



Licensing Staff and Provider Views on Child Care and Early Education Licensing

TRLECE

The Role of Licensing in
Early Care and Education



Licensing Staff and Provider Views on Child Care and Early Education Licensing

OPRE Report #2024-281

September 2024

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Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Contract number: HHSP233201500034I-75P00119F37007

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Suggested citation: Miranda, B., Ekyalongo, Y.Y., Early, D.M., Maxwell, K. & Madill, R. (2024). *Licensing staff and provider views on child care and early education licensing*. OPRE Report #2024-281. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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This report and other products sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation are available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>.

Acknowledgements: *Licensing Staff and Provider Views on Child Care and Early Education Licensing* was produced through the Understanding the Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The authors wish to thank Tracy Carter Clopet, Maia Connors, Laura Cutler, Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, Mary Beth Salomone Testa, and Shannon Warren for their helpful feedback. The authors also wish to thank Sage Caballero, Sherri Castle, Jessica Conway, Alyssa Corrine Ibarra, Dayne Ornelas Gonzalez, Priya Koushik, Kylee Novak, Analisa Pines, and Hannah Wodrich of Child Trends for their support with data collection.

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Overview

Introduction

Although **licensing**¹ plays a key role in the operations of **child care and early education** (CCEE) programs and the broader CCEE systems, we know very little about the views and experiences of those who are most affected by licensing: licensed **CCEE providers** and **licensing staff**. This report summarizes results from a national survey of **CCEE licensing administrators** and the first national surveys of **front-line licensing staff** and **licensed CCEE** providers.

This report starts with a brief description of CCEE licensing and a summary of past research about provider perceptions of CCEE licensing. The introduction is followed by a high-level overview of our research methods, followed by research findings. The report ends with conclusions and suggestions for future research.

Purpose

This report compares views on licensing among administrators, front-line licensing staff, and licensed providers.

Research questions

This report addresses three primary research questions:

1. Do licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers have different perceptions about the role of CCEE licensing?
2. Do licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff have different perceptions about the role of CCEE licensing staff?
3. Do licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers have different perceptions of CCEE **licensing regulations**?

Methods

This report is based on a survey of 37 administrators, 919 front-line licensing staff, 1,121 **center**-based providers, and 1,102 **family child care** (FCC) providers in 37 U.S. states. Front-line licensing staff and CCEE provider data were weighted to represent, to the extent possible, the population of front-line licensing staff and CCEE providers in the 37 states included in our analysis.

Key findings and highlights

- On average, licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, center-based providers, and FCC providers agreed that the child care licensing system helps support children's health and safety and helps providers deliver higher-quality care.
- Front-line licensing staff and licensing administrators, on average, agreed that the role of licensing staff is to ensure that children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment and to ensure that regulations

¹ The first time we use a term that is defined in the glossary, it will appear in bold purple text. View the [glossary section](#) toward the end of this document for definitions.

and laws are enforced. They also agreed that the role of licensing staff is to build relationships with providers, help them navigate the licensing process, connect them resources and supports, help them correct violations, and improve the quality of care they provide.

- When asked about their views on licensing regulations—including whether there are too many regulations, whether regulations are reasonable to meet, and whether regulations are easy to understand—there were some statistically significant differences between groups. Generally, center-based and FCC provider views differed from those of licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff, though the differences were small.
- Although some group differences rose to statistically significant levels, many of the group average response scores hovered in the neutral range (i.e., neither agree nor disagree), therefore differences should be interpreted with caution.

Introduction

Child care and early education (CCEE) licensing is a key part of the early childhood supports available to young children, families, and CCEE providers. CCEE licensing is responsible for setting the regulations that licensed CCEE programs must meet to operate legally, and **monitoring** programs to ensure those regulations are met. Each state and territory establishes its own licensing regulations and **procedures**, with some guidance and requirements through the federal Child Care and Development Fund program (45 C.F.R. § 98, 2016).² Although licensing plays a key role in the operations of CCEE programs and the broader CCEE system, research is lacking about the views and experiences of those who are most affected by licensing: CCEE providers and licensing staff. In this brief, we present and compare licensing administrator, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE provider perceptions of the role of CCEE licensing, the role of licensing staff, and licensing regulations.

This study is part of the project [The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education \(TRLECE\)](#). TRLECE is funded from 2019-2024 by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families. The project team includes staff from Child Trends and ICF. The team has conducted a variety of activities to strengthen the field's understanding of child care and early education licensing.

Perceptions of CCEE licensing

State licensing is comprised of various staff, including a licensing administrator who oversees the agency and front-line licensing staff who routinely conduct **inspections** of licensed programs. Although these staff play a central role in the day-to-day operations of licensing, little is known about how they view licensing.

State licensing agencies are one of the few types of agencies that interact with a substantial portion of CCEE providers, specifically center directors and family child care (FCC) providers. Although understanding provider perceptions of licensing is a critical step in identifying how to best support providers and improve licensing, there are a limited number of publicly reported studies that have examined provider perceptions of licensing. Further, each of the existing studies was conducted in a single state or a small subset of states and cannot be generalized across states. For example, some studies have found that CCEE providers tend to agree that regulations are necessary and important for the health and safety of children (Lent, 2015; Shdaimah et al., 2018). However, providers have also experienced challenges meeting licensing regulations because they felt regulations sometimes do not work well in practice, can be so rigid they interfere with their ability to provide care, are unnecessarily costly, can be time consuming, and involve a large administrative burden (Bromer et al., 2021; Rohacek et al., 2010; Shdaimah et al., 2018). Some FCC providers also felt that regulations lacked flexibility and were focused on centers (Bromer et al., 2021). Finally, center directors reported several challenges related to maintaining their license, including duplicative paperwork (e.g., to meet both local fire safety and licensing requirements); lack of alignment between licensing standards and other standards (e.g., accreditation, subsidy); and high-turnover rates among CCEE program staff, which led to additional background checks and made it difficult to ensure proper provider-child ratios (Rohacek et al., 2010; Shdaimah et al., 2018).

Understanding licensing administrator, front-line licensing staff, and provider perceptions of licensing is a critical step in identifying how to best support licensed providers and strengthen licensing. While it is important to understand each group's perceptions, it is also important to examine the extent to which perceptions are similar or different across roles. Shared perceptions across roles could identify relative

² We cite the CCDF regulations that were in place at the time this product was developed. The CCDF regulations were updated in 2024 (Child Care and Development Fund, 45 C.F.R. § 98, [2024]), and we encourage readers to review those for the most up-to-date information about CCDF guidelines.

strengths in licensing or point to opportunities for improvement based on shared views. Differences in perceptions might highlight areas that require more intensive work to understand or address.

Research Questions

This study is the first to compare licensing administrator, front-line licensing staff, and licensed provider views on licensing. The study addressed three primary research questions using data from 37 U.S. states:

1. Do licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers have different perceptions about the role of CCEE licensing?
2. Do licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff have different perceptions about the role of CCEE licensing staff?
3. Do licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers have different perceptions of CCEE licensing regulations?

Methods

The study team conducted national surveys of CCEE licensing administrators, CCEE front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers. Below we briefly summarize each survey and sample. For more detailed information about our survey construction, outreach, response rate calculations, and weights, please refer to our methodology report (Early et al., 2024). See the [TRLECE project page](#) for all TRLECE briefs and reports.

CCEE licensing administrator survey

The study team reached out to the licensing administrators in all U.S. states and territories (n=56) to gather information about state and territory licensing as well as administrators' perceptions, challenges, and ideas to improve CCEE licensing. We defined "CCEE licensing administrator" as the person who oversees the operation of the CCEE **licensing agency**. We received usable responses from 43 state and territory administrators (a 75% response rate). Our analysis sample for this brief is 37 states, after excluding 3 territory respondents³ and 3 state respondents who dropped out of the survey after only responding to the first few questions.

Front-line CCEE licensing staff survey

We administered a national survey of CCEE front-line licensing staff, whom we defined as individuals who routinely conduct inspections of licensed CCEE programs. The survey asked about their background, roles, responsibilities, and perceptions. We invited all 3,102 CCEE front-line licensing staff from all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (DC) to participate using contact information we gathered directly from state CCEE licensing administrators and through online searches. We received 1,153 usable responses. Using the formula from the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR, 2023), this corresponds to a 42% response rate. For this brief, we further limited the analysis sample to the 919 front-line licensing staff who were located in the 37 states represented in the administrator sample. We applied response weights to

³ Territories were not included in the provider and front-line licensing staff surveys because our 2021 interviews with licensing administrators (approved under generic OMB #0970-0356; Understanding Child Care Licensing Challenges, Needs, and Use of Data) indicated that CCEE licensing in U.S. territories is quite different from licensing in U.S. states, with licensing agencies in the territories being smaller and typically working with fewer providers. We were concerned that the questions we developed for states would not apply to territories.

all analyses to account for state-level differences in response rates, so the data presented here represent, to the extent possible, the entire population of CCEE front-line staff in the 37 states included in our analysis.

CCEE licensed provider survey

We administered a national survey of licensed CCEE providers in all 50 states and DC to understand provider perceptions of and experiences with licensing. We compiled a list of all child care providers across 50 U.S. states and DC, primarily drawing from published information on state licensing websites. From this list, we randomly selected a sample of 9,746 licensed CCEE providers (5,118 center and 4,628 FCC) to conduct outreach. We received usable responses from 1,469 center providers and 1,428 FCC providers. Using the formula from the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR, 2023), this corresponds to a 39% response rate for each type of provider. Our analysis samples for this brief are 1,121 center providers and 1,102 FCC providers, after limiting the samples to licensed center and FCC providers in the 37 states represented in the licensing administrator sample. We applied design and sampling weights to account for state-level differences in being invited to participate and responding to the survey. As such, we present data that represent, to the extent possible, the entire population of licensed CCEE providers in the 37 states included in our analysis.

Findings

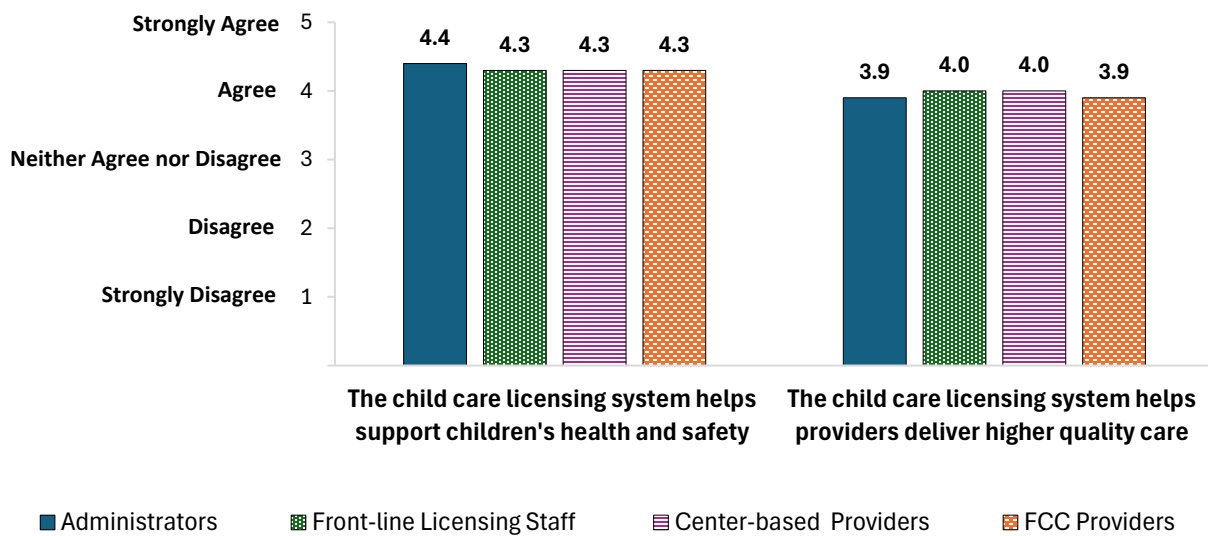
This section summarizes and compares licensing administrator, front-line licensing staff, and/or licensed CCEE provider perceptions of the role of CCEE licensing, the role of licensing staff, and licensing regulations. For each research question, we present the average response for each group. We then statistically compare survey responses across the respondent groups and note when there are statistically significant differences (see Appendix A for details about our analytic approach). Although some group differences rise to statistically significant levels, many of the group average scores hover in the neutral range (i.e., neither agree nor disagree) and should be interpreted with caution. An average response represents the mean for the overall group. An average response of neutral does not mean everyone in the group responded neutrally; some individuals may have agreed or disagreed with the survey item (see Appendix B for detailed statistics, including standard deviations).

Do licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers have different perceptions about the role of CCEE licensing?

The surveys asked licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, center providers, and FCC providers to indicate their level of agreement with statements about the role of the child care licensing system, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly Agree). In Figure 1, each bar represents the respondent group average score for each statement.

Notably, all respondent groups, on average, tended to agree (average scores around 4) that the child care licensing system helps support children’s health and safety and helps providers deliver higher quality care. There were no statistically significant differences in average responses between the four groups.

Figure 1. Average Agreement with Statements About the Role of CCEE Licensing



Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Means are based on 3,179 responses, including administrators (n=37), front-line licensing staff (n=919), center-based providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102).

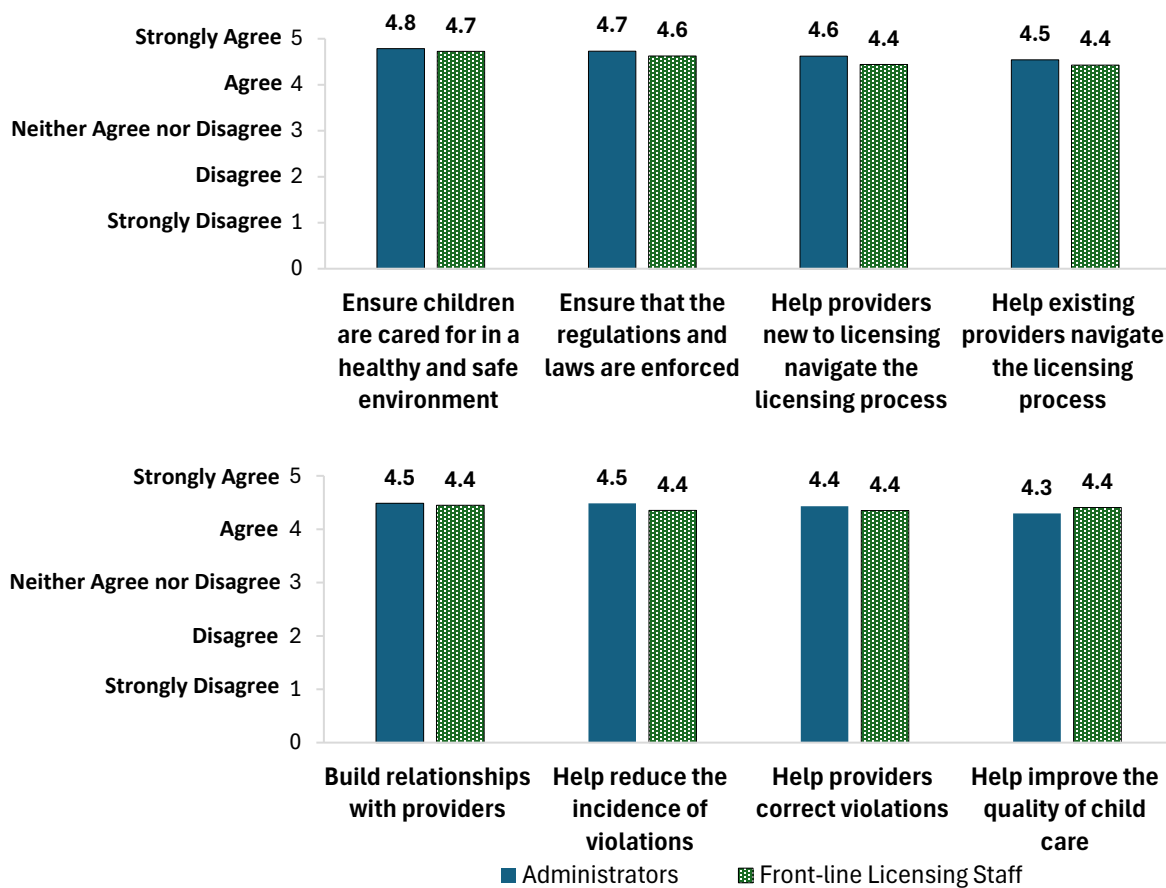
Do licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff have different perceptions about the role of CCEE licensing staff?

Licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff reported their level of agreement with eight statements about the role of CCEE licensing staff on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly Agree). The items were worded slightly differently for administrators and front-line staff due to differences in roles. For example, licensing administrators reported their agreement with the statement, “*The child care licensing unit’s role is to help ensure children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment,*” whereas front-line licensing staff reported their agreement with the statement, “*Part of my role is to help ensure children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment.*” Survey items about the role of CCEE licensing staff were not included in the licensed provider survey. Figure 2 presents the average agreement scores for each respondent group.

On average, licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff tended to agree with all statements, with an average response between “Agree” and “Strongly Agree.” Both administrators and front-line licensing staff had the highest agreement, on average, with statements about licensing’s role in supporting children’s health and safety and enforcing regulations. However, on average, they also agreed that licensing staff help providers navigate the licensing process, correct violations, and improve the quality of their programs.

There were no statistically significant differences between licensing administrator and front-line licensing staff average responses.

Figure 2. Average Agreement with Statements About the Role of CCEE Licensing Staff



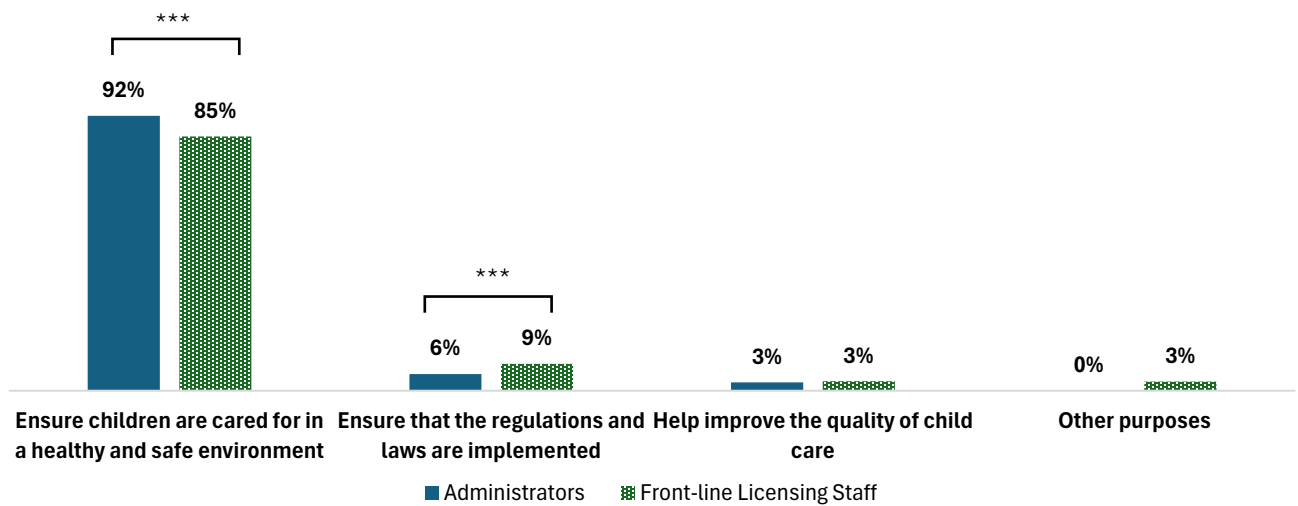
Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey

Note: Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Means are based on 956 responses, including licensing administrators (n=37) and front-line licensing staff surveys (n=919).

As a follow-up question, administrators and front-line licensing staff were shown a list of all the statements they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with in the previous question and were asked to select the primary purpose of the licensing unit (administrators) or their child care licensing role (front-line licensing staff).

As seen in Figure 3, the primary purpose selected by most administrators and front-line licensing staff was to “ensure children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment;” though administrators (92%) were significantly more likely to select this as a primary purpose compared to front-line licensing staff (85%). A few administrators (6%) and front-line licensing staff (9%) indicated that the primary purpose was to “ensure that the regulations and laws are implemented.” Front-line licensing staff were more likely to select this as a primary purpose compared to licensing administrators, though the difference was small. A small percentage of administrators (3%) and front-line licensing staff (3%) selected to “help improve the quality of child care” as the primary purpose of licensing staff. Three percent of front-line licensing staff selected other purposes, including to “build relationships with providers,” “help providers new to licensing navigate the licensing process,” and “help reduce the incidence of violations.”

Figure 3. Primary Purposes of CCEE Licensing Staff, by Role



Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey

Note: These percentages are based on 937 respondents, including licensing administrators (n=36) and front-line licensing staff (n=901). *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

Do licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and CCEE providers have different perceptions about CCEE licensing regulations?

In this section, we summarize respondent views about licensing regulations. Topics include the number of regulations, whether regulations are reasonable to meet, whether regulations are easy to understand, and conflicts between regulations and other standards. For all survey items included in this section, we measured perceptions by asking respondents to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale 1 to 5 (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly Agree).

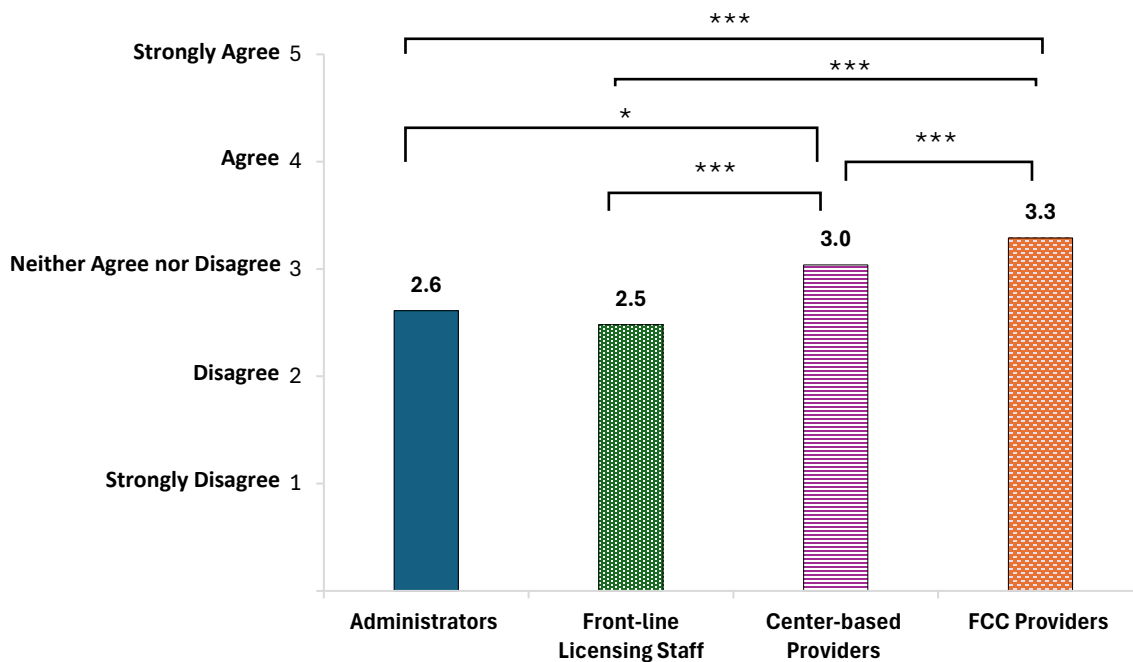
Number of regulations

Respondents rated their agreement with the statement, “I think there are too many regulations.” On average, state licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff responses fell between “disagree” and “neither agree nor disagree.” On average, center providers gave a neutral response (i.e., “neither agree nor disagree”), whereas the average response for FCC providers fell between the “neither agree nor disagree” and “agree” options. Although the average response for all groups tended to be neutral or close to neutral, there were some statistically significant differences between some of the groups.

Center-based and FCC providers’ responses, on average, were significantly higher on the agreement scale with regard to there being too many regulations compared to licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff (Figure 4). Further, FCC providers’ reports, on average, were significantly higher on the agreement scale compared to center-based providers. In previous qualitative studies, some center directors and FCC providers have reported that they feel there are too many regulations (Bromer et al., 2021; Rohacek et al., 2010). Future research could further examine licensing staff and provider views on different aspects of regulations, such as the cost, burden, and stringency of regulations.

There were no statistically significant differences between licensing administrator and front-line licensing staff responses.

Figure 4. Average Agreement That There Are Too Many Regulations



Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Means are based on 3,178 responses, including administrators (n=36), front-line licensing staff (n=919), center-based providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102). *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

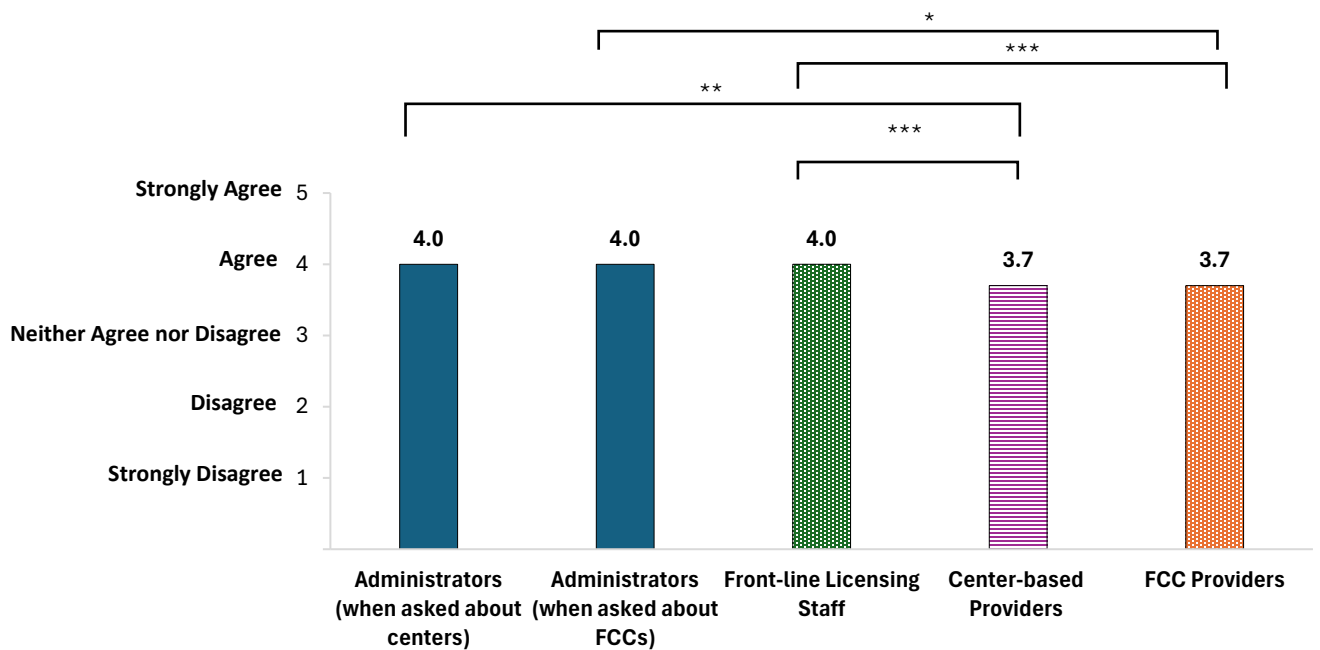
Regulations that are reasonable to meet

All respondents were asked to report the extent to which they agreed that licensing regulations are reasonable to meet; licensing administrators were asked this question separately for centers and FCC.⁴ On average, licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff agreed that regulations are reasonable to meet, whereas center-based and FCC provider responses tended to fall between “neither agree nor disagree” and “agree.”

Licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff responses about whether regulations are reasonable to meet were higher on the agreement scale, on average, compared to center-based and FCC providers, though the difference was small (Figure 5). There were no statistically significant differences between center-based and FCC provider responses or between administrator and front-line licensing staff responses. It is possible that licensed providers experience challenges complying with regulations that administrators and front-line licensing staff may not be aware of.

⁴ Centers and family child care homes are typically required to meet different sets of licensing regulations. Therefore, our survey asked licensing administrators to indicate their agreement with two separate statements, “Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet for center-based programs,” and “Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet for family child care providers.” Front-line licensing staff, center-based providers, and FCC providers were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement “Child care licensing regulations are reasonable to meet.”

Figure 5. Average Agreement That Licensing Regulations Are Reasonable to Meet



Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Means are based on 3,178 responses, including administrators (n=36 when asked about centers, n=35 when asked about FCCs), front-line licensing staff (n=919), center-based providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102). *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

Regulations that are understandable

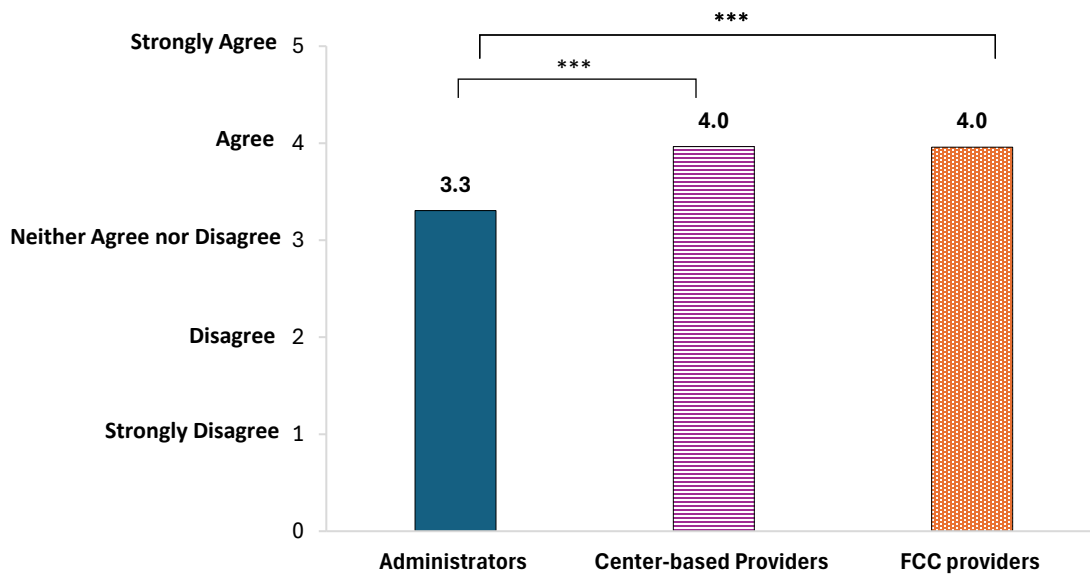
Finally, the surveys asked administrators to report how much they agreed that licensing regulations are described in plain language that providers can understand, and providers were asked to report how much they agreed that they understand all licensing regulations that apply to their program. Although these questions are not identical, they both speak to how understandable licensing regulations are. (A question on this topic was not included in the front-line licensing staff survey.)

Center-based and FCC providers, on average, agreed that they understood all licensing regulations that apply to their program. The average response among administrators fell between “neither agree nor disagree” and “agree.”

Center and FCC providers’ responses about whether regulations were understandable were significantly higher on the agreement scale on average, compared to licensing administrators (Figure 6). Differences in responses between administrators and licensed providers may be due to the differences in the survey item wording. Licensed providers reported on how much they agreed that they understood all licensing regulations that apply to their program, whereas administrators reported on how much they agreed that licensing regulations are described in plain language that providers can understand.

There were no statistically significant differences between center and FCC providers.

Figure 6. Average Agreement That Regulations Are Understandable



Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Means are based on 2,259 responses, including administrators (n=36), center-based providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102). *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

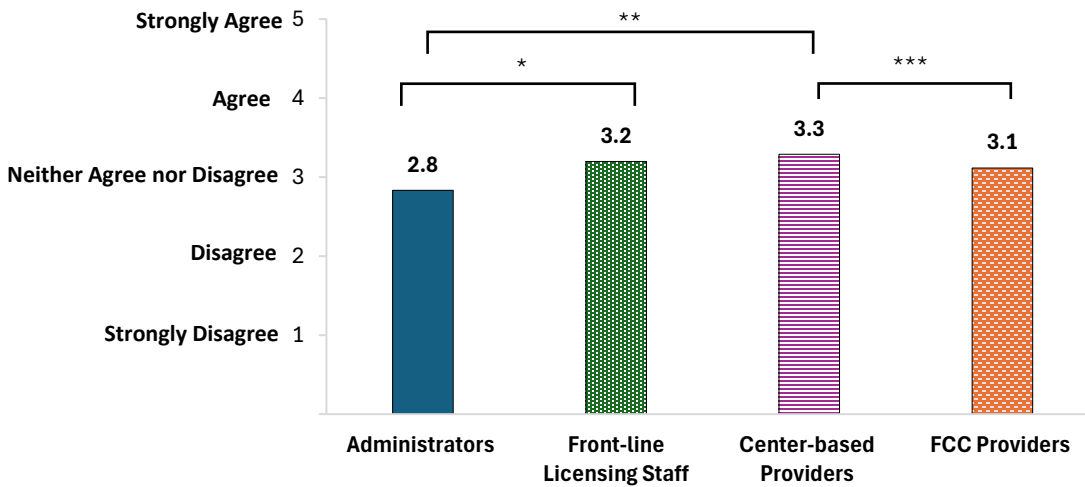
Conflicts with other standards

Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the statement, “Licensing regulations sometimes conflict with other standards.” Front-line licensing staff, center-based providers, and FCC providers, on average, responded between the “neither agree nor disagree” and “agree” options. Licensing administrators, on average, responded between the “disagree” and “neither agree nor disagree” options.

Although the average response for all groups hovered around the neutral response option (i.e., “neither agree nor disagree”), there were some statistically significant differences between groups. **On average, center-based provider responses about whether licensing regulations conflict with other standards were significantly higher on the agreement scale compared to licensing administrators and FCC programs (Figure 7).** The differences between center-based and FCC providers may reflect that centers are more likely to receive funding from more agencies (e.g., pre-K, Head Start) and are therefore more likely to be impacted by different sets of regulations.

Front-line licensing staff responses were, on average, also significantly higher on the agreement scale compared to licensing administrators. Front-line licensing staff work more closely with providers and therefore may be more aware of the challenges providers face compared to licensing administrators. There were no statistically significant differences between center-based provider and front-line licensing staff responses or between licensing administrator and FCC provider responses.

Figure 7. Average Agreement That Licensing Regulations Sometimes Conflict with Other Standards



Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Means are based on 3,178 responses, including administrators (n=36), front-line licensing staff (n=919), center-based providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102). *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

Study Limitations

The current study has a few limitations. First, the findings presented are based on data collected from respondents in 37 U.S. states and therefore may not be representative of licensing staff and licensed providers in the 13 states that were not included in our analysis. Second, the overall survey response rate varied across respondent groups from 40% to 75%. Although we applied weights to account for different response rates in each state, it is possible that licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and licensed providers who responded to our survey may have had systematically different perceptions compared to those who did not respond to the survey. Third, the findings presented here represent aggregate trends across states. These findings do not examine how state-specific policies may affect respondents' perceptions and differences in perceptions across respondent groups. Finally, providers' survey responses may have been affected by social desirability bias (Paulhus, 1991). Many of their responses fell in the neutral range. It is possible that licensed providers responded to survey items in a manner that is more favorable rather than reporting their true actual beliefs and experiences. Although providers were informed that the survey was being conducted as part of The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project and individual responses would not be shared outside of the project team, some providers may have believed the survey was being conducted by their licensing agency and thus may have responded in a more socially desirable manner.

Summary and Conclusion

In this brief, we presented and compared licensing administrator, front-line licensing staff, and licensed provider perceptions of licensing. Below we summarize our overall conclusions and suggestions for future research.

Licensing staff and licensed providers agreed that it is the role of CCEE licensing to support children's health and safety and CCEE providers. Licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, and licensed providers generally agreed that CCEE licensing supports children's health and safety and helps providers deliver higher quality care. Licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff agreed, on average, that

part of the role of the licensing unit is to build relationships with providers, help providers navigate the licensing process, connect them to resources, and help providers correct violations. These findings suggest that although protecting children was the primary driving force behind establishing CCEE licensing (Gold, 1980), licensing staff and licensed providers acknowledge that licensing also plays an important role in supporting providers, helping them succeed, and improving the quality of care they provide.

When asked about their views on the number of licensing regulations, whether regulations are reasonable to meet and whether regulations are easy to understand, there were some small, but statistically significant, differences between respondent groups. When asked whether there were too many regulations, licensed provider (center-based and FCC) responses were, on average, higher on the agreement scale compared to licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff. Licensed provider reports that regulations are reasonable to meet were, on average, lower on the agreement scale compared to licensing administrators and front-line licensing staff. In previous studies, some center directors and FCC providers reported that there are too many regulations to comply with and that regulations can be costly and misaligned with the realities of CCEE settings (Bromer et al., 2021; Rohacek et al., 2010). When asked whether licensing regulations were understandable, on average, licensing administrator responses were lower on the agreement scale compared to licensed providers. These findings indicate that at least some administrators think that some regulations may be hard to understand. Some licensing agencies address this, for example, by having written documents that provide additional information and guidance about the regulations. (see Diamond, et al., 2024, for more information) or offering technical assistance to help providers understand, meet, or maintain licensing regulations (see Villegas et al., 2024 for more information). See the [TRLECE project page](#) for all TRLECE briefs and reports.

Center-based provider reports about whether regulations sometimes conflict with other standards were, on average, higher on the agreement scale, compared to FCC provider reports, though the differences were small. This finding may be more prominent for center-based programs, compared to FCC providers, because centers may be more likely to receive funding that is subject to different requirements, including Head Start, pre-K, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) standards (BUILD Initiative & Child Trends, 2024; Weisenfeld & Frede, 2021). However, in previous qualitative studies, some center directors and FCC providers reported that inconsistencies across different CCEE monitoring systems created significant administrative burden, including duplicative paperwork and lack of alignment between licensing regulations and other standards like accreditation or subsidy (Bromer et al., 2021; Rohacek et al., 2010). The fragmentation of the broader set of early childhood services is well documented (Smith et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2023). The challenges providers face in navigating this disjointed system stress the importance of increasing the coordination and alignment of various sets of CCEE standards, monitoring, and documentation (Maxwell et al., 2016).

Front-line licensing staff and center-based provider responses about regulations being in conflict with other standards were, on average, also significantly higher on the agreement scale compared to licensing administrators, though the differences were small. Front-line licensing staff work directly with licensed providers and therefore may be more aware of the challenges providers face compared to licensing administrators. The findings presented in this report provide an initial description and comparison of licensing staff and licensed provider perceptions of CCEE licensing. In the future, we hope to further examine these data to better understand differences and similarities between respondent groups. For example, our analyses indicated that some respondent perceptions were more similar within states than across states (see Appendix A). Future analyses could examine how state-specific policies might affect licensing staff and provider perceptions of CCEE licensing. Future research could also examine whether there are patterns in the data that indicate that some licensing administrators, front-line licensing staff, or providers have more positive or negative views of licensing and, if so, what factors may influence their views. Finally, this report indicated that there were some small, but statistically significant, differences in licensing staff and licensed provider views of licensing regulations. Future research could further examine licensing staff and provider views on different aspects of licensing regulations, such as the cost, burden, and stringency of regulations.

Glossary

Child care and early education: Caregiving and educational services for children from birth to age 13. CCEE includes center- and home-based settings for infants, toddlers, preschool- and school-aged children. CCEE refers to services for a larger age group than early care and education (ECE), which consists of services provided only for young children (birth to age 5 who are not yet in kindergarten). ECE programs are included within the definition of CCEE.

Child care and early education center: “Child care services for fewer than 24 hours per day per child in a nonresidential setting, unless care in excess of 24 hours is due to the nature of the parent(s)’ work” (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2015, p. 3).

Child care and early education licensing: Establishes regulations that must be met to legally operate a child care program. Child care licensing also monitors and enforces those regulations.

Child care and early education provider: An organization or individual that provides CCEE services (adapted from Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d.).

Family child care: “Child care provided for one or more unrelated children in a provider’s home setting.” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d.). “Family child care” can be used to describe a provider (i.e., person) or a setting (i.e., home).

Front-line licensing staff: Individuals who routinely conduct licensing inspections of licensed CCEE programs. They may have other responsibilities as well, as long as one of their jobs is to routinely conduct licensing inspections.

Inspection: A visit to assess if a CCEE provider is meeting licensing regulations.

Licensed child care and early education: CCEE programs operated in homes or facilities that fall within the regulatory system of a state or community and comply with those regulations. Many states have different licensing and regulatory requirements (adapted from Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d.).

Licensing administrator: The person who oversees the operation of the CCEE licensing agency.

Licensing agency: The agency responsible for regulating and licensing CCEE facilities. The term “licensing unit” may also be used.

Licensing procedures: Information about carrying out the functions of the licensing unit.

Licensing regulations: “Requirements that providers must meet to legally operate child care services in a state or locality, including registration requirements established under state, local, or Tribal law” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d.). (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections uses this definition for “licensing or regulatory requirements.”)

Monitoring: “The process used to enforce child care providers’ compliance with licensing rules and regulations” (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d.).

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Appendix A. Analysis

We assessed the missingness in our variables of interest to identify whether missing data should be addressed in our analysis. We found that certain respondent characteristics were associated with the likelihood of missing data, meaning that the data were not missing at random. Therefore, we conducted multiple imputation for the front-line CCEE licensing staff survey and CCEE provider survey separately, using the variables of interest for our research questions along with key demographic variables (e.g., race and ethnicity, educational attainment, gender). We did not impute the administrator survey responses due to the small analytic sample ($n=37$) and population of CCEE administrators ($N=57$).

To statistically compare Likert scale survey responses across groups, we considered two approaches: linear regression models or multilevel models. To make this decision, we calculated intraclass coefficients (ICCs) to assess the extent to which responses from the same state tended to be similar to one another. We interpreted an ICC equal to or greater than 0.10 to indicate meaningful similarity among responses within the same state, suggesting that we use a multilevel model to account for the state effect, instead of a linear regression model that would not account for nesting at the state level (Robson & Pevalin, 2016). We found that two dependent variables had ICCs greater than 0.10 and decided to proceed with multilevel models that account for the fact that respondents within the same state were more likely to be similar to one another than respondents across states. We disaggregated licensed provider responses by setting type (centers and FCCs), to examine whether there were differences in perceptions of licensing by setting. Previous research suggests that some provider experiences with licensing may be unique to each setting type (Bromer et al., 2021; Rohacek et al., 2010).

To compare administrator and front-line licensing responses about the primary role of licensing staff, we asked respondents to select the primary purpose of the licensing unit (for administrators) or their child care licensing role (for front-line licensing staff). We then used chi-square tests to statistically compare their responses.

Appendix B. Descriptive Statistics

Table B1. Item-level Means (and Standard Deviations) by Respondent Group

Survey Item	Administrators	Front-line licensing staff	Center-based providers	FCC providers
The child care licensing system helps support children's health and safety	4.432 (1.119)	4.336 (0.711)	4.299 (0.922)	4.304 (0.91)
The child care licensing system helps providers deliver higher quality care	3.865 (1.11)	4.01 (0.887)	3.99 (1.082)	3.912 (1.138)
Administrators: The role of the licensing unit is to... Front-line staff: My role is to...				
Ensure children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment	4.784 (0.712)	4.726 (0.663)	--	--
Build relationships with providers	4.486 (0.768)	4.449 (0.782)	--	--
Help providers new to licensing navigate the licensing process	4.622 (0.758)	4.44 (0.792)	--	--
Help existing providers navigate the licensing process	4.541 (0.836)	4.428 (0.805)	--	--
Help improve the quality of child care	4.297 (0.845)	4.408 (0.844)	--	--
Ensure that the regulations and laws are enforced-	4.73 (0.732)	4.624 (0.707)	--	--
Help providers correct violations	4.432 (0.929)	4.35 (0.842)	--	--
Help reduce the incidence of violations	4.486 (0.804)	4.353 (0.835)	--	--
Help connect providers to resources and supports	4.541 (0.803)	4.356 (0.8)	--	--
There are too many licensing regulations	2.611 (0.803)	2.481 (1.01)	3.038 (1.154)	3.289 (1.17)
Licensing regulations sometimes conflict with other standards (e.g., QRIS standards, fire safety requirements, Head Start Program Performance Standards)	2.833 (0.941)	3.198 (1.053)	3.289 (1.071)	3.115 (1.056)
Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet	for centers: 4.000 (0.676) for FCCs: 3.971 (0.822)	3.966 (0.766)	3.65 (0.954)	3.674 (0.982)
Administrators: Licensing regulations are described in plain language that providers can understand Center-based and FCC providers: I understand all regulations that apply to my program	3.306 (0.951)	--	3.965 (0.865)	3.959 (0.892)

Appendix C. Statistical Comparisons Across Respondent Groups

Table C1. Multilevel Models Comparing Administrator, Front-line Licensing Staff, Center-based Provider, and FCC Provider Perceptions of the CCEE Licensing System

Survey item	Comparison ^a	B	SEB	p-value
The child care licensing system helps support children's health and safety	Administrators vs. Center-based providers	0.153	0.18	0.393
	Front-line licensing staff vs. Center-based providers	0.027	0.048	0.572
	FCC providers vs. Center-based providers	0.015	0.028	0.595
	Administrators vs. FCC providers	0.139	0.181	0.444
	Front-line licensing staff vs. FCC providers	0.012	0.051	0.809
	Administrators vs. Front-line licensing staff	0.126	0.196	0.520
The child care licensing system helps providers deliver higher quality care	Administrators vs. Center-based providers	-0.090	0.166	0.590
	Front-line licensing staff vs. Center-based providers	0.031	0.057	0.579
	FCC providers vs. Center-based providers	-0.036	0.061	0.554
	Administrators vs. FCC providers	-0.053	0.19	0.779
	Front-line licensing staff vs. FCC providers	0.068	0.058	0.243
	Administrators vs. Front-line licensing staff	-0.121	0.181	0.503

Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Analyses for both survey items are based on 3,179 respondents with responses, including administrators (n=37), front-line licensing staff (n=919), center providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102).

^aThe reference group is listed second.

Table C2. Multilevel Models Comparing Administrator Perceptions About the Role of the CCEE Licensing Unit and Front-line Licensing Staff Perceptions About Their Role

Survey item	B	SE B	p-value
Administrator: <i>The role of the licensing unit is to...</i> Front-line licensing staff: <i>My role is to...</i>			
Ensure children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment	0.044	0.116	0.706
Build relationships with providers	0.045	0.115	0.696
Help providers new to licensing navigate the licensing process	0.166	0.125	0.183
Help existing providers navigate the licensing process	0.104	0.132	0.431
Help improve the quality of child care	-0.078	0.140	0.576
Ensure that the regulations and laws are enforced	0.109	0.119	0.360
Help providers correct violations	0.126	0.155	0.415
Help reduce the incidence of violations	0.164	0.130	0.209
Help connect providers to resources and supports	0.207	0.125	0.099

Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey

Note: Analyses for all survey items are based on 956 respondents with responses across licensing administrators (n=37) and front-line licensing staff surveys (n=919). We used front-line licensing staff as a reference group to calculate coefficients across all items.

Table C3. Chi-square Tests Comparing Administrator and Front-line Licensing Staff's Selection of the Primary Purpose of Licensing Staff

Survey item	Chi-square statistic	p-value
Administrator: <i>The primary purpose of the licensing unit is to...</i> Front-line licensing staff: <i>The primary purpose of child care licensing role is to...</i>		
Ensure children are cared for in a healthy and safe environment	0.534	<0.001
Ensure that the regulations and laws are enforced	0.211	<0.001
Help improve the quality of child care	0.006	0.526

Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey

Note: Analyses for all survey items are based on 937 respondents, including licensing administrators (n=36) and front-line licensing staff (n=901).

Table C4. Multilevel Models Comparing Administrator, Front-line Licensing Staff, Center-based Provider, and FCC Provider Perceptions of CCEE Regulations

Survey item	Comparison ^c	B	SE B	p-value
There are too many licensing regulations	Administrators vs. Center-based providers	-0.398	0.156	0.011
	Front-line licensing staff vs. Center-based providers	-0.596	0.090	<0.001
	FCC providers vs. Center-based providers	0.204	0.050	<0.001
	Administrators vs. FCC providers	-0.602	0.152	<0.001
	Front-line licensing staff vs. FCC providers	-0.800	0.071	<0.001
	Administrators vs. Front-line licensing staff	0.198	0.155	0.201
Licensing regulations sometimes conflict with other standards (e.g., QRIS standards, fire safety requirements, Head Start Program Performance Standards)	Administrators vs. Center-based providers	-0.476	0.168	0.005
	Front-line licensing staff vs. Center-based providers	-0.092	0.059	0.117
	FCC providers vs. Center-based providers	-0.199	0.044	<0.001
	Administrators vs. FCC providers	-0.277	0.158	0.078
	Front-line licensing staff vs. FCC providers	0.106	0.082	0.192
	Administrators vs. Front-line licensing staff	-0.384	0.186	0.039
Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet for center-based programs ^a	Administrators vs. Center-based providers	0.362	0.129	0.005
	Front-line licensing staff vs. Center-based providers vs.	0.350	0.064	<0.001
	Administrators vs. Front-line licensing staff	0.012	0.144	0.936
Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet for FCC providers ^a	Administrators vs. FCC providers	0.363	0.154	0.018
	Front-line licensing staff vs. FCC providers	0.335	0.062	<0.001
	Administrators vs. Front-line licensing staff	0.028	0.159	0.861
Administrators: Licensing regulations are described in plain language that providers can understand ^b Providers: I understand all licensing regulations that apply to my program	Administrators vs. Center-based providers	-0.651	0.157	<0.001
	FCC providers vs. Center-based providers	0.032	0.033	0.330
	Administrators vs. FCC providers	-0.683	0.163	<0.001

Source: TRLECE 2023 CCEE Licensing Administrator Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Front-line Licensing Staff Survey, TRLECE 2023 CCEE Provider Survey About Licensing

Note: Analyses were based on 3,178 responses, including administrators (n=36), front-line licensing staff (n=919), center providers (n=1,121), and FCC providers (n=1,102).

^a Licensing administrators were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements, "Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet for center-based programs" and "Licensing regulations are reasonable to meet for family child care providers." Front-line licensing staff, center-based providers, and FCC providers were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement "Child care licensing regulations are reasonable to meet."

^b Front-line licensing staff were not asked this question. The survey items were worded differently for licensing administrators and licensing providers.

^c The reference group is listed second.