

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES TOGETHER

Strong communication between parents and child care providers supports children's healthy development and strengthens families. When families and providers connect through open, positive communication, children thrive, parents feel more resilient, and communities benefit from a stronger, more stable workforce. This research highlights opportunities to strengthen communication in South Carolina's child care system through supporting both parents and providers.

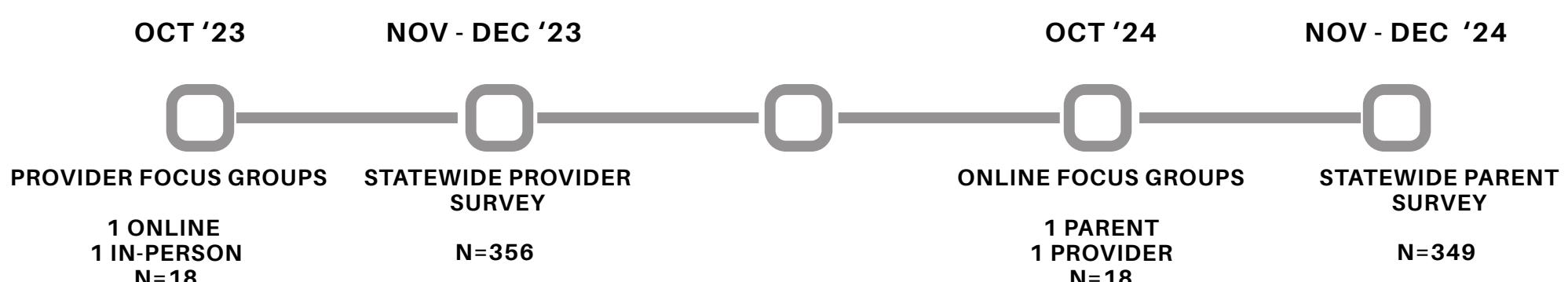
## OUR APPROACH

Through a partnership with the South Carolina Department of Social Services, Children's Trust of South Carolina commissioned SRS Group LLC, to conduct a multi-phase research initiative to examine how communication between child care providers and parents influences trust, engagement, and child development outcomes. In fall 2023, statewide focus groups and surveys with South Carolina child care providers revealed that communication with parents and caregivers is both a persistent challenge and a key opportunity for future training.

Providers highlighted the need for practical guidance to navigate post-pandemic shifts in teaching and learning, as well as strategies for engaging parents who may have limited familiarity with child care settings. Building on these insights, a second phase of research was conducted in fall 2024 with parents of young children enrolled in early child care programs, alongside providers, to explore specific communication experiences and challenges and to identify opportunities to strengthen provider-parent partnerships.

## STUDY TIMELINE

Research was conducted among South Carolina parents and early child care providers.



## WHAT WE LEARNED

**Research revealed that families and providers want the same thing:  
trusting partnerships that put children first.**

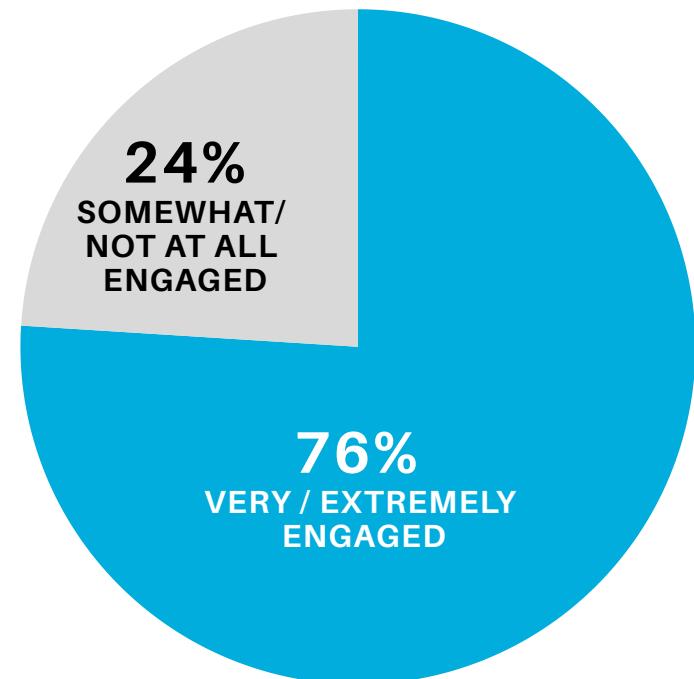
**Communication Builds Trust:** Parents' trust in providers is primarily based on communication quality.

- Open, respectful, and reliable communication emerged as the top driver of positive relationships.
- Both providers and parents view communication as essential for aligning on children's growth and development.
- Daily communications between parents and providers lead to higher levels of parental engagement, comfort with approaching their child care provider about child development, and confidence in discussing difficult situations.

**Parents Are Engaged Partners:** 76% of parents report being very engaged in their child's early childcare experience.

- Parents want meaningful updates about their child's learning, development, and well-being, and are eager to partner with providers on cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral, and language development.
- 79% of parents feel very confident discussing difficult issues.
- Both parents and providers recognize the importance of sensitive conversations (e.g., child development, behavior, age-appropriate curiosity) and desire more support in navigating them effectively.

**Q. HOW ENGAGED DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR CHILD'S EARLY CHILD CARE EXPERIENCE?**



## WHAT WE LEARNED, CONTINUED

Parents and Providers Seek a Balance: Digital updates for efficiency, complemented by face-to-face discussions for relationship building.

- In-person conversations remain the most valued form of communication.
- Digital tools (e.g., apps, texts, emails) are widely used by both parents and providers, who report feeling overwhelmed by the number of platforms.
- Parents want more frequent photos, developmental progress updates, and reports on behavior and social interaction.

Opportunities for Growth: Providers seek professional development to improve communication, and parents and providers point to practical barriers.

- Providers often face time and resource constraints, particularly when balancing multiple communication channels.
- Parents cite scheduling conflicts, a lack of space for private conversations, and frustrations with technology as barriers to effective communication.
- To increase their professional confidence with communication, providers want to improve their ability to:
  - Explain to parents that their child has emotional and developmental needs (49%),
  - Speak to parents about child development (44%), and
  - Communicate and review developmental milestones with parents (40%).

Q. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WORK-RELATED SKILLS WILL HELP WITH YOUR PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE?  
SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

**49%**  
CHILD HAS DEV. AND EMO. NEEDS

**44%**  
CHILD'S CURRENT DEV.

**40%**  
DEV. MILESTONES

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