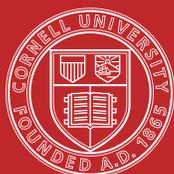


CORNELL UNIVERSITY CHILD CARE & CHILD CARE GRANT SURVEY: *Impact on the Cornell Community*

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Cornell University
Division of Human Resources

2009

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Summary Report
Karen Shellenback

July, 2009

Executive Summary

“Cornell's continued commitment to improving the struggle of work/family relationships makes me proud to work here. It makes me perform my duties above and beyond.”

Cornell University created a new employee benefit of child care subsidies for employees (Cornell Child Care Grant Subsidy Program or CCCGSP) in 2001. Available on a sliding income scale, the grant is administered through the Flexible Spending Account (FSA) and can be used to pay for any form of legal child care including child care centers, preschools, summer camps, licensed family child care homes, and individual care providers. Children up to age twelve and households with incomes under \$150,000 are eligible for assistance (dependents over age 12 must have special needs in order to qualify). In 2009, Cornell awarded \$1,660,000, which served 882 Cornell faculty and staff families. The university extended coverage to post doctoral associates and graduate students in 2004. In 2008, the university further extended coverage to provide supplemental child care grant funding to users of the Cornell Child Care Center (with a household income of up to \$85,000).

I've received a CU child care grant for about 8 years running, now, and I almost cannot begin to express what a difference it has made in making access to good quality child care available to our family. I've been extremely grateful for the CU Child Care Grant Program for this. The CU Child Care Grant Program has not only contributed to the quality of my work experience at CU, but has made me proud to be working for an employer that does walk the walk in terms of building healthy community.

The first evaluation of the program and its impacts was conducted in 2007 and is repeated in this 2009 study. The 2009 evaluative online surveys collected in-depth information on Cornell employees' ideas regarding the CCCGSP, both those who had received grants and those who had not. Evaluators were particularly interested in grant recipients' perceived impacts of the grant program on the quality of child care their children receive, as well as grant recipients' productivity at work. This evaluative online survey also asked questions regarding the design, implementation and administration of the program, as well as strategies for improving it. While increased funding can increase parental effective demand for child care, program designers were interested to know if there is an effect on the quality of care and on employee's relationship to Cornell.

Below are the primary questions this research sought to answer and the “quick and dirty” answers:¹

- Q: Do parents, when given subsidies for child care, choose higher quality care?

¹ Note: The “quick and dirty” answers are based on respondent percentages and open-ended comments and have not been tested for statistical significance nor imply a causal relationship.

A: Yes, many choose higher quality care, especially those who couldn't afford high quality care otherwise. Just under 30% report that the CCCGSP directly increased the quality of their child care arrangements and 22% report that the grant helped them enroll their children in desired programs. Of respondents who changed their arrangements because they applied or received the Cornell grant, 70% indicated that their new arrangement was of higher quality.

- Q: Does the additional money for child care allow families to change their type of care arrangement or afford after-school programs or summer camps? If so, do parents feel that their new arrangement is of higher quality?

A: Yes, for some. Almost 12% of respondents changed their arrangement due to the grant. Almost one-fifth (19.8%) did enroll their kids in summer camps, sports or other enrichment programs because of the grant and many comments illustrate that grant monies provided school-agers and their families with enriched or expanded summer care experiences. Furthermore, 41% of respondents reported that the grant money expanded the number of possible child care arrangements considered or accessed.

- Q: Compared to their past arrangements, are parents more likely to choose regulated over unregulated care?

A: Somewhat. Ten percent of respondents commented that they moved their child from unregulated to regulated care. However, approximately 86% of respondents believe that the freedom to use funds for any type of legal care is an important strength of the grant program.

- Q: Do extra child care funds allow families to maintain an arrangement they prefer?

A: Yes. Nearly all respondents reported that the grant helped pay for child care. Twenty-one percent report that the grant provided more hours of care and another 20% report that the grant helped increase the reliability of their care.

- Q: Do additional monies free up funds for families to address other quality-of-life issues, such as buying a new computer or taking a family vacation?

A: Yes, 65% believe the extra grant money freed up money for other family activities.

- Q: Do employer-sponsored child care programs help recruit and retain employees?

A: Yes! Approximately 70% of respondents indicated that receiving a child care grant positively influenced their decision to continue working at Cornell. One in five responded that the program allowed Cornell parents to return to work after the birth of their child. Numerous comments indicate that the CCCGSP helps to recruit and especially retain employees. Furthermore, three-quarters of respondents (74.2%) report that receiving the grant has increased their dedication or loyalty to Cornell.

- Q: Does an improvement in the quality, stability, or reliability of child care arrangements affect employees' concentration and productivity at work?

A: Yes! Almost three quarters (72.6%) of respondents reported that receiving the grant had somewhat or significantly decreased their work-family stress. Furthermore, numerous comments throughout the

survey indicate that maintaining stable, reliable and high quality child care arrangements positively impact employee concentration, engagement and productivity at work.

Overwhelmingly, respondents who have used the CCCGSP are grateful and satisfied with the program although more funds would be graciously welcomed by all. Many employees also request more institutional communications and support for flexibility. Want to know more about what Cornell parents think about the current state of child care and Cornell’s support for working families? ... Read the attached summary report.

Methods: An online survey was designed and developed by a multi-disciplinary work group composed of Human Resource staff, faculty, graduate students, staff from the Survey Research Institute (SRI) at Cornell, and an independent consultant. The survey consisted of the core questions asked of Cornell employees in the original 2007 study, as well as a few new questions. Participants were identified through Cornell Human Resources records as: 1) having dependent children up to age 12 and/or 2) past or current Cornell Child Care Grant Subsidy Program (CCCGSP) participants and were contacted via email. Invitation e-mails were sent out by SRI on February 13th, 2009 followed by reminder e-mails to non-respondents on February 18th, February 25th, March 5th, and finally March 17th, 2009. Web data collection ended on March 25th, 2009. In addition to the web completions, there were 28 surveys filled out on paper by employees without access to computers at their worksites. SRI entered the data from paper surveys into the web instrument on March 27th, 2009. 1,051 survey responses were collected out of a possible 2,564 with valid email addresses yielding a response rate of 40.99%. The results also captured 1,141 comments. Results (frequencies and percentages) in this report have not been tested for statistical significance.

Overall Survey Results: All Respondents

Respondents were asked if they have ever heard of the Cornell Child Care Grant Subsidy Program; 92.3% of respondents (N = 1,051) indicated that they have heard of the program. Over one-third (37.2%) reported that they learned about the grant program from a co-worker and another 36% reported that they learned about the program from an email announcement from university or unit HR.

Children:

Almost all respondents (97.6%) indicated that they have children under age thirteen living with them or for whom they have partial custody (N = 1,051). Just over half (52.1%) of Cornell parents have one child, another 40.7% report two children and 7.1% report having 3-5 children under age 13. Only 6.3% of parents report that at least one of their children attends Head Start or publicly funded pre-kindergarten (N = 1,020). Just over 1,600 children were reported.

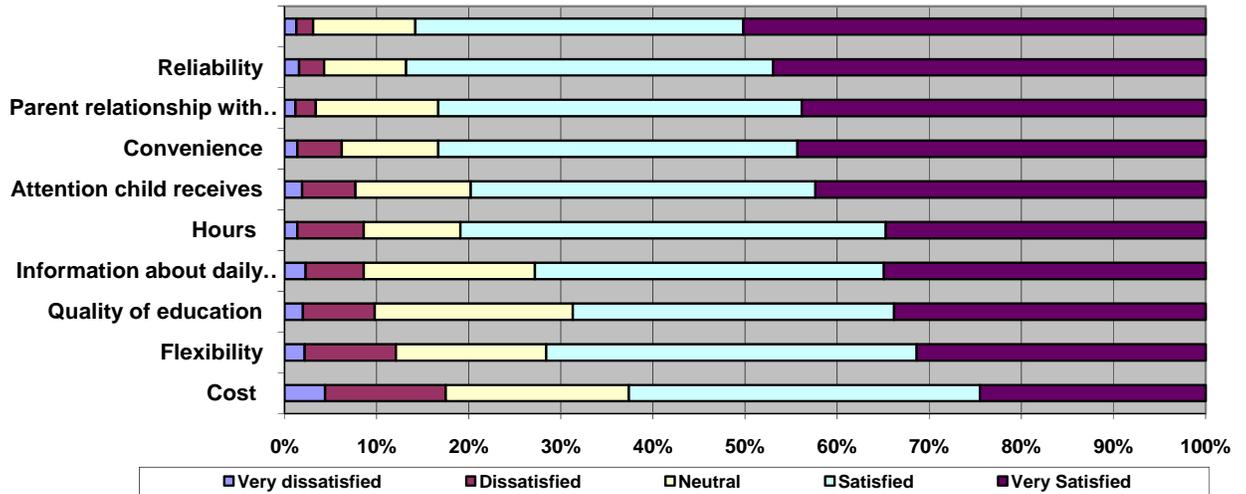
Table I: Frequency and Percentage of Children Reported by Age Group

1,601 children were reported		
Age group	Frequency	Percentage of all children reported
Infants (0-17 months)	209	13%
Toddlers (18-36 months)	227	14%
Pre-school/pre-kindergarten (3-5 years)	341	21%
School-Age (5-12 years)	824	52%

The following chart indicates respondent level of satisfaction with each of the following child care issues. Parents were asked to respond in terms of their youngest child’s child care experience. Parents are most

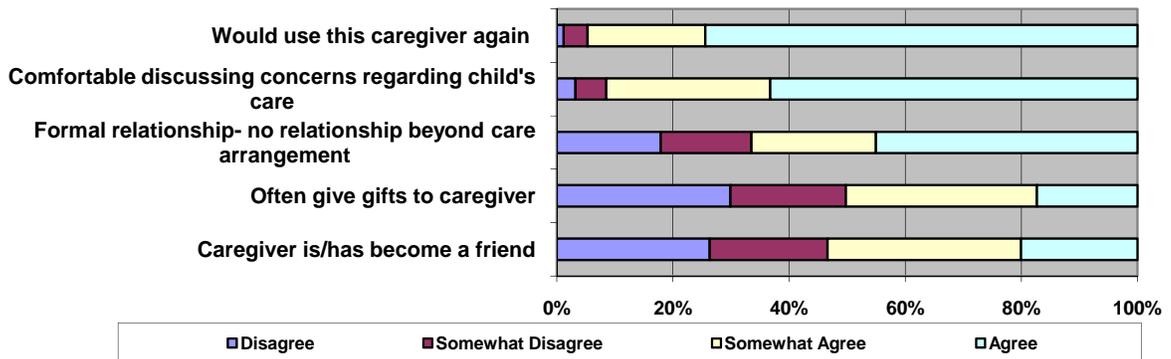
satisfied with the youngest child’s relationship with caregiver, reliability and parent relationship with caregiver. Parents are least satisfied with cost, flexibility and quality of education of their youngest child’s care.

Chart 1: Parental Satisfaction with Child Care Issues for Youngest Child



Parents were asked to think about their relationship with the paid caregiver of their youngest child and indicate agreement or disagreement with the following issues. Almost all parents report that they would use their caregiver again (94.7%) and feel comfortable discussing concerns regarding their child’s care (91.4%). Approximately two-thirds (66.47%) agree that their relationship is formal, yet approximately 53.36% of parents report that the caregiver of their youngest child is a friend and another 50% report that they often give this care provider gifts.

Chart 2: Parental Relationship with Paid Non-Relative Caregiver of Youngest Child

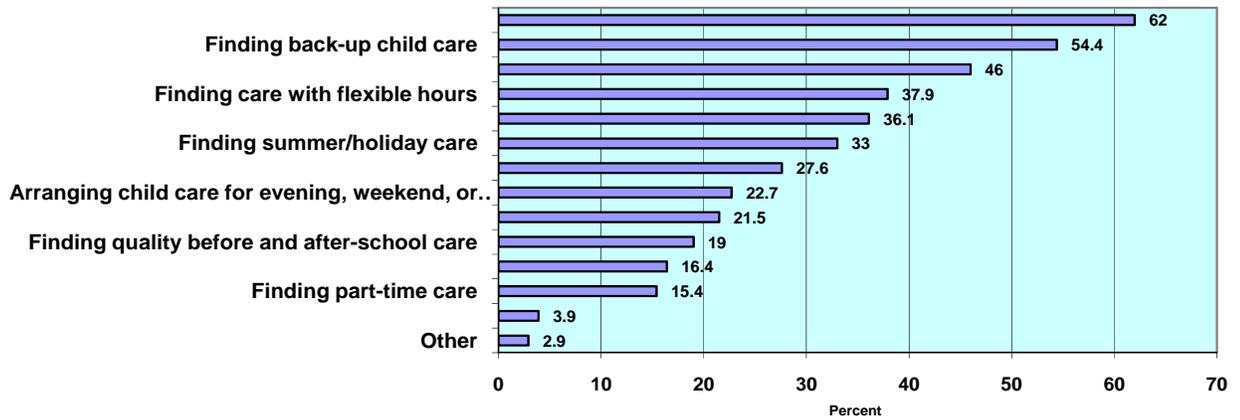


Participants were asked, “On average, how often is your child caregiver unable to care for your child(ren) and you must find another arrangement?” Approximately 18% replied “never”, 18% replied “once or twice a year”, 20.3% replied “three or four times a year”, 21.5% replied “five or six times per year” and 22.5% replied at least once a month (includes responses of once (9.3%), twice (6.1%), three (2.7%) or four (4.4%) times or more a month)(N = 1016). The majority (82.4%) of survey respondents indicated that they are

personally responsible for back-up care when their child care provider is closed or their child is sick (N = 1,026).

Cornell parents face challenges regarding child care, especially finding affordable care (62%) and finding back-up care (54.4%). Almost one-half (46%) of parents report difficulty finding high quality child care. Finding flexible hours (37.9%) and conveniently located care (36.1%) are also issues for Cornell parents (N = 1,026). “Other” comments (N = 28) included problems finding care for children with special needs, especially medical and behavioral issues (six comments).

Chart 3: Parental Challenges Regarding Child Care



When the above “child care challenge” data is cut by household income some interesting findings emerge. Overall, difficulty finding high quality child care increases as household income increases. Furthermore, difficulty finding affordable care increases as household income decreases.

Almost two-thirds (62.6%) of respondents have applied for a grant from the Cornell Child Care Grant Program (N=1,022). Of those who did not apply for the grant (37.4%), 35.3% replied that they are not eligible, 23.6% replied that they were unaware of the program, 14.9% missed the application deadline, 9.7% responded that the amount of money was not worth the time, 9.4% did not want to sign up for a select benefits dependent care account which is required, and 5% indicated that the application was too burdensome. Over one-fifth of respondents (20.9%) indicated that there were “other” reasons why they did not apply: 17% simply felt that they were not eligible, 12% use unqualified care, 12% have a spouse at home, 11% commented that they felt they have “no need” and 9% responded that they do not know enough about the program.

Survey Results: Respondents who have Received the Cornell Child Care Grant

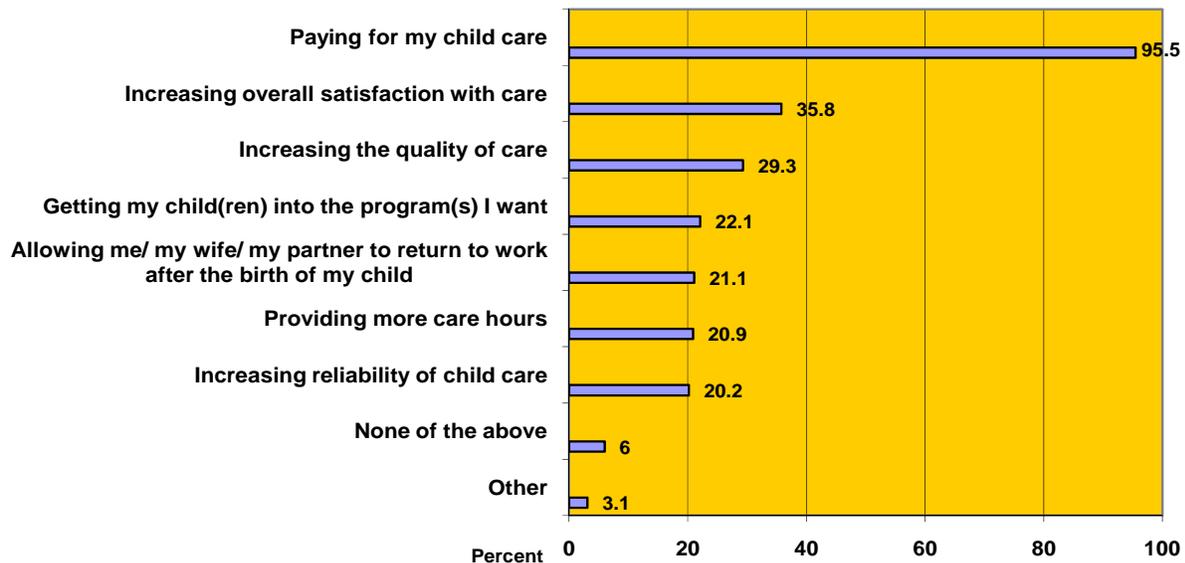
Over one-half (58.9%)(619) of all survey respondents (N=1,049) report that they have received a Cornell Child Care Subsidy Grant. Of those who have applied for a grant, 96.4% report that they have received a grant. Of those respondents who have ever received a grant, 82.2% (505) received a grant in 2009. Of those who received a grant in 2009, 29.9% (149) report that this was their first year receiving the grant. The majority (67.4%) of respondents report receiving a grant for under \$2,000 in 2009.

Perceived Impacts of the CCCGSP:

A series of questions asked respondents whether receiving grants from the CCCGSP changed aspects of their child care or work productivity.

Almost all (95.5%) respondents indicated that the grant helped with paying for child care. Over one-third responded that the grant increased overall satisfaction with care and 29.3% indicated that the grant increased the quality of care. Interestingly, over one-fifth responded that the program allowed Cornell parents to return to work after the birth of their child. Just over three percent reported that the grant helped them in “other” ways: 40% of these comments mentioned assistance with providing better or expanded summer experiences. Respondents indicated that the grant helped with the following child care issues (N = 584):

Chart 4: The CCCGSP Helped with the Following Child Care Issues:



Approximately two-thirds (65.3%) of respondents reported that the money provided by the child care grant freed up money for other family activities (N = 616). Forty-one percent of respondents reported that the grant money expanded the number of possible child care arrangements considered or accessed (45.9% indicated that the money did not help in this area) (N = 614).

Interestingly, the majority (88.2%) of grant recipients did not change their child care arrangements because they applied or received a grant from the grant program. However, one in five respondents who reported a household income of \$40,000 – \$60,000 changed their arrangement because of the grant (N=125). Overall, of the 11.8% (73) of respondents who changed arrangements, 70.4% indicated that their new arrangement was of higher quality, 69% indicated that their new arrangement was more convenient and 54.9% indicated that it was more reliable than their child’s previous arrangement.

When participants were asked to comment about the child care changes they made and why they made them, 68.57% of the comments (N = 70 comments) related to being able to afford a higher level of quality care for their child(ren) due to the grant. Over one in four (27%) comments illustrate that respondents chose more enriching summer camp experiences, 23% moved from home based care to center based care or were able to afford more hours at a quality preschool program, 13% were able to afford the Cornell Child Care Center on campus and 10% moved their child from unregulated to regulated care.

With the help of the grant, we decided to find registered daycare, instead of using an informal provider. The informal provider was not providing a safe atmosphere, so we were relieved when we could move our children to a registered provider where the atmosphere is safe, caring and enriching for our children.

Over one-half (54.8%) of the respondents did not enroll their child(ren) in summer camps, sports or other enrichment programs because of participation in the Cornell Child Care Grant Program (N = 617). Although, almost one-fifth (19.8%) did enroll their kids in summer camps, sports or other enrichment programs because of the grant. Another 25.4% responded that the question was not applicable.

Does receiving a Cornell Child Care Grant reduce work-family stress? Almost half of the respondents (49.6%) indicated the grant “somewhat decreased” their work-family stress, and over one in five (23%) responded that the grant “significantly decreased” their work-family stress. Twenty one percent responded “no change” in work-family stress (N = 617).

The grant also appeared important to employee retention. Almost seventy percent of respondents (69.3%) report that receiving a Cornell Child Care Grant positively influenced their decision to continue working at Cornell University (22.9% reported “no”, 7.8% reported “not sure”) (N = 616). Furthermore, the majority of respondents (74.2%) report that receiving a Cornell Child Care Grant has increased their dedication/loyalty to Cornell University as an employer (.5% “reduced dedication”, 25.3% “no change”). As a further indication of positive impact, 92% of respondents have recommended the program to colleagues (N = 614).

Participants were asked to explain why receiving a Cornell Child Care Grant increased their dedication/loyalty to Cornell University (N= 307 comments). Over one in five (27%) comments specifically mentioned their “sincere appreciation” and “gratefulness” for the grant program. Of the 307 written responses:

- 26% indicated that “Cornell is committed to valuing and assisting employees and their families in various life stages, as well as the difficulties working parents face.”

My spouse and I could not have anticipated - before having children - HOW MUCH it means to have our employer's full support. It's overwhelming in today's world...trying to raise a family and maintain a healthy home environment...while both parents work full-time. We feel enormously grateful for the Child Care Grant and for the overall atmosphere of immense support from Cornell. From support of breastfeeding...to encouraging parental leave when appropriate...we are SO GRATEFUL!!!!!! Thank you. This definitely increases the sense of loyalty and dedication that we feel.

- 25% indicated that “Cornell cares about its employees.”

The Child Care Grant made me feel that my employer was concerned about me and my family and they have made an investment in me. This has an impact on my dedication and loyalty to CU.

- 23% indicated that the “CCCGSP benefits Cornell by creating and retaining a productive, engaged and committed workforce.” Another 10% indicated that the grant program reduced their stress.

I feel more dedication/loyalty to an employer who actively supports me as a single parent and recognizes that I will perform better if I am less stressed about my work-family balance and arrangements. The child care grant is a wonderful thing. I am very grateful for it.

- 20% indicated that “Cornell recognizes and understands the financial stress of child care on working families.”

I appreciate the fact that Cornell supports its parents, especially women. Our day care costs are the largest household expense we have (more than the mortgage), so everything helps. Having the grant shows me that Cornell values me as a parent and has provided flexibility and funding to ensure I can continue to work.

- 12% responded that the “CCCGSP is a benefit other local employers do not offer.”
- 7% responded that the grant “allows parents to afford the best child care possible.”

This grant has allowed me to keep them in the highest quality child care I could afford. Not only that, it made my stress level go down and my feelings towards being a CU employee very positive. I am proud to be here and proud of Cornell for recognizing the issue as Ithaca offers very little high quality care at an affordable rate. Cornell helped my family and for this I am eternally grateful. Whatever I receive I am thankful and hope that in these tight budget times the program can continue. Yes, I for one think Cornell is a great place to work and I am lucky to be here!

Participants were asked, “Do you plan to continue participating in Cornell’s Child Care Grant Program?” A majority of respondents (84.2%) (517) indicated “yes” they would, 13% indicated “no”, and 2.8% indicated “no, their child(ren) aged out of the program.”

Seventy-six respondents commented on why they will not participate in the future:

- 30% state they earn too much money to qualify
- 16% report that their school age child does not need financial assistance
- 14.5% are moving
- 13% report altruistic reasons – believing that the money available should go to families who need it more than they do
- 12% will use family, older sibling or spousal care
- 6% feel the amount of money received is not worth the time/burden
- 5% state that their provider does not qualify

Over two-thirds (69.5%) of respondents manage their grant and Select Benefit child care funds using the ClaimsPlus on-line system (49.3% responded “yes, regularly” and another 20.2% responded “yes, sometimes”). For the 30.5% who do not use the online management system, here are the main reasons why:

- Just have not tried it (41.2%)
- Did not know about it (20.3%)
- Easier to file on paper (22.3%)
- No computer at home (2%)
- Other (14.2%)

Approximately two-thirds (61.5%) of participants did not add funds from their paycheck into a Select Benefits Dependent Care (FSA) account in 2009, 35.3 % did add funds. Participants report that the freedom to use any type of legal care (85.7%) is the main strength of the grant program, followed by the “ease of the application process” (63.9%). Only one in five (20.6%) indicated that “the grant amount is adequate or more than adequate for my financial needs” (N = 621).

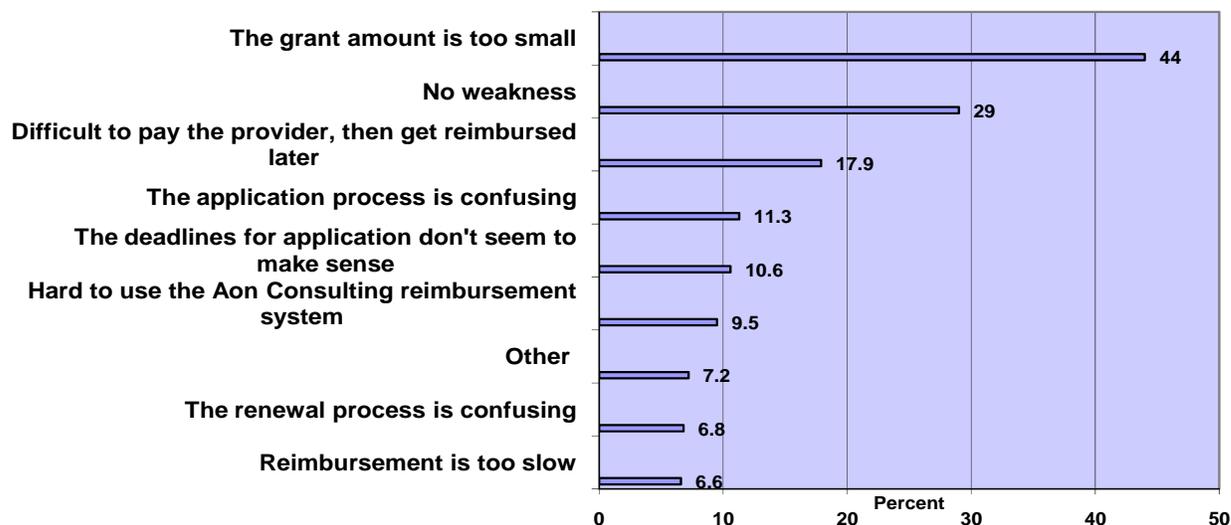
Participants were asked to provide comments on what they thought are the most important benefits of the grant program (N = 172 comments). Overwhelmingly, 52% commented that helping to ease the financial burden was the most significant benefit.

Again, respondents also discussed:

- 17% - access to quality otherwise unaffordable
- 11% - benefits to Cornell in helping to retain and create a productive, loyal and creative workforce
- 10% - flexible use of funds
- 8% - efficient program, simple process
- 6% - pre-tax benefits

Participants were asked to indicate weaknesses of the grant program (N = 621). When this survey was conducted in 2007, 72% of respondents thought that “the grant amount was too small” as compared to 44% who feel the same way in 2009. Another illuminating finding: 29% feel there are no weaknesses in the program! Almost one-quarter feel that it is difficult to pay the provider and get reimbursed weeks later.

Chart 5: Weaknesses of the Cornell Child Care Grant Program



Satisfaction and Ways to Improve the Program:

Overwhelmingly, 91.7% of respondents are “very satisfied” (34.5%) or “satisfied” (57.2%) with the program. Only 3.5% are dissatisfied. Respondents were asked to comment on ideas to improve the program. Again, a large majority of comments indicated participants were extremely grateful, appreciative and satisfied with the program, but also offered suggestions for additional improvement especially regarding deadline communications (20%), additional funding (17%), and further clarification regarding how grant money is awarded or how “the formula” is calculated (14%) (N = 184).

Conclusion:

- Does the Cornell Child Care Grant Subsidy Program positively impact the variety, reliability and quality of child care for employee children?
- Are most employees not only satisfied, but extremely grateful and appreciative of the grant program?
- Does the CCCGSP positively impact the productivity and engagement of Cornell’s working parents?
- Does the CCCGSP, as an integral part of a holistic work-life program, retain Cornell’s workforce?
- Is the university, as a whole, positively impacted by this grant?

... the answers are... Yes!

Project Credits:

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