

Impact and Need for After-Hours Care

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Date: November 17, 2023



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Acknowledgments

We extend our gratitude to the County of El Paso for commissioning this report, a collaborative effort supported by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The discoveries and conclusions highlighted in the report result from our collective effort to learn more about the challenges and essential needs of after-hours care. Workforce Solutions Borderplex (WSB) wants to extend recognition to the committee members who gave their insights and guidance to this study.

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Executive Summary

In today's dynamic work environment, the availability of after-hours care is indispensable for supporting the workforce, enhancing employee well-being, and boosting productivity. This study centers on evaluating the demand for after-hours care within industries characterized by shift-based or extended-hour operations, focusing on addressing the challenges employers and employees face.

The far-reaching consequences of childcare challenges reverberate across multiple aspects of the economy. The intricate nexus connecting childcare access, parental employment, and overall economic growth is undeniable, as outlined in Strong Nation's 2023 report.¹ Businesses are inherently intertwined with their employees, and these employees, in turn, rely on childcare services. When childcare challenges arise, parents navigate the complex terrain by hurriedly seeking alternative care solutions or incurring unscheduled absences to attend to their children. For countless parents, this insecurity translates into reduced working hours, salary compromises, or the painful decision to exit the workforce altogether.

Families with young children are increasingly faced with a challenging choice—whether to allocate a sizable portion of their income to secure childcare, seek potentially lower-quality but cost-effective care options, or make the heart-wrenching decision to leave the workforce and become full-time caregivers. The intersection of prohibitive costs, limited availability, and inconvenient program hours within the childcare landscape expeditiously propels parents out of the workforce. In response to these formidable challenges, Workforce Solutions Borderplex, in collaboration with El Paso County² as part of an ICMA initiative, has embarked on a comprehensive regional study to understand the impact and ramifications of the after-hours care deficit. We aspire to engage in a broader dialogue with key stakeholders, encompassing employers, employees, childcare providers, and other child advocacy groups, with the collective goal of addressing the challenges and consequences head-on.

As this study unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that addressing the need for after-hours care is not merely a matter of convenience but an economic imperative. By shedding light on the intricate interplay between childcare access and workforce participation, this research lays the foundation for bespoke solutions that consider the El Paso culture, bridge the gap in after-hours care services, and help propel industries and our community towards a more productive, inclusive future.

I. Introduction

a. WSB Background

Workforce Solutions Borderplex, Inc. is a regional 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that provides workforce services to job seekers and businesses in a six-county region along the U.S.-Mexico border from El Paso to Brewster County. As one of twenty-eight workforce boards in Texas, Workforce Solutions Borderplex's mission is to provide skilled workers to employers by advancing education, employment, entrepreneurship, and economic development in support of global competitiveness and regional prosperity. The Childcare Services Program, under Workforce Solutions Borderplex, provides support services to low-income parents to work, train, or continue their education goals.

b. Research Background

As a vibrant county in the U.S.-Mexico border region, El Paso, TX, contains a dynamic and diverse workforce with a wide range of industries that drive and fuel the local economy. With the growing population in the region, the need for childcare that supports the families in the community is a vital economic and social component and not simply a matter of convenience. This study explored the demand for after-hours childcare across various industries in El Paso, TX.

The productivity and well-being of the county's workforce are well-known to be tied to the accessibility of childcare services. As work hours and schedule patterns vary more than ever, shift-based, and extended-hour operations are becoming the norm. While there is a wide range of childcare services in the region, most do not support or accommodate after-hours care and unpredictable schedule patterns. The availability of flexible and reliable childcare services is an absolute necessity.

Through this study, we reviewed the multifaceted challenges parents, employers, and childcare providers face when reviewing the impact of the challenges on childcare arrangements in detail. These challenges extend beyond the workplace, affecting family dynamics, workforce participation, and economic growth in our community. Finding solutions that cater to El Paso's unique characteristics is critical when identifying existing challenges. WSB seeks to support El Paso County leaders in the formulation of solutions that effectively address the pressing childcare needs in the community for local employees, employers, and childcare providers.

c. Purpose

This study reviewed the availability and need for after-hours childcare services and the consequences and challenges that may arise from providing them. We defined after-hours childcare hours as service hours beyond 6 p.m., including weekends and holidays. This study provided insight into the various industries that do not follow the traditional work hours of 9-5 p.m. and the significant need for after-hours care.

II. Research Objectives

The WSB team designed the study to address and answer the following objectives:

1. Determine the percentage of employers in different industries requiring after-hours care.
2. Assess the demographics of workers in these industries to identify parents' needs.
3. Investigate current childcare arrangements among workers.
4. Evaluate the availability and accessibility of childcare providers offering after-hours care.
5. Understand the reasons for the unavailability of after-hours care services.

III. Methodology

The following is the methodology used to gather data, including surveys and data analysis.

a. Designated Roles

WSB designated roles within our team, based on expertise, to ensure assignments aligned with the objectives of the study. Key staff members collaborated with community partners to distribute study tools, gain insight from educational experts, and ensure eligible participants were able to engage in the study.

b. Data Collection and Study Tool

In order to complete the research objectives, three surveys were created for parents, employers, and childcare providers and subsequently distributed via Google Forms through our Business Services Unit, the YWCA, the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the El Paso Police Department, and the El Paso County Sheriff's Office. A Spanish-language version of the parent and childcare provider survey was also available for distribution. The study collected 1,180 responses from parents, eighty-five from employers, and 115 from childcare providers. Information collected from employers focused on workforce composition and any after-hours care needs they have observed. The survey of employees/parents concentrated on gathering data on parental status, childcare preferences, and existing childcare arrangements. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with employers and childcare advocates to better understand their perspectives on childcare experiences, nuances, and challenges. Existing data and reports regarding childcare provider availability were collected to review issues that contribute to the scarcity and unavailability of after-hours care services.

c. Incentives

Participatory incentives were provided to drive engagement to the first fifty participants for each survey category. The first fifty participating parents would be eligible for a chance to win one of five prizes. The first fifty employer responders

would be eligible for an advertisement in El Paso Inc. Newspaper. The first fifty childcare providers would be eligible for a gift card for additional resources.

IV. Data Analysis

a. *Need for After-Hours Childcare Analysis*

i. *Employees*

The employee survey revealed that 42% stated that their current employment requires them to work after-hour shifts past 6 p.m. (Figure 1); and 60% of respondents are required to work weekends and holidays (Figure 2). Working parents depend on family members when professional after-hours care is not available. This was confirmed by over half of the responses from parents concurring with this statement. Parents with existing childcare services reported being satisfied to very satisfied (70%) with their services, while the remaining 30% reported being dissatisfied to very dissatisfied with their current childcare arrangements (Figure 3).

Additional findings from the parents surveyed were that 41% of parents reported requiring after-hours childcare due to their work schedule (Figure 4). This finding varied from needing the service daily to rarely, being less than three times a month. Parents surveyed were asked to share how many times they incurred unscheduled work absences in the past six months due to the lack of available or suitable childcare options. Responses indicated that 47% incurred unscheduled absences at least once during that time (Figure 5). Of those respondents, 101 parents shared that they incurred unscheduled absences ranging from six times to more than ten occurrences in the past six months due to the lack of childcare arrangements after 6 p.m. From our findings, 62% of parents were interested in utilizing after-hours childcare services if they were available.

ii. *Childcare providers*

In contrast to the parent responses, 80% of childcare providers reported not having observed an increased demand for after-hours childcare services starting at 6 p.m. in their service area. Some providers indicated that they had not identified a service need for after-hours care and that their clients had not requested or indicated an interest in extended hours or services that extended to weekends and holidays. This observation suggests a potential disconnect between parents and providers in expectations, as discussions on this topic rarely occur. Other providers shared that the increased demand is still not significant enough to invest time and resources to extend services.

Overall, from the 115 participating childcare providers, twenty-six were open to collaborating with local businesses to support after-hours childcare services, and sixty-six, while not committing, would consider the potential opportunity in the future (Figure 6). These ninety-two providers represent a potential opportunity for future collaboration.

iii. Employers

With the employer's survey, we immediately confirmed that 48% experienced scheduling issues with employees attributable to the lack of childcare options or arrangements (Figure 7). These challenges revolve around working weekends when most childcare services are not available. Though the lack of after-hours childcare options, some of the major impacts employers observed included absenteeism, incomplete work, and reduction of services provided to clients depending on the industry. Despite this challenge, over 70% of employers shared that they would not consider implementing any childcare support programs or policies (Figure 8) but were open to the possibility of supporting or facilitating access to evening childcare services as needed for their employees by 60% of the eighty-five responses (Figure 9). Most employers shared the same positive view that extended hours beyond the traditional working hours would alleviate stress and improve morale among their employees. Additional comments about reducing employee turnover and scheduling issues would have a positive effect on businesses as parents would be more available to work weekends.

b. Focus Group Insight

Two focus groups with the El Paso Police Department were conducted to gain insight into the current needs and arrangements officers must work around based on their work schedules. From the officers interviewed at the Westside Regional Command Center, some shared that their spouses do not work due to the cost of childcare and their work schedule requiring a second shift. Most expressed a great desire for affordable childcare and would use childcare services if they were available during their work shift. One officer stated that although his spouse works, his occupation takes priority, and they work around his shifts due to the lack of options for care. Similar responses were collected at the Pebble Hills Regional Command Center, where some officers have the need to miss work due to their children falling ill and the financial burdens due to extended shifts. A sergeant confirmed that absenteeism due to childcare concerns is a significant operational issue with his team. There are times when unpredictable work schedules are made, and childcare arrangements are strained. Due to the nature of their occupation, there are many times that work-life balance is under constant strain between work and family responsibilities. The focus group shared that they have seen their existing childcare arrangements have adverse impacts on their children but do not have an immediate solution. Disruptions to routines and sleep schedules have the biggest impact on children as parents continue to work night shifts.

Overall, it has been difficult to find resources when both parents work non-traditional hours. Like other parents in different industries, many officers rely on family members for childcare while they work evening and night shifts. They shared there is a need for workplace policies to be placed that acknowledge and support officers with families while working non-traditional hours with an increase in childcare benefits or flexible spending accounts to alleviate the financial burden of childcare costs.

c. Childcare Advocacy Group Insight

A third focus group was conducted by WSB Chief Executive Officer, Leila Melendez, with input from WSB partners in early education and childcare fields, including:

1. Al Velarde, Paso del Norte Children's Development Center
2. Kim Kofron and Gina Martinez, Children at Risk
3. Juliet Brommer, Herr Research Center at Erikson Institute

All peers shared the same awareness and understanding that parents who work non-traditional hours want extended services beyond 6 p.m. but shared that most are not seeking overnight care. Kofron stated that the "best childcare is the care that is provided consistently by a loving adult, regardless of whether it is in a home or at a center." It would be difficult for parents to amend and fix any lost time due to inconsistent routines.

Brommer shared that as a service topic, the effects of utilizing non-traditional childcare services have not been fully researched in this service area due to the lack of supply but added that such a study is needed. Additionally, she suggested that even less research on home-based childcare has been conducted. Brommer continued by stating the belief that families prefer a home setting when designing what they want and will use for non-traditional hours childcare hours. Quality of care is a key factor to consider and sustain in a curriculum-based learning environment. Brommer explained that the quality of evening, weekend, and overnight childcare is different from the quality of childcare in a formal licensed center or licensed home. Differences include routines, rituals, healthy sleep, and hygiene practices present in a home setting that may not be present in alternative settings.

d. Challenges Faced by Childcare Providers

Retaining responsible and experienced direct care staff due to the lack of interest is a constant challenge for childcare facilities today. Expanding service hours to meet the potential increase in demand could result in an increased staffing shortage and a challenge in trying to address created service gaps. Providers also expressed concerns over the financial viability of licensing for night care, with the cost of caring for children through extended hours increasing significantly. A few providers detailed incidents of some parents taking advantage of their extended hours services by showing up past closing time or leaving their children for longer than scheduled hours. These providers also noted that they experienced behavioral issues with children who stay for long hours or on weekends.

Of the responding childcare providers, twenty-six facilities (23%) offer after-hour care services past 6 p.m. in El Paso County (Figure 10). Most facilities do not offer any services on the weekends or holidays, with only 13 (11%) offering services for parents who need to work during weekends or holidays (Figure 11). Respondents were asked the number of days they closed annually to evaluate how many times a year most childcare provider services would not be available. From the responses, sixty-nine childcare providers (60%) are closed an additional 9-10 days (about one and a half weeks) of

the year, excluding the days they are usually closed as operating hours (Figure 12). Aside from the weekends and holidays that they close, there are intermittent times during the week when different childcare providers are closed.

A notable challenge brought to our attention was compensation concerns for overtime hours to those willing to be scheduled for late shifts. A solution one provider implemented was hiring additional part-time employees to staff the later shifts. Additionally, providers expressed reluctance and concern about extending work hours beyond the typical 11 to 12 service hours currently being offered. The extended work hours would add stress to their own employees with other duties that would be pushed back and maintain financial stability for the facility to continue to provide services for parents and children. Some providers also provided feedback that, as parents themselves, extra hours would be a burden for their own families and impact their quality of life.

In the context of the study, childcare providers would encounter several fiscal and workforce challenges when considering after-hours care services. Our study found that most childcare providers in El Paso, TX, do not usually offer services during the weekends or holidays. Approximately 89% of these providers close their facilities, while the remaining 11% open on Saturdays and a few holidays (Figure 13).

V. Findings and Recommendations

a. Workforce Proportion

The industries with the highest number of responses in the study were 290 from healthcare workers (25%), 173 from law enforcement officers (15%), and 123 from education (10%) (Figure 14). Of the 1180 employees surveyed, 1082 are a parent or guardian of at least one child under the age of fourteen. From the top three industries highlighted in this study, WSB collected 272 parents in healthcare, 120 in education, and 133 in law enforcement. Healthcare and law enforcement are two major industries known for high stress and the requirement for workers and officers to work non-traditional hours past 6 p.m. due to the work required. Additionally, industries such as construction, food services, manufacturing, retail, logistics, and transportation may require non-traditional work hours.

b. Childcare Arrangements by Industry

The childcare arrangements found in the study were similar across all industries from participating parents in the employee survey. The most common childcare arrangement brought up consisted of family or spouse support when childcare services are not available. In the education industry, most parents either have family support or do not need childcare services past 6 p.m. Few parents have a babysitter or have their children in extracurricular activities after school. In the healthcare industry, one interesting finding was how some parents refuse to be scheduled to work past 6 p.m. to avoid needing evening childcare services. In the law enforcement industry, most officers plan with family members or their spouses, but very few either

pay for a private babysitter, ask friends, or do not have any childcare arrangements but have been fortunate not to have a problem yet.

c. Availability and Accessibility of Childcare Providers

During the analysis of the childcare need, WSB collected and reviewed the availability of childcare providers within El Paso County. In total, there are 393 childcare providers in the county with twenty-four offering evening childcare and thirty-three offering weekend services (Figure 15). The capacities vary by zip code with the highest concentration above two thousand children in zip codes 79936, 79912, 79924, 79938, and 79925 (Figure 16). The zip code with the highest among them is 79936 with a total capacity of 3896 among sixty-nine childcare providers.

Among the categories of childcare providers, licensed childcare providers under a childcare program are the largest facilities with the greatest capacity at 21,655 in the county. Of the 219 licensed childcare programs, 137 are in zip codes 79936, 79912, 79924, 79925, 79907, 79938, 79935, and 79915 with a total capacity of 13,435. In the zip code 79924, 4 childcare providers offer evening childcare at a capacity of 372 (Figures 17 and 18). Additionally, zip code 79936 contains three licensed childcare programs with a capacity of 454, and 12 providers distributed in various zip codes with a total capacity of 1483. When looking at weekend availability among the licensed childcare programs, eight providers are in zip codes 79925 and 79938 with a combined capacity of 603 (Figures 19 and 20). In zip codes 79936, 79912, and 79935, 9 providers are available during the weekends with a total capacity of 845.

d. Recommendations for Policymakers and Community Leaders

The After-hours Childcare Act introduced by U.S. Senators Todd Young of Indiana and Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire is intended to support expanding existing childcare programs, as well as establish new facilities so parents would be able to remain in the workforce while working non-traditional hours. From the childcare advocacy focus group, Brommer and Melendez agreed that federal funds should be allowed to subsidize informal care that can be provided to families in their homes. The model of a "babysitter" has been used in society for decades and has worked for families. This is where a disconnect of existing and current government-regulated funds may not be allowed to pay for this resource. There is an opportunity through government funding and support to create levels of standards for informal care that may provide childcare services during non-traditional hours based on children's ages and individual needs. Another potential solution brainstormed by the group would be to create a public-private partnership with an informal marketplace with subsidized options for working families.

At the community level, there is an opportunity for a research partnership with the UTEP (University of Texas at El Paso) College of Education to better understand the potential effects and consequences to reduce the childcare services gap. Extensive research is needed in support of findings from valid instruments and sources on the issue to minimize future consequences of short-term solutions. A larger sample size is needed to represent the focus area and the impacted population of El Paso County

more clearly. The sample size of this study collected from parents and employers primarily focused on responses from law enforcement and healthcare workers due to increased participation. Manufacturing is a major industry in El Paso County, but this study was only able to collect forty-one responses among the 1180 participating employees surveyed. Cross sectional participation from primary industry clusters in the region would be ideal to better represent the current needs of the community and be able to plan accordingly.

VI. Conclusion

Evidence from this study should serve as a catalyst for expanded research on the need for after-hour childcare services to parents who work in industries that require non-traditional hours. While parents are in need and would use childcare services to not miss work, most employers and childcare providers are ambivalent and would need further data driven analysis to encourage buy-in and collaboration. The low supply and capacity in El Paso County are linked to the challenges childcare providers have observed in the community with the families they currently serve. While WSB can serve as a facilitation and resource role to find community solutions, it is critical to have a larger understanding of the scope of the issue to troubleshoot unintended consequences.

Overall, the issue of inadequate after-hours childcare is not a concern for the childcare industry to solve, but for community partners to address together through distinct options and resources that meet family needs. It is overdue to provide solutions to the changing workforce that best meets the necessities in a way that helps the community and does not hinder it. Engagement with employers in the private and public sectors is needed to establish a long-term commitment and be sustainable in society solutions.

VII.Appendices

Figure 1

Are you currently employed in a job requiring you to work after-hours shifts (after 6 pm or overnight hours)?

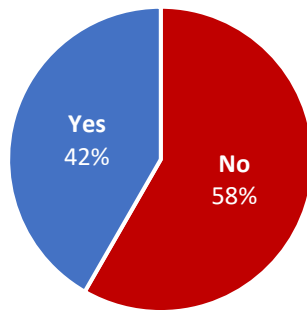


Figure 2

Based on where you currently work, do you need to work weekends and/or holidays?

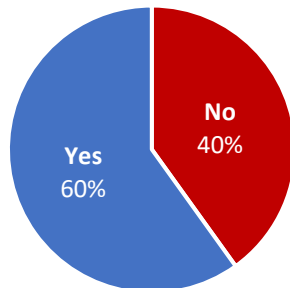


Figure 3

How satisfied are you with your current after-hours childcare arrangements?

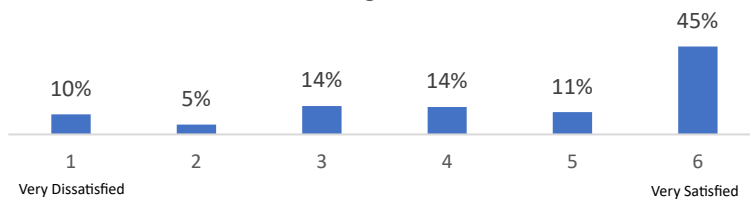


Figure 4

How often do you require after-hours (after 6 pm or overnight) care for your child/children due to your work schedule?

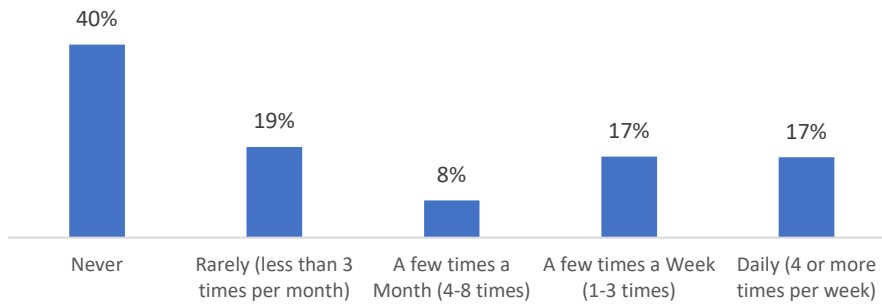


Figure 5

How many times have you had to call in or miss work in the past six months due to a lack of available or suitable after-hours childcare options?

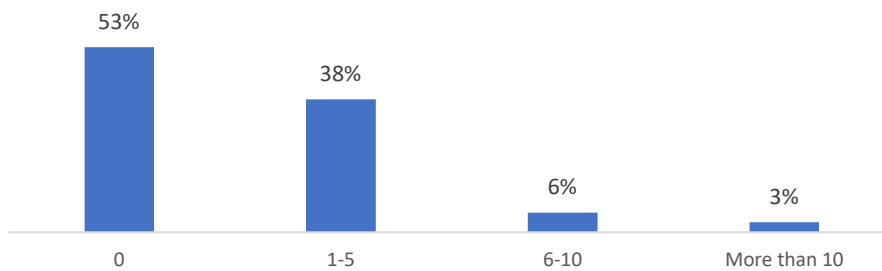


Figure 6

Do you think there are opportunities for collaboration with local businesses to support after-hours childcare services?

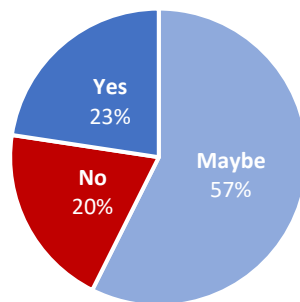


Figure 7

Have you observed scheduling issues, or employees calling into work, due to a lack of after-hours (after 6 pm or overnight) childcare options?

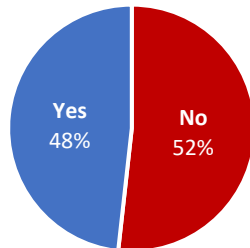


Figure 8

Has your business considered implementing any childcare support programs or policies?

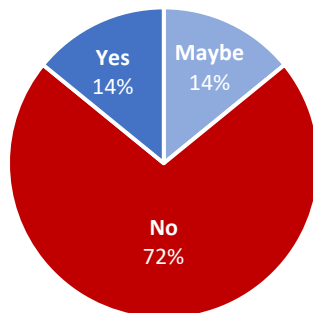


Figure 9

Would your business be willing to support or facilitate access to evening childcare services?

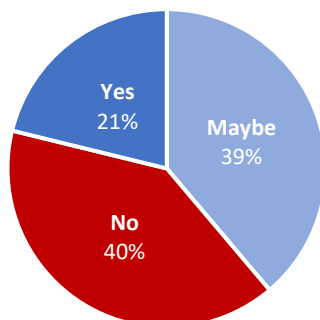


Figure 10

Does your childcare facility offer after-hours care services (after 6 pm and/or overnight)?

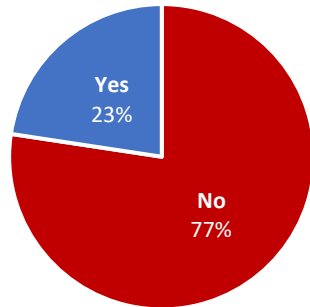


Figure 11

Does your facility offer childcare services during weekends and holidays?

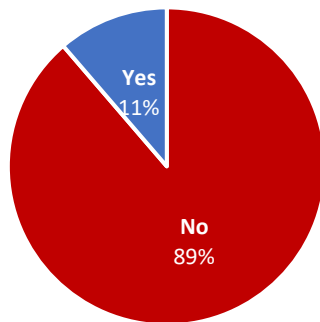


Figure 12

How many days a year do you close? Please indicate a specific number.

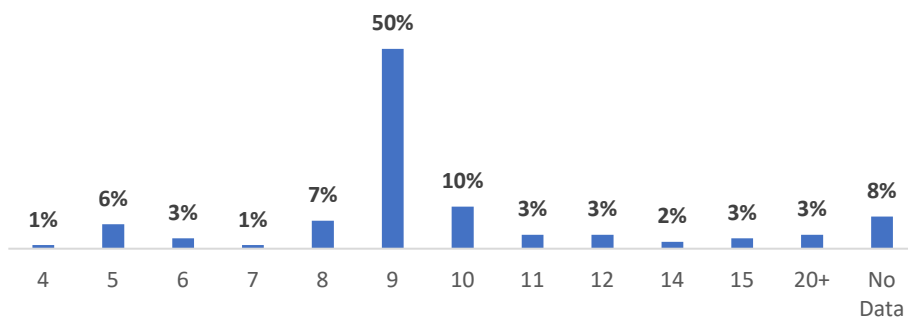


Figure 13

Does your facility offer childcare services during weekends and holidays?

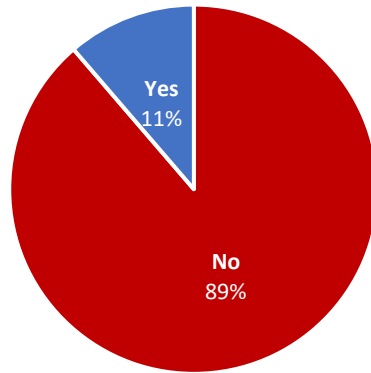


Figure 14

What industry does your employer align with?

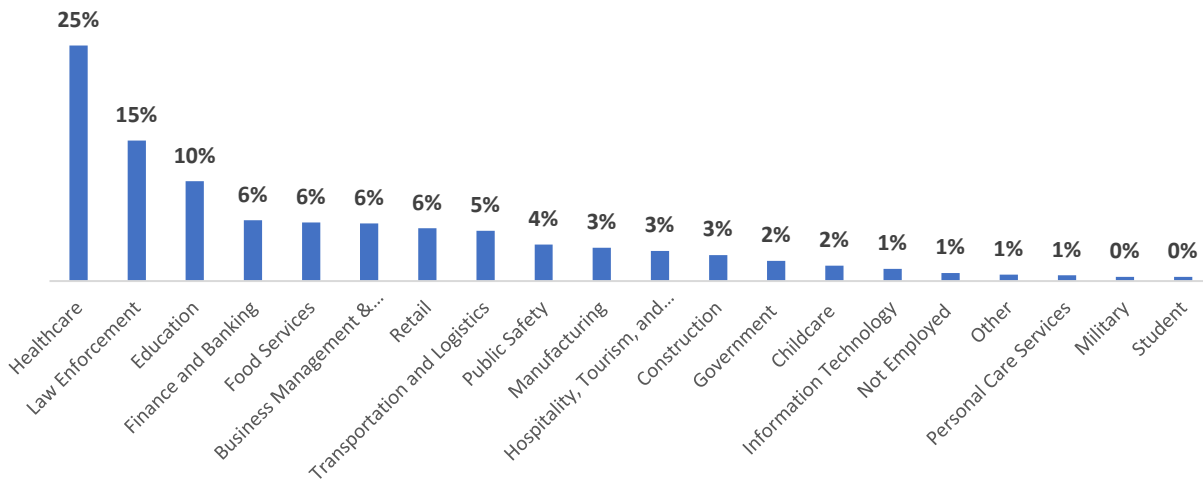


Figure 15

Childcare Providers in El Paso County

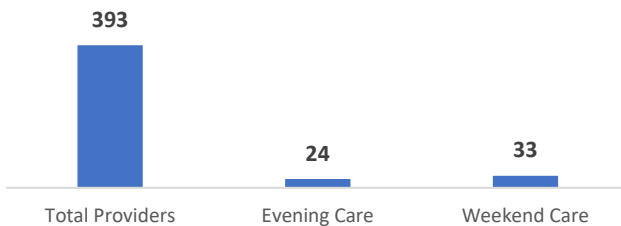


Figure 16

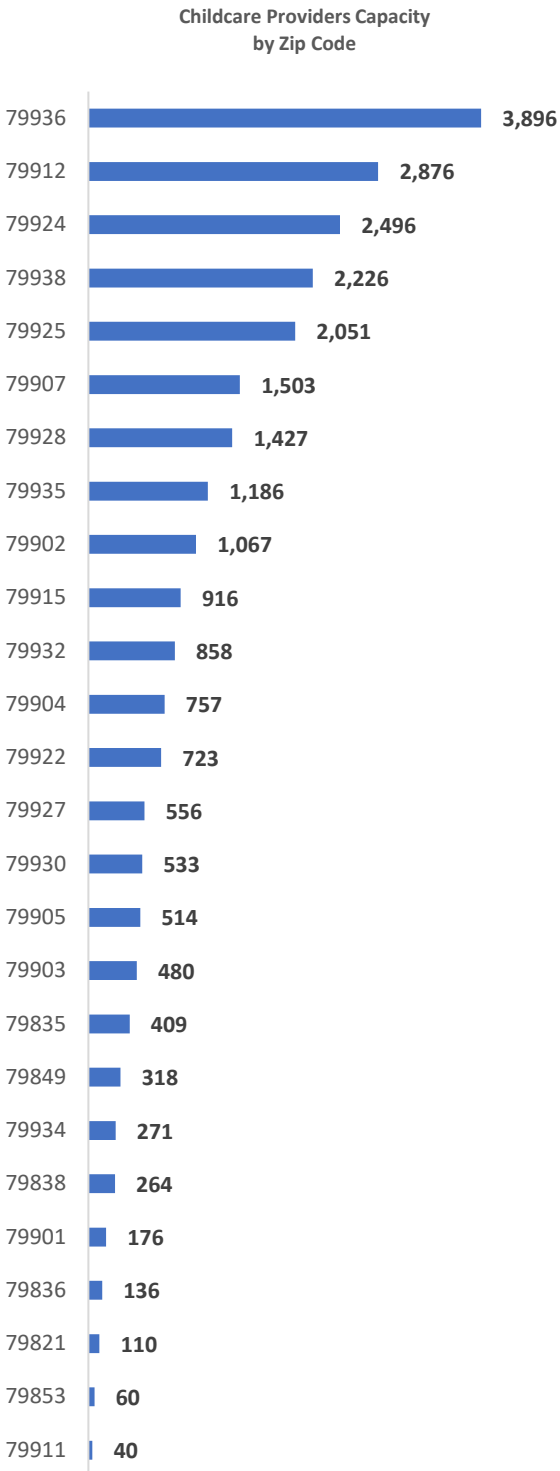


Figure 17

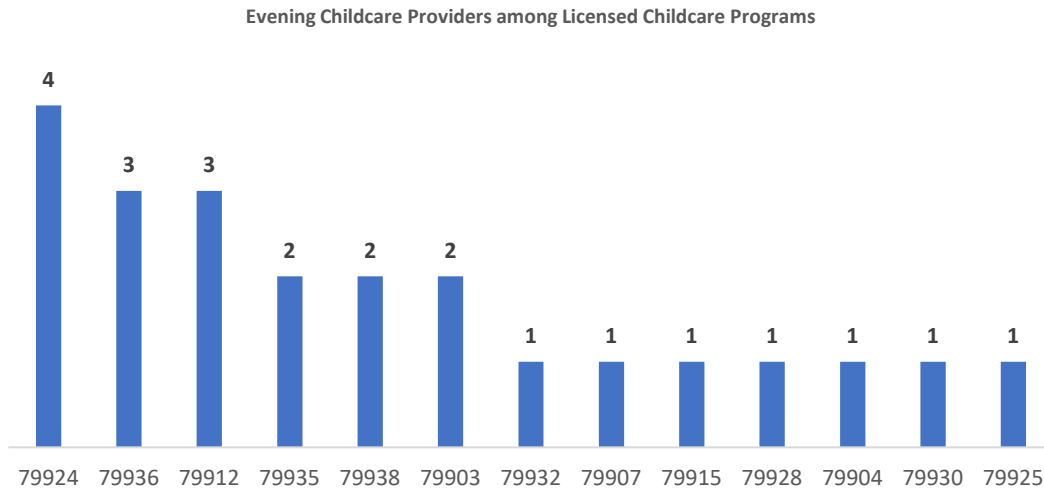


Figure 18

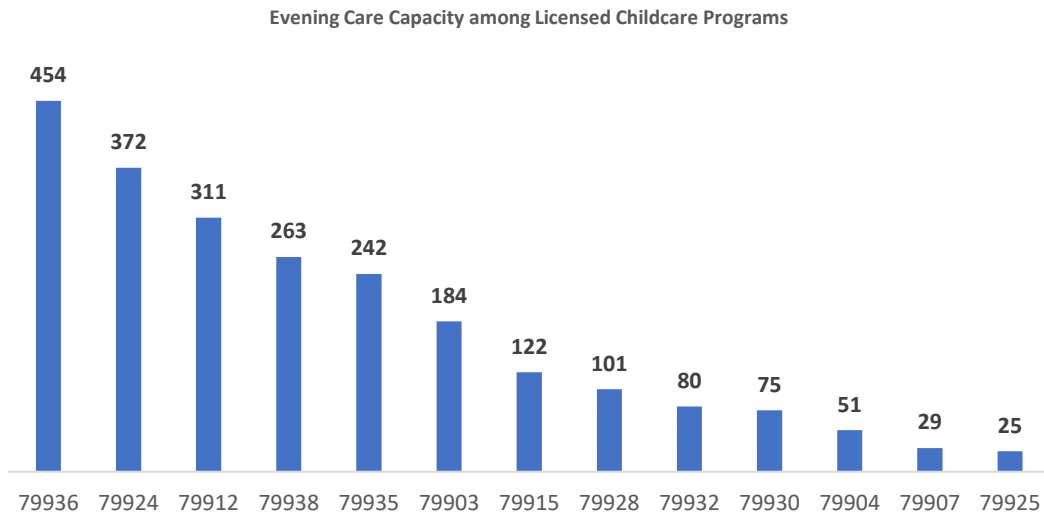


Figure 19

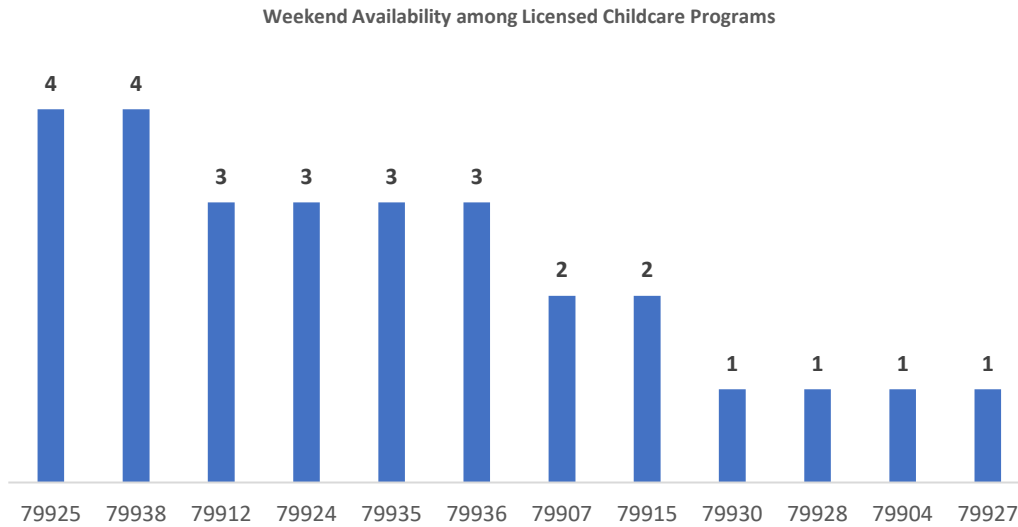
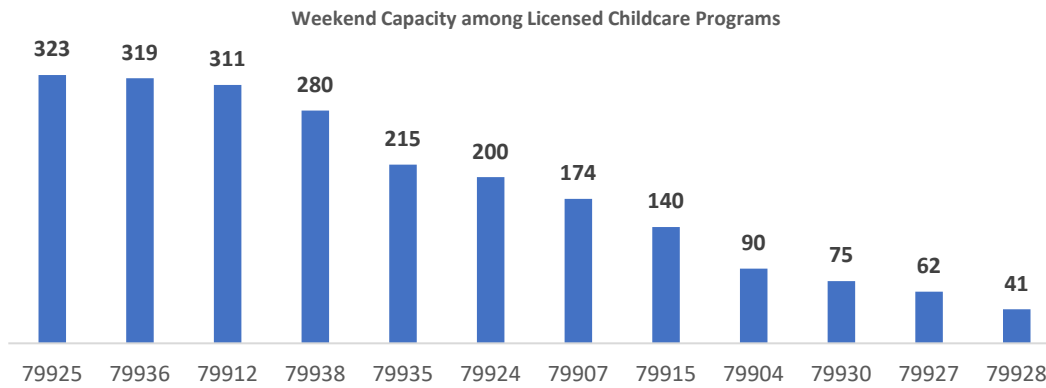


Figure 20



VIII. Contact Information

Kindly refer questions, requests for additional information, or additional resources to the WSB Research Department at research@borderplexjobs.com.