

# Family Child Care Leadership:

## A Critical Solution to Address the Child Care Crisis

### Executive Summary

Having reliable child care arrangements is necessary for millions of families to make ends meet across the country. In 2019, nearly 60% of children ages 5 years and younger not enrolled in kindergarten had at least one non-parental care arrangement (NCES, 2021). More children spend time in home-based child care, including family child care (FCC), than in any other child care setting (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2016).

This brief builds on the need to expand and support FCC programs as sustainable, high-quality child care options for families with young children by highlighting the role of FCC leadership. It highlights the current state of FCC-led organizations, including data from a recent survey of FCC leaders, key National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) offerings, and profiles of FCC leaders. Finally, the brief summarizes recommendations for legislators, state child care leaders, and other stakeholders to expand and sustain strong FCC programs.

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Home-based child care, otherwise known as family child care, is defined as any instance when a caregiver is paid to take care of children within her or his home.



# The State of Family Child Care

**Family child care (FCC)** educators offer care for a small number of children in their homes. Parents may choose this home-based care option over a child care business based in a center or facility for several reasons, including a preference for a small group setting; greater caregiver consistency; and cultural and linguistic continuity, as FCC educators are often rooted in the same community as the child. FCC educators often offer families more **affordable care for young children than other child care arrangements**, a high priority for many. FCC programs can also offer greater flexibility in the time frames during which they can provide care, including evenings and weekends, necessary for parents that working non-traditional hours. In 2019, **20%** of children from birth to age 5 received non-relative, home-based care (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

## Despite high demand, the number of Licensed FCC Programs has tumbled

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, home-based child care educator numbers dropped **25%** nationally from 2012 to 2019 (Datta et al., 2021); and **79%** of states reported a decline in FCC educators from 2018 and 2019. After the pandemic began, **21%** of FCC programs nationwide were closed by July 2020 (Child Care Aware of America, 2020); and **13%** remained closed in December 2020 (Haynie, 2021).

The loss of FCC programs would have been worse without the COVID-19 relief funds. However, as these funds expire, an educator survey indicates only 13% of FCC programs “will be fine” when the stabilization grants end. 40% of FCC respondents reported that they are considering leaving their program or closing their FCC home (NAFCC & NAEYC, 2023).

Despite declining FCC availability, its demand among families has remained high to meet child care needs. According to the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development (RAPID) – Early Childhood **study**, approximately 40% of parents chose non-center-based care for their young children from May 2022 to April 2023 (RAPID Survey, 2023). **The decline in FCC means fewer families and children have access to the early care & learning they need to succeed.**



## Peer Support is Key Support in Keeping FCC Businesses Open

Given the continued need for FCC, it's crucial to understand what's motivated those educators who have stayed. According to recent findings from the Erikson Institute (Bromer et al., 2021), **the most commonly cited support for FCC educators who remained open was support from their peers and organizations that helped them to overcome challenges in distinct ways.** Specifically, their peers – including other educators in FCC associations – provided them with social, emotional, and informational support. Child care resource and referral agencies, FCC systems and networks, and unions offered financial support and hands-on help navigating early care and education (ECE) systems. Still, they were not cited as the emotional support that kept educators in the work.

FCC data from Ohio (Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.) further illustrate the importance of peer support for keeping FCC businesses going and expanding FCC access to young children and families. From 2018 to 2020, Ohio lost a total of 676 FCC programs across the state. During that same time frame, however, one region of the state saw notable growth – 19 programs – in the number of FCC programs. In this county and region of the state, the FCC region specialist was also an FCC educator herself. Perhaps because she was an educator, she was better equipped and more likely to offer other FCC educators in her region and county the social and emotional support highlighted as critical for keeping FCC educators in the field per the Erikson Institute report. In this case, social and emotional support went beyond keeping educators in the field to increasing the number of educators available to young children and their families.



# Strengthening Leadership and Support for FCC Educators

## The National Association of Family Child Care

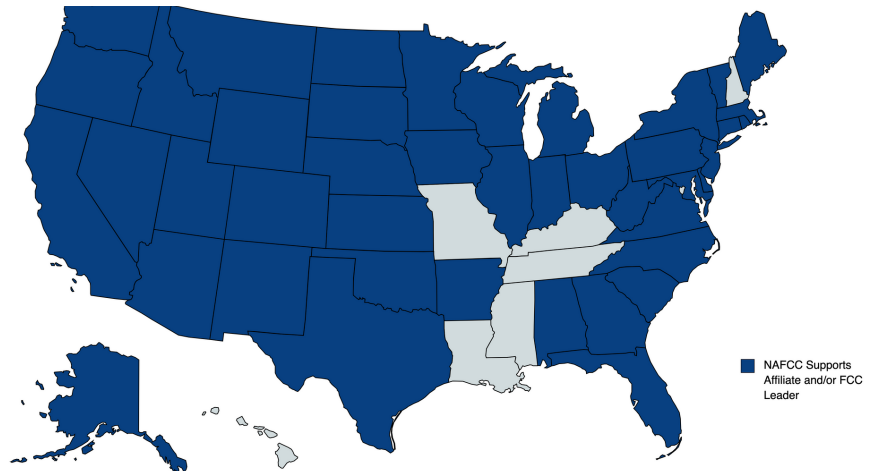
Since 1982, the NAFCC has connected practice, policy, and research to support and leverage a nationwide network of educational professionals in expanding and promoting the power of Family Childcare. **NAFCC promotes quality that reflects diverse, dynamic early childhood professionals and supports all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children in home-based settings.** NAFCC has a critical role to play in sustaining peer support groups and building grassroots leadership to reverse the decline in the supply of family child care programs and ensure all families have access to child care.

NAFCC has implemented several initiatives to support the leadership of FCC educators across the country. Two years ago, NAFCC launched the Leaders Shaping Leadership fellowship. This year-long initiative for FCC professionals is designed to strengthen their leadership, entrepreneurship, advocacy, and institutional knowledge, enabling greater impact on policies and practices for children and families. This initiative is a result of NAFCC's partnership with Parent Leadership Training Initiative, Better Futures, National Women's Law Center & Jerletha McDonald FCC Consultant. Participants significantly increased civic actions taken - twice as many participants indicated engaging in the following activities from the beginning to the end of the program: spoke publicly or testified (79%), met with an elected official (86%) or protested, marched or demonstrated (64%).

### Additional leadership initiatives at NAFCC include:

- **Leadership Day at Annual NAFCC conference:** An invaluable opportunity for FCC leaders in NAFCC's community to network, learn from FCC experts, and hear about new tools and resources available to FCC programs.
- **Professional Development Academy:** A new online learning platform offered in English and Spanish with tailored monthly live and on-demand trainings, often featuring FCC educators as facilitators.
- **Support for local affiliates:** An opportunity for local FCC association leaders to work with NAFCC to provide support and resources directly to FCC educators.
- **National Accreditation Program:** Recognition of FCC educators' dedication to excellence in child care service delivery and access to resources such as personalized feedback from a trained observer to improve the quality of care offered to children and families.

Leadership roles within the NAFCC community include NAFCC Governing Board, State Representatives, Accreditation Council, State & Local Association Leaders & LSL Fellows & cover **43 states**.





## FCC Leadership at a Glance

Family Childcare educators have formally and informally organized in every state & abroad to network, share resources, and influence policies. The first FCC peer association was established in 1958 in Los Angeles, and the first national FCC conference was held in 1977. FCC educators have been leaders across diverse organizations & movements, including associations, FCC networks, unions, advocacy groups, and CCR&Rs.,

In 2022, NAFCC surveyed FCC leaders in its network to better understand their organizations. Collectively, 16 FCC-led organizations responded, representing over 1,700 FCC educators in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Across organizations serving FCC providers statewide, the median membership was 186, and the average was 378.

Regarding operations and financing, **75% of FCC-led organizations reported functioning as a non-profit corporation with 501(c)(3)** or under another organization's 501(c)(3). The remaining organizations reported functioning as sole proprietorships were still determining the process or some combination of all of the above.

Organizations were funded primarily through some combination of membership dues (ranging from less than \$10 to over \$50 per year), foundation grants, state or local contracts, individual donations, and professional development fees. Most organizations (77%) reported that active FCC educators made up much of all staff, board members, or volunteers working on behalf of the organization. Most also rely on volunteers, although at least four associations currently have paid staff or contractors.

**Nearly all FCC-led organizations (88%) also reported collaborating with additional community organizations.** Most reported having affiliations with staffed FCC networks/home-based child care networks, labor unions, child care resource and referral agencies, AEYCs, universities/colleges, and/or other non-profit organizations.

Surveyed organizations supported FCC educators through a variety of services, including:

- FCC licensing support
- Accreditation support
- Networking opportunities
- Professional development
- Advocacy
- QRIS or other quality improvement services
- Shared services, and information and resources.

# FCC Leadership Profiles

Meet FCC leaders from Colorado, Florida, and Washington and learn a bit more about how their work is providing leadership for FCC educators in their states. All serve as NAFCC state representatives.



## Amber Bilby

Owner and Operator, Amber's Kids Daycare  
President, Colorado Association of Family Child Care

Amber Bilby has been a teacher her entire life. During her childhood, she pretended to be a teacher while playing “school” with friends. While in high school, she worked as an afterschool kindergarten teacher. In 2010, she started her own FCC business, Amber’s Kids. “I like it; I can’t do anything else.” Her work in FCC didn’t stop there, though.

Amber had been a Colorado Association of Family Child Care member for nine years and realized that something needed to change. “We’ve been doing this same thing for ten years, but it’s just not working. How can we make it better?” When she discovered that the Association lost its connections with the Colorado office managing early childhood, she started attending their meetings. Getting FCC a voice at that table is what led her to seek the role of Association president, which she’s held for the past six years.

“Being an FCC educator has actually helped me in understanding more of my leadership role and what I can do.”

Amber has initiated several projects advancing Colorado educators’ professional development and business knowledge and has influenced Colorado legislation to support FCC educators. **She won a \$100,000 grant from the Buell Foundation to launch a version of All Our Kin’s FCC licensing support program as a licensing tool kit for new educators in Colorado.** Under Amber’s leadership, the association is working to provide the tool kits as well as create a mentoring program in which educators licensed for at least a year mentor new educators to manage city, county, and Colorado state requirements.

Amber also worked alongside early childhood leaders from Colorado’s Office of Early Childhood and Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance as the lead for the Family Child Care Network Development Team 2022 cohort. Her vision is for new educators to work with the association’s licensing tool kit program and then transition to state-funded network programming.

“Being an FCC educator has actually helped me in understanding more of my leadership role and what I can do,” said Amber of her role in influencing Colorado legislation along with other organizations. One such bill advocated by FCC voices that was enacted is House Bill 21-1222, requiring local authorities to apply the same regulations to FCC homes as to residential property, which has helped to increase young children’s and families’ access to FCC educators across the state.

# Arleen Lambert

Co-educator, Horent Kennedy Family Home Daycare  
Vice President and President (in July 2023), Florida Family Child Care Home Association

"We have sustained the test of time," Arleen said of the Florida Family Child Care Home Association (FFCCHA). "We had COVID. We had our conference after two years, and everyone came back. They were motivated, they felt like they were a part of something, they were connected. . . There's a real sense of camaraderie within our association." A member herself for over 15 years, Arleen has been vice president for nearly two years and will become FFCCHA president in July 2023.



**"There's a real sense of camaraderie within our association."**

FFCCHA receives funding from the Florida Department of Children & Families to offer scholarships to FCC educators for professional development & NAFCC accreditation. Arleen has also developed a strong professional relationship with Florida State Representative Dana Trabulsy. In 2023, they collaborated to inform a handful of Florida state bills, including **Senate Bill 990** and **House Bill 1021**. Arleen successfully advocated adding language to the bills, which collectively would eliminate duplicative and unnecessary inspections of FCC educators and provide them with programmatic and financial support.

Looking toward the future, Arleen has big ambitions for strategic planning with her executive board to ensure that FCC educators' voices are heard. First, she wants all proposed changes to align with the current language. "In Miami Dade, a lot of things passed because all of the agencies, as a collective, had the same language and asks. I would want to follow that model," she said. Second, she wants to strengthen relationships with local association members to get a real sense of what's happening at the county level throughout the state of Florida to also meet her goal of alignment.

Third, Arleen believes that we need more teachers in the early education field; and is creating a career path pipeline to meet this need. The FFCCHA provides free professional development training and implements a paid mentorship program to help FCC educators to create strong career paths for themselves. In fact, she's spent much of her career focused on providing professional development to students all the way up to those already established in FCC careers. As the early education chair for the Miami Dade PTA, she's working to create an FCC pipeline from high school into early childhood education. As part of the Miami Dade College educational committee for early childhood, she advocates for apprenticeships for students in FCC homes. Arleen also facilitates a master class session to teach aspiring and existing FCC educators about business and marketing and runs an FCC academy to assist educators in earning NAFCC accreditation, strengthening the quality of their programs, and increasing their income.



## Mary Curry

Director and Licensee, Pathways Enrichment Academy  
Executive Director, Yes! for Early Success  
Director, Washington State Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program  
Public Policy Representative, Washington State Family Child Care Association

"I can't reiterate enough that we need to stand in partnership with what is happening in our communities." Mary Curry is not only in touch with what's happening in FCC communities across Washington state. As Tri-Chair Director of Linked Arms, the statewide FCC association for African Descendants of the Enslaved; Public Policy Representative for the Washington State Family Child Care Association; and President of SEIU 925's Family Child Care chapter, she's also a voice for them.

In 1985, Washington introduced the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), a state-funded prekindergarten program modeled after Head Start. According to program rules, however, programs contracting with ECEAP had to have a minimum of 75 slots for children, which no FCC educator alone has the resources to support. In response, Mary created **Yes! for Early Success – a membership-driven co-op focused on supporting FCC educators as small businesses** – to ensure that these qualified child care educators receive an ECEAP subcontract. Their subcontracts provide funding, professional development, and additional ECEAP services to equip educators to offer young children high-quality early learning opportunities. Initially, Yes! for Early Success got referrals primarily by word of mouth; but now the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families provides Yes! for Early Success most of their referrals.

An estimated 85% of Yes! for Early Success' educators aren't native English speakers, so the organization has focused its efforts on dual language and dual culture programs. Mary shared "Things we do are growing out of the community that we serve. . . Never was their story told. Wherever we landed, we just enhanced what we already do." The organization currently supports 52 programs in 7 different languages across Washington state.

"Things we do are growing out of the community that we serve."

In addition to supporting FCC educators directly, Yes! For Success has also worked on their behalf through its influences on state legislation. After hearing from members of Yes! For Success, legislators drafted House Bill 1199 that passed in 2023 with strong bipartisan support. The bill prohibits apartment, unit, and homeowners' associations from limiting business operations and imposing regulations specific to licensed FCC businesses.

Mary also recently collaborated with fellow SEIU 925 Family Child Care chapter officers to ensure that FCC educators get additional financial support to sustain their businesses following the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a collective bargaining agreement, they worked with the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families to get FCC educators an additional child care enhancement rate of \$2,000 per month and increased health insurance coverage for a period of two years.

In addition to meeting families' needs, parents have noted that FCC is culturally responsive and relevant for their children's development, one more reason that Mary wants to further Yes! for Early Success' reach. "Family child care educators are valuable. We need them. They're culturally responsive. . . There's a level of support built in. It better prepares students and families as they enter broader systems," said Mary. "I've had people come to me and say, 'Miss Mary, I'm bringing my child to you because I want them to see African Americans in a different way.' . . . At least two families said, "I want my sons to know the beauty of your 'blackness'. . . People choose us."



# Recommendations

## Six Ideas for Supporting Educator Leadership to Increase FCC Retention

### **UNDERSTAND AND BUILD ON EXISTING FCC PROGRAMS AND LEADERSHIP**

For decades, FCC educators have formally and informally organized efforts in every state to network, share resources, and influence policies. In the absence of formal FCC-led organizations, every community has at least one FCC leader informally organizing and providing resources and information to other FCC educators. FCC leaders often serve as trusted pillars in their communities and can serve as bridges for broader transformative work.

Legislators, non-profit and agency leaders, funders, and other stakeholders having a better understanding of existing community assets, and wisdom on how family child care works distinctly from other child care options will strengthen efforts to support FCC educators. And in some communities, healing from a lack of support and resources made available to FCC educators and underserved populations needs to occur. FCC-led organizations are well equipped to ensure any initiatives meet both of these goals, resulting in better inclusion of FCC educators.

### **MAKE CAPACITY BUILDING AND FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR FCC-LED ASSOCIATIONS AND PEER NETWORKS**

Strong FCC-led associations and peer networks are critical components of the ECE landscape. Characteristics of healthy and effective FCC-led organizations include but are not limited to:

- A clearly defined mission and scope of services informed by FCC educators.
- Current or former FCC educators comprising most of an organization's leadership or board and reflecting racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the communities served.
- Paid staff or consultants working in a part-time or full-time capacity.
- Support and affiliation with a larger organization to provide resources (e.g., toolkits), networking, leadership development, and infrastructure support. For example, local cities or community groups can be supported by statewide associations and/or networks, which national organizations can support.

To fully participate in the ECE landscape, FCC-led organizations need additional funding sources and cannot rely solely on dues or other member fees (e.g., conference fees). Funding sources should also include philanthropy and public funding. Philanthropy can be important in building organizational capacity to fund FCC leadership in advocacy efforts. FCC leaders will also benefit from access to start-up grants, coaching, assistance in obtaining 501(c)(3) status, pro-bono legal advice, and communications tools.

### **OFFER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

Leadership development opportunities should take a strengths-based approach, building on the existing expertise that FCC leaders bring to their work as educators, business owners, and community organizers. Potential leadership topics for study include strategic development, organizational governance, civic engagement, advocacy, and effective communication.

Additionally, FCC educators should have access to multiple career paths within and outside FCC programs. For example, part-time peer mentoring provides more experienced FCC educators opportunities for leadership growth and additional compensation. Finally, quality improvement systems can encourage FCC educators to participate in professional associations such as NAFCC and affiliates.



## **INCLUDE FCC-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN ECE SYSTEMS BUILDING AND BEYOND**

FCC leaders are willing and ready to collaborate to better support FCC educators, other child care program professionals, and their communities more broadly. Stakeholders should invite FCC leaders to contribute their feedback and ideas from conceptualization through implementation as they make decisions influencing not only FCC but also ECE systems. For example, in consulting FCC, leaders, legislators, and agency leaders can ensure that state and local systems and guidance function so that varied child care options can support rather than compete with each other for business. Legislators should invite FCC leaders to join conversations as state laws are conceptualized and drafted specifically regarding guidance for child care and other factors influencing FCC, such as legislation regarding housing and small businesses.

FCC-led organizations should be considered potential host organizations delivering technical assistance to FCC educators in the community. State agencies can contract with FCC-led organizations to leverage public funding to offer services through FCC associations, including FCC networks, mentoring and coaching, and licensing support. Leveraging FCC-led organizations will ensure that FCC educators receive relevant professional development from individuals who are trusted advisors and that FCC educators are seen as trusted advisors themselves.



## **BUILD A BIG TENT: FCC-LED ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD BE INCLUSIVE OF ALL HOME-BASED CHILD CARE AND PARTNER WITH SIMILAR GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS**

Because they often share similar needs and face similar challenges, FCC-led organizations should include all home-based child care, including FFN and license-exempt family child care, in their ECE systems improvement efforts. FCC-led organizations should also connect with other grassroots organizations focused on issues relevant to FCC communities, including women's rights, low-wage workers, paid family leave, and immigrant rights.

FCC partnerships with unions can also address child care challenges. This has served as a powerful mechanism for increasing wages and providing home-based educators with benefits and improved working conditions.

Finally, FCC-led organizations should also participate in statewide advocacy groups building coalitions of providers, families, and community members. Their collective representation of FCC and other child care professionals can ensure that their specific needs as child care providers are voiced and that broader issues affecting their businesses, as well as the children and families they serve, are acknowledged and more effectively addressed.



## **ENGAGE FCC LEADERS AS EQUAL PARTNERS AND BUILD IN COMPENSATION AND FLEXIBILITY TO RESPECT THEIR EXPERTISE AND TIME**

ECE systems leaders should collaborate with FCC educators to understand their distinct needs in system design. When available, FCC-led organizations should be consulted in the design of any programs or services. However, even in the absence of any FCC-led organizations, principles for effectively engaging FCC leaders include the following:

- Compensating for work completed and time providing input.
- Engaging throughout the entire design and implementation cycles.
- Providing background knowledge and tools (e.g., technology) so that FCC educators can effectively contribute.
- Making space for multiple perspectives from FCC educators, including licensed, license-exempt, and FFN educators, and understanding that there's no 'one size fits all' approach for every program.
- Making opportunities accessible for family childcare. FCC educators should be asked what would make their participation feasible, and this often includes offering opportunities in multiple languages, in different locations (including virtual), and at convenient times (i.e., evenings and weekends).

Organizations delivering services to FCC educators should consider formal mechanisms to engage FCC leaders, including establishing advisory boards with autonomy and decision-making over funding, programming, and resources for FCC.

# Conclusion



The ECE mixed delivery system is complex, with several layers and moving parts, and there's no silver bullet to address the country's child care crisis. All child care options play a distinct role in providing young children and their families with high-quality care, and FCC remains in high demand among families despite decreasing numbers of available FCC educators across the country.

While investing in FCC associations and peer networks is important to retaining FCC programs, it is not a substitute for addressing the economic challenges faced by FCC educators and the families they care for. **We must increase public investment in a mixed-delivery child care system, ensuring families have access to multiple options that meet their needs and early educators can earn a life-sustaining wage.**

Legislators, non-profit and agency leaders, funders, and other stakeholders can fully engage FCC educators in all decisions made regarding FCC, ECE systems, and adjacent systems (e.g., housing) to increase the availability of FCC to families. Supporting FCC educators and capitalizing on their expertise, organic networks, and strong connections to families within their communities can help young children to learn and grow and families to thrive through access to quality child care.

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