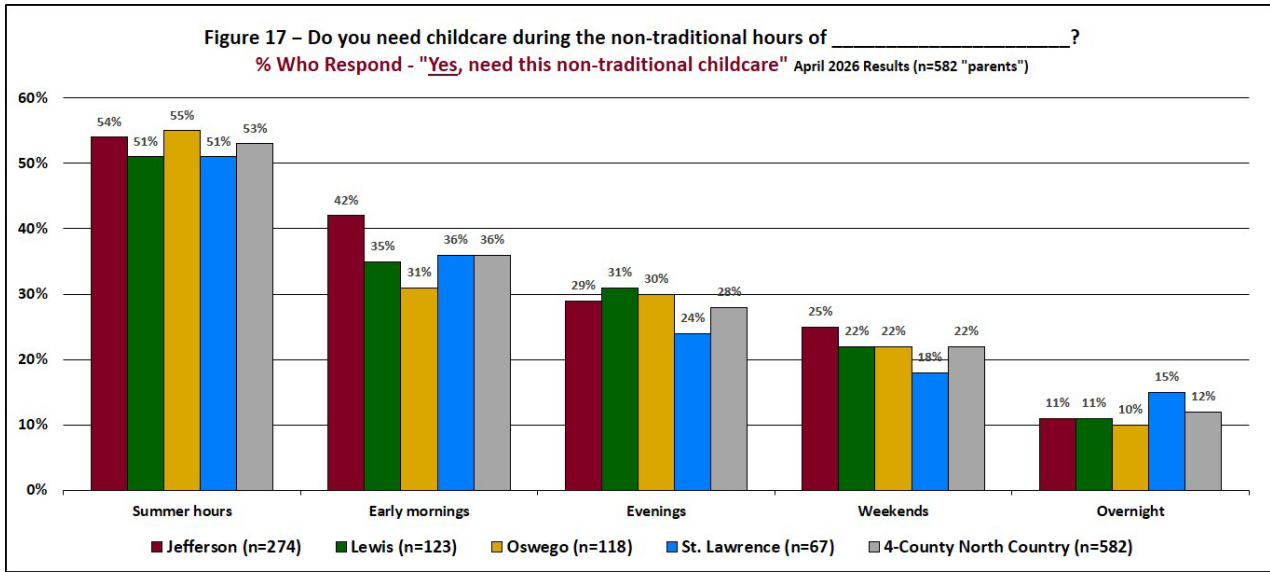
(4) How satisfied are parents with their current childcare arrangements?
(Table 8)

Parents were asked to rate how *satisfied* they are with each of 7 different factors, or characteristics, of the childcare services that they are currently using. Figure 16 shows the results for the combined regional sample of n=623 parents, as well as the county-specific results. For six of the seven characteristics (all except “Child Care Assistance Program – Access to and the availability of financial assistance to help pay for the cost of childcare”) a majority of parents respond with “Very Satisfied” both regionally and within each of the four studied counties. (Figure 16, and Table 8, Tables 8.1 –8.7 in Appendix I)

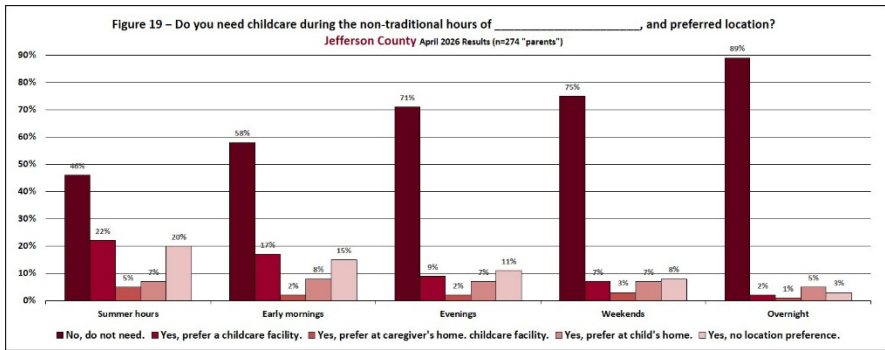
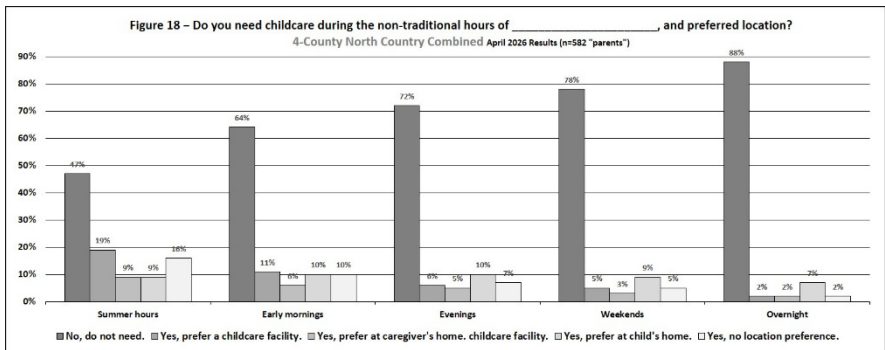


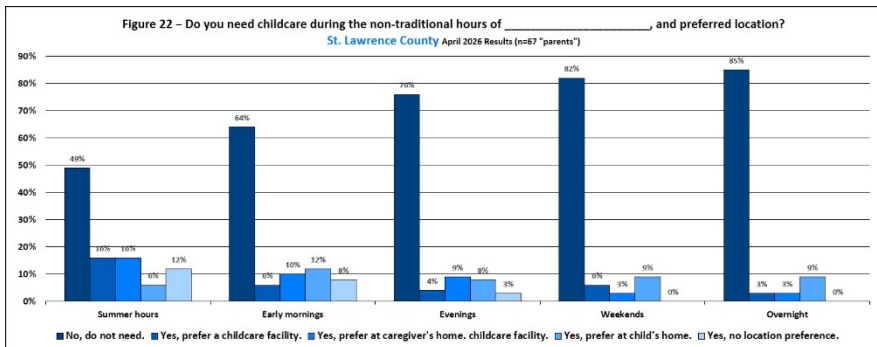
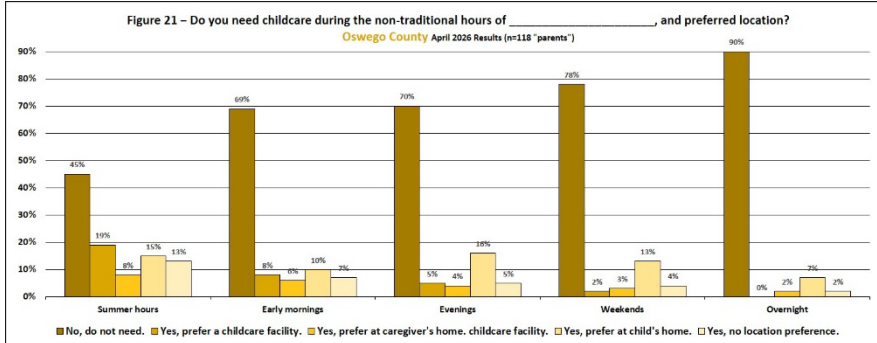
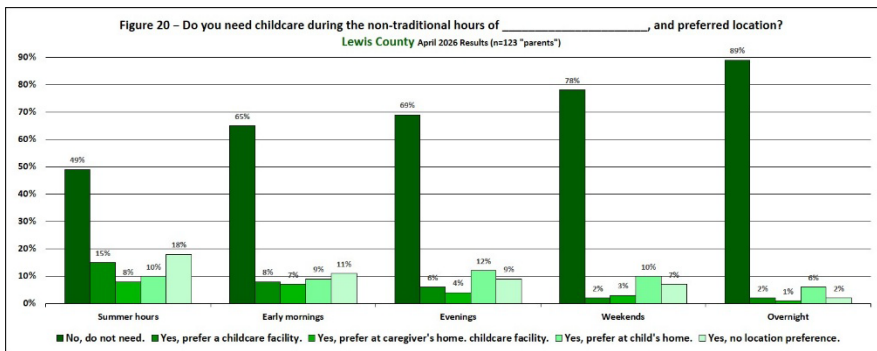
(5) What needs do parents have for non-traditional childcare? (Tables 9-10)

Parents were asked the types of non-traditional childcare hours that they need, and clearly “summer hours” emerges as the most in need (53% of parents need this). Significant need has been expressed for other types of non-traditional childcare hours in the North Country region as well, with 36% needing “early mornings”, 28% needing “evenings”, 22% needing “weekends”, and 12% (one-in-eight parents) needing “overnight”. (Figure 17, and Table 9 in Appendix I)

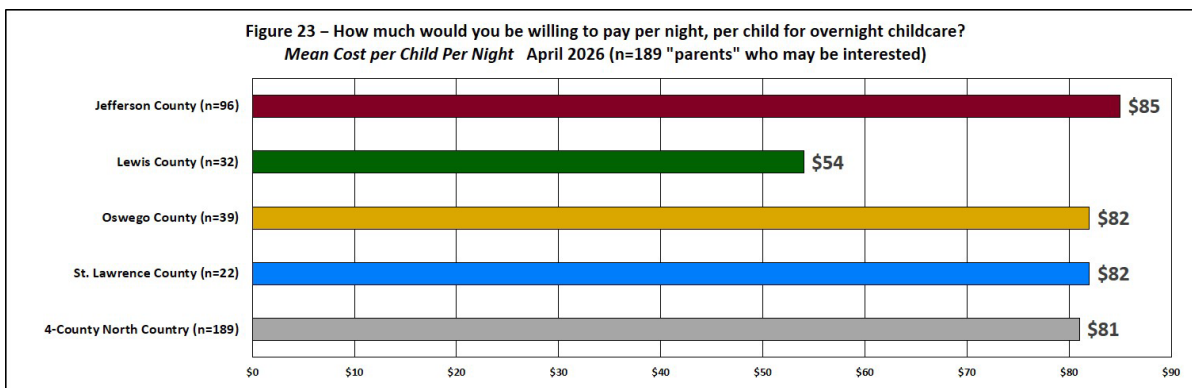


The following five graphs (Figures 18-22) illustrate the county-specific levels of interest in each of the five potential non-traditional times of childcare services, along with the preferred location for each non-traditional childcare service among those parents who have the need. (Tables 9.1 – 9.5 in Appendix I)



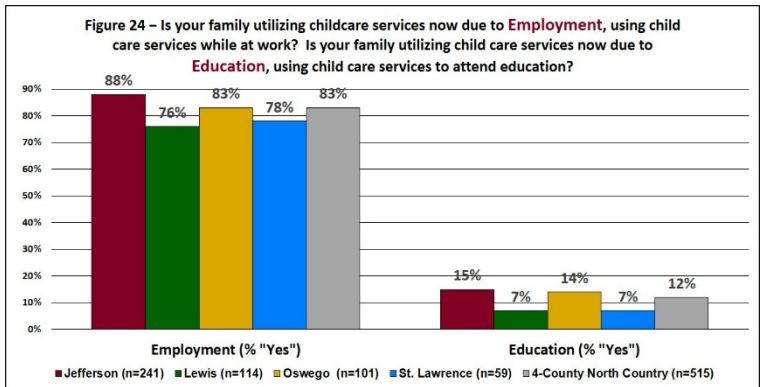


Parents were also asked the amount that they would be willing to pay per night per child for overnight childcare. The average amount across the region is \$81, with Lewis County the significant outlier with a much lower amount of only \$54. (Figure 23, and Table 10 in Appendix I)

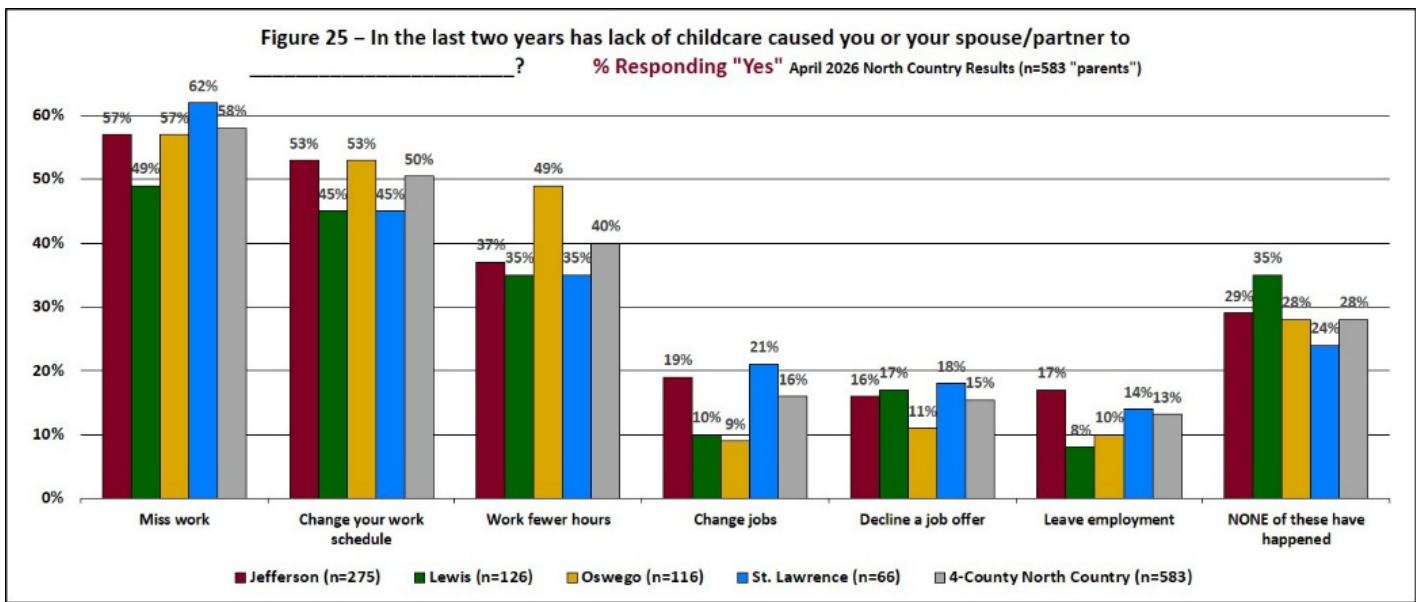


(6) How has the need for childcare impacted parents' and their family's employment situations? (Tables 11-12)

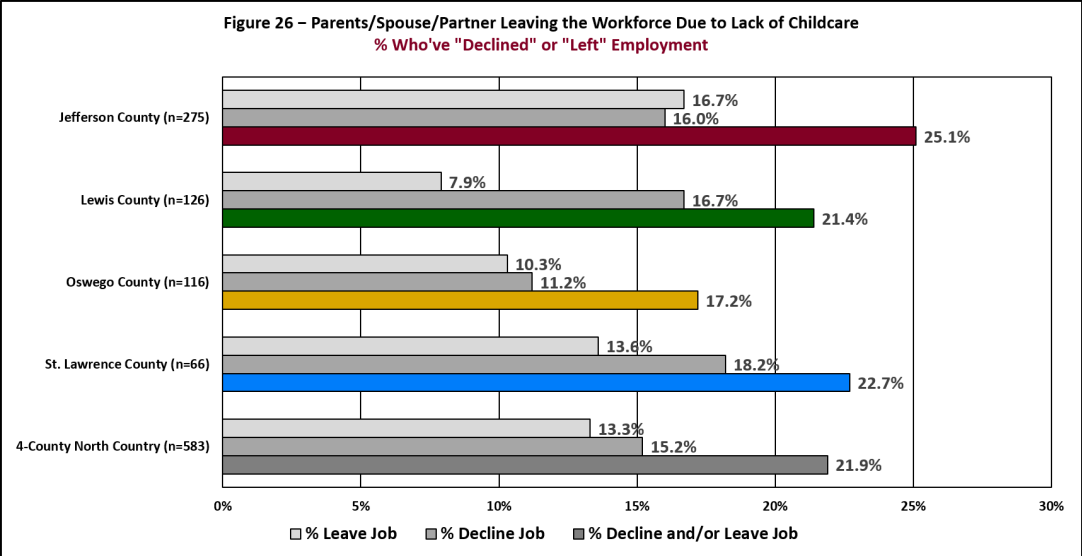
One very important goal of this North Country childcare study is to collect data to better understand various economic and workforce impacts of childcare challenges upon parents and families. When asked the *reason* for utilizing childcare services, overwhelmingly North Country parents indicate that it is due to *employment* rather than *education* (83% of parents, versus only 12% of parents, respectively). (Figure 24, and Table 11 through Table 11.2 in Appendix I)



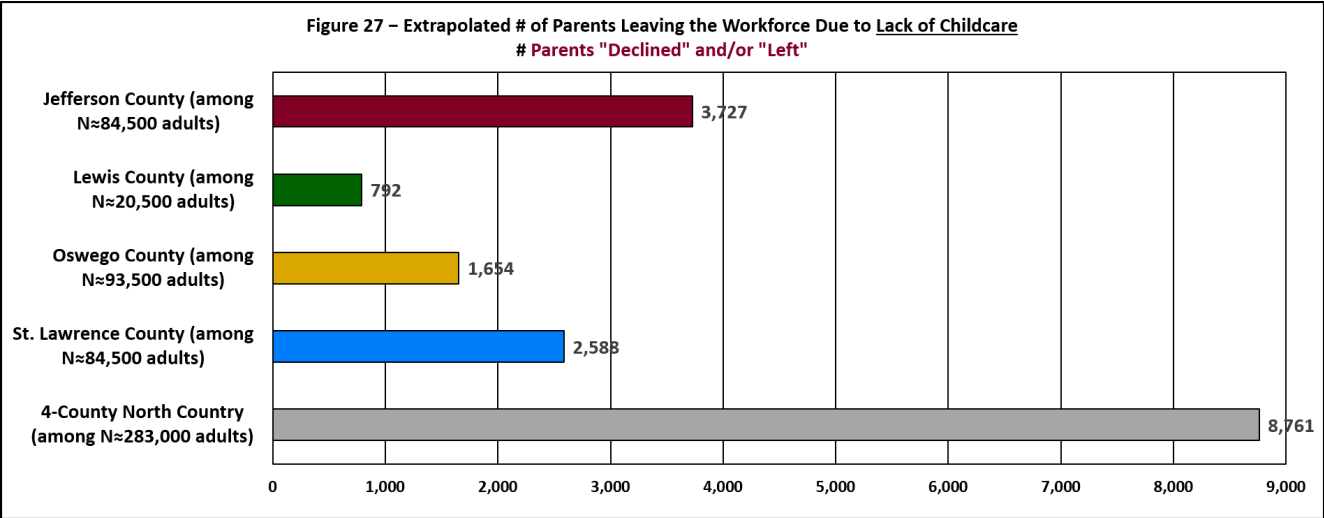
To focus specifically on workforce impacts of childcare needs upon parents and families, participating parents were asked “In the last two years has lack of childcare caused you or your spouse/partner to experience any or all of the following employment issues?” The six separate employment issues presented to participants are summarized below and in the past two years clearly a majority of parents have had to miss work, and a majority have had to change their work schedule, due to lack of childcare. (Figure 25, and Table 12 in Appendix I)



Even more impactful upon the local North Country workforce are the choices that parents have made to either *leave* or *fail to enter* the workforce due to lack of childcare. Figure 26 illustrates that in the North Country region among parents: 13.3% have left a job due to lack of childcare, 15.2% have declined a job due to lack of childcare, and collectively, 21.9% of parents have experienced *one-or-both of these two workforce-leaving actions*. (Figure 26, and Table 12 in Appendix I)

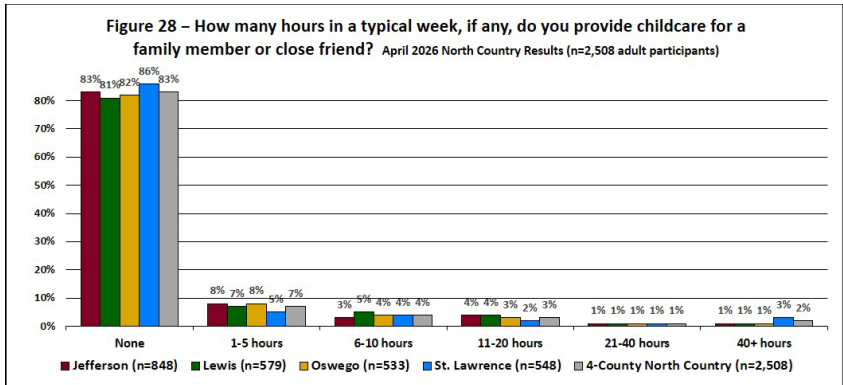


To best understand the large impact that lack of childcare has upon lessening the *number* of available individuals in the North Country workforce is illustrated in Figure 27. The percentages of parents who have recently declined a job offer or left employment or have a spouse or partner who declined a job or left employment due to providing childcare have been applied to the overall parent population sizes and the percentages of single parent and dual parent households in each county to generate the estimated number of adults who are currently not in the local workforce (but could be) due to providing childcare. Note that this study provides evidence to suggest that over 12,000 adults are not working in the four counties due to lack of childcare (approximately 283,000 adults * 20% are parents * 15.5% have declined/left employment) (Figure 27, and Table 12 in Appendix I)

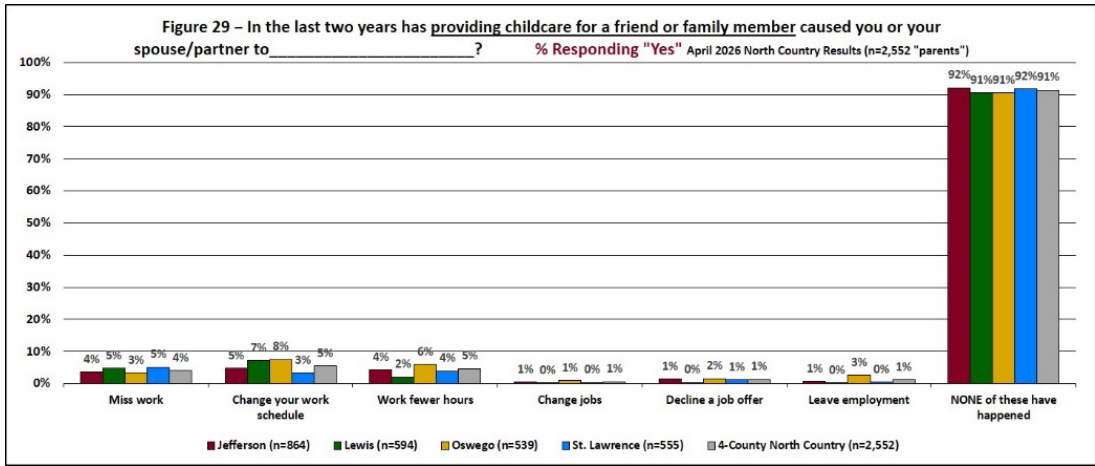


(7) How common is it among adults in the region to provide free childcare services to friends and family members, and what is the corresponding impact upon individuals' employment situations? (Tables 13-14)

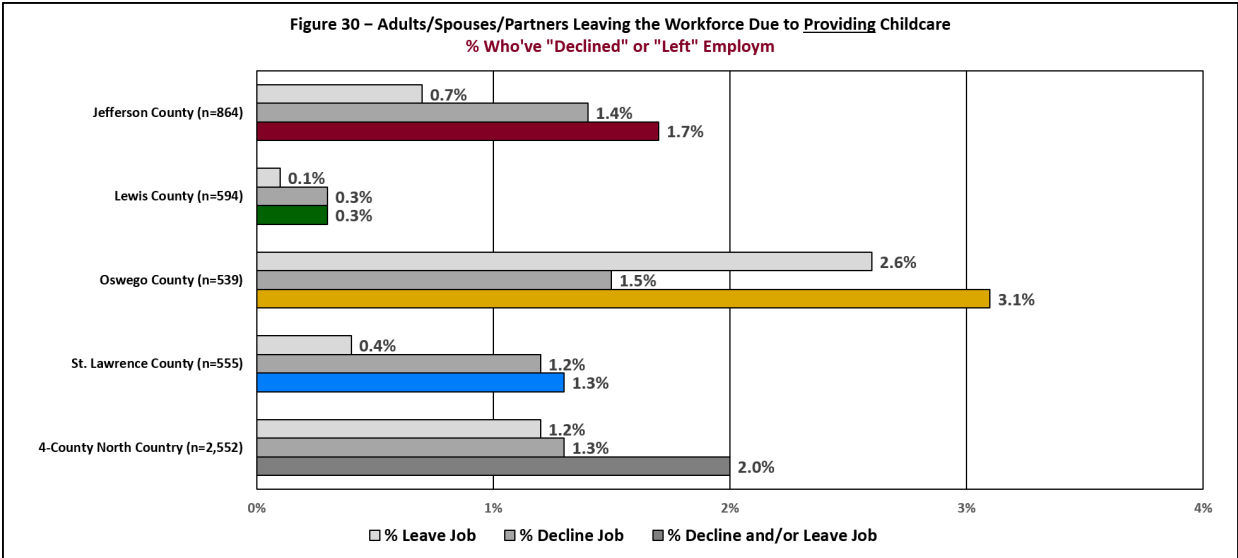
Employment impact due to childcare needs, of course, is not exclusive to only the parents of those children aged 12 or under. Another goal of this study is to estimate the impact upon other adults, those who are **providing** childcare to friends and family members. To validly estimate the rates of local adults providing these childcare services and making associated personal employment choices, the data from the entire n=2,562 sampled adults in the overall Current Issues community study is again used. Approximately one-in-six adult participants (17%) is now providing childcare to a family member or close friend, a rate that the cross-tabulations interestingly reveal to increase to 23% among those participants age 60-69. (Figure 28, and Table 13 in Appendix I)



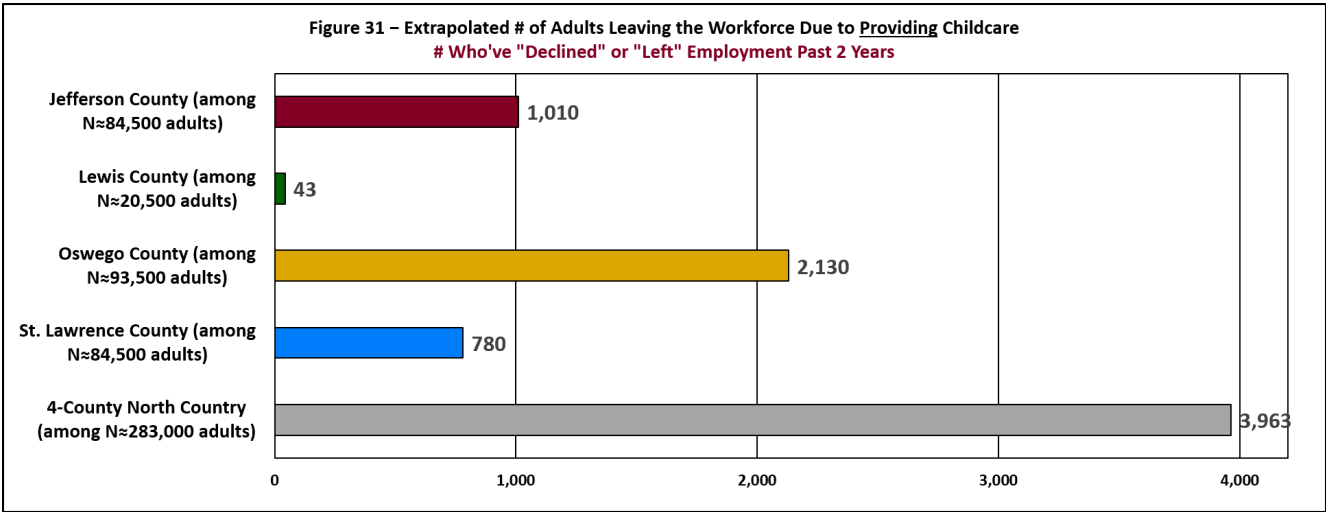
Almost one-in-ten adult participants (9%) have experienced a negative impact on their employment situation, with the most common impacts being that to provide this presumably no-or-low-cost child care, one must work fewer hours or one must change their work schedule. Among all survey participants, one-in-twenty has to work fewer working hours and change their work schedule. (Figure 29, and Table 14 in Appendix I)



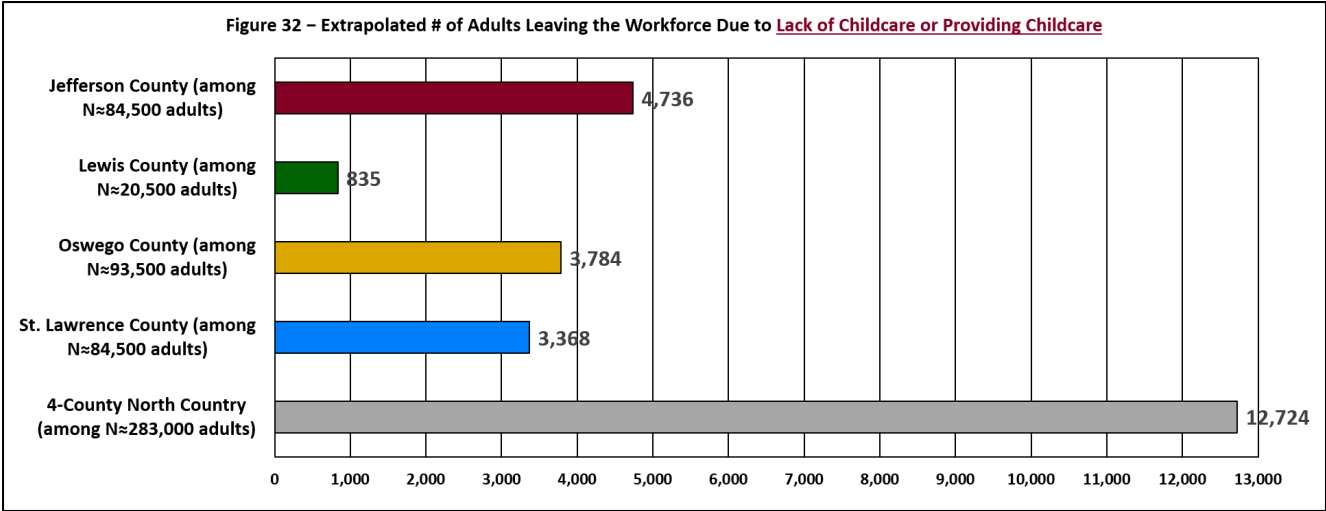
Providing childcare for a family member or friend has also resulted in adults leaving or failing to enter the workforce in the North Country. Figure 30 illustrates that in the North Country region among adults: 1.2% have left a job to provide childcare, 1.3% have declined a job to provide childcare, and collectively, 2.0% of adults have experienced *one-or-both of these two workforce-leaving actions*. (Figure 30, and Table 14 in Appendix I)



To best understand the large impact that providing childcare has upon lessening the *number* of available individuals in the North Country workforce is illustrated in Figure 31. The percentages of adults who have recently declined a job offer or left employment or have a spouse or partner who declined a job or left employment due to providing childcare have been applied to the overall adult population sizes and the percentages of single parent and dual parent households in each county to generate the estimated number of adults who are currently not in the local workforce (but could be) due to providing childcare. Note that this study provides evidence to suggest that almost 5,500 adults are not working in the four counties due to providing childcare. (approximately 283,000 adults * 1.4% have declined/left employment) (Figure 31, and Table 14 in Appendix I)



Finally, since it is assumed to be very unlikely that an individual adult would both leave the workforce due to lack of childcare along with leave the workforce to provide free childcare to a family member or close friend (although admittedly this is possible) the following Figure 32 has been provided to summarize the combined overall impact on the local workforce due to childcare challenges. The extrapolated estimates combine the workforce loss due to lacking childcare with the loss due to providing childcare. Almost 12,750 local adults have left the workforce due to childcare challenges (which represents approximately 4.5% of the population of 283,000 adults in the region). (Figure 32, and Table 14 in Appendix I)



The Study Methodology

Methodology:

The Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College is one of approximately 1,500 colleges, universities, and polling businesses in North America that are members of the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). AAPOR is the leading public opinion professional association in the world. Further, the Center is one of approximately 100 AAPOR members that has been granted membership to the Transparency Initiative (TI) of AAPOR. As a member of TI, the Center pledges to utilize best practices in the industry in both data collection methodology and data analytics techniques. Additionally, the Center is a member of the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations (AASRO), a professional association exclusive to colleges and universities in the United States that complete public opinion research in an academic (higher education, not profit-centered) setting.

The data for this childcare needs and challenges study were collected in the four-county North Country region of Northern and Central New York State in two “waves” in late March and early April 2026.

Wave #1 – Random Sample of North Country Adults:

The first wave of sampling included a random representation of adult residents of the four-county region. Specifically, the 80 childcare questions, along with a few childcare-related questions that are appropriate for all adults, were included in the Center’s annual Current Issues study in the four counties. This initial sampling wave collected a total of 2,562 adult residents from the four-county Northern and Central New York region (870 adult residents of Jefferson County, 596 from Lewis County, 541 from Oswego County, and 555 from St. Lawrence County).

The methodology used in this portion of the study of current issues includes a mixed-mode sampling methodology using a combination of live interviewer telephone interviews of residents on cell phones and landlines ($n_{\text{phone}}=470$), random email invitation of residents to complete the survey online via a nonprobability panel developed over the past decade at SUNY Jefferson ($n_{\text{email}}=523$), random MMS and SMS text messages sent to cellular phones with invitations to complete the survey online ($n_{\text{Text}}=1,474$), and intercept surveying of the difficult-to-access subpopulation of military members and their dependents on

Fort Drum ($n_{int}=94$). All cellular phone numbers and email addresses were obtained from L2, www.l2-data.com. All interviews were completed between March 31 and April 11, 2026.

To adjust for sampling nonresponse error in this random sampling, the data were weighted within county for gender, age, education, and race, with further weighting for military affiliation in Jefferson County. All county-specific weight targets were sourced from the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Defense. A further weight for county population size was applied to generate North Country estimates as a region. The data were calibrated for sampling modality, and finally weights were trimmed to minimize the design effect, generating a final design effect for the study of 2.0.

After all data compilation, cleansing, transforming, weighting, calibrating, and trimming the overall approximate margin of error for this study when analyzing four-county region-wide results for 2,562 participants is $\pm 2.2\%$. When investigating on a county-specific basis the margin of error is greater due to smaller county-specific sample sizes. The approximate margins of error within each county are $\pm 3.8\%$ in Jefferson County, $\pm 4.5\%$ in Lewis County, $\pm 4.8\%$ in Oswego County, and $\pm 4.7\%$ in St. Lawrence County (county sample sizes are: $n_J=870$, $n_L=596$, $n_O=541$, $n_S=555$). Investigation of demographic subgroups, such as only male participants, will also result with margins of error of greater than $\pm 2.2\%$. The margin error is a measurement of random error, error due to simply the random chance of sampling. When surveying humans there are other potential sources of error, sources of error in addition to random error (which is the only error encompassed by the margin of error). Response error, nonresponse error, process error, bias in sample selection, bias in question-phrasing, lack of clarity in question-phrasing, social desirability bias, acquiescence bias, satisficing, and undercoverage are common sources of other-than-random error. Methods that should be, and have been in this study, employed to minimize these other sources of error include: maximum effort to select the sample randomly, piloting and testing of utilized survey questions, extensive training of all data collectors (interviewers), thorough cleansing of data, calibration of data, and application of post-stratification algorithms to the resulting sampled data. Hence, when using this study data to make estimates to the entire North Country adult populations, as is the case in standard survey research practices, the margin of error will be the only error measurement cited and interpreted.

Wave #2 – Oversampling North Country Parents:

There were $n=299$ parent participants with childcare needs among the $n=2,562$ overall participants in the first sampling wave of this overall study (a parent with childcare needs has been defined for this study as an adult who has at least one child aged 12 or under living in their home). A sample of only $n=299$, of course, makes county-specific analysis extremely difficult and susceptible to margins of error within county that would be too large to be as effective as would be the case with larger sample sizes. Therefore, continued sampling of parents in need of childcare services in the North Country was implemented in the second wave (an “oversampling” wave), where local childcare experts assisted the Center by distributing the survey to parent-groups with which they work. (email and text message invitations to complete the survey online were sent to parent groups identified by local childcare experts). This second wave successfully acquired an additional 324 parents to supplement the original random sample of 299 parents and generate an overall four-county sample of $n=623$ parents. County-specific, the overall “parent” sample for this study includes 293 from Jefferson County, 133 from Lewis County, 124 from Oswego County, and 73 from St. Lawrence County. The combined random and oversampled parents’ data has only been weighted toward county population sizes of those under the age of 15 residing in the counties. The approximate margins of error for the *parent* samples within each county are $\pm 5.4\%$ in Jefferson County, $\pm 8.0\%$ in Lewis County, $\pm 8.3\%$ in Oswego County, and $\pm 10.8\%$ in St. Lawrence County, and an overall regional margin of error of $\pm 3.7\%$. (Design Effect = 1.4)

Both Wave #1 and Wave #2 – Combined North Country Parents:

Validity checks including attention checks, logic checks, and excluded respondents who straight-lined or completed the survey under a prescribed time constraint were applied. Screening of content for evidence that it originated from bots or fabricated profiles was not employed due to the fact that no rewards or

incentives are offered for participants in this study. No re-contacts to confirm that the interview occurred or to verify respondent's identity or both were used. Respondents are asked to verify that they have not completed the survey more than once directly after the voluntary informed consent statement and agreement/consent to participate. There has been no data imputation or other data exclusions or replacement. All open-ended text coding was completed by human coders, with no use of LLMs or AI tools. In the reporting of study findings, percentage points are rounded off to either the nearest whole number or tenth of a percent. As a result, percentages in a table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%. In questions that permit multiple responses, columns may total to more than 100%, depending on the number of different responses offered by each respondent.

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