
Parent perspectives: Child support participant survey

Minnesota Department of Human Services
Child Support Division
September 9, 2022

This project was funded by [HHS-2018-ACF-OCSE-FD-1368](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Project Team

Ashley Johnson
Charlie Sellew

Enterprise Director

Beth Bibus

Assistant Directors

Lisa Anderson
Kris Van Amber

Contact Information

Telephone: 651-259-3800
Email: Management.Analysis@state.mn.us
Website: mn.gov/mmb/mad

Address:
658 Cedar Street
Centennial Office Building
Room 300
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

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Executive summary

In January and February 2022, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Support Division (CSD) invited a sample of parents with an open child support case to participate in a survey about their experiences with the program. Management Analysis and Development (MAD) administered the survey and received 1,206 responses (12.8 percent response rate).

Nearly two-thirds of respondents were parents receiving child support payments (receiving parents, often referred to as “custodial parents” within CSD) and just over one-third were parents making child support payments (paying parents, often referred to as “non-custodial parents” within CSD). Nearly three-quarters of respondents had participated in the program for four or more years and just over two-thirds of respondents identified as White. An equal proportion of respondents reported making more than or less than \$50,000 annually.

Average ratings on statements about overall experience, logistics, payments, and communications ranged from mixed (neither agree nor disagree) to negative (disagree to strongly disagree); none of the statements received a particularly positive average rating across all respondents.

Broadly, survey findings are directionally consistent with findings from interviews conducted with program participants in January and February 2021. Findings from interviews and the survey provide concrete suggestions for better serving participants.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- Respondents who identified as American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, or Indigenous consistently rated statements lower than respondents that identified with another racial or ethnic group, on average. Respondents who identified as having an Other race or ethnicity also often rated statements lower than respondents who identified with another racial or ethnic group, on average.
- Custodial parents consistently rated their overall experience more positively than non-custodial parents, and statements about overall experience included some of the greatest levels of disagreement between these two groups.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed that child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met. In contrast, fewer respondents said they trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of their children, or that the program is fair and unbiased.
- Parent perceptions of program logistics were generally neutral. While nearly two-thirds of respondents said they understood how to provide updates about a change in their address or contact information, only half said they understood how to provide updates when they experience a life event.
- About one-third of respondents said they would be interested in referrals to other programs and resources. Overall and across all subgroups, the number of parents interested in referrals was greater than the number who reported having been connected with other programs and resources.

- More than two-thirds of respondents agreed that it is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on their case. Perceptions of automatic payments and income withholding and consistently collecting payments were also among the highest-rated statements overall.
- Respondents' ratings on statements about communications ranged from mixed to more negative. Overall, statements about general communication and information were rated lower by respondents (there was less agreement) than statements about county child support officers, which were rated higher (there was more agreement).
- While custodial parents consistently rated statements about communications higher than non-custodial parents, these statements included some of the lowest levels of disagreement between these two groups.
- Over half of respondents expressed interest in receiving email and text messaging communications from the program, and some said they already receive these communications.
- Most commonly, respondents selected email as their preferred communication method and monthly and quarterly communications as their preferred frequencies.

These and other findings are described in more detail in the [Findings](#) section of the report.

MAD developed recommendations for the child support program based on input from both interview participants and survey respondents. The program should explore these recommendations in the broader context of programmatic goals, priorities, feasibility, and available resources. These recommendations include:

- Build on the findings of this study and move toward action planning and implementation.
- In future research, explore other methods of parent engagement that would complement surveys and interviews.
- Proactively communicate with parents throughout their time in the program using a range of communication methods.
- Consider opportunities to connect parents with other programs and resources.
- Consult with county child support offices to identify opportunities to improve parent interactions with county workers and leverage interactions with county workers to inform and connect parents.
- Seek to better understand the experiences of parents who identify as American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, or Indigenous.
- Explore simplifying application and modification processes.
- Build on parents' appreciation for automated payments and review suggestions about payment logistics to determine if they can be incorporated.
- Further explore differences in opinion among parents regarding payment calculations.

These recommendations are discussed in more detail in the [Recommendations](#) section of the report.

Background

Child support in Minnesota

Minnesota's child support program administers and enforces court orders that include child support payments between parents. A variety of levels and branches of government play roles in the child support program:¹

- The **federal government's** Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) sets minimum standards for state child support programs and provides the majority of program funding.
- The Minnesota **legislative branch** establishes child support laws in Minnesota.
- The Minnesota **judicial branch** interprets and applies child support laws in individual cases. This includes district court judges, family court referees, and child support magistrates.
- The Minnesota **Department of Human Services** (DHS) Child Support Division (CSD) oversees the state's program, maintains PRISM (the case management system), manages administrative enforcement tools (such as driver's license suspensions), establishes program policies, provides training and assistance to counties, and maintains relationships with the federal government, other country and state programs, and other Minnesota state agencies.
- **County** child support agencies administer the program. County workers work directly with participating parents and their cases.

Courts can order child support during a divorce or separation of a married couple with minor children or when parentage is established for unmarried parents, either voluntarily or through a contested paternity process. Courts can also establish child support orders when a child is in the legal custody of an individual other than a parent.

In Minnesota, DHS CSD and county child support offices serve 314,000 parents and 220,000 children.² Custodial (receiving) parents who participate in certain public assistance programs are required to use the child support program to administer and enforce child support. In addition, parents not participating in public assistance programs can voluntarily apply to the child support program to administer and enforce child support. When the child support program is not involved, parents instead directly handle child support payments and privately settle concerns. Once the child support program is involved, it will support parents in locating the other parent (if applicable), establishing parentage (if applicable), establishing child support orders, processing child support payments, and enforcing child support orders.

¹ This section is adapted from Aves, L. (2015). Minnesota's Child Support Laws: An Overview (State of Minnesota, Minnesota House of Representatives, Research Department). St. Paul, MN.

<https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/chldsupp.pdf>

² Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Support Division. (2021). Annual Performance Report. St. Paul, MN.

Terminology

Participants in the child support program and county workers are referred to using different terms by the program and by parents themselves.

Legally, participants are defined as either “obligors” or “obligees.” According to Minnesota Statute 518A.26, subdivisions 13 and 14³:

- “Obligee means a person to whom payments for maintenance or support are owed.”
- “Obligor means a person obligated to pay maintenance or support.”

Within the Department of Human Services Child Support Division, participants are referred to either as the “custodial parent” or the “non-custodial parent.” Contrary to the naming convention, these terms are not related to the amount of custody a parent has (or does not have). Instead, these terms refer to which individual receives child support (“custodial parent”) and which individual pays child support (“non-custodial parent”).⁴

In program participants interviews, individuals were generally referred to as “paying parents” and “receiving parents.” Table 1 displays the different ways in which child support participants are described in different contexts.

Table 1. Typical terms for child support participants in different sources/contexts

Source/Context	Term for those who receive child support	Term for those who pay child support
Statute	Obligee	Obligor
Department of Human Services Child Support Division	Custodial parent	Non-custodial parent
Participants	Receiving parent	Paying parent

This report generally uses the terms “custodial parent” and “non-custodial parent” to match the terminology used within the Department of Human Services Child Support Division.

In addition, county child support workers are sometimes referred to by parents as “case workers” or “case managers,” although these terms are not necessarily ones that counties or DHS CSD use for these positions. This report generally uses the terms “case worker” when describing what parents said and uses the term “county worker” when making recommendations about how the program can best support these roles.

³ Minnesota Statute 518A.26, subdivisions 13 and 14: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/518A.26>, Minnesota’s Child Support Laws: An Overview: <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/chldsupp.pdf>.

⁴ For example, a parent who makes child support payments to another parent would be described as a non-custodial parent within DHS CSD, even if this parent had majority legal custody of the child. This situation could occur when a parent with majority (but not full) custody has greater income than the other parent.

Project background

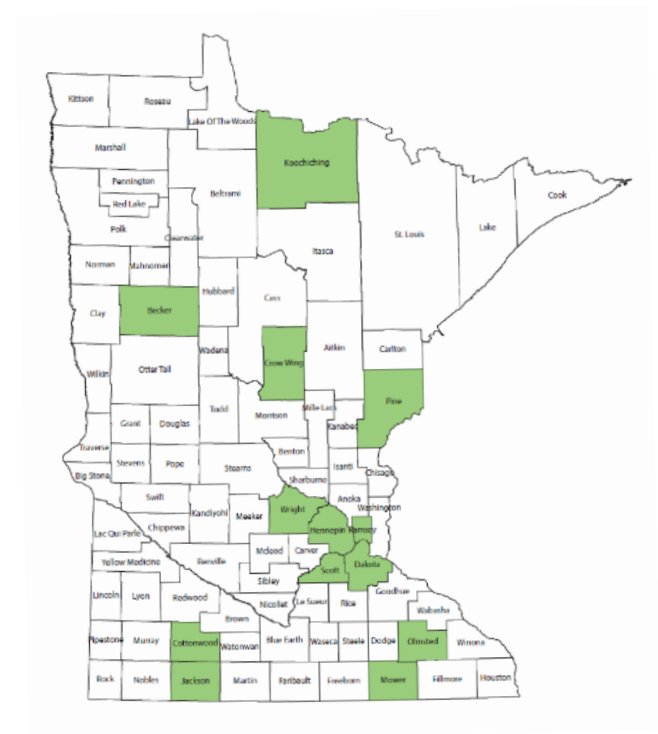
CSD engaged Management Analysis and Development (MAD) in summer 2020 to identify ways the child support program could be improved and develop deliverables associated with the digital marketing grant. MAD is a management consulting practice housed in Minnesota Management and Budget. In the first phase of this effort, MAD consultants interviewed program participants to understand their overall experiences, as well as opportunities and barriers experienced related to the program. In the second phase of this effort, MAD consultants facilitated a series of workshops with state agency and county staff to discuss what was learned from interviews with parents, what efforts were already underway, and what gaps remained between feedback from parents and existing efforts. Following workshops, MAD consultants designed a survey to reach a large number of program participants. Survey development was based on findings from interviews with parents in phase one and discussions with state agency and county staff in phase two. The goal of the survey was to learn about parents' perspectives about how the child support program has benefited their families, challenges they have experienced, and changes they would recommend.

This work is part of a project [funded](#) by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to

increase participation in Minnesota's child support program in pilot counties (Figure 1).⁵

This broader project includes information gathering and program evaluation (including this research) as well as targeted digital marketing and text messaging. CSD will use the results of this research to inform future marketing efforts as well as inform improvements to the child support program overall.

Figure 1. Map of Minnesota's child support program pilot counties



⁵ The pilot counties are Becker, Cottonwood, Crow Wing, Dakota, Hennepin, Jackson, Koochiching, Mower, Olmsted, Pine, Ramsey, Scott, and Wright.

Methodology

Response rate

In January and February 2022, MAD consultants emailed 9,810 parents and other individuals to invite and remind them to participate in a survey. A total of 386 email addresses bounced. Of the 9,424 email addresses that worked, 1,206 individuals provided at least a partial response to the survey (12.8 percent of those with a working email responded). Partial surveys (surveys where respondents did not complete the entire survey) were included if individuals provided responses to four or more statements or questions. Survey questions are included in Appendix A.

The response rate for this survey was likely influenced, in part, by email quality in DHS' Providing Resources to Improve Support in Minnesota (PRISM) case management system where child support participant data are stored. For example, some emails in PRISM may be inaccurately recorded, some may no longer be actively used by participants (even if they are active), and some may be inactive.

The response rate may have also been impacted by the enforcement nature of the program, with which participants may not want to interact more than required. Additionally, the program has not routinely reached out to participants for their feedback at the state level, meaning there are not established relationships between the state and participants. This could have an impact on participants' trust in the program and may lower their response rate if they are unsure how the program will (or will not) use their input.

Multiple survey tool resources note a response rate between 5 and 30 percent as typical.⁶ They also note that external customer satisfaction surveys tend to have lower response rates than other types of surveys, such as internal employee surveys.⁷

Sampling approach

CSD used administrative records from PRISM to gather a sample of participants from pilot counties who had an open case with a court order and current support due.

⁶ Survey response rates: <https://peoplepulse.com/resources/useful-articles/survey-response-rates/#:~:text=Customer%20satisfaction%20surveys%20and%20market,respondents%20who%20complete%20your%20survey.%E2%80%9D>; What is a good survey response rate for online customer surveys?: <https://delighted.com/blog/average-survey-response-rate>; What is a good survey response rate?: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/blog/what-is-a-good-survey-response-rate>; Average survey response rate – What you need to know: <https://www.customerthermometer.com/customer-surveys/average-survey-response-rate/>

⁷ What is a good survey response rate for online customer surveys?: <https://delighted.com/blog/average-survey-response-rate>; What's the average survey response rate? [2021 benchmark]: <https://surveyanyplace.com/blog/average-survey-response-rate/>; What is a good survey response rate?: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/blog/what-is-a-good-survey-response-rate>

CSD excluded participants meeting any of the following criteria from the sample:

- Participants currently in the intake process
- Alleged fathers for whom paternity has not yet been established
- Cases that do not have an order for support
- Closed cases
- Non-IV-D cases (that is, cases that are not using the child support program to administer and enforce support)
- Cases maintained outside of Minnesota (that is, out-of-state parents receiving support from Minnesota parents)
- Individuals with no email address on file
- Duplicate records
- Participants who are incarcerated
- Non-custodial parents who have contempt proceedings against them
- Cases with good cause granted or pending⁸
- Tribal cases
- Cases outside of pilot counties

CSD used a non-proportional stratified random sample, which selected equal-size groups of participants in four distinct categories:

1. Non-custodial parents with no enforcement remedy history
2. Non-custodial parents with a case history of at least one enforcement remedy in the past five years
3. Custodial parents with no enforcement remedy history
4. Custodial parents with a case history of at least one enforcement remedy in the past five years

MAD sent survey invitations in two waves, with the first wave of 5,000 participants sent in January 2022, and the second wave of 4,810 sent in February 2022. In the first wave of survey invitations, an equal number of custodial and non-custodial parents were sampled. The second wave included an unequal number of custodial and non-custodial parents, after duplicate records from the first wave were removed. In the second wave of participants, 3,047 custodial parents and 1,763 non-custodial parents were invited to take the survey.

CSD used administrative data to develop the sample but only shared a subset of that data (name, email address, and parent role) with MAD for survey purposes. Additional information about participants, including program tenure, geographic location, race and ethnicity, absolute income (respondent's annual income), relative income (respondent's income relative to the other parent's income), and any enforcement remedy were self-reported by participants in the survey.

⁸ Parents participating in public assistance programs must help pursue child support unless they have good cause for not cooperating. Good cause exists in cases such as when the parent is a current participant in the Safe at Home address confidentiality program for people who fear for their safety, when the parent conceived the child as a result of rape or incest, or when legal proceedings for the adoption of the child are pending.

Survey respondents

Table 1 provides demographic information for survey respondents and for parents in pilot county cases overall.

Table 2. Survey respondent and pilot county participant case demographics

Category	Survey Number	Survey Percent	Pilot County Percent
Role⁹			
Custodial (receiving) parents	732	61%	51%
Non-custodial (paying) parents	474	39%	49%
Case Tenure¹⁰			
Less than 1 year	75	7%	4%
1–3 years	208	19%	6%
4–6 years	269	25%	5%
7+ years	527	49%	85%
Minnesota residency¹¹			
Yes	1005	93%	79%
No	71	7%	14%
Pilot county¹²			
Becker	2	0%	2%
Cottonwood	3	0%	1% ¹³
Crow Wing	26	3%	3%
Dakota	172	21%	13%
Hennepin	291	35%	46%
Jackson	1	0%	1%
Koochiching	5	1%	1%
Mower	13	2%	2%
Olmsted	49	6%	5%

⁹ For survey respondents, role information came from PRISM data associated with them at the time of survey invitation. For pilot county participants overall, data is at the person-case level in PRISM, where there are more custodial parents than non-custodial parents because of an inability to locate some non-custodial parents.

¹⁰ For survey respondents, case tenure and all subsequent demographic questions were self-reported. For pilot county participants overall, tenure is defined as the time since the person was first entered into PRISM.

¹¹ For pilot county participants overall, Minnesota residency is defined as the state of the participant's most recent mailing address. An additional 7% had no mailing address listed.

¹² For survey respondents, county percentages reflect self-reported residence excluding respondents who answered "None of the above" or who reported a residence outside of Minnesota.

¹³ In PRISM, Cottonwood and Jackson counties are combined into a single entity.

Category	Survey Number	Survey Percent	Pilot County Percent
Pine	10	1%	1%
Ramsey	118	14%	21%
Scott	63	8%	3%
Wright	85	10%	4%
Race and ethnicity¹⁴			
Black/African American	141	13%	33%
American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous	20	2%	3%
Asian	55	5%	4%
Hispanic/Latinx	53	5%	3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	7	1%	<1%
White	731	68%	37%
Other	13	1%	14%
Unknown	5	0%	6%
Prefer not to answer	103	10%	N/A
Annual income¹⁵			
\$0–\$24,999	134	13%	30%
\$25,000–\$49,999	316	30%	20%
\$50,000–\$74,999	238	22%	11%
\$75,000–\$99,999	113	11%	4%
\$100,000+	103	10%	3%
Prefer not to answer / Not reported	167	16%	31%
Relative income¹⁶			
Higher than other parent	264	25%	17%
About the same as the other parent	172	16%	13%
Lower than other parent	350	33%	17%
I don't know	285	27%	52%

¹⁴ Respondents could select all race and ethnicity categories that applied. Cross-tabulations for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Unknown are not presented in this report data privacy purposes as fewer than 10 individuals identified with these groups.

¹⁵ For pilot county participants overall, annual wage amounts are calculated from DEED wage data.

¹⁶ For pilot county participants overall, “higher than other parent” and “lower than other parent” are defined as cases where one parent earned more than \$10,000 more or less than another parent, “about the same” is defined as cases where parents earned within \$10,000 of each other, and “I don’t know” is defined as either parent not having wages in PRISM.

Category	Survey Number	Survey Percent	Pilot County Percent
Enforcement remedy¹⁷			
Yes	437	41%	48%
No	414	38%	62%
I don't know	226	21%	N/A

Relative to the pilot county participant population overall, the survey had:

- More custodial (receiving) parents, and fewer non-custodial (paying) parents
- More parents in the first several years in the program, and fewer with 7+ years in the program
- More Minnesota residents, and fewer non-residents
- More residents of suburban and rural counties, and fewer residents of Hennepin and Ramsey counties
- More parents in the highest income categories, and fewer parents in the lowest income category
- More White parents, and fewer Black parents and parents with an Other race or ethnicity
- Fewer parents with no enforcement history

The implications of these differences are discussed below in the Interpreting findings section of the report, as well as in the [Recommendations](#) section of the report.

Interpreting findings

The report is organized into five main parts:

- **Overarching findings:** Cross-cutting findings from sections that follow.
- **Overall experience:** Findings about respondents' overall experience with the program, including perceived benefit and importance, overall fairness, and trust.
- **Program logistics:** Findings about respondents' experience with applying for the program and level of understanding about various administrative aspects of the program. Also includes findings about connections to other government programs and resources that could benefit families, and interest in other government programs and resources.
- **Payments:** Findings about respondents' experiences related to making or receiving payments (for example, how amounts are determined, fairness, methods of making or receiving payments, collection of payments, and changing payment amounts).
- **Communications:** Findings about respondents' experience locating and receiving information about the child support program and their case, and with child support workers. Also includes findings about resources used to access case information, interest in receiving email or text communications from the program, and communication method and frequency preferences.

¹⁷ For pilot county participant cases overall, percentages total over 100 because the denominator is at the participant level and some participants have had both cases with enforcement remedy history as well as other cases without enforcement remedy history. Enforcement remedies of any status and of any type are included.

Similar to the methodological approach used in parent interviews, MAD designed this survey to obtain feedback from a range of parents to inform future improvements to the child support program, not to provide precise estimates of perceptions among the total parent population. For example, as noted in the “Sampling approach” section above, parents currently in the intake process were excluded from the sample because they might not yet have opinions on all aspects of the program.

In addition, as noted in the “Survey respondents” section above, parents responding to the survey were more likely to be White, higher income, newer to the program, and have enforcement remedy history compared to pilot county parents overall. Because of these factors, survey responses do not proportionately reflect the overall parent population. Readers should interpret survey results as directional, rather than precise estimates of parent perceptions and should consult cross-tabulation tables to compare results across different demographic groups.

Many questions on the survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement on a scale. MAD gave each answer a numerical value to calculate the average score for each statement:

- Strongly agree = 5
- Agree = 4
- Neither agree nor disagree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Strongly disagree = 1

Average statements of 4 or greater reflect general agreement with the statement; the higher the number, the stronger the level of agreement. Four statements in the survey (about program logistics) included an option to select “not applicable.” MAD excluded these responses from average score calculations for these statements.

To better understand participant perspectives, MAD analyzed survey responses for different demographic groups. The goal of this analysis was to identify general patterns and trends that might be interesting, rather than testing for statistical significance. Understanding the perspectives of different demographic groups can help the program more effectively make changes to improve participant experiences.

Compare responses from different demographic groups with caution. In some cases, differences between groups can be difficult to interpret because one group is much larger or smaller than others. For example, only 75 respondents reported participating in the program for less than one year, compared with the 527 respondents who reported participating for seven or more years.

Comparisons explore notable differences or trends in how demographic groups responded to survey questions. In this report, “notable difference” means one group’s average score for a statement differed by 0.5 point or more than another group’s within the same demographic category (or 10 percentage points or more for statements presented by proportion).

For parent role as well as for race and ethnicity comparisons, differences are calculated between the maximum value of any group for that statement in comparison to every other group. For example, if the highest average rating for a statement among any group is 4.0, other groups are described as having a notably lower average if their average was 3.5 or less.

For absolute income, relative income, and program tenure, differences are calculated between the averages of the highest and lowest levels within that demographic category's continuum. For example, if the average rating among respondents who made \$24,999 or less annually is 0.5 points higher or lower than respondents who made \$100,000 or more annually, that is described as a notable difference.

Cross-tabulation tables include columns that reflect the difference between scores in that row ("difference" column). Due to rounding, subtracting the lowest score in a row from the highest may yield a slightly different number than the "difference" column reflects. For example, a row may reflect a score of 4.0 for custodial respondents and 2.3 for non-custodial respondents, but because the true difference is between 4.04 and 2.25, the difference rounds to 1.8 instead of 1.7. The report provides differences for cross-tabulation tables related to parent role, absolute income, relative income, and program tenure. To conserve space on cross-tabulation tables of race and ethnicity, cells with notable differences (positive or negative) are highlighted using a blue background with white, bold text.

In demographic questions, the survey gave respondents the opportunity to select "prefer not to answer" for questions about race and ethnicity and absolute income. Similarly, respondents could select "I don't know" for the question about relative income. While this report provides these data in relevant cross-tabulation tables and includes these respondents in calculations of overall averages, they were not included in analysis of notable difference or notable trend calculations across demographic subgroups.

Since the survey did not require respondents to answer any question, denominators are different for each statement and question. For simplicity, demographic denominators included in cross-tabulation tables reflect the total number of respondents who identified with that category in the survey.

To conserve space in cross-tabulation tables, MAD shortened the racial and ethnic group names in the header row. The full category names respondents could select from included:

- Black/African American
- American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Other
- Unknown
- Prefer not to answer

The report includes abbreviated group names in descriptive narratives for brevity and clarity.

Data on respondents who identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or unknown are not presented in race and ethnicity cross-tabulations in this report because fewer than 10 responses were received from each of these groups. Cross-tabulation data are suppressed when cell sizes are less than 10 to protect the identity of individuals. Additionally, respondents could select multiple race and ethnicity categories (for example, both Black/African American and Asian). Respondents who selected more than one category were reported in all categories they selected (for example, included in both Black/African American and Asian averages).

Interview findings from the first phase of this project have been included throughout the report, as appropriate. Where interview findings are discussed, county child support workers or officers are sometimes referred to as “case workers,” “case managers,” or “county workers” because this terminology was used by interviewees; it is not necessarily the terminology used by counties or DHS CSD for these positions.

Findings

Overarching findings

Broadly, survey findings are directionally consistent with findings from interviews conducted with participants in January and February 2021, particularly related to overall experience, payments, and communications.

Average ratings on statements about overall experience, logistics, payments, and communications ranged from mixed (neither agree nor disagree) to negative (disagree to strongly disagree). Though the average of the highest rated statement in the survey, “Child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met,” (3.9) approached a positive response (agree), none of the rated statements received a particularly positive average rating across all respondents.

In interviews, parent perceptions of fairness varied substantially by parental income. However, the survey found few notable differences by relative income (respondent’s income relative to the other parent’s income) or absolute income (respondent’s annual income). For example, there were no notable differences in relative or absolute income levels for the statement “The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.” However, individuals at all absolute and relative income levels disagreed with this statement, so opinions on why payment amounts are unfair that were discussed by interviewees may still differ by income (higher-income parents wanting flatter, non-variable payment amounts that did not rise with income and lower-income participants wanting variable payment amounts that rise along with parent income).

Respondents who identified as Native American consistently rated statements lower than respondents who identified with another racial or ethnic group, on average. Respondents who identified with an Other race or ethnicity also often rated statements lower than those identifying with another racial or ethnic group. While these respondents’ averages followed the trend of the overall average on several statements, their responses were notably lower than the trend of the overall average on several statements:

- I would recommend participating in the child support program to other parents. (Native American and Other race or ethnicity)
- The child support program has benefited my family. (Other race or ethnicity)
- I understood the administrative fees associated with the child support program when I applied or enrolled. (Other race or ethnicity)
- I understand how child support payment amounts are determined. (Native American)
- I understand the information the child support program provides to me. (Native American)
- It is easy for me to find the information I need about the child support program and my case. (Native American and Other race or ethnicity)
- My child support worker treats me with dignity and respect. (Other race or ethnicity)
- My child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about my case. (Other race or ethnicity)
- My child support worker responds to me in a timely way. (Other race or ethnicity)
- It has been easy for me to contact my child support worker. (Other race or ethnicity)

Overall experience

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on statements related to their overall experience in the child support program, from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Overall findings are presented first (Figure 2 and Table 2), followed by notable differences and trends among respondents.

Figure 2. Overall experience with the child support program

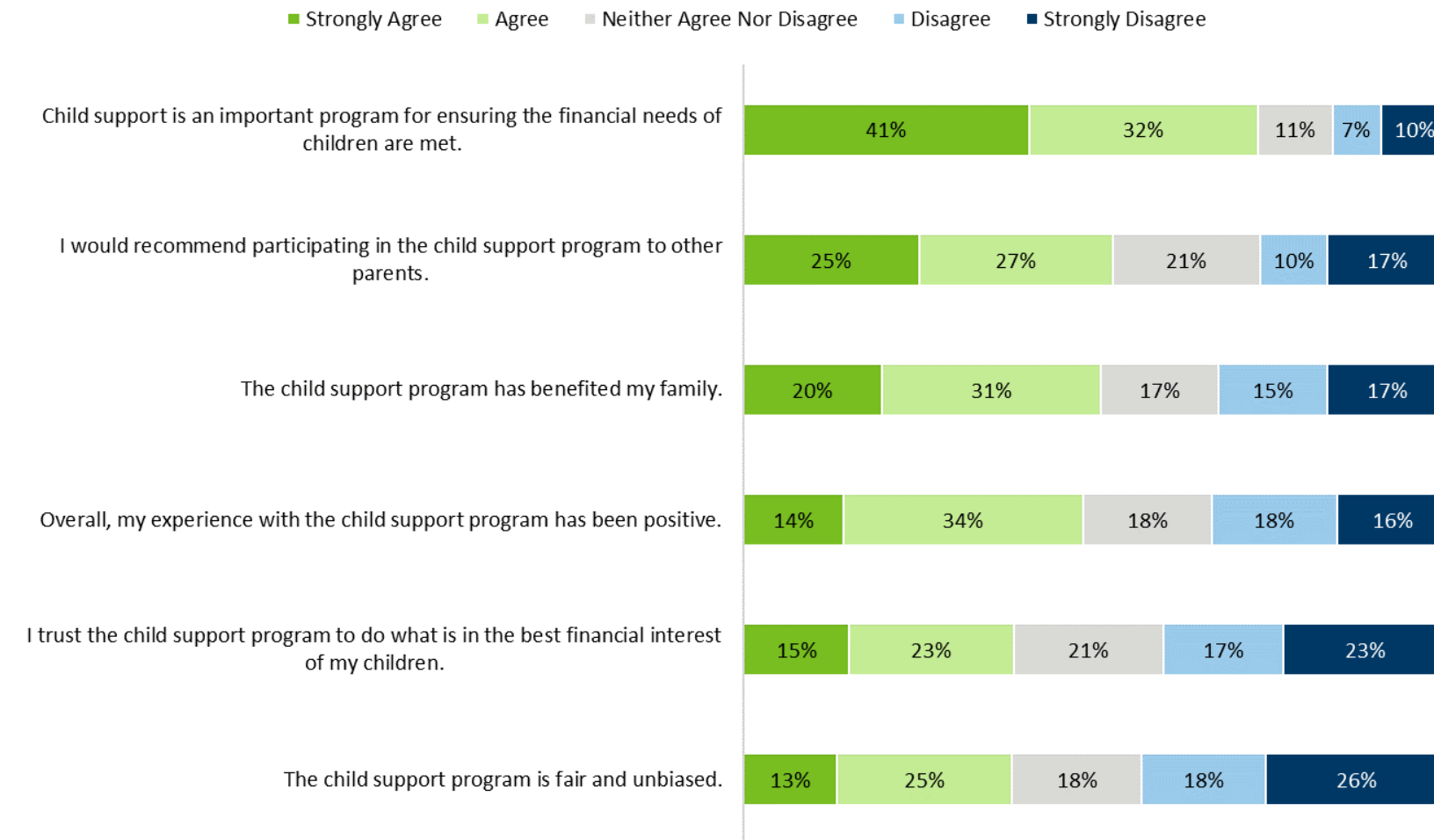


Table 3. Overall experience with the child support program

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total answers	Average
Child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met.	41% 487	32% 390	11% 129	7% 81	10% 115	1,202	3.9
I would recommend participating in the child support program to other parents.	25% 299	27% 329	21% 250	10% 115	17% 205	1,198	3.3
The child support program has benefited my family.	20% 236	31% 373	17% 200	15% 186	17% 206	1,201	3.2
Overall, my experience with the child support program has been positive.	14% 170	34% 410	18% 218	18% 215	16% 189	1,202	3.1
I trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of my children.	15% 180	23% 279	21% 255	17% 203	23% 281	1,198	2.9
The child support program is fair and unbiased.	13% 159	25% 297	18% 220	18% 211	26% 310	1,197	2.8

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) agreed child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met. This was the highest-rated statement in the survey. In contrast, fewer respondents said they trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of their children (38 percent) or that the program is fair and unbiased (38 percent). These statements were some of the lowest-rated statements in the survey.

Just over half said they would recommend participating in the program to other parents (52 percent) and that the program has benefited their family (51 percent). Less than half agreed that their experience in the program has been positive (48 percent).

Custodial (receiving) parents rated all of these statements notably higher than non-custodial (paying) parents (more agreement; Table 3). These statements included some of the greatest levels of disagreement between custodial and non-custodial parents in the survey. While the program's importance in ensuring the financial needs of children are met was among the highest-rated statement for both custodial and non-custodial parents in the survey, recommending participation in the program to other parents had the greatest level of disagreement between custodial and non-custodial parents.

Table 4. Notable differences in overall experience with the child support program by parent role

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
Child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met.	4.3	3.1	1.2
I would recommend participating in the child support program to other parents.	4.0	2.3	1.8
The child support program has benefited my family.	3.8	2.2	1.6
Overall, my experience with the child support program has been positive.	3.6	2.4	1.3
I trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of my children.	3.4	2.0	1.4
The child support program is fair and unbiased.	3.5	1.8	1.7

These findings are consistent with interview findings, in which custodial interviewees more often reported positive **overall experiences with the child support program** compared with non-custodial parent interviewees. Among non-custodial parents, negative experiences were related to the perception that the program is biased against men specifically and non-custodial parents broadly, which is consistent with non-custodial parent survey respondents' rating of the statement "**the child support program is fair and unbiased.**" Other contributing factors to non-custodial interviewees' more negative experiences included the perception that the program moves quickly to threatening non-custodial parents, and not receiving sufficient help from the program upon enrollment, including information that would have been helpful to understand or be aware of.

The more positive rating among non-custodial survey respondents that **the program is important for ensuring the financial needs of children are met** is aligned with the opinions of non-custodial interviewees who were indifferent toward the program. These interviewees said they understood the importance of child support and why the program exists, and said their payments are being used appropriately to support their child's well-being.

Similar to survey results, custodial interviewees more often said participation in **the program benefited them or their families**, while non-custodial interviewees more often said there was not a benefit. Benefits for custodial interviewees included minimizing direct communication with non-custodial parents, having a third party determine payment amounts, enforcement of payments they would not otherwise receive, and the convenience of automatic payment methods to ensure payments are made. Benefits for non-custodial interviewees included automatic payment methods and the structure of the program being helpful for supporting their child. However, a few non-custodial interviewees felt that the program

is more beneficial when a co-parenting relationship exists, so the focus is on supporting the child and not on money. Other non-custodial interviewees questioned the benefits of the program due to perceived inappropriate use of funds by custodial parents.

Consistent with survey results, while many custodial interviewees said they would **recommend participating in the child support program** non-custodial interviewees had more mixed feelings on recommending the program. While a few non-custodial interviewees said they would recommend the program, a few said they would do so only in certain situations (for example, disagreement between parents), and a few others said they would not recommend the program.

Similar to the notable difference found in the survey between parent roles related to **trust in the program**, trust in the child support program varied between custodial and non-custodial parents who participated in interviews. While custodial interviewees more often said they trusted the program to do what is in the best financial interest of children, non-custodial interviewees more often said they did not.

Respondents who identified as Native American and respondents who identified as having an Other racial or ethnic background had notably lower average responses (less agreement) than at least one other race and ethnicity category, across all statements about overall program experience (Table 4). Table cells are highlighted in blue when there is a 0.5 point or more difference between the average for the highlighted group and at least one other group in the same row. For example, on average, respondents who identified as an Other racial or ethnic background rated the statement “child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met” 0.5 point lower than respondents that identified as Black, Asian, Hispanic, or White.

Table 5. Notable differences in overall experience with the child support program by race/ethnicity

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
Child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met.	3.9	3.6	3.9	4.2	4.0	3.3	3.2
I would recommend participating in the child support program to other parents.	3.5	2.8	3.4	3.3	3.5	2.7	2.4
The child support program has benefited my family.	3.3	2.8	3.3	3.2	3.3	2.5	2.5
Overall, my experience with the child support program has been positive.	3.3	2.8	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.0	2.5

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
I trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of my children.	3.1	2.2	3.3	2.9	2.9	2.5	2.1
The child support program is fair and unbiased.	3.0	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.2	2.2

In general, as participants' absolute income increased, their agreement about the program benefiting their family notably decreased. Similarly, as participants' absolute income increased, their agreement that the program is fair and unbiased notably decreased (Table 5).

Table 6. Notable differences in overall experience with the child support program by absolute income

Statement	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
The child support program has benefited my family.	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.0	2.8	0.5
The child support program is fair and unbiased.	3.1	3.0	2.9	2.8	2.5	2.4	0.6

As participants' time in the program increased, their agreement that the program is fair and unbiased and that they trust the program to do what is in the best financial interest of their children notably decreased (Table 6).

Table 7. Notable differences in overall experience with the child support program by program tenure

Statement	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
I trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of my children.	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.8	0.5
The child support program is fair and unbiased.	3.2	3.0	2.8	2.7	0.5

There were no notable differences in average perceptions of overall experience by relative income (whether parents' income was higher, about the same, or lower than the other parent involved in their child support case).

Program logistics

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on statements related to program logistics, from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). This report presents overall findings are presented first (Figure 3 and Table 7), followed by notable differences and trends among respondents.

Figure 3. Perceptions of program logistics

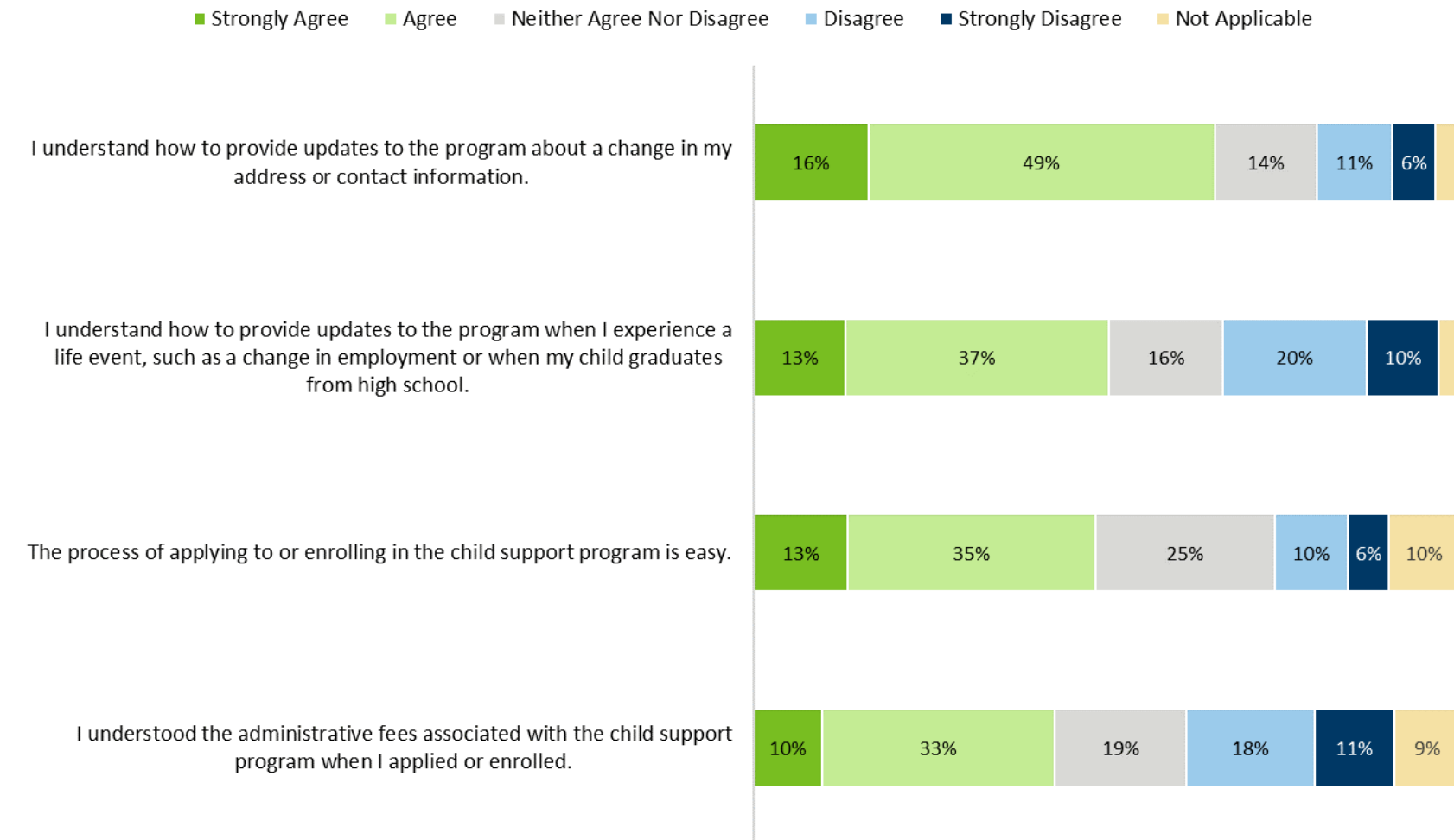


Table 8. Perceptions of program logistics

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable	Total answers	Average
I understand how to provide updates to the program about a change in my address or contact information.	16% 187	49% 566	14% 166	11% 124	6% 69	3% 40	1,152	3.6
I understand how to provide updates to the program when I experience a life event, such as a change in employment or when my child graduates from high school.	13% 150	37% 430	16% 186	20% 234	10% 118	3% 33	1,151	3.2
The process of applying to or enrolling in the child support program is easy.	13% 154	35% 406	25% 294	10% 119	6% 68	10% 115	1,156	3.4
I understood the administrative fees associated with the child support program when I applied or enrolled.	10% 112	33% 379	19% 215	18% 210	11% 130	9% 106	1,152	3.1

While nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents said they understood how to provide updates about a change in their address or contact information, only half (50 percent) said they understood how to provide updates when they experience a life event—and nearly one-third (30 percent) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Even fewer (43 percent) said they understood the administrative fees associated with the program when they applied or enrolled.

In interviews, many parents described the documentation the program requests in the application process as burdensome. These interviewees described gathering the necessary documentation as complicated, confusing, and time-consuming. These findings were relatively consistent with the survey: while nearly half of respondents agreed that **applying to or enrolling in the child support program was easy**, the average parent rating still neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Custodial (receiving) parents rated their perceptions of program logistics notably higher than non-custodial (paying) parents (more agreement; Table 8) on providing updates to the program and understanding administrative fees; there were no notable differences by parent role on perceptions of the enrollment process being easy.

Table 9. Notable differences in perceptions of program logistics by parent role

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
I understand how to provide updates to the program about a change in my address or contact information.	3.8	3.3	0.5
I understand how to provide updates to the program when I experience a life event, such as a change in employment or when my child graduates from high school.	3.5	2.8	0.7
I understood the administrative fees associated with the child support program when I applied or enrolled.	3.4	2.7	0.7

One difference compared with interview findings was, while one custodial interviewee expressed frustration with **administrative fees associated with the child support program** and the lack of clarity about these fees when they applied, in the survey, custodial parents rated their understanding of administrative fees higher than did non-custodial parents. However, since these fees are charged to custodial parents, it is possible for custodial parents to both be more aware of these fees and, at the same time, be more frustrated with them.

Respondents who identified as Native American had notably lower average responses (less agreement) than at least one other race and ethnicity category across all statements about program logistics (Table 9). In addition, respondents who identified with an Other racial or ethnic background had a notably lower average response to understanding administrative fees.

Table 10. Notable differences in perceptions of program logistics by race/ethnicity

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
I understand how to provide updates to the program about a change in my address or contact information.	3.9	3.2	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.3
I understand how to provide updates to the program when I experience a life event, such as a change in employment or when my child graduates from high school.	3.5	2.8	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.1	2.9

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
The process of applying to or enrolling in the child support program is easy.	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.0
I understood the administrative fees associated with the child support program when I applied or enrolled.	3.2	2.8	3.4	3.2	3.2	2.6	2.5

There were no notable differences on average perceptions of program logistics by absolute income, relative income, or program tenure.

Program connections

Respondents were asked whether the child support program had connected them with other government programs or resources and whether they would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources based on information in their child support case. Overall, 12 percent of respondents had been connected to other programs and resources and 35 percent were interested in referrals (Table 10).

Table 11. Overall experience and interest in connections to other programs and resources

Statement	Yes	No	Total answers
The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.	12% 140	88% 1,011	1,151
I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case.	35% 403	65% 744	1,147

These survey results help quantify interview findings, where a few parents said the child support program does not do enough to **connect parents to other resources and supports**. The survey results suggest that, while a meaningful number of participants (about one-third in the survey) would be interested in referrals, not everyone would be interested (about two-thirds). Both overall and across all subgroups, the number of parents interested

in referrals was greater than the number that had been connected—overall, about three times the number of parents were interested in referrals as had been connected with other government programs or resources. “The Minnesota child support program doesn’t set anyone up for success,” said one interviewee interested in more connections. “Provide people information on other benefits they may be able to access when child support is decreasing their resources—SNAP, utility support,” another interviewee said. “I wish that were there, it would have made the first few years [more manageable] for me.”

Comparing survey responses by role, custodial parents were both notably more likely to have been connected to and notably more likely to be interested in referrals to other programs and resources (Table 11).

Table 12. Notable differences in connections to other programs and resources by parent role

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.	17%	5%	12 pp ¹⁸
I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case.	39%	29%	10 pp
<i>Referral gap (percent interested minus percent connected)</i>	22 pp	24 pp	2 pp

Connections to other programs and resources also differed by race and ethnicity (Table 12). Despite these differences, for all racial and ethnic groups, the percent of parents who had been connected to other programs was lower than the percent of parents interested in being referred. Indeed, even for groups with lower levels of interest in referrals, there was still a notable referral gap. Respondents who identified as Native American, Asian, Hispanic, or an Other racial or ethnic background had notably higher referral gaps (the percent interested in referrals minus the percent connected to programs or resources).

¹⁸ In this document, “pp” refers to a percentage point difference between two percentages. Due to rounding, subtracting the lowest percentage in a row from the highest may yield a slightly different number than the “difference” column reflects.

Table 13. Notable differences in connections to other programs and resources by race/ethnicity

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.	16%	15%	24%	10%	12%	0%	5%
I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case.	40%	47%	54%	51%	34%	46%	24%
<i>Referral gap (percent interested minus percent connected)</i>	24 pp	32 pp	30 pp	41 pp	22 pp	46 pp	19 pp

Parents with lower levels of absolute income were both notably more likely to have been connected to programs and notably more interested in referrals (Table 13). Lower-income parents also had somewhat larger referral gaps.

Table 14. Notable differences in connections to other programs and resources by absolute income

Statement	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.	20%	16%	11%	9%	5%	7%	16 pp
I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case.	50%	42%	35%	29%	26%	21%	23 pp
<i>Referral gap (percent interested minus percent connected)</i>	30 pp	26 pp	24 pp	20 pp	21 pp	14 pp	9 pp

Parents with lower levels of relative income were also notably more interested in referrals, although they were only somewhat more likely to have been connected to programs (Table 14).

Table 15. Differences in connections to other programs and resources by relative income

Statement	Lower (n=350)	About the same (n=172)	Higher (n=264)	I don't know (n=285)	Difference
The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.	15%	9%	11%	12%	4 pp
I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case.	41%	33%	31%	35%	10 pp
<i>Referral gap (percent interested minus percent connected)</i>	26 pp	24 pp	20 pp	23 pp	6 pp

Despite these differences, for all income groups, the percent of parents who had been connected to other programs was lower than the percent of parents interested in being referred.

As participants' time in the program increased, they were notably less interested in referrals to other programs and had a notably smaller referral gap; over time, participants were somewhat less likely to have been connected (Table 15).

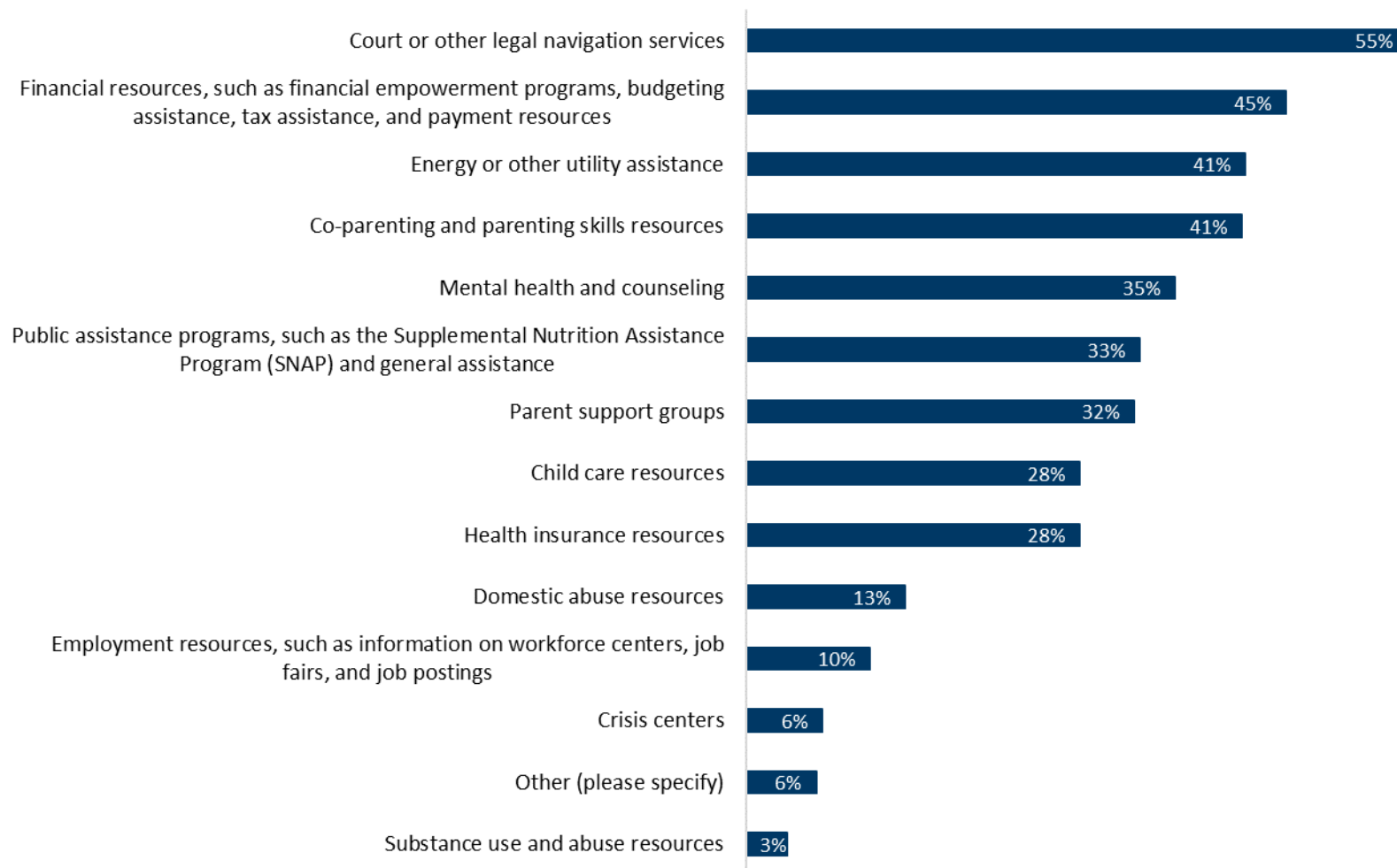
Table 16. Differences in connections to other programs and resources by program tenure

Statement	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.	17%	14%	14%	10%	7 pp

Statement	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case.	49%	47%	37%	28%	20 pp
<i>Referral gap (percent interested minus percent connected)</i>	31 pp	33 pp	23 pp	18 pp	13 pp

Respondents who said they would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources based on the information in their child support case were asked to select resources they would be most interested in from a list, selecting all that applied (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Resources and supports of interest to respondents (select all that apply; n=381)



The five most frequently requested resources were court or other legal navigation services (55 percent); financial resources, such as financial empowerment programs, budgeting assistance, tax assistance, and payment resources (45 percent); energy or other utility assistance (41 percent); co-parenting and parenting skills resources (41 percent); and mental health and counseling (35 percent).

Custodial parents were notably more interested in referrals to energy or other utility assistance, public assistance programs, and mental health and counseling. Non-custodial parents were notably more interested in co-parenting and parenting skills and resources as well as court or other legal navigation services.

All resources had at least some notable differences between one or more racial or ethnic groups. The largest differences were for interest in referrals to health insurance resources (Asian, White, and Hispanic parents were more interested in referrals), public assistance programs (Native American parents were less interested in referrals), co-parenting and parenting skill resources (Native American parents were less interested in referrals), and energy or other utility assistance (Black, Asian, and Native American parents were more interested in referrals).

Parents with lower levels of absolute income were notably more interested in referrals to public assistance, energy or other utility assistance, and financial resources. Parents with higher levels of absolute income were notably more interested in referrals to court or other legal navigation services, co-parenting and parenting resources, and parent support groups. Parents with less relative income were notably more interested in referrals to public assistance, and parents with relatively more income were notably more interested in referrals for co-parenting and parenting resources.

Finally, as participants' time in the program increased, they were notably more interested in referrals to parent support groups.

Payments

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on statements related to payments with the child support program, from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Overall findings are presented first (Figure 5 and Table 16), followed by notable differences and trends among respondents.

Figure 5. Perceptions of payments with the child support program

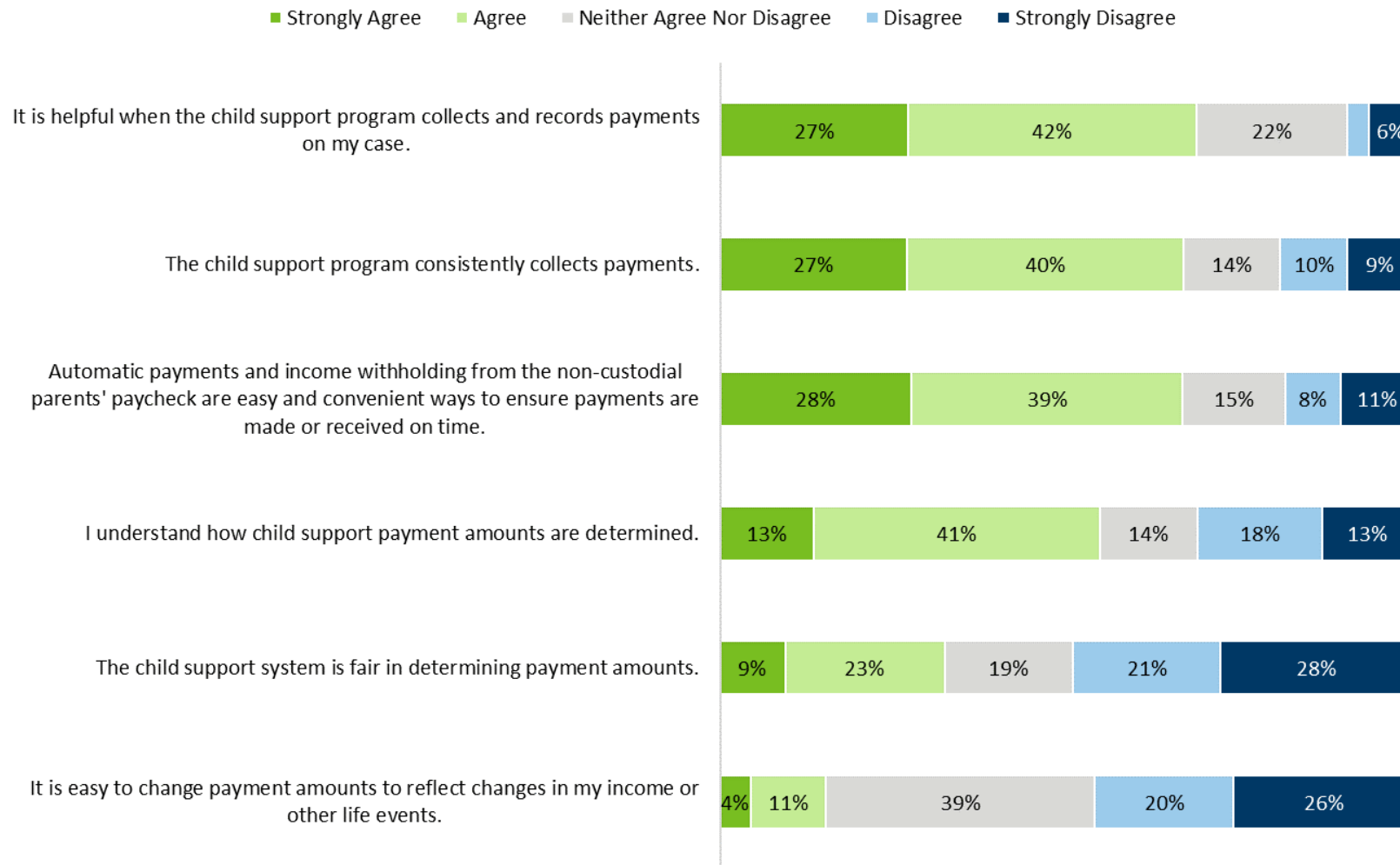


Table 17. Perceptions of payments with the child support program

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total answers	Average
It is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on my case.	27% 306	42% 470	22% 245	3% 35	6% 73	1,129	3.8
The child support program consistently collects payments.	27% 305	40% 449	14% 158	10% 110	9% 107	1,129	3.7
Automatic payments and income withholding from the non-custodial parents' paycheck are easy and convenient ways to ensure payments are made or received on time.	28% 312	39% 442	15% 167	8% 90	11% 119	1,130	3.7
I understand how child support payment amounts are determined.	13% 152	41% 468	14% 160	18% 203	13% 149	1,132	3.2
The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.	9% 106	23% 260	19% 210	21% 240	28% 315	1,131	2.6
It is easy to change payment amounts to reflect changes in my income or other life events.	4% 50	11% 122	39% 437	20% 225	26% 292	1,126	2.5

Statements about payments included both some of the highest-rated and some of the lowest-rated statements in the survey. More than two-thirds of respondents agreed and only 9 percent disagreed with the statement “it is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on my case,” which was the second-highest average rated statement overall. Automatic payments and income withholding and consistently collecting payments were the third- and fourth-highest-rated statements overall.

“It is easy to change payment amounts to reflect changes in my income or other life events” and “The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts,” however, were the second- and third-lowest-rated statement overall. Only 15 percent of respondents agreed that changing payment amounts was easy, while nearly half disagreed. About one-third of respondents felt the child support system is fair in determining payment amounts, while about half disagreed.

These findings are consistent with interview findings, where both custodial (receiving) and non-custodial (paying) interviewees commented on the **ease and convenience of automatic payment methods**. Meanwhile, many interviewees thought the process of **updating support amounts to reflect a change in income or life event** was difficult and two-thirds of interviewees raised questions about the **fairness of the current nature of child**

support payments (although with conflicting perspectives, in which one-third of interviewees were concerned about the fairness for parents with higher relative incomes, and one-third of interviewees were concerned about the fairness for parents with low absolute incomes).

In interviews, parents described the process of updating orders as expensive because of the costs of going to court. “I don’t want to go back to court,” said one custodial parent. “I don’t want to spend money fighting.” Beyond the cost of going to court, a few other parents described challenges with the time and complexity of the court process. “By the time you get back in court, that is five or six months,” said one non-custodial parent. “It knocks the fight out of you—the wait is too long.”

Interviewees said they wish there were an easier, simpler way to update orders for support without going to court. “If income changes or living situations change, there should be a faster or easier process,” said one non-custodial parent. Even “if it’s agreed upon, you still have to go to court; the state should be able to hold a faster mediation process,” they said.

Non-custodial parents had notably lower perceptions of payments with the child support program across every statement—except for the program consistently collecting payments, where custodial parents had notably lower perceptions (Table 17). The largest difference across payment statements by parent role was around fairness in determining payment amounts, where the average custodial parent rating (3.3) was almost double the average non-custodial parent rating (1.7).

Table 18. Notable differences in perceptions of payments with the child support program by parent role

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
It is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on my case.	4.2	3.2	0.9
The child support program consistently collects payments.	3.5	3.9	0.5
Automatic payments and income withholding from the non-custodial parents’ paycheck are easy and convenient ways to ensure payments are made or received on time.	3.9	3.2	0.7
I understand how child support payment amounts are determined.	3.5	2.8	0.7
The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.	3.3	1.7	1.6
It is easy to change payment amounts to reflect changes in my income or other life events.	2.9	1.8	1.1

Survey findings on **fairness in determining payment amounts** are consistent with interview findings, where two-thirds of non-custodial parents raised concerns about the financial burden that child support places on parents. A few interviewees concerned about the financial burden of child support described the actual or potential implications of this financial burden, such as inability to afford rent or car payments, and potential longer-term impacts, including homelessness.

In interviews, while many parents discussed challenges with **updating child support payments**, non-custodial parents raised specific challenges with the program being unresponsive to economic or health hardships. For example, one non-custodial parent described going to court to ask for a decrease in their order for support because they had to reduce their work hours while they were undergoing cancer treatment. “When I presented documentation that I was too sick to work 40 hours a week, the judge asked me if I could drop my chemo and pick up more hours at work instead—she said that’s not her problem,” they said. “I lost all hope in the system right then and there. That was the most cruel and inhumane thing a person has said to me.”

Respondents who identified as Native American had notably lower average responses (less agreement) than at least one other race and ethnicity category across all statements about payments (Table 18). In addition, respondents who identified as Hispanic had a notably lower average response to the statement about consistently collecting payments. Respondents who identified as having an Other racial or ethnic background had a notably lower average response to the statements about fairness in determining payment amounts and ease of changing payment amounts to reflect changes in income or life events.

Table 19. Notable differences in perceptions of payments with the child support program by race/ethnicity

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
It is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on my case.	3.8	3.4	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.6	3.2
The child support program consistently collects payments.	3.9	3.5	4.0	3.3	3.6	3.9	3.4
I understand how child support payment amounts are determined.	3.0	2.4	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.0
The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.	2.7	2.2	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.1	2.0

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
It is easy to change payment amounts to reflect changes in my income or other life events.	2.7	2.3	2.9	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.0

Parents with the highest incomes had notably higher agreement about the consistency of the program in collecting payments (Table 19).

Table 20. Notable differences in perceptions of payments with the child support program by absolute income

Statement	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
The child support program consistently collects payments.	3.6	3.5	3.7	3.7	4.1	3.5	0.5

There were no notable differences in statements about payments among parents by relative income, though perceptions about fairness were consistently low: Across all absolute income groups as well as across all relative income groups, the average rating was between “Disagree” and “Neither Agree Nor Disagree.” Considering interview findings, this may be because both low- and high-income earners have concerns about fairness of payment amounts, but for differing reasons: In general, parents with higher incomes expressed a preference for payments to be flatter (to change less if they earn more), while parents with low incomes expressed a preference for more graduated payments (for payments to change more based on income earned at a given time).

As participants’ time in the program increased, parents had notably lower perceptions of the fairness of the system in determining payment amounts (Table 20).

Table 21. Notable differences in perceptions of payments with the child support program by program tenure

Statement	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.5	0.7

Communications

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on statements related to communication with the child support program, from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Overall findings are presented first (Figure 6 and Table 21), followed by notable differences and trends among respondents.

Figure 6. Communications with the child support program

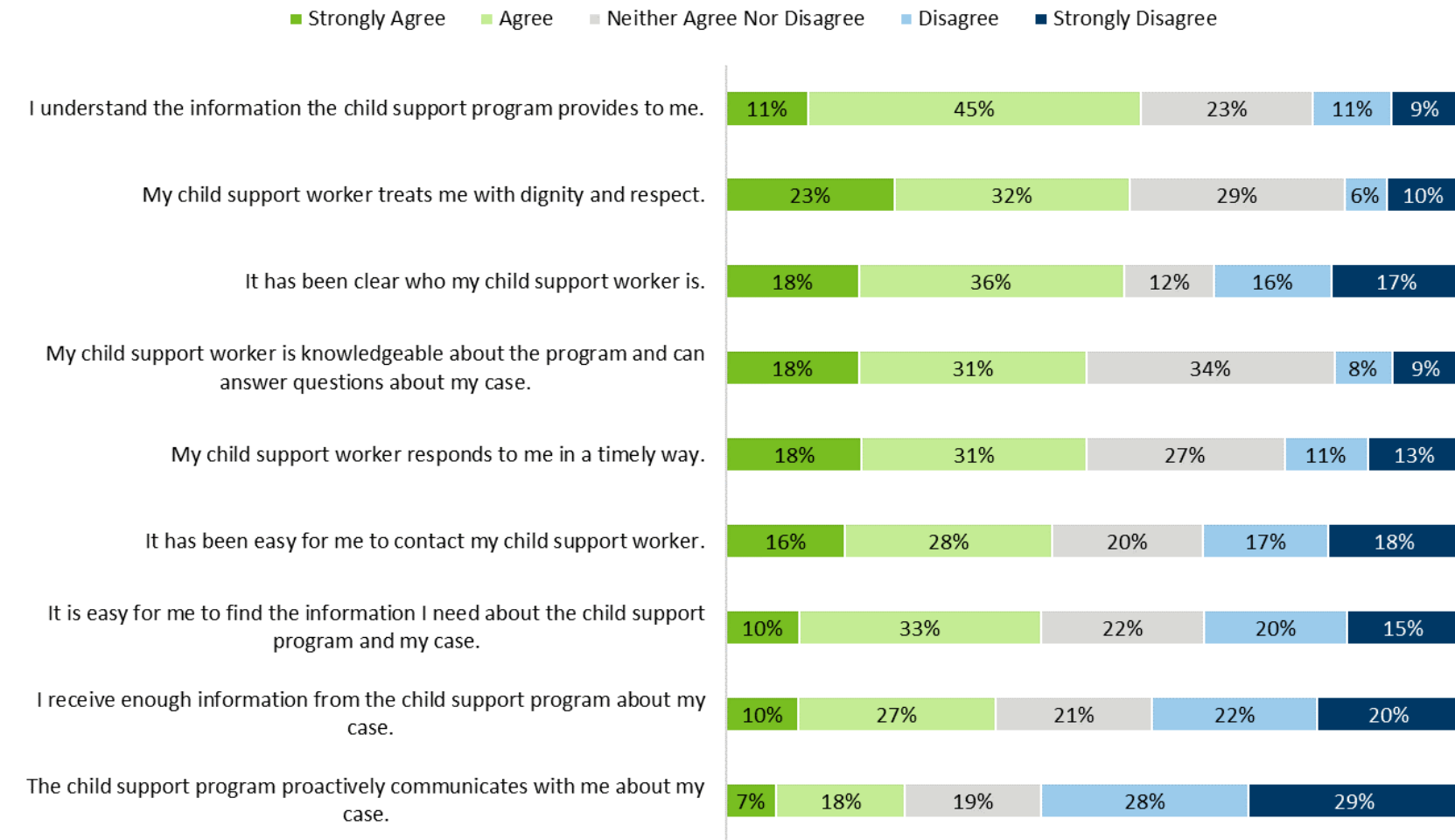


Table 22. Communications with the child support program

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total answers	Average
I understand the information the child support program provides to me.	11% 122	45% 500	23% 256	11% 119	9% 103	1,100	3.4
My child support worker treats me with dignity and respect.	23% 252	32% 353	29% 324	6% 63	10% 110	1,102	3.5
It has been clear who my child support worker is.	18% 199	36% 399	12% 135	16% 178	17% 193	1,104	3.2
My child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about my case.	18% 199	31% 342	34% 372	8% 87	9% 102	1,102	3.4
My child support worker responds to me in a timely way.	18% 203	31% 337	27% 298	11% 125	13% 139	1,102	3.3
It has been easy for me to contact my child support worker.	16% 178	28% 312	20% 226	17% 188	18% 199	1,103	3.1
It is easy for me to find the information I need about the child support program and my case.	10% 109	33% 363	22% 245	20% 215	15% 170	1,102	3.0
I receive enough information from the child support program about my case.	10% 107	27% 296	21% 235	22% 246	20% 215	1,099	2.8
The child support program proactively communicates with me about my case.	7% 75	18% 194	19% 205	28% 311	29% 319	1,104	2.5

Respondents' ratings on statements about communications ranged from mixed to more negative. Just over half of the respondents agreed that they understand the information the child support program provides (56 percent), that their child support worker treats them with dignity and respect (55 percent), and that it has been clear who their child support worker is (54 percent). Less than half agreed that their child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about their case (49 percent), that their child support worker responds to them in a timely way (49 percent), that it has been easy to contact their child support worker (44 percent), and that it has been easy to find information they

need about the program and their case (43 percent). Fewer respondents agreed that they receive enough information from the program about their case (37 percent) and that the program proactively communicates about their case (25 percent).

Overall, statements about general communications and information were rated lower by respondents (less agreement) than statements about county workers, which were rated higher (more agreement). The statement about receiving enough information from the program was one of the lowest-rated statements in the survey, and the statement about receiving proactive communication from the program was the lowest-rated statement in the survey. These findings are supported by interview findings, where participants reported:

- Mixed experiences with case workers
- Difficulty finding information about and navigating the program, particularly in relation to the program’s website and case worker knowledge
- Lack of clear, proactive communication about the status of their case, particularly at milestones and life events

Custodial (receiving) parents rated all communication statements notably higher than non-custodial (paying) parents (more agreement; Table 22); however, these statements included some of the lowest levels of disagreement between custodial and non-custodial parents in the survey (difference between averages). In other words, their levels of agreement trended in the same direction and, while notable differences still exist, custodial and non-custodial parents were more aligned in their opinions of communication with the program. The statement about receiving proactive communication from the program was the lowest-rated statement in the survey among custodial parents.

Table 23. Notable differences in communications with the child support program by parent role

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
I understand the information the child support program provides to me.	3.7	2.9	0.7
My child support worker treats me with dignity and respect.	3.7	3.2	0.6
It has been clear who my child support worker is.	3.4	2.9	0.5
My child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about my case.	3.6	3.1	0.5
My child support worker responds to me in a timely way.	3.5	3.0	0.6
It has been easy for me to contact my child support worker.	3.3	2.7	0.6

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
It is easy for me to find the information I need about the child support program and my case.	3.3	2.5	0.8
I receive enough information from the child support program about my case.	3.1	2.4	0.8
The child support program proactively communicates with me about my case.	2.7	2.1	0.6

Similar to interviews, both custodial and non-custodial survey respondents reported **mixed experiences with child support workers**, with levels of agreement about these statements ranging from disagree to neither agree nor disagree. While some receiving parent interviewees cited positive case worker experiences, those that said they had an okay experience with child support most often cited challenges with their case worker, including a perception of inappropriate questioning, challenges in serving the non-custodial parent with child support documents, challenges with enforcing child support orders, and changes in case worker assignment without notification. Non-custodial interviewees also discussed challenges with child support workers, including inconsistent experiences between workers, slow response times without the involvement of a lawyer, and lack of depth in program knowledge beyond what is publicly available. Non-custodial interviewees also mentioned challenges with case workers related to difficulties interacting with the program, including inability to email case workers directly, lack of case worker availability to help parents, and the perception that case workers are less helpful to non-custodial parents. Overall, parents who participated in interviews wanted county workers to be better equipped to communicate program information to parents, and to receive enhanced training on positively communicating with parents.

Survey results about the **ease of finding information about the program and a case** were similar to opinions expressed in interviews. While custodial interviewees had more positive experiences finding information compared with non-custodial parent interviewees, both said finding information and navigating the program could be improved, particularly in relation to the program's website and with case workers. Custodial interviewees discussed challenges with the child support website, noting that it is difficult to navigate and not intuitive, that it does not provide a lot of information or that the information provided is too generic, that the personal identification number (PIN) system is cumbersome, and that it does not provide real-time status updates about cases. They also noted that, while it is easy to find information about payments, it is not easy to identify next steps when faced with challenges (for example, how to start the enforcement process), and that if the website were easier to navigate, it could help minimize reliance on case workers. Non-custodial interviewees said that, while they have learned more about the program over time, information (for example, necessary forms and documentation, child support calculator, case review) was generally not explained well when they entered the program and they had to learn on their own. Other challenges in finding information noted by non-custodial interviewees included the ability to locate information easily and independently on the website and having to contact the program multiple times to find information.

One non-custodial interviewee noted that it is difficult to **understand the information provided by the program** because plain language is often not used, making it necessary to involve a lawyer to understand content. This experience is aligned with the low average score among non-custodial parents for this statement.

In interviews, many parents described challenges around the lack of clear communication about a parent’s status from the child support program, which aligns with lower average ratings among custodial and non-custodial respondents for survey statements about **receiving enough information from the program about a case** and **receiving proactive communication from the program about a case**. Many parents felt uncertain about various aspects of the program and felt that they could benefit from a holistic review of their program status. Parents expressed interest in proactive high-level status updates and said clear communication was needed at milestones and life events, such as a child turning 18. Interviewees also suggested providing information on the child support program with divorce filings, actively reviewing cases for potential modification needs, checking in on participants (to see what they need, what their concerns are, and what questions they have), and telling participants when their case worker has changed. Non-custodial interviewees also recommended that the tone of communications from the program be less threatening, less presumptive, and more welcoming.

Respondents who identified as Native American and respondents who identified as having an Other racial or ethnic background had notably lower average responses (less agreement) than at least one other race and ethnicity category, across all statements about communications (Table 23).

Table 24. Notable differences in communications with the child support program by race/ethnicity

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
I understand the information the child support program provides to me.	3.5	2.9	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.1	3.0
My child support worker treats me with dignity and respect.	3.5	3.2	3.6	3.4	3.6	2.9	3.1
It has been clear who my child support worker is.	3.4	3.0	3.6	3.2	3.2	3.1	2.8
My child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about my case.	3.5	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.5	2.9	3.0
My child support worker responds to me in a timely way.	3.4	2.9	3.2	3.1	3.4	2.6	3.0
It has been easy for me to contact my child support worker.	3.2	2.6	3.1	2.8	3.1	2.5	2.7

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
It is easy for me to find the information I need about the child support program and my case.	2.8	2.0	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.3	1.9
I receive enough information from the child support program about my case.	3.1	2.2	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.5	2.3
The child support program proactively communicates with me about my case.	2.8	2.0	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.3	1.9

In general, as participants' absolute income increased, their agreement about their child support worker responding in a timely way notably increased (Table 24).

Table 25. Notable differences in communications with the child support program by absolute income

Statement	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
My child support worker responds to me in a timely way.	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.1	3.6	3.0	0.5

Generally, as participants' time in the program increased, their agreement that it has been clear who their child support worker is notably decreased (Table 25).

Table 26. Notable differences in communication with the child support program by program tenure

Statement	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
It has been clear who my child support worker is.	3.7	3.4	3.1	3.2	0.6

There were no notable differences in average perceptions of program communications by relative income.

Communication preferences

Findings on resources used to access information, preferred communication methods, and preferred communication frequencies are highlighted differently than other findings in this report. While other findings tend to focus on which demographic groups reported lower ratings, this section highlights both higher and lower ratings across groups, depending on the question. For example, this section highlights which groups reported lower usage of different resources to access information about their case and which groups had greater preferences for different communication methods. Findings are highlighted in this way to be more useful for future communication planning efforts.

Respondents were asked how often they utilized different resources to access information about their child support case (Figure 7 and Table 26).

Figure 7. Resources used to access information about child support case

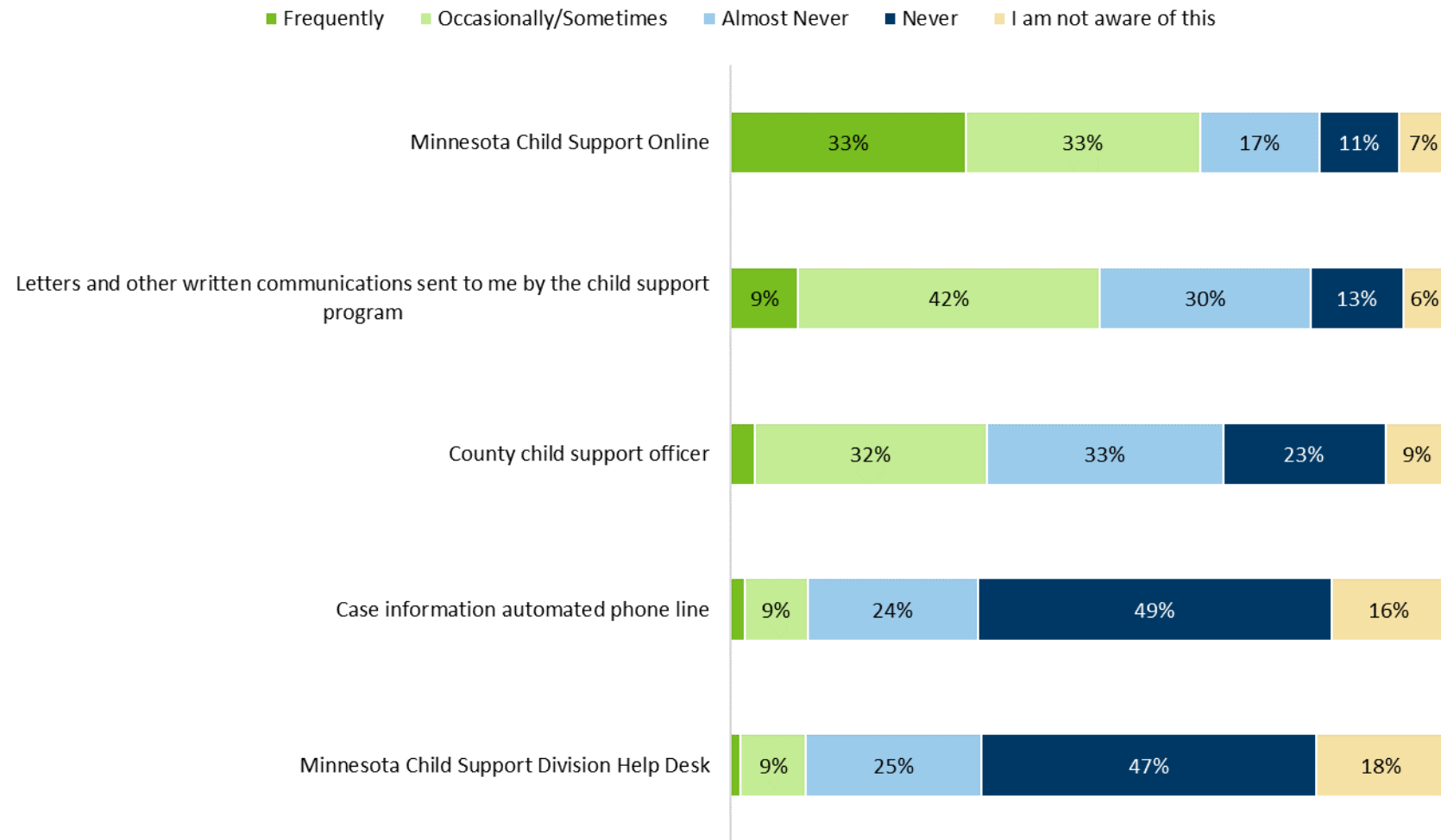


Table 27. Resources used to access information about child support case

Statement	Frequently	Occasionally/ sometimes	Almost never	Never	I am not aware of this	Total answers
Minnesota Child Support Online	33% 361	33% 361	17% 183	11% 123	7% 73	1,101
Letters and other written communications sent to me by the child support program	9% 102	42% 460	30% 322	13% 141	6% 66	1,091
County child support officer	3% 36	32% 354	33% 361	23% 248	9% 93	1,092
Case information automated phone line	2% 21	9% 96	24% 261	49% 543	16% 176	1,097
Minnesota Child Support Division Help Desk	1% 15	9% 99	25% 268	47% 512	18% 199	1,093

Respondents reported using Minnesota Child Support Online (MSCO) most often (66 percent used it frequently or occasionally/sometimes).¹⁹ Just over half reported using letters and other written communications sent by the program (51 percent used them frequently or occasionally/sometimes). Fewer respondents reported using their county child support officer as a resource (35 percent), the case information automated phone line (11 percent), or the help desk (10 percent). A greater proportion of respondents said they are not aware of the case information automated phone line (16 percent) or the help desk (18 percent).

A notably higher proportion of custodial parents said they use MSCO or letters or other written communications frequently, occasionally, or sometimes compared with non-custodial parents (Table 27).

¹⁹ Because a valid email is required to use Minnesota Child Support Online (MSCO), this survey's approach of inviting participants via email may have resulted in an overrepresentation of MSCO users.

Table 28. Notable differences in resources used frequently, occasionally, or sometimes to access information about child support case by parent role

Statement	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
Minnesota Child Support Online	75%	51%	24 pp ²⁰
Letters and other written communications sent to me by the child support program	56%	45%	11 pp

Notable differences in use of resources to access information about a child support case by race and ethnicity included (Table 28):

- Respondents who identified as Native American or White generally reported lower usage of resources to access information about their child support case.
- Respondents who identified as Native American, White, or an Other racial or ethnic background reported lower usage of MSCO.
- Respondents who identified as Asian or White reported lower usage of letters or other written communication compared with respondents who identified as Black, Native American, or an Other racial or ethnic background.
- Respondents that identified as Native American reported lower usage of county child support officers; respondents that identified as an Other racial or ethnic background reported higher usage.
- Respondents that identified as Native American or White reported lower usage of the case information automated phone line; respondents that identified as Black or an Other racial or ethnic background reported higher usage.
- Respondents that identified as Native American or White reported lower usage of the help desk; respondents that identified as an Other racial or ethnic background reported higher usage.

²⁰ In this document, “pp” refers to a percentage point difference between two percentages. Due to rounding, subtracting the lowest percentage in a row from the highest may yield a slightly different number than the “difference” column reflects.

Table 29. Notable differences in resources used frequently, occasionally, or sometimes to access information about child support case by race/ethnicity

Statement	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
Minnesota Child Support Online	77%	50%	70%	74%	65%	62%	56%
Letters and other written communications sent to me by the child support program	64%	60%	54%	55%	50%	62%	44%
County child support officer	37%	25%	35%	30%	36%	54%	33%
Case information automated phone line	22%	5%	13%	11%	8%	31%	8%
Minnesota Child Support Division Help Desk	20%	5%	20%	17%	7%	31%	9%

Respondents who reported higher absolute income also reported notably lower usage of the case information automated phone line and help desk (Table 29).

Table 30. Notable differences in resources used frequently, occasionally, or sometimes to access information about child support case by absolute income

Statement	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
Case information automated phone line	19%	12%	11%	4%	5%	8%	14 pp
Minnesota Child Support Division Help Desk	17%	14%	8%	6%	4%	8%	13 pp

As respondent tenure increased, use of county child support officers notably decreased (Table 30).

Table 31. Notable differences in resources used frequently, occasionally, or sometimes to access information about child support case by program tenure

Statement	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
County child support officer	45%	41%	33%	33%	12 pp

Respondents who identified as Hispanic were notably less aware of their county child support officer than respondents that identified as another racial or ethnic background (Table 31). Respondents who identified as Native American, Hispanic, or White were notably less aware of the help desk compared with respondents that identified as Black or an Other racial or ethnic background. Additionally, respondents who participated in the program for less than one year were notably less aware of the case information automated phone line than respondents that had been in the program for seven or more years (Table 32).

Table 32. Notable differences in awareness of the Minnesota Child Support Division Help Desk by race/ethnicity

Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
I am not aware of this: County child support officer	6%	5%	7%	11%	8%	0%	15%
I am not aware of this: Minnesota Child Support Division Help Desk	9%	26%	17%	19%	19%	8%	29%

Table 33. Notable differences in awareness of the case information automated phone line by program tenure

Response	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
I am not aware of this: Case information automated phone line	27%	15%	17%	14%	13 pp

When asked about their interest in email and text messaging communications from the program, just over half of respondents expressed interest (53 percent, n=580), and some said they already received these communications from the program (15 percent, n=163). Nearly one-third said they were not interested in text messaging or email communications (32 percent, n=353).

A notably larger proportion of custodial parents were interested in receiving email and text messaging communications from the program compared with non-custodial parents (Table 33), as were Native American or Hispanic respondents (Table 34).

Table 34. Notable differences in interest in email and text messaging communications from the program by parent role

Response	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
I would be interested in email and text messaging communications from the Child Support Program	60%	41%	19 pp

Table 35. Notable differences in interest in email and text messaging communications from the program by race/ethnicity

Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
I would be interested in email and text messaging communications from the Child Support Program	50%	70%	50%	60%	54%	46%	51%

A notably lower proportion of respondents who identified as Native American, White, or an Other racial or ethnic background said they already receive email and text messaging communications from the program compared with respondents that identified as Asian (Table 35). Similarly, a notably lower proportion of respondents with an absolute income of \$75,000 or more said they already receive email and text messaging communications from the program compared with respondents with an absolute income of \$49,999 or less (Table 36).

Table 36. Notable differences in email and text messaging communications received by race/ethnicity

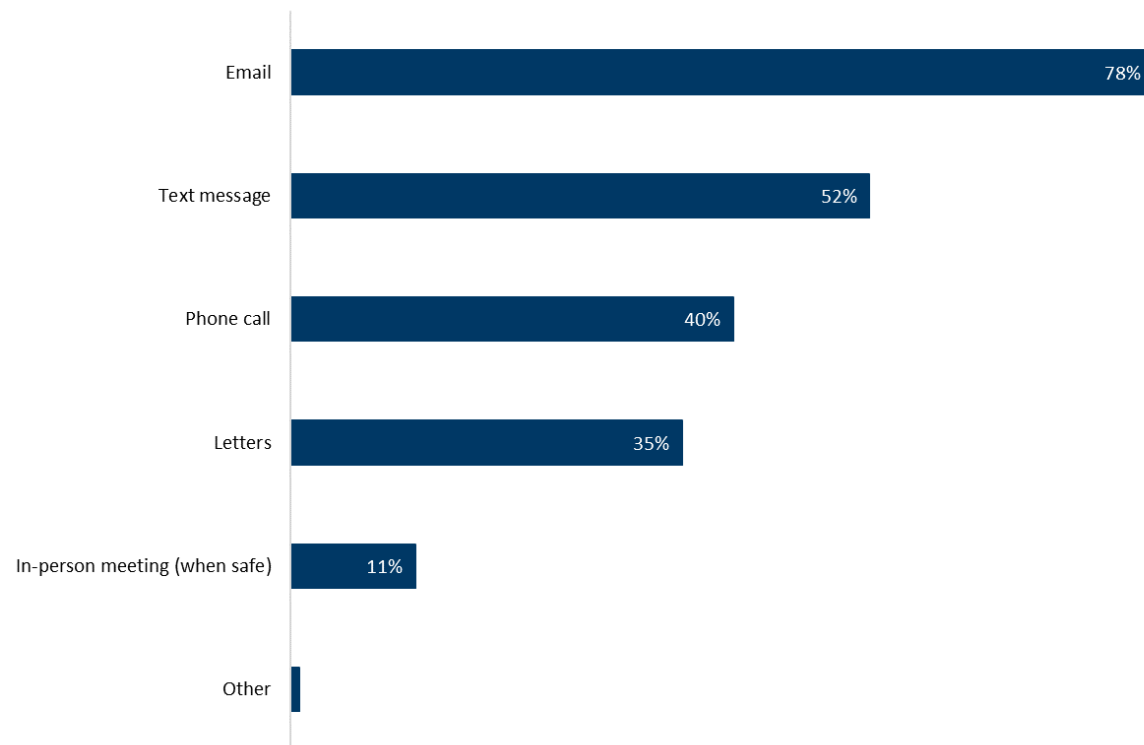
Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
I already receive emails and/or text messages from the Child Support Program	21%	15%	26%	21%	13%	15%	12%

Table 37. Notable differences in email and text messaging communications received by absolute income

Statement	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
I already receive emails and/or text messages from the Child Support Program	19%	19%	16%	8%	9%	12%	11 pp

Respondents were asked to indicate their preferred communication methods (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Preferred communication method (check all that apply; n=1084)



Most commonly, respondents selected email communication (78 percent) and over half selected text messaging (52 percent) as their preferred communication method. Email was also the most commonly preferred form of communication discussed in interviews with parents, who noted it is a direct and fast method of communication. Less than half of respondents selected phone calls as a preferred communication method (40 percent).

Though letters and other written communications were frequently or occasionally used by over half of respondents (52 percent), few selected it as their preferred communication method (35 percent). This may suggest that written communications are used because it is how the program currently communicates with participants, but that it is not participants' preferred method of communication.

A minority selected in-person meetings as a preferred communication method (11 percent) and several selected other communication methods (1 percent). Among those who selected other, respondents most commonly said they would prefer if the program did not contact them at all. Others suggested voice mail, video call, and other online methods not further specified.

A notably higher proportion of custodial parents reported preferring text messaging and email than non-custodial parents, though email was the most preferred method of communication across all respondents (Table 37).

Table 38. Notable differences in preferred communication method by parent role

Response	Custodial parent (n=732)	Non-custodial parent (n=474)	Difference
Text messaging	61%	38%	23 pp
Email	82%	71%	11 pp

Notable differences in preferred method of communication by race and ethnicity included (Table 38):

- Respondents who identified as Native American or Hispanic preferred text messaging more often than other groups.
- Respondents who identified as Hispanic or an Other racial or ethnic background preferred phone calls more often than other groups. Respondents that identified as White preferred phone calls less often than respondents that identified as Black.
- Respondents that identified as Black or an Other racial or ethnic background preferred letters more often than other groups.
- Respondents that identified as Native American or an Other racial or ethnic background preferred in-person meetings more often than other groups.

Table 39. Notable differences in preferred communication method by race/ethnicity

Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
Text messaging	56%	70%	54%	63%	53%	54%	39%
Phone call	48%	40%	41%	61%	36%	69%	45%
Letters	49%	35%	33%	29%	33%	46%	37%

Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
In-person meeting (when safe)	16%	25%	11%	12%	10%	38%	12%

Phone calls, text messaging, and letters were preferred notably less often as absolute income increased among respondents (Table 39). Additionally, letters were preferred notably more often among respondents with a lower relative income compared with those with a higher relative income (Table 40).

Table 40. Notable differences in preferred communication method by absolute income

Response	\$0– \$24,999 (n=134)	\$25,000– \$49,999 (n=316)	\$50,000– \$74,999 (n=238)	\$75,000– \$99,999 (n=113)	\$100,000 or above (n=103)	Prefer not to answer (n=167)	Difference
Text messaging	65%	56%	53%	48%	51%	41%	13 pp
Phone calls	45%	41%	39%	36%	33%	40%	12 pp
Letters	48%	34%	33%	28%	36%	37%	12 pp

Table 41. Notable differences in preferred communication method by relative income

Response	Lower (n=350)	About the same (n=172)	Higher (n=264)	Difference
Letters	43%	33%	28%	15 pp

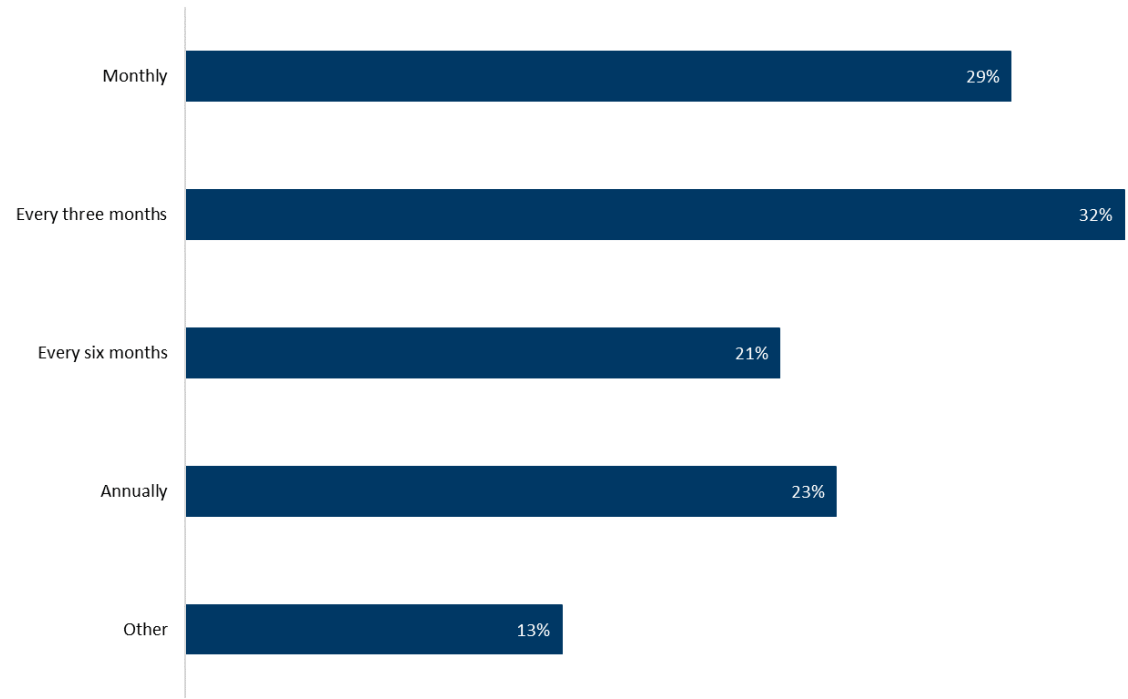
Phone calls were preferred notably less often as respondents' time in the program increased (Table 41).

Table 42. Notable differences in preferred communication method by program tenure

Response	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
Phone call	61%	46%	35%	37%	24 pp

Respondents were asked to indicate their preferred frequency of communications (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Preferred contact frequency (check all that apply; n=1079)



Respondents were most often interested in monthly (29 percent) and quarterly (32 percent) communications from the program. Similar proportions of respondents were interested in bi-annual (21 percent) and annual (23 percent) communications from the program. Few respondents selected other communication frequencies (13 percent). Most of these respondents said they preferred communication on an as-needed basis, for example when there are changes in payment amounts, missed payments, changes to employment or case worker assignments, when major life events occur (for example, a child graduates from high school), or when an enforcement remedy is enacted. Receiving communications as needed was also commonly discussed among parents that participated in interviews, where life events and changes in support status were common sources of confusion and frustration. Interviewees often expressed uncertainty about the implications of these events on their case and a lack of clarity about actions they could or should take.

Several respondents who selected other communication frequencies said they never wanted the program to contact them, while a few requested more-frequent communication (for example, daily, weekly, bi-weekly). A few respondents requested that the program return their phone calls, and, in line with ratings above, a few suggested the program provide more proactive communication, which would decrease their need to contact the program directly (for example, updates, important news, frequently asked questions, sufficient information about requests and changes to cases).

Notable differences in preferred frequency of communication by race and ethnicity included (Table 42):

- Approximately one-third of respondents across all race and ethnicity groups were interested in monthly communications. Respondents who identified as White were less interested in monthly communications than respondents that identified as an Other racial or ethnic background.
- Respondents who identified as Asian or Hispanic were more interested in quarterly communications compared with other groups and respondents that identified as an Other racial or ethnic background were less interested.
- Respondents that identified as Native American were more interested in bi-annual communications compared with other groups.
- Respondents that identified as an Other racial or ethnic background were more interested in annual communications compared with other groups.
- Respondents that identified as an Other racial or ethnic background were more interested in other communication frequencies compared with other groups.

Table 43. Notable differences in preferred contact frequency by race/ethnicity

Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
Monthly	34%	32%	31%	32%	28%	38%	22%

Response	Black (n=141)	Native (n=20)	Asian (n=55)	Hispanic (n=53)	White (n=731)	Other (n=13)	Prefer not to answer (n=103)
Every three months	33%	32%	50%	42%	32%	23%	34%
Every six months	22%	37%	19%	20%	21%	15%	18%
Annually	21%	21%	29%	12%	23%	31%	25%
Other	10%	11%	8%	12%	13%	23%	15%

As respondents' time in the program increased, their interest in monthly communications notably decreased, while interest in bi-annual and annual communications notably increased. Respondents were most consistently interested in quarterly communications from the program, regardless of their program tenure (Table 43).

Table 44. Differences in preferred contact frequency by program tenure

Response	Less than 1 year (n=75)	1–3 years (n=208)	4–6 years (n=269)	7 or more years (n=527)	Difference
Monthly	42%	38%	31%	22%	20 pp
Every three months	39%	39%	32%	30%	9 pp
Every six months	8%	17%	23%	22%	14 pp
Annually	10%	16%	20%	28%	18 pp

All rated statements sorted by average

Table 44 below shows the results for each rated statement. They are shown in order of average score, from highest to lowest.

Table 45. All rated statements sorted by average

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable	Total answers	Average
Child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met.	41% 487	32% 390	11% 129	7% 81	10% 115	-	1,202	3.9
It is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on my case.	27% 306	42% 470	22% 245	3% 35	6% 73	-	1,129	3.8
Automatic payments and income withholding from the non-custodial parents' paycheck are easy and convenient ways to ensure payments are made or received on time.	28% 312	39% 442	15% 167	8% 90	11% 119	-	1,130	3.7
The child support program consistently collects payments.	27% 305	40% 449	14% 158	10% 110	9% 107	-	1,129	3.7
I understand how to provide updates to the program about a change in my address or contact information.	16% 187	49% 566	14% 166	11% 124	6% 69	3% 40	1,152	3.6
My child support worker treats me with dignity and respect.	23% 252	32% 353	29% 324	6% 63	10% 110	-	1,102	3.5
The process of applying to or enrolling in the child support program is easy.	13% 154	35% 406	25% 294	10% 119	6% 68	10% 115	1,156	3.4

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable	Total answers	Average
My child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about my case.	18% 199	31% 342	34% 372	8% 87	9% 102	-	1,102	3.4
I understand the information the child support program provides to me.	11% 122	45% 500	23% 256	11% 119	9% 103	-	1,100	3.4
I would recommend participating in the child support program to other parents.	25% 299	27% 329	21% 250	10% 115	17% 205	-	1,198	3.3
My child support worker responds to me in a timely way.	18% 203	31% 337	27% 298	11% 125	13% 139	-	1,102	3.3
I understand how child support payment amounts are determined.	13% 152	41% 468	14% 160	18% 203	13% 149	-	1,132	3.2
I understand how to provide updates to the program when I experience a life event, such as a change in employment or when my child graduates from high school.	13% 150	37% 430	16% 186	20% 234	10% 118	3% 33	1,151	3.2
It has been clear who my child support worker is.	18% 199	36% 399	12% 135	16% 178	17% 193	-	1,104	3.2
The child support program has benefited my family.	20% 236	31% 373	17% 200	15% 186	17% 206	-	1,201	3.2
Overall, my experience with the child support program has been positive.	14% 170	34% 410	18% 218	18% 215	16% 189	-	1,202	3.1
I understood the administrative fees associated with the child support program when I applied or enrolled.	10% 112	33% 379	19% 215	18% 210	11% 130	9% 106	1,152	3.1

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable	Total answers	Average
It has been easy for me to contact my child support worker.	16% 178	28% 312	20% 226	17% 188	18% 199	-	1,103	3.1
It is easy for me to find the information I need about the child support program and my case.	10% 109	33% 363	22% 245	20% 215	15% 170	-	1,102	3.0
I trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of my children.	15% 180	23% 279	21% 255	17% 203	23% 281	-	1,198	2.9
I receive enough information from the child support program about my case.	10% 107	27% 296	21% 235	22% 246	20% 215	-	1,099	2.8
The child support program is fair and unbiased.	13% 159	25% 297	18% 220	18% 211	26% 310	-	1,197	2.8
The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.	9% 106	23% 260	19% 210	21% 240	28% 315	-	1,131	2.6
It is easy to change payment amounts to reflect changes in my income or other life events.	4% 50	11% 122	39% 437	20% 225	26% 292	-	1,126	2.5
The child support program proactively communicates with me about my case.	7% 75	18% 194	19% 205	28% 311	29% 319	-	1,104	2.5

Recommendations

MAD developed recommendations for the child support program based on survey responses and earlier interview findings; these recommendations may be improved and refined with additional perspectives from program staff and other stakeholders. The child support program should explore these recommendations in the broader context of programmatic goals, priorities, feasibility, and available resources.

Recommendations categorized by complexity and impact

Low complexity, high impact

- **The child support program should build on the findings of this study and move toward action planning and implementation.** CSD has invested significant time and financial resources in studying the parent experience and now has a number of tangible improvements it should make to the program. Counties, courts, and other partners in the child support program should be consulted in reviewing the parent perspectives reflected in this report and planning changes that could be made in response.
- **In future research, the child support program should explore other methods of parent engagement that would complement surveys and interviews.** Parents who responded to the survey were more likely to be White, higher income, newer to the program, and have more enforcement remedy history compared to pilot county parents overall. In addition, they were more likely to be custodial parents and more likely to be residents of suburban and rural counties rather than Hennepin and Ramsey counties. In future research and engagement activities, the child support program could explore other methods of engaging families that might better reach parents of color, low-income parents, parents with longer program tenure, parents without enforcement remedy history, and parents residing in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.
- **The child support program should proactively communicate with parents throughout their time in the program using a range of communication methods.** In both the survey and interviews, parents expressed an interest in more frequent communication, with different needs for different groups of parents. When contacting parents, the child support program should use plain language and consider the tone and framing of communications, identifying any that may be perceived as overly punitive, particularly when communicating with non-custodial (paying) parents.

High complexity, high impact

- **The child support program should consider opportunities to connect parents with other programs and resources.** The child support program could partner with other state programs and nonprofit organizations to refer families to resources and programs for which they may be eligible. The survey results suggest that about one-third of parents would be interested in referrals, far more than have been connected in the past—overall, about three times the number of parents were interested in referrals as had been connected with other government programs or resources.

- **The child support program should consult with county child support offices to identify opportunities to improve parent interactions with county workers and leverage interactions with county workers to inform and connect parents.** While respondents rated statements about case workers more positively than statements about general communications, none of the statements about communications were rated particularly positively. To best serve parents, county worker resources and training elements could include sections on how to serve families holistically, how to shift toward a customer service mindset, and how to identify community resources that may be available to support parents. County workers could also be supported with automated notifications and resources sent to both participants and county workers about a status change, life event, or potential eligibility for another program.
- **The child support program should seek to better understand the experiences of parents who identify as American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, or Indigenous.** Respondents who identified as American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, or Indigenous consistently rated statements lower than respondents that identified with another racial or ethnic group, on average. Further engagement is needed to better understand the needs and experiences of Native American parents and identify opportunities to serve them better.
- **The child support program should explore simplifying application and modification processes.** Only half of the parents surveyed said they understood how to provide updates when they experience a life event. In interviews, many parents described the process of updating support amounts to reflect a change in income or life event as difficult. Parents said they wish there were an easier, simpler way to update orders for support without going to court. In interviews, many parents also described the documentation requested as part of the application process as burdensome. These findings were relatively consistent with survey findings, though were not as negatively rated, on average. Improving these processes would likely involve working with counties, judicial partners, and legislative partners to streamline forms and the documentation that is requested.

Low complexity, low impact

- **The child support program should build on parents' appreciation for automated payments and review suggestions about payment logistics to determine if they can be incorporated.** More than two-thirds of respondents agreed it is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on their case. Perceptions of automatic payments and income withholding and consistently collecting payments were also among the highest-rated statements overall. CSD can build on this success by highlighting the value the program provides to parents through payment collection and recording and by continuing to refine and improve payment logistics. For example, auto pay for self-employed non-custodial (paying) parents, electronic refunds, and selecting on which day of the month payments are made.

High complexity, low impact²¹

- **As DHS and policymakers implement changes in statute²² to calculating child support payments, they should further explore the differences in opinion among parents regarding payment calculations.** Only one-third of respondents felt the child support system is fair in determining payment amounts, while about half disagreed. In interviews, parents with higher incomes expressed a preference for payments to be flatter (to change less if they earn more), while parents with low incomes expressed a preference for more graduated payments (for payments to change more based on income earned at a given time). Additionally, DHS should consider parent feedback about potential unintended consequences of existing and future payment structures, such as making it difficult for low-income parents to pursue further education and decreasing the incentive for higher-earning parents to pursue a promotion.

Potential action steps

Action planning

- Convene internal staff to share results and identify short- and medium-term actions, including timelines and staff responsible for implementation.
- Convene counties, courts, and other partners to review the parent perspectives reflected in this report and plan changes that could be made in response.

Proactive communication

- Ask visitors to Minnesota Child Support Online to opt in to email and text message updates (the most preferred methods of communication) and confirm their email address and phone numbers on file.
- Write a series of physical and electronic welcome mailings to automatically send to newly enrolled parents (who were notably more interested in more frequent communication) during the first few months they are enrolled, covering topics such as different ways parents can contact the program, the intent and goals of the program, and how child support amounts are determined.
- Write a series of milestone messages to automatically send to parents in specific situations, such as a change in county worker, changes in support status, and a child turning 18.
- Develop a customized quarterly report to send to all parents summarizing information about their case, such as their current assigned county worker and provision of reminders and frequently asked questions (for example, how to update employment information). As program tenure increased, parents were less interested in frequent communication but were also less likely to know information such as their currently assigned county worker.

²¹ It may be unlikely that DHS and policymakers will identify a payment calculation system that satisfies most or all participants, resulting in potentially low impact.

²² Minnesota Session Laws 2021, Regular Session final engrossment, chapter 30 HF No. 2128.

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2021/0/Session+Law/Chapter/30/>

- Review all messages for plain language, tone, and framing, identifying any that may be perceived as overly punitive, particularly when communicating with non-custodial (paying) parents.
- In situations where the program must provide documents with complex legal language, include a cover letter with a plain language summary.

Connections with other programs and resources

- Work with other programs and departments within DHS (for example, Business Solutions Office) and at other state agencies (such as interagency Preschool Development Grant initiatives) to identify and develop a repository of eligibility criteria for programming of most interest to parents.
- Solicit input from counties on programs and resources parents might find useful.
- Share repository of programs and resources with county child support officers.
- Share information about commonly requested resources as part of Minnesota Child Support Online.
- Develop automated messages to send to parents based on their potential eligibility for other programs and resources, either as stand-alone messages or as part of other proactive communications.

Improving interactions with county workers

- Share results of this research with county staff and facilitate a workshop to collectively identify ways to improve parents' experiences with county workers.
- Develop training and job aids highlighting best practices from counties on topics such as serving families holistically, how to shift toward a customer service mindset, and how to identify community resources that may be available to support parents.
- Equip county workers with resources identified as part of the recommendations on proactive communication and connection with other programs. When proactive messages and automated referrals are sent to parents, send a copy of these messages to county workers as well.
- Make information about a parent's currently assigned county worker more visible across communication methods, such as on letters and on Minnesota Child Support Online. Proactively send parents messages whenever their worker changes.

Understanding the experiences of Native American parents

- In future research, continue to disaggregate the perspectives of parents who identify as American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, or Indigenous. In addition, explore conducting separate, intentional research to better understand these parents' experiences.
- In future research, explore other methods of parent engagement that would complement surveys and interviews.
- Work with tribal liaisons and other DHS programs to identify ways to begin building stronger relationships with Native American tribes and communities. Once relationships have been established, engage with community members to identify ways the program could better support individuals with cases managed by the state.

- Identify opportunities to engage with parents residing outside of tribal lands, such as the Urban Indian Advisory Board of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.
- Consider how the history of state and federal policies centered on Native American children may contribute to a lack of trust in the state to do what is in the best interest of Native American children, and identify actions the program could take to acknowledge this history and earn parents' trust.

Simplifying application and modification processes

- Share results of this research with judicial and legislative partners and convene a conversation to discuss the potential to streamline forms and the documentation that is requested.
- Evaluate which pieces of requested information are vital and which pieces could be optional by reviewing how often different pieces of information on the application and modification processes lead to changes in child support determinations.

Appendix A: Child Support Program Survey

About this survey

Earlier this year, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Support Division (CSD) invited parents with an open child support case to participate in interviews. The state's third-party consulting service, Management Analysis and Development (MAD), conducted in-depth interviews with a small group of interested parents about whether and how the program has benefited their families, challenges they have experienced, and what changes they would recommend. CSD now wants to build on those interviews and gather feedback from a large group of parents about their experience in the program and ideas for improvement.

The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the survey **by Friday, February 18th**.

Data privacy

DHS hired MAD to administer the survey and analyze the results. MAD is a state government office within Minnesota Management and Budget and is separate from DHS. Only MAD, and not DHS, will know whether you took the survey and how you answered. Any information that could reasonably be used to identify an individual from their responses is considered private data under the Minnesota Data Practices Act (Minnesota Statute §13.64), meaning MAD cannot share it with others, except as provided by law. MAD will provide a summary of survey findings to DHS and will use methods such as rounding, aggregation, and data suppression to make sure no individual can be identified by their responses. For example, if there are only a few survey respondents in a group, MAD will combine that grouping with a larger group of respondents to ensure confidentiality.

Participation in the survey is voluntary; the only consequence of not participating is that DHS will not have your feedback.

If you have questions

If you have questions about how the results will be used, please contact Bruce Erickson at bruce.t.erickson@state.mn.us. If you have any technical problems accessing the survey, please contact Ashley Johnson at ashley.johnson@state.mn.us.

If you have questions about your child support case, please contact your county child support case worker.

Tips for using this survey

- If you cannot complete the survey at one sitting, you can use the "Save" button at the bottom of the page to save your answers. You can return to complete the survey later using the link in the invitation email.

- To reset your answers on a particular page, use the “Reset” button.
- If you would prefer a text-based version of the survey (for example, if you use a screen reader), use the “text only” link on the center of the top of the screen.

Thank you for your time!

Overall experience

1. **Thinking about your overall experience with the child support program, please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.** [Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
 - Overall, my experience with the child support program has been positive.
 - The child support program has benefited my family.
 - The child support program is fair and unbiased.
 - Child support is an important program for ensuring the financial needs of children are met.
 - I would recommend participating in the child support program to other parents.
 - I trust the child support program to do what is in the best financial interest of my children.

Program logistics

2. **Thinking about program logistics, please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements. Select “Not Applicable” if you have not had experiences related to the statement.** [Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Applicable]
 - The process of applying to or enrolling in the child support program is easy.
 - I understood the administrative fees associated with the child support program when I applied or enrolled.
 - I understand how to provide updates to the program about a change in my address or contact information.
 - I understand how to provide updates to the program when I experience a life event, such as a change in employment or when my child graduates from high school.
3. **The child support program has connected me with other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family.**
 - Yes
 - No
4. **I would be interested in referrals to other government programs or resources that could benefit me and my family, based on information in my child support case. *Selecting “yes” will not sign you up to receive referrals.***
 - Yes
 - No
 - a. **If yes to Q4: Which of the following resources and supports would you be most interested in? Select all that apply.**
 - Child care resources
 - Health insurance resources
 - Parent support groups

- Co-parenting and parenting skills resources
- Court or other legal navigation services
- Employment resources, such as information on workforce centers, job fairs, and job postings
- Financial resources, such as financial empowerment programs, budgeting assistance, tax assistance, and payment resources
- Public assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and general assistance
- Energy or other utility assistance
- Domestic abuse resources
- Substance use and abuse resources
- Mental health and counseling
- Crisis centers
- Other (please specify)

Payments

5. **Thinking about child support payments, please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.** [Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
- I understand how child support payment amounts are determined.
 - The child support system is fair in determining payment amounts.
 - Automatic payments and income withholding from the non-custodial parents' paycheck are easy and convenient ways to ensure payments are made or received on time.
 - The child support program consistently collects payments.
 - It is easy to change payment amounts to reflect changes in my income or other life events.
 - It is helpful when the child support program collects and records payments on my case.

Communications

6. **Thinking about communicating with the child support program, please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.** [Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
- I receive enough information from the child support program about my case.
 - The child support program proactively communicates with me about my case.
 - It is easy for me to find the information I need about the child support program and my case.
 - I understand the information the child support program provides to me.
 - It has been clear who my child support worker is.
 - It has been easy for me to contact my child support worker.
 - My child support worker responds to me in a timely way.
 - My child support worker treats me with dignity and respect.
 - My child support worker is knowledgeable about the program and can answer questions about my case.
7. **How often do you access or use the following to help you get information about your child support case?** [Frequently, Occasionally/Sometimes, Almost Never, Never, I am not aware of this]
- Minnesota Child Support Online
 - Letters and other written communications sent to me by the child support program

- County child support officer
 - Case information automated phone line
 - Minnesota Child Support Division Help Desk
8. **I would be interested in email and text messaging communications from the child support program. *Selecting “yes” will not sign you up to receive email or text messaging communications.***
- Yes
 - No
 - I already receive emails and/or text messages from the child support program
9. **How would you prefer the child support program communicate with you? Check all that apply.**
- Phone call
 - Text message
 - Email
 - Letters
 - In-person meeting (when safe)
 - Other (please specify)
10. **How often would you like the child support program to contact you? Check all that apply.**
- Monthly
 - Every three months
 - Every six months
 - Annually
 - Other (please specify)

About you

Reminder: Information that could reasonably be used to identify an individual from their responses is considered private data under the Minnesota Data Practices Act (Minnesota Statute §13.64), meaning MAD cannot share it with others, except as provided by law. MAD will provide a summary of survey findings to DHS and will use methods such as rounding, aggregation, and data suppression to make sure no individual can be identified by their responses.

You are not required to share the following information. Sharing information in this survey about yourself will not impact any current or future child support cases.

11. **How long have you participated in the child support program?**
- Less than a year
 - 1–3 years
 - 4–6 years
 - 7 or more years
12. **Do you currently live in Minnesota?**
- Yes
 - No
- a. **If yes to Q12: In which Minnesota county do you live?**
- Becker
 - Cottonwood

- Crow Wing
- Dakota
- Hennepin
- Jackson
- Koochiching
- Mower
- Olmsted
- Pine
- Ramsey
- Scott
- Wright
- None of the above

13. What racial/ethnic background do you identify with? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Hispanic/Latinx
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Unknown
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

14. Which of these describes your annual income?

- ☐ \$0–\$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000–\$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000–\$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000–\$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 or above
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

15. Compared with the other parent involved in your child support case, is your level of income about the same as theirs, higher than theirs, or lower than theirs?

- ☐ Higher
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Lower
- ☐ I don't know

16. Have you or the other parent involved in your child support case experienced an enforcement remedy in the past five years? Enforcement remedies include (but are not limited to) actions such as arrears collection, credit bureau reporting, passport denial, and driver's license suspension.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Use the **“Submit”** button below to submit your survey. Thank you for your feedback!