

Cost of Care Survey Tips

2026–2027 Provider Year

Early Learning Coalition Sample Purpose of the Cost of Care Survey

The Cost of Care Survey collects information about the **true cost of operating your childcare program**. The data is used to:

- Understand childcare costs in your community
- Support School Readiness Reimbursement Rate Decisions
- Inform state and local planning for early learning services

Your responses do not affect your current contract status, but accuracy is extremely important.

Before You Begin: What to Gathe information available before starting the survey:

- Current **private tuition rates** by age group
- **Payroll information** (wages, benefits, substitutes)
- Monthly or annual **operating expenses**, such as:
 - Rent or mortgage
 - Utilities
 - Food and supplies
 - Insurance
 - Curriculum and classroom materials
- Your **hours of operation** and days of service

- Enrollment numbers by age group

 *Tip:* You may use estimates if exact numbers are not available.

General Tips for Completing the Survey

✓ Be Honest and Accurate

- Enter what you **actually charge and spend**, not what you wish you could charge.
- Do not lower or inflate numbers to “look better.”

✓ Do Not Leave Blank Fields

- If a question does not apply, enter “**0**” instead of leaving it empty.

✓ Use Current Information

- Base answers on your **most recent operating year** or current rates.

✓ Take Your Time

- You can usually **save and return** to the survey later.
- Review each page before moving forward.

Tuition & Fee Questions

- Report **private pay rates**, even if most families receive School Readiness.
- Include:
 - Weekly or daily tuition
 - Registration or supply fees
 - Any additional charges families pay
- If you offer discounts (siblings, staff, military), include them where prompted.

 *Reminder:* School Readiness reimbursement rates are **not** private pay rates.

Staffing & Payroll Tips

- Include:
 - Teachers
 - Directors/administrators
 - Floaters and substitutes
- Report:
 - Hourly wages or salaries
 - Payroll taxes and benefits, if applicable
- If staff wear multiple hats, **estimate how time is divided.**

Operating Expenses

Include regular business costs such as:

- Rent or mortgage
- Utilities (electric, water, internet)
- Food and kitchen supplies
- Classroom materials and toys
- Cleaning and maintenance
- Insurance and licensing fees

 *Home-based providers:* Include the portion of household expenses used for childcare.

Enrollment Questions

- Use **average enrollment**, not your licensed capacity.
- Report by age group as accurately as possible.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- 🚫 Leaving answers blank
- 🚫 Reporting School Readiness rates as private pay
- 🚫 Guessing wildly instead of estimating realistically
- 🚫 Rushing through without reviewing

Submitting the Survey

- Review all responses before submitting.
- Once submitted, changes may require coalition assistance.
- Watch your **Provider Portal messages** in case follow-up is needed.

If you have questions or are unsure how to answer:

- Contact your **Early Learning Coalition Provider Services team**

Your participation helps strengthen early learning services across your community. Thank you for taking the time to complete the Cost of Care Survey.

Finance Team