

FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDER ASSISTANT STUDY

Background: Since CCSF first began to offer early childhood education classes, hundreds of local family child care providers have enrolled in our early child education and development classes. Participants have included providers from all of San Francisco's neighborhoods, ethnic and language groups.

Focus on the Assistants: However, there is one group we have not yet been able to serve, at least not systematically and in large numbers, and that is those who serve as assistants to the providers. As many of you know, we recently conducted a study to assess the interest and need for training among members of this group. We consider this to be a very important subject because many assistants spend as much—some even more—time with the children as do the providers.

Study Design: Many of you helped us design and implement the study which included two surveys (one for providers and one for assistants), focus groups, and interviews with assistants. The research was conducted in three languages: English, Spanish and Chinese.

Study Response: The surveys were mailed to 200 providers and 57 assistants. In addition, surveys were distributed through network leaders and at network meetings. Overall, 53 providers and 46 assistants responded. The focus groups included 43 providers. A total of 19 assistants were interviewed.

Study Findings: Key findings contributing to profile San Francisco's family child care assistants included:

- The assistant workforce is stable and older, especially among the Chinese-language group (refers to those who responded to the Chinese version of the survey or participated in the Chinese-language focus group/interviews)
- Close to 60% of assistants are family members or family friends
- Many assistants (especially Spanish-language) have a strong desire to start their own FCC business
- Assistants have completed a limited number of years of academic preparation
- The majority of assistants surveyed and interviewed have participated in CDEV courses and almost half had completed core classes and earned a permit

Key findings describing assistants' interest in education and training included:

- Half of the assistants *surveyed* indicated they are "extremely interested" in training; 43% were "somewhat interested." Almost all assistants *interviewed* were extremely interested in training.
- The interest is qualified by the following factors: Most Chinese- and Spanish-language assistants want the training to be offered in their own language and the location must be convenient. Additionally, many assistants have limited time as they are working full time.
- The highest priority for training among assistants is child development skills education with literacy and curriculum development receiving the highest ratings followed closely by "health and safety" and "working with mixed-age children"
- A large majority of Spanish-language assistants are interested in ESL and Business Admin training

Key findings describing providers' interest in education and training for their assistants included:

- 36% of survey respondents were “extremely interested” in having their assistants participate in training while 47% were “somewhat interested”
- Most providers value assistants' basic good-employee skills (dependability, trustworthiness) over specific CDEV related skills
- Most providers give highest ratings of importance to assistant training in: “Health & Safety” and “Working with Mixed Age Children” and “Infant/Toddlers”
- Parent satisfaction is a key incentive for providers to encourage their assistants to enroll in training, especially among the Chinese-language group

Conclusions and Qualifications

The Assistant Study was a small research project and the findings cannot be generalized to describe the entire FCC community. This is also the case because participation was uneven among the three language group and because some communities were not (sufficiently) represented in the research. Nevertheless, the study suggests that a large number of assistants and a smaller, but still considerable, number of providers are extremely interested in assistant training and education.

The type of training that tops the list of priorities for providers and assistants is not entirely consistent, yet there are clearly areas that are high priority to both parties.

One major challenge in actually delivering the training in a meaningful manner will be to address the assistants' concerns about language, place, time and scheduling constraints.

The survey findings suggest that different language groups have different priorities for the kind of training they would most like to access. The focus groups similarly found different impediments to assistant training among the different provider language-groups. All these factors would have to be taken into account if CCSF is to proceed to increase recruitment and/or training of assistants.

Finally, it is significant that so many assistants are family members or friends. The impact that these relationships may have on whether assistants actually access training have yet to be explored.

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