

## What do **Minnesota families** want from early care and education?

Think Small hosted conversations to talk with families about early care and education (ECE) in Minnesota. Families of diverse backgrounds from both rural and urban areas shared what's working, what's challenging, and what they hope to see change. Below are highlights of what families said they want.

### Support for All Types of Learners

- Child care options designed for children with neurodivergence (e.g. autism, ADHD).
- Skilled educators trained and supported to work with all kinds of learners.
- Clear documentation of learning needs with consistent follow-up, evaluation, and planning.

"I feel like our kids get written off when they don't fit the norm."

"Sometimes kids need a little more support than others."

### Neurodivergence by the Numbers

- 3% of 4-year old children have been diagnosed with autism<sup>1</sup>
- 1 in 6 children ages 3-17 has been diagnosed with a developmental disability (includes autism, ADHD, blindness, cerebral palsy, etc.)<sup>2</sup>

### Quality & Professionalism

- Consistent quality across all programs, regardless of zip code.
- High-quality relationships between educators and children.
- Wide-ranging staff with expertise in a variety of developmental needs.
- Stable routines and intentional activities.



## Equity & Access

- Intentionally inclusive ECE system designed with diverse needs in mind and accessible to all.
- “Our children are not [brand-name] bags or [generic] bags. It should be a standard of quality. And that [standard of quality] should be high for our children.”
- “Having reliable, quality child care should be the standard and something that everyone has access to.”

“There’s a spectrum of daycares from purely just child care and they’re keeping our kids alive, to this—they’re helping me be a better parent.”

## Strong Family-Educator Partnerships

- Strong parent support from programs.
- Opportunities for parent education.
- Use of technology for daily communication.



“Something I really appreciate is the community aspect. They do a lot of parenting education, which I need.”

## Key Learnings from Families

- High-quality, inclusive ECE is essential to meet the needs of children with diverse needs.
- Investing in skilled educators, ongoing training, and family partnerships must be a priority.
- Families need stable, reliable care and consistent quality across early care and education programs.

1 Autism Speaks. (2025, April 15). Autism prevalence rises to 1 in 31 children in the U.S. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/autism-prevalence-rises-1-31-children-us>

2 CDC. (2025, May 27). Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html>