

Important Features to Help Parents Navigate Child Care Consumer Education Websites:



One of the main purposes of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 (CCDBG), is “to encourage States to provide consumer education information to help parents make informed choices about child care services and to promote involvement by parents and family members in the development of their children in child care settings.” Each state must have an online consumer education website.

Important Features

A comprehensive online provider directory is an extremely useful tool for parents seeking child care programs. It saves parents time from unnecessary searching and also provides the opportunity for the best fit for their multiage children with different needs. Through reviewing 40 provider directories, we identified some important features that are most relevant to parents’ program selection process. With these features in the directory, parents are able to narrow down their options to the ones that fit best to their needs.

■ Basic Search

Name: This allows parents and community members to identify a particular program—for example, the one which a child already attends, one they have passed by in their neighborhood, or one that has been recommended to them. It is a basic and necessary requirement for all sites.

Age: It is important to have providers offer distinctive quality care that meet the developmental needs of different age groups. Additionally, parents with multiage children need a directory that helps them take care of all children potentially across multiple locations. The ability to search for programs that serve children in a range from infant to school-age or to search for programs that serve “school-age children only” is essential in allowing parents to make the best choice for their children and family. Checkboxes to allow parents to select these combinations of ages are helpful.

Location: A location function is a crucial element for parents to identify nearby programs whether to their work, their home, another child’s provider or their school-age children’s school etc. 80% of parents see location as one of their most important considerations. We recommend a distance search function (eg 1 mile, 5 miles, 10 miles) searchable by zip code or address paired with a map. This allows parents to locate all the providers in a certain area, which can also help parents of multiage children find nearby programs for each child. The map will help parents visually understand the programs location and think about possible transportation.

■ Advanced Search

Schedule: A tool that allows a user to easily navigate the schedule of operation hours will be really helpful for working parents that face time conflicts, especially parents who may work nights or weekends or non-traditional hours. Sites that allow parents to pick specific days and/or times during the search process are particularly helpful. Additionally, school age children may have other enrichments on certain days of the week and only need care at particular times. These tools help parents pick the best options.

Languages: Programs may be privileged to have staff that communicate in different languages reflective of their communities. Allowing parents to search by programs with staff that speak a language the family is most comfortable communicating in could promote child care access and quality. States would benefit from listing this information in the search.

Financial: For many families, the cost they pay is a determining factor of program selection. It is important for websites to include both payment rates information (eg. 200\$/week) and financial program information (e.g. Subsidy Participation)

Environment: Environment information is important for children with special requirements such as allergies and differing mobility needs. We suggest that websites at least have environment information listed on each providers detail page.

Transportation: Transportation information allows parents, especially parents with school-age children to know how their young children can safely transport from school to the provider. Having transportation information available not only simplifies parents' searching process, but also reduces potential safety issues and parents' concern. School age parents will benefit from knowing which programs will provide transportation from their child's school.

Activities: For parents of school-age children quality programs often mean those that match the child's interests. School-age programs should be able to list on their provider page activities such as STEM learning, music, sports so that parents can make a good match.

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