TWO VOICES, ONE VISION

Connecting Family and Educator Definitions of Quality

The Marin UPK Family Survey (178 families, spring 2025) alongside Defining Quality in ECE (77 educators and providers, November 2025)

Where the two voices say the same thing

Families were never shown the educator survey, and educators were never shown the family survey — yet five of the six quality elements families named map almost directly onto five of the eight themes educators independently generated. That convergence, reached from two different vantage points using two different surveys, is itself a finding: it suggests Marin does not have a disagreement about what quality means, but a gap in how consistently that shared vision is delivered and resourced.

FAMILY REPORT THEME	EDUCATOR REPORT THEME	HOW THEY ECHO EACH OTHER
Caring Relationships	**Relationships, Belonging & Emotional Safety**	Nearly identical language, independently generated. Families: "Caring, loving teachers that are willing to meet your child where they are at." Educators: "An environment where children feel safe, loved and valued." This is the strongest cross-validated theme in both surveys.
Whole Child Learning	**Developmentally Appropriate Practice & Whole-Child Focus**	Both reject an academics-only view of readiness. Families describe self-regulation and "learning through play"; educators describe supporting "cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development."
Rich Learning Experiences	**Play-Based, Hands-On, Inquiry Learning**	Both name exploration, nature, art, and open-ended materials as central — not extras. Families and educators use almost the same vocabulary ("explore," "discovery," "hands-on").
Individualized Support / Developmental Fit	**Child Agency, Autonomy & Capability**	Partial overlap with a real difference in emphasis: families want to be understood and supported ("program understands and supports their needs"); educators emphasize trusting children's independence and voice. Same value — "honor the individual child" — seen from two sides.
Family Partnership & Belonging	**Family Partnership, Communication & Connection**	Strong alignment. Families: "Staff are approachable, communication is open." Educators: "Families are treated as partners and experts in their child's learning and care experience."

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Accessible & Sustainable Care	**No matching theme**	The most important gap. Cost, hours, and location — families' single biggest access barrier (page 7 of the family report) — does not appear among the educators' eight themes. The only echo is a passing note that providers want "financial assistance for families to access high-quality care."
No matching theme	**Skilled, Reflective, Well-Supported Educators**	The reverse gap. Families never mention teacher compensation, retention, or training — they only see the outcome. Educators name this as a top concern: "Teachers must feel taken care of before they can adequately care for children." See below.

The clearest connection: teacher well-being and the classrooms families experience
The single most concrete link between the two reports is also the most actionable one. In the family survey, two independent respondents — different families, same program type — described a TK classroom where "the lead teacher has been absent nearly 20% of the time" and the classroom felt "chaotic more than halfway through the year." Families experienced this as a quality failure.

"*Teachers must feel taken care of before they can adequately care for children.*" — Educator respondent

In the educator survey, staff compensation, retention, and well-being were named as among the most important elements of quality — not as a nice-to-have, but as a precondition for everything else on both surveys' lists. Read together, the two reports describe a single causal chain: workforce conditions (visible only to educators) shape teacher presence and stability, which families experience directly as warmth, consistency, or its absence. A family-facing quality report and a workforce-facing quality report are, in this instance, describing the same event from opposite ends.

A shared channel Marin isn't yet using
The two surveys also point to an operational opportunity. Families' top source of information about their child's care (76.8%) is their child's own teacher or program — far ahead of community organizations (33.3%) and county or school district resources (28.8%). Educators, meanwhile, rely heavily on the Marin County Office of Education and their professional colleague networks (67.5% each) for their own guidance on quality.

Put together: MCOE and mc3 already have a trusted, established relationship with educators, and families already have a trusted, established relationship with their child's educators. The most efficient way to get county-level information and resources into family hands may not be a new family-facing channel, but a strengthened flow through the educators families already lean on — turning a resource educators use into a resource families receive.