Full Research Scope

Family Child Care Research and Policy Analysis led by Tessie Ragan, M.Ed.

Research Purpose

Chaos & Clarity studies what it takes for family child care educators to keep their programs open and thriving. The work helps legislators, administrators, and early childhood partners understand how policy, funding, and changes in local markets affect the people operating these programs and the families who rely on them.

National Family Child Care Landscape Survey

The 2026 study paired a voluntary survey with facilitated educator conversations and written input. The next national survey is in development as part of an on going annual effort to document what educators are experiencing and identify questions that warrant closer study.

State and Regional Studies

State and regional studies examine questions tied to a specific place and its policy context. Examples include how licensing requirements influence enrollment decisions, how subsidy reimbursement affects business operations, and how public preschool expansion affects the mix of ages a program serves.

Focused Research with Partners

Agencies and early childhood organizations can commission a study or scope a narrower project around a decision they are facing. A project can focus on a specific policy question, educator engagement, analysis of existing evidence, or a combination of those activities.

Regulation and sustainability have to be considered together. Educators bring firsthand knowledge of how both play out in their businesses and communities.

Research Priorities

Questions about how policy, funding, and local conditions shape family child care.

Business Sustainability

How do income, operating costs, enrollment, staffing, and substitute access affect what educators can offer and whether they can stay in business?

Policy and Operating Conditions

How do licensing, inspections, subsidy payment reliability and cost coverage, food program requirements, and changes such as public preschool expansion affect day-to-day operations and access to care?

Professional Recognition and Decision-Making

What does professional recognition mean to educators in practice? How do compensation, health and retirement benefits, and a meaningful role in policy decisions affect their ability to remain in the field?

Interpretation and Limitations

Reporting explains who participated, how they were recruited, and what the data can support. The 2026 voluntary sample describes the experiences of participating educators. State and subgroup comparisons depend on the study design and the number and distribution of responses.

Research Design and Rationale

Survey evidenceguides the facilitatedconversations.Educators’accountsinformhowthe findings areinterpreted and applied.

Survey Data Collection and Preliminary Review

The study starts with a defined research question and a review of relevant policy and existing evidence. Survey responses show where experiences converge, where they differ, and which patterns need more explanation. For commissioned studies, recruitment, language access, participant consent, and data handling are planned as part of the scope.

Development of Facilitated Conversation Questions

I develop the discussion questions once enough survey data has been gathered to see where the responses are pointing. Preliminary patterns guide what I ask educators to explain. This sequence helps guard against predetermined conclusions and gives educators room to challenge an initial interpretation or raise an issue the survey missed.

Educator Perspectives and Interpretation

Facilitated conversations reveal the circumstancesbehind an answer. Educators can explain why they made a particular business decision, what options were available, and what trade-offs they faced. For example, a survey response about accepting fewer infants tells us what changed. A conversation can help clarify whether licensing requirements, staffing, costs, or family demand shaped that choice.

Implications for Policy and Access to Care

Without that context, a policy response can address the wrong problem and make it harder for educators to operate or for families to find care. Bringing survey patterns and educator accounts together helps decision-makers consider who may benefit, who may face new barriers, and what they still need to understand before acting.

Findings and Collaboration

Research products that help decision-makers see what educators are experiencing and consider where policy or practice can change.

Research Products

Findings Report. Documents the research questions, methods, results, limitations, and implications.
Policy Brief and One-Page Summary. Pull forward findings and considerations relevant to policy and program decisions.
Webinars, Briefings, and Presentations. Walk audiences through the evidence and make time for questions.

Commissioned Research Planning

Tell me what decision your team needs to make, who will be affected, and when you need the findings. We agree on the research questions, geography, participant groups, methods, deliverables, timeline, and estimate before work begins.

State Landscape Study Scope of Work

The **State Family Child Care Landscape Study Scope of Work** details the base package, optional extensions, and pricing approach for a commissioned study in one state. It is available alongside this overview on the Perfect Start Consulting website.

Discuss a Research Project

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