

New York Child Care Subsidy Staff Describe How Policy Implementation Influences Latino Families' Receipt of Subsidies

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Introduction

Recent national data show that many Latino^a families with low incomes use child care arrangements on a regular basis,¹ and that those who pay out-of-pocket for care spend an average of 30 percent of their income—well above the federal affordability threshold of 7 percent.² Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies are one of the primary policy levers available to help families with low incomes access affordable child care. This brief, part of a multi-state series exploring Latino families' access to CCDF subsidies, shares insights from local program staff who help implement the subsidy program in New York—a state that is home to more than 1 million Latino children,³ many of whom are eligible for child care subsidies but do not receive them.⁴ Data suggest that 13 percent of state-eligible Hispanic children in New York received subsidies in 2020, which is higher than the national average of 9 percent, but lower than the average of 15 percent for all children in New York.⁵

In New York, the state's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is administered at the county level through 58 local social service districts covering 62 counties.^b (See "Context and Background" section for more information on New York's Hispanic population, and about the CCDF program overall and in New York.) To learn more about local subsidy implementation and administrative practices with potential implications for Latino families' access, we surveyed more than 100 district-level CCAP frontline caseworkers and administrators. In this brief, we report on the survey results related specifically to subsidy eligibility requirements, the application process, and communication and outreach with families, as well as staff members' views on how Latinx applicants may experience these aspects of the subsidy program similarly to or differently than other applicants.

Key Findings

By sharing information about their implementation practices and experiences related to aspects of the subsidy application process—including key eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, and communications and outreach—local New York subsidy program staff provided insights about potential access barriers and facilitators for Latine families.

Local CCAP staff members' perceptions of the activities and circumstances that make families eligible for subsidized child care were generally aligned with New York state policy, despite notable variation. Except for parental employment, which nearly all staff recognized as a qualifying activity, the share who said that various state-approved activities were 'not approved'—or that they did not know whether the activity could qualify families to receive child care subsidies—ranged from 23 percent (attending high school/obtaining a GED) to 51 percent (employment-related activities as part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP). At the time of this survey, districts had greater flexibility regarding what qualifying activities they would cover, and the program allowed for other options such as case opening and closing procedures to vary by district. Subsequent regulatory changes since, have standardized many of those options resulting in greater clarity and uniformity between districts.

According to CCAP staff, the Hispanic and non-Hispanic families they served most often received child care subsidies to support parental employment, job search, and job training. In addition, staff mentioned that English as a Second Language classes were a more common qualifying activity for Hispanic applicants (relative to non-Hispanic

^a We use "Hispanic," "Latino," "Latinx," and "Latine" interchangeably throughout the brief. The terms are used to reflect the U.S. Census definition to include individuals having origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, as well as other "Hispanic, Latino or Spanish" origins.

^b The five New York City borough counties constitute one service district.

applicants), and that post-secondary education and child involvement in child protective services or foster care were relatively more common for non-Hispanic applicants than for Hispanic applicants.

Local staff described implementation practices and experiences related to collecting documents from subsidy applicants, highlighting several areas of potential administrative burden for families overall and for Hispanic families in particular.

- Staff were generally in alignment with one another and with state policy in terms of the documents they collected from families, with some variability around asset verification, driver's license or state identification, and birth certificates for adults in the household.
- Notably, no staff said they *required* families to provide Social Security numbers (which is prohibited by federal and state guidelines), though just over 40 percent said they *requested* them during the application process.
- While most staff reported few challenges with documentation, nearly 40 percent said that work hours and income verification (two key pieces of eligibility determination) can be difficult for families to provide. Staff descriptions of documentation challenges highlighted significant mismatches between verification requirements and the nature of many parents'—including Latino parents'—employment (e.g., multiple jobs, self-employment, fluctuating hours, and wages paid in cash) that make documentation more complicated. Staff also recognized that language barriers and immigration status concerns could complicate or compound these challenges for some Latino families.

CCAP staff responses suggest some degree of system capacity to support access to subsidy programs for Spanish-speaking applicants, but very little in the way of resources to engage with Latino families who primarily speak an Indigenous language.

- Roughly half of surveyed staff described Spanish-language program resources (e.g., materials, interpreter services) as very accessible.
- Few staff (<10%) personally identified as being of Latino heritage or being fluent in Spanish, which may leave them reliant on centrally provided resources to engage and communicate with Spanish-speaking applicants. Only around 5 percent of frontline staff felt 'greatly' prepared to assist families who primarily speak Spanish.
- Most staff described supports for applicants who speak an Indigenous language from Latin America as not accessible and reported feeling 'not at all' prepared to assist these families.

According to CCAP staff, Hispanic and non-Hispanic families in New York learn about child care subsidies through a variety of methods—most commonly through child care providers, word of mouth, and agency referrals.

While just over one third of staff (37%) said that their agency engages in targeted outreach to Latino communities, a smaller share (<20%) reported that such connections were made through community contacts or partnerships with community-based organizations.

About our series and brief

This brief is part of a [research series](#) on Latino families' access to social welfare assistance; the series examines—from different vantage points—how government programs offering benefits to income-eligible families are structured and implemented in ways that shape families' access and uptake. Here, we use findings from a survey of New York child care subsidy program staff conducted in 2023 as part of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families' Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in Local Communities. This study seeks to inform federal and state efforts to reduce administrative burden on families and improve the efficiency, equity, and efficacy of service delivery—especially among Latino families.

Previous work on administrative burden, including [our own analysis](#), suggests that [program-related learning, psychological, and compliance costs limit the reach of public benefits](#) like CCDF because they prevent eligible families from participating. Learning costs occur when individuals are unaware of a resource or how to apply for it. Psychological and compliance costs arise from aspects of the process that create negative experiences for applicants or make it too challenging to navigate. Recognizing that such costs limit access and potentially exacerbate inequities, the [2021 White House Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government](#) directed governmental agencies to assess and improve the customer experience and reduce access barriers to public services, especially for individuals and communities who have been historically underserved.

Local staff tasked with administering public benefit programs play a key role in this process as the primary and potentially sole point of contact for families seeking assistance. Research on [local program staff perceptions, knowledge and practices](#) has begun to explore the [administrative burdens that Latino families with low incomes may encounter when applying to programs](#) like CCDF, [including language barriers, challenges providing required documentation, and lack of time or experience navigating agency procedures.](#)

Context and Background

Profile of New York's Hispanic population

New York is home to the fourth largest Hispanic child population in the country, totaling [more than 1 million children](#). Proportionally, [1 in 4 children in New York are Latino](#), which mirrors the entire U.S. population. Hispanic people in New York represent a wide range of heritage countries from across the Latino diaspora, with no single dominant descent group. While nearly 30 percent of [Latinos in the state](#) are of Puerto Rican heritage, more than 20 percent identify as Dominican; those of South American, Mexican, and Central American descent each make up an additional 10 percent or more of the population. Nearly two thirds of [Hispanic children in New York](#) (64%) live in a home where all parents were born in the United States, while just over one third (36%) have at least one parent who was foreign-born.

Many Latino households in New York are multilingual. [Roughly one quarter](#) of all New York children under age 6 living in households with low incomes also lives in a home where Spanish is spoken. In addition, a significant and growing share of immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America are from Indigenous communities and speak an Indigenous language. While national and state estimates of these communities are lacking, the Mexican Consulate of New York reports that [one third](#) of Mexican-born individuals in the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) speak an Indigenous language like Amuzgo, Mixe, Purepecha, or Tlapanec.

Latino parents in New York have relatively high rates of employment, but many work in low-wage jobs, increasing the odds that their families will experience poverty. While roughly [60 percent](#) of adults in Latinx child households in New York are engaged in paid work, [more than half of the state's Hispanic children \(51%\)](#) live in households with low incomes (below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level), which is considerably higher than the overall rate for children in the state (37%).

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) context

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the primary federal funding mechanism to subsidize child care costs for families with low incomes. CCDF subsidies are administered by states, territories, and Tribes and aim to support parents' work efforts and children's development by making high-quality child care arrangements more affordable for families who may otherwise not be able to access them. Although [poverty rates](#) have declined in recent years, Hispanic children continue to be overrepresented among households with low incomes, despite relatively high rates of parental employment. Given these characteristics, Latino families make up a large share of those who are eligible for CCDF subsidies and who could benefit from this form of assistance. However, CCDF funding levels mean that only a fraction of eligible children are served by their state, territory, or Tribal program ([16% in 2019](#)). Research has also shown that eligible Hispanic children are [less likely than those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds to receive CCDF assistance](#). [While Latino children make up 1 in 3 of those estimated to be eligible for subsidies nationally, they represent only 1 in 5 recipients](#).

Which families can access and receive child care subsidies is shaped in part by various policy decisions and administrative practices. Within broad federal parameters, states, territories, and Tribes have considerable flexibility in how they design and operate their child care subsidy programs. In some states, authority for setting program policies and procedures is further devolved to local entities (e.g., counties or regions), leading to significant variation in how CCDF programs are implemented. While [national policy scans](#) have identified several ways that state policy decisions can either increase or lessen administrative burdens for Latine families (see 'About this Series' box)—for example, through specific eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, recipient prioritization, and language accessibility of program materials—less is known about how these play out 'on the ground' within communities as families engage with subsidy program staff.

New York CCDF policy context

As in many states, child care costs in New York exceed what many families can afford; indeed, the [average cost of center-based care in the state surpasses the median cost of rent and in-state college tuition and fees](#). To help offset child care costs for New York families with low incomes, federal CCDF funds are administered through the CCAP by local social service districts (LSSD); these districts are overseen by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). Within OCFS-established parameters, local social service districts have historically had flexibility in how they administer the CCAP and set policy around documentation and verification processes, how they prioritize categories of children and families, and how they establish sliding scales for parental fees.^c

^c Since the time of data collection for this study, changes to state statute, regulation and policy have removed many of these flexibilities by standardizing the income standards, categories of families served, fee scales, documentation requirements and procedures around jurisdiction, with the stated goal of providing consistency and continuity for families.

New York's 62 counties are served by 58 social service districts, with the five boroughs of New York City constituting one district. Within each district, County Departments of Social Services administer CCAP subsidies and other publicly funded social assistance programs. [In 2022, more than 105,000 children younger than age 13 received subsidized child care statewide, 28 percent of whom were Latino.](#) Most subsidized child care in New York is provided through vouchers to families, although [approximately 1 in 4 children receiving CCAP funds are served in contracted slots.](#)

Staff Perspectives on Child Care Subsidy Eligibility and the Application Process

Qualifying activities for child care subsidy eligibility

A variety of activities and circumstances can qualify families for child care assistance, including parents' engagement in employment- or education-related activities and care for children considered to be vulnerable (e.g., unhoused, involvement with Child Protective Services); states vary on the specific set of activities deemed eligible. Because program staff members' awareness and communication of eligibility criteria can impact families' access, our survey asked New York staff about the activities or circumstances they understood to be approved for subsidy coverage, and how commonly each activity or circumstance is used to qualify Hispanic and non-Hispanic applicants served by their local office.

Figure 1 depicts the set of activities and circumstances approved in New York state policy as qualifying families for subsidy receipt and shows variation in how local staff perceived or understood these qualifying activities. While most staff agreed that each of these activities and circumstances were state-approved, more than one third said they were unsure or did not consider English as a Second Language classes, SNAP- and TANF-related activities,^d homelessness, and parent incapacitation to qualify families for subsidies. Notably, when staff did not affirm an activity as approved, they tended to respond "don't know or unsure" rather than "this is not an approved activity." This may suggest uncertainty about state policy, given that districts had different options before CCAP requirements became standardized across the state in October 2023, or it may reflect inexperience with families applying for care to support that activity.

When asked about the relative frequency of each qualifying activity or circumstance for the families served by their office, CCAP staff tended to report similar activities for Hispanic and non-Hispanic applicants. Most staff said employment is a common qualifying activity among Hispanic (78%) and non-Hispanic subsidy applicants (83%), and at least half also identified parental job search and involvement with the child welfare system as qualifying activities for both groups.

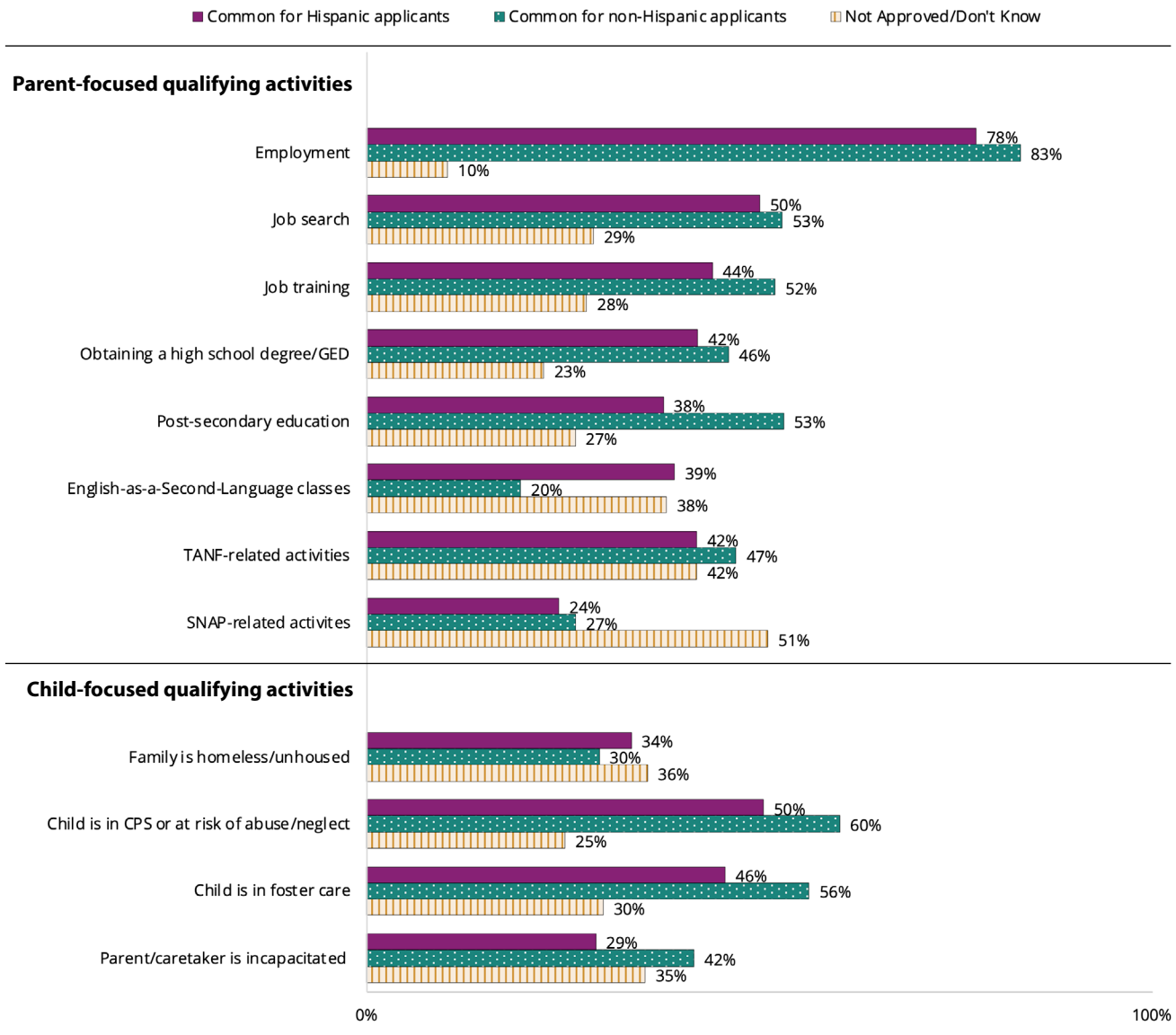
For other activities, staff responses diverged for Hispanic and non-Hispanic applicants. For example, almost twice as many staff said that ESL classes were a common qualifying activity for Hispanic applicants compared to non-Hispanic applicants (39% vs. 20%); in contrast, more staff described post-secondary education, CPS involvement, foster care, and incapacitated parents as common qualifying circumstances for non-Hispanic applicants than for Hispanic applicants.



^d These refer to employment- or training-related activities associated with the parent's receipt of benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs.

Figure 1. Hispanic and Non-Hispanic applicants in New York qualify for subsidies to support a range of activities and circumstances, with parental employment being the most common.

Percentage of staff reporting whether each activity qualifies families for subsidies, and how common each activity is for Hispanic and non-Hispanic applicants served by their office, 2023



Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Note: Number of staff with valid responses to these items ranged from 94 to 107.

Documents collected as part of the child care subsidy application

Verification of an applicant’s eligibility and identity is central to the subsidy application process and typically involves collecting documentation forms from families. States vary in whether documentation procedures are set at the state or local level, depending on how their program is structured and administered. To learn more about staff practices in New York, where the subsidy program is administered at the county level and overseen by the state, we asked local CCAP staff a series of questions about the documents they requested or required from applicants and whether they felt any were challenging for families to provide (for Hispanic applicants, non-Hispanic applicants, or both)—and, if challenging, why.

New York subsidy staff responding to the survey were generally in alignment with one another and with state policy in terms of the documents required or requested from families as part of the child care assistance application. The documents for which staff practices varied the most were verification of assets, driver's license or state identification cards, and birth certificates for adults in the household. Notably, although no staff reported requiring families to provide Social Security numbers, just over 40 percent reported requesting them as part of the application which is an allowable practice in New York. It is relevant that New York State policy does not require specific documents; rather, applicants can provide a variety of documents that verify required information. For example, if an applicant does not have a rental agreement or mortgage document to verify residency, they can provide a utility bill in their name. A birth certificate can also verify multiple requirements—including name, sex, date of birth, and citizenship—but other documents are also allowable in place of a birth certificate.

Table 1. Documents collected during the application process according to local subsidy staff, and whether documents are required by state policy, 2023

Document type	Required	Requested, not required	Not collected	Don't know	Document required by state policy?
Eligibility					
Income verification	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	Yes
Work-hour verification	86.7%	13.3%	3.8%	1.9%	Yes
Documentation of assets	23.2%	9.5%	64.2%	3.2%	Yes
Household composition and personal information					
Current address	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	Yes
Household membership	96.3%	<1.0%	1.9%	<1.0%	Yes
Relationship to child	97.2%	1.9%	<1.0%	0.0%	Yes
Child citizenship status ¹	79.8%	13.5%	3.9%	2.9%	Yes
Social Security number ¹	0.0%	42.9%	46.7%	10.5%	No*
Driver's license/State ID	51.5%	31.3%	15.2%	2.0%	No*
Birth certificate – child	94.3%	4.7%	<1.0%	0.0%	No*
Birth certificate – adult	30.4%	29.4%	35.3%	4.9%	No*

Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Note: Number of staff with valid responses for these items ranged from 95 to 107.

*According to the [New York CCDF plan for FY2022-2024](#), local social service districts establish their own procedures for documentation, and these are among the documents that may be collected for verification.

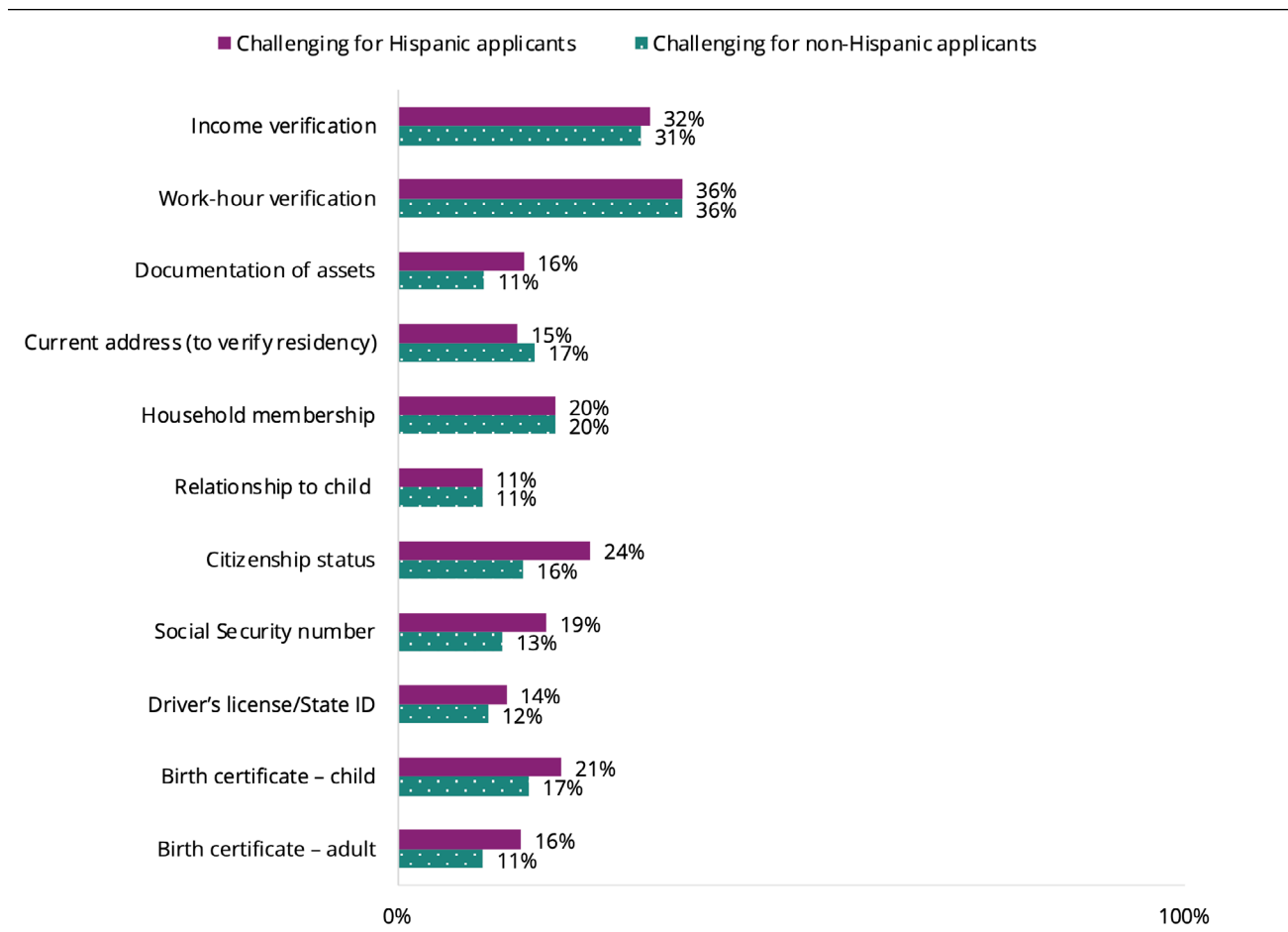
¹ Survey question did not specify for whom in the household this information was collected.

For documents staff said they collected, the survey asked a follow-up question about whether they perceived the document as challenging for families to provide generally, relatively more challenging for either Hispanic or non-Hispanic families, or not challenging for families. For each document type, most staff felt it was not difficult for families to provide, although at least 10 percent reported challenges for the applicants they served (Figure 2).

The documents most often noted as challenging were those related to verifying parents' work hours and income; more than 30 percent of staff said each of these were difficult for applicants to document. Generally, if staff reported a type of document as challenging for families to provide, they reported this for all families rather than differentially based on applicants' Hispanic ethnicity. The primary exception to this pattern was that more staff described citizenship status and Social Security numbers as challenging for Hispanic applicants than for non-Hispanic applicants; though allowable, a Social Security number is not required.

Figure 2. According to local subsidy staff, income and work hour verification are often challenging for Hispanic and non-Hispanic applicants.

Percentage of subsidy staff reporting that application documents are challenging for applicants to provide, 2023



Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Note: Number of staff with valid responses to these items ranged from 82 to 97.

Staff perceptions of why documents can be challenging for families to provide

Nearly half of the local CCAP staff surveyed (n=53) provided open-ended responses to elaborate on their perspectives of—and experiences with—challenges surrounding documentation requested from families as part of the subsidy application process. As illustrated in the sample quotations below, local New York subsidy staff responses highlighted multiple ways that verification of eligibility requirements can be complicated and burdensome for families because of work or life circumstances, as well as administrative barriers. For example:

ID such as birth certificates, Social Security verification, guardianship/custody verification are challenging because they tend to get lost or misplaced by the clients. Residence verification can be hard because clients do not want to ask their landlords (especially if they are behind on rent or have some other issue with the landlord), or the landlord refuses to complete a shelter verification form or they have an absentee landlord. Income verification can be difficult because clients do not keep paystubs or don't know how to access their on-line paystubs.

Depending on the employer and method of payment, at times salary verification and verification of hours can be difficult for applicants to obtain.

Sometimes the documentation is difficult to obtain because they do not have the resources to obtain them, landlords do not like to provide documentation, employers can make it difficult for employees to access their wage information or do not like to provide employment statements. Working with the Social Security Administration is a challenge all on its own.

The challenging part about the documents is the lack of communication for Latino/a/x families that do not speak English fluently. The second challenging part is when Latino/a/x families have immigrated from their own countries and reside in America; the documents they bring need to be transcribed into English along with proof of citizenship (Visa/Green/Alien Card).

Staff Perspectives on Communication and Outreach Efforts

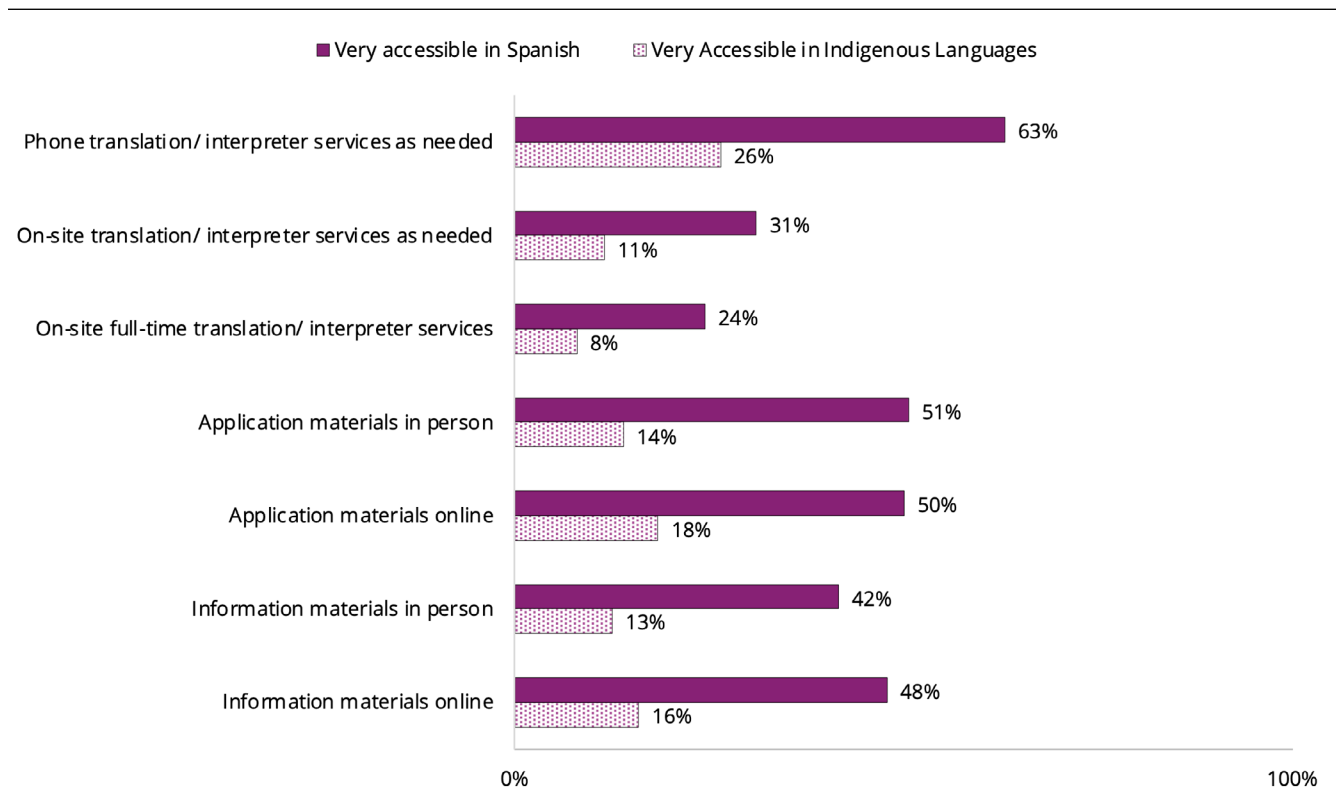
Language accessibility of program information and resources

Given that nearly half of young children in New York have a parent who speaks a language other than English at home, and just over 20 percent have a parent who speaks English less than “very well,”⁶ it is important to understand how subsidy offices and staff serve families whose primary language is not English. Latino families who primarily speak Spanish or one of the many Indigenous languages spoken across Latin America may experience significant barriers while trying to access subsidized child care. Providing program information and application materials in other languages and having staff readily available to interpret or translate can facilitate access for these families.

Roughly half of surveyed New York CCAP staff felt that subsidy program information and application materials were very accessible in Spanish, both online and in person. Nearly two thirds of staff (63%) said that Spanish translation or interpreter services were very accessible by phone when needed, although fewer reported having these services available onsite, either as needed (31%) or full-time (24%). In contrast, far fewer staff perceived Indigenous language resources to be ‘very accessible.’ For example, less than 20 percent said that information or application materials were readily available in an Indigenous language and 26 percent said translation and interpreter services were very accessible by phone if needed.

Figure 3. Many local staff reported that families can access Spanish-language resources, while few reported supports for languages indigenous to Latin America.

Percentage of staff reporting program materials and services as very accessible in Spanish and Indigenous Latin American languages, 2023



Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Note: Number of staff with valid responses to these items ranged from 86 to 90.

Local New York subsidy staff were also asked to rate their preparedness to serve Latino families who speak Spanish or an Indigenous language. We found that just 5 percent of surveyed staff felt highly prepared to serve such families (Figure 4), which is consistent with the low percentage of staff (<10%) in the sample who reported being a native or fluent Spanish speaker themselves (Table 2). Much larger percentages said they felt moderately prepared (38%) or prepared to a small extent (33%) to serve Spanish-speaking applicants. In comparison, more than half of surveyed staff said they were not at all prepared to serve families who speak a language indigenous to Latin America.

Figure 4. Just over 40 percent of local staff said they feel at least moderately prepared to serve families who speak Spanish. Percentage of staff reporting different levels of preparedness to serve families who speak Spanish and families who speak an Indigenous language, 2023



Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

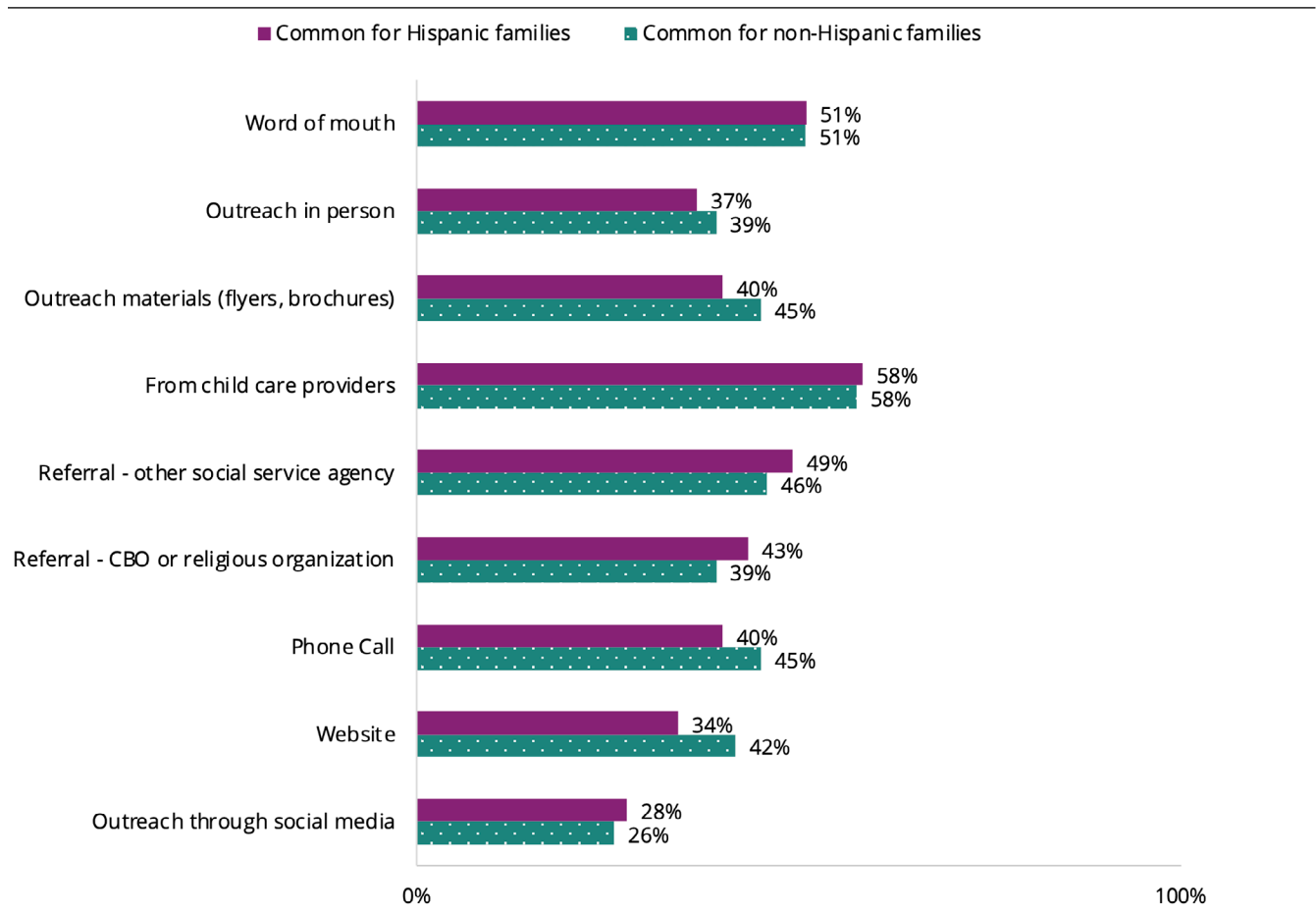
Note: These questions were only asked of CCAP frontline staff working directly with families and not of administrators. The number of staff with valid responses to these items is 63.

Common methods by which Latino families learn about child care subsidies

The final set of findings featured in this brief reflect local New York subsidy staff perceptions of how families—and Latinx families in particular—tend to learn about the child care assistance program, as well as any outreach activities used by their local offices to engage Hispanic communities.

According to CCAP staff, families in New York receive information about child care assistance through a variety of methods, with similar information sources used across Hispanic and non-Hispanic families. Staff most frequently identified child care providers as a common information source for families (58%), followed by word of mouth (51%)—highlighting the importance of relationship-based sources. Additionally, 30 to 50 percent of staff said families commonly learn about the CCAP through referrals from social service, community-based, or religious organizations, or via phone calls, outreach materials and in-person contacts, and websites. Although outreach via social media was the least endorsed information source, more than one quarter of surveyed staff said it was a common way to reach both Hispanic and non-Hispanic families.

Figure 5. According to local staff, Latino families commonly learn about the subsidy program through personal connections. Subsidy staff reports of common ways by which families learn about subsidized child care, 2023



Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Local subsidy office outreach efforts and resources

When asked about outreach efforts to connect with families potentially eligible for child care assistance, more than one third of New York CCAP staff (37%) said their local office engaged in targeted outreach with Latino communities. Twenty percent of staff said their office used community contacts with some frequency to make these connections. In addition, 20 percent said partner organizations helped refer Hispanic families to their offices, and 17 percent said partner organizations enabled them to refer Latino CCAP applicants to other services.

Figure 6. Just over one third of staff said their local office engages in targeted outreach to Latino communities.

Staff reports of various types of outreach used to engage Latino families, 2023



Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Note: Number of staff with valid responses to these items ranged from 72 to 99.



Conclusion and Future Directions

Recent national data show that many Latino families use child care arrangements on a regular basis,⁷ and that those who pay out-of-pocket for care tend to spend an average of 30 percent of their income—well above the federal affordability threshold of 7 percent—indicating a clear need for more affordable care options.⁸ Yet both state and national data indicate disproportionately lower child care subsidy receipt among Latinx households. Evidence suggests that state CCDF policy choices play a significant role in determining which families know about, apply for, and can receive and use subsidies—an understanding that may help explain lower subsidy coverage for Hispanic children.⁹ The ways in which state programs are then implemented within communities have further implications for families' access, yet this remains more of 'black box.' As those tasked with administering the CCDF program and engaging with applicants, local CCDF program staff offer a unique perspective for understanding potential subsidy access barriers and facilitators for Latino children and families.

In this brief, we shared results from a survey of local CCDF frontline caseworkers and supervisors serving families as part of New York's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). This research is part of a larger multi-state study aimed at understanding how the CCDF program is structured and implemented [on the ground](#) in ways that may shape Hispanic families' access to affordable child care. New York is home to the fourth largest Hispanic child population in the country, more than half of whom reside in households with low incomes.¹⁰ While New York's subsidy program serves a higher percentage of eligible Hispanic children than in many other states,⁵ it still serves a fraction of those who may qualify and could benefit and the coverage rate for Hispanic children is lower than the overall rate for children in the state.¹¹ In the set of results presented here, local New York subsidy staff described aspects of the application process, communications, and outreach that likely impact how easily Latino families can engage with the subsidy system.

Qualifying activities

According to local CCAP staff, Latino children in New York receive subsidies to meet a variety of family care needs. While parental employment was the most cited reason for receiving subsidies (for Hispanic and non-Hispanic children), staff also recognized that families may enter the subsidy system through a variety of other pathways related to parents' economic and educational activities or care for children in vulnerable living situations. Across the sample, staff responses suggested that Latino families apply for and receive subsidies for the full range of qualifying activities, although care for children who are unhoused or involved with child welfare services was noted as relatively less common for Latino children than for non-Latino children. Notably, the number of staff who reported that several state-approved qualifying activities were not allowable—or that they were unsure—was not trivial (>25% for most activities), which may indicate a need for additional training or communications around state policy. These responses may also reflect less experience among individual staff with applicants seeking subsidized care for certain reasons. Alternately, they may have been impacted by the flexibility in place at the time of the survey, as significant changes made since the study was launched have significantly standardized the program across local districts. Future studies should further explore staff perceptions of qualifying activities given implications for how they communicate with potential applicants about eligibility criteria and who the program is intended to serve.

Eligibility and verification documents

One aspect of the subsidy application process for which states, territories, and Tribes have flexibility—and for which local offices and staff may have considerable discretion—is the documentation collected from families to determine eligibility. In New York, local departments of social services establish their own procedures for verification and documentation.¹² While this may provide helpful flexibility, the resulting variation may contribute to confusion (for staff and families) and inequities. Some of this variability was evident in staff reports of the documents they gather from families, primarily around driver's license/state identification and birth certificates for adults in the household. Additionally, while staff were unanimous in recognizing that Social Security numbers are not required, more than 40 percent said they typically request these as part of the application process. This practice may be intended to reduce burden, as it can validate information that eliminates the need for additional documentation; additionally, the request may be framed as optional to families. However, the verbal request or inclusion of this question on application materials may lead applicants to believe it is required to qualify for a subsidy and may dissuade those with family members who are not authorized to reside in the United States.

Most local New York subsidy staff did not describe required or requested documents as difficult for families to provide, which may indicate that staff flexibility to accept various types of documents for verification are generally working. At

the same time, nearly half of surveyed staff identified and described at least one type of challenge related to documents collected during the subsidy application process. The most commonly cited challenges were related to verification of work hours and income; staff relayed that many applicants, including Hispanic applicants, worked in jobs featuring variable hours, difficult-to-access documentation and/or undocumented pay, and employers that may be hard to reach for verification. We suggest documentation practices as an area for further research, along with monitoring to better understand how these practices are communicated to and enacted with families. Moreover, reducing documentation requirements that are cumbersome or mismatched to the realities of some families' lives could reduce administrative burden both for staff and families.

Program communication and outreach

The final set of staff perceptions and practices examined in this brief were related to communications and outreach with Latino families. These findings suggest some positive supports for access, as well as potential areas of unmet need. Roughly half of staff felt that Spanish-language application materials and translation/interpreter services by phone were very accessible, and nearly half felt at least moderately prepared to serve Spanish-speaking families. At the same time, very few staff who responded to the survey identified as Hispanic or considered themselves fluent in Spanish. Moreover, most staff felt unprepared to assist families who speak an Indigenous language from Latin America and said that resources to do so were not accessible. While language accessibility needs vary across communities and subsidy offices—something potentially helpful for state lead agencies to track—general strategies for improving access could include ensuring that all staff know how to easily access translated materials and interpreter services and recruiting additional bilingual staff.

While some staff said their offices engaged in intentional outreach and community-based partnerships to help them serve Latino applicants, most did not report such outreach. Given that staff recognized the importance of relationship-based communications for families (both Hispanic and non-Hispanic) to learn about subsidies, community-based outreach and partnerships are likely to be an effective strategy. Notably, staff felt that child care providers are the most common source of information about subsidies for families, suggesting that improved coordination and communication between local subsidy offices and care providers could be leveraged to improve access.

While state and local CCDF policy choices and implementation practices during service delivery represent only one set of many factors that contribute to racial/ethnic disparities in access to child care subsidies,⁵ results emerging from New York and other states participating in this study illustrate the potentially significant role of policies and practices in shaping whether subsidies are distributed efficiently, effectively, and equitably. In the time since this survey was fielded, New York has expanded its Child Care Assistance Program and raised its income eligibility limit to the maximum allowed by federal law (85% of state median income), making more than 100,000 children newly income-eligible for subsidies in the initial months of the change.¹³ The findings shared in this brief point to potential strategies for ensuring that Latino families have access to this expanded and critical support for parents and children.

The recently enacted [2024 federal CCDF final rule](#) introduces policies intended to make the enrollment process easier and faster for families. These include a requirement for online applications when practicable, recommendations that states implement presumptive eligibility (i.e., granting subsidies for a short period while the verification process is completed), and the use of documentation from other benefit programs to enroll families. Some states already have such policies in place or are taking steps to implement. For example, New York offers adjunctive income eligibility for applicants in receipt of SNAP and HEAP, so families receiving those benefits do not have to duplicate their income information when applying for child care, and presumptive eligibility is allowable via district option. Additionally, New York recently launched an online application system with mobile phone accessibility, which is an important feature for many households with low incomes who access the internet primarily through their mobile device.

By reducing administrative burdens, such policy changes have the potential to improve access for families seeking child care assistance, including Hispanic families. However, further intentional efforts around culturally relevant outreach, language accessibility, and documentation requirements aligned with the realities of families' lives may be necessary to fully address the access barriers for Latine families highlighted in this brief. For example, presumptive eligibility may speed up benefit receipt for some families but may be less impactful for those facing significant obstacles in obtaining documentation (e.g., parents in jobs that require verification from an uncooperative employer). As another example, Latino individuals are less likely than other populations to take up various public benefits for which they are eligible, meaning they will potentially benefit less than other groups from policies that use cross-program eligibility or prioritization. In support of equitable access to child care subsidies, it will be important to monitor how various federal and state policy changes impact diverse families and communities.

Methodology and Study Design

As part of a multi-state study to examine how state and local CCDF implementation have shaped Hispanic families' access to child care subsidies, the research team developed an online survey for administrators and frontline caseworkers who help administer the program at the community level. Through a series of closed- and open-ended items, the survey asks about: staff and agency characteristics, staff practices related to subsidy eligibility and the application process, the language accessibility of program materials and communications, outreach to Hispanic communities, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on CCDF services, staff members' perceived barriers to subsidized child care, and recommendations for improving services. Frontline caseworkers and administrators generally received the same survey items, except for those related to caseload characteristics (frontline staff only) and office operations (administrators only).

In each participating state, we partnered with the lead CCDF agency to tailor the survey to reflect the specific state context. In New York, leadership from the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) provided input and helped facilitate distribution of the voluntary survey. In January 2023, members of the research team joined a statewide Division of Child Care Services stakeholder call to provide an overview of the study. In March 2023, study information and the online survey link were sent from the state OCFS office to key contacts in each Local Social Service District (LSSD) for distribution to their frontline caseworkers and administrators. To support recruitment from the LSSD containing the five populous New York City counties, study information was also sent out by leadership from the Administration for Children's Services, which administers subsidized child care in New York City. Responding staff who consented to participate in the study completed the survey from March to July 2023 via a hyperlink to the [REDCap platform, an electronic data collection tool](#).

A total of 120 local CCAP staff working in 56 of New York's 62 counties (90%) completed the survey. Descriptive information for the sample of participating staff is reported in Table 2. Our recruitment strategy of having the state lead agency send study information to key contacts in each LSSD resulted in a convenience sample of CCAP caseworkers and administrators who were forwarded the invitation and elected to participate. Although we received surveys from nearly all counties in the state, it is difficult to gauge the representativeness of our sample given that the size and characteristics of the local CCAP workforce is not tracked at the state level.

Table 2. Characteristics of Surveyed New York Child Care Subsidy Staff

	Full Sample N = 120	Frontline Staff ¹ (63.3%) n = 76	Administrators (36.7%) n = 44
Years of experience			
≥ 3 years	21.0%	29.4%	6.9%
4-6 years	11.8%	16.0%	4.6%
7-10 years	6.7%	4.0%	11.4%
>10 years	60.5%	50.7%	77.3%
Racial/ethnic identity²			
Hispanic	4.2%	4.0%	5.0%
Black	28.3%	29.0%	27.3%
White	59.2%	56.6%	63.6%
Other	8.3%	10.5%	5.0%
Spanish Language skills			
Native or fluent Spanish speaker	6.2%	7.9%	3.0%

Source: Data come from Summer 2023 New York Survey of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families Multi-State Study of CCDF Implementation in local Communities project.

Notes: Number of staff with valid responses to these items is 120. ¹Frontline includes caseworkers, staff who perform a combination of both frontline and administrative roles, and 'other' types of nonsupervisory roles. ²Categories are not mutually exclusive.

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About the Center

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