

A FOCUS ON FAMILY CHILD CARE: HELPING THOSE HARDEST HIT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

December 2020

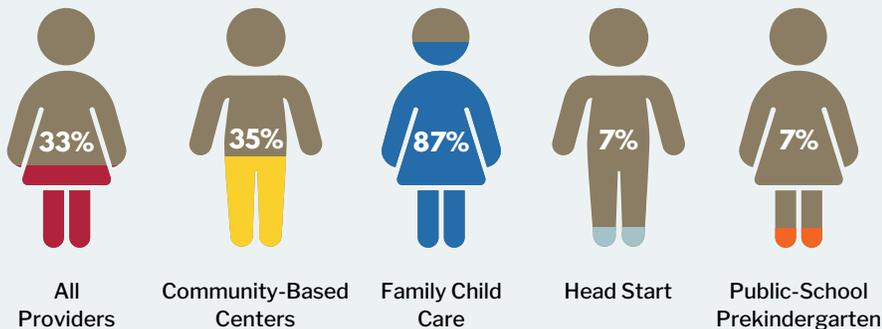
Brief 1

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Family child care providers are an important part of the early education and care landscape and have unique strengths that make them a linchpin in the country's pandemic response and recovery; indeed, there are early signals that family child care settings are becoming a "go-to" option for families as they slowly return to work. By design, family child care providers serve small, mixed-age groups of children in a home-like environment, a configuration that may be especially in demand given public health concerns about large group sizes. Family child care programs also tend to be more affordable, flexible, and likely to be staffed by educators and caregivers who reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition of the communities they serve than other types of early education and care programs.

Despite the importance of family child care providers, our survey of early educators and caregivers across Massachusetts shows those working in family child care programs were particularly vulnerable to the pandemic's initial impacts. Nearly all (87%) educators and caregivers in family child care programs reported their income had been affected, which was not the case among those in other provider types. In particular, educators and caregivers in Head Start and public school prekindergarten programs, settings typically marked by stable funding streams and systemic supports, were very unlikely to report the pandemic had affected their incomes.

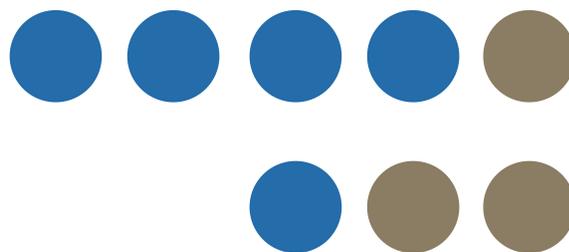
Educators and Caregivers Reporting Their Income was Affected by Pandemic, Overall and by Program Type



“ I've been without income and won't be able to continue much longer, despite the fact that I know my daycare families are counting on me to be able to reopen my business when appropriate. It might not happen, and I am scared. ”

Not surprisingly, educators and caregivers working in family child care programs reported high levels of financial stress. Further, about one in three educators and caregivers expressed uncertainty about the viability of their business.

“ After 30 plus years of running a successful family child care, always having a waiting list, never having to advertise, I'm not sure what the future holds. ”



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Sustaining family child care providers is essential for protecting the livelihoods of educators and caregivers and meeting the needs of families with young children. There are a number of ways to help family child care providers weather this storm:



Provide immediate, stabilizing financial support to ensure program survival.

Making funds available to family child care providers, such as through [emergency grants or stipends](#), can stabilize operations in the wake of the pandemic's extensive financial disruptions. Family child care providers are often self-employed and therefore not always eligible for the same financial relief as other early education and care programs or employees. Ensuring family child care providers have access to immediate financial supports will be critical to preventing further program closures.



Promote the longer-term financial sustainability of family child care programs.

Even before the pandemic, family child care providers operated with [small profit margins](#), which made them particularly vulnerable to prolonged program closures. Redesigning finance and support systems to ensure family child care providers are equitably compensated can promote stability in the sector. For example, shared service models can be used to distribute common administrative and business costs across networks of providers, reducing the burden on individual business owners while maintaining the strengths of family child care. Further, reimbursement rates family child care providers receive for subsidized child care slots in most states fall short of the federally recommended levels. Raising reimbursement rates to reflect the cost of providing high-quality care can support programs' long-term viability.



Build networks to connect family child care providers.

Educators and caregivers in family child care programs often work long hours and balance multiple roles in relative isolation. Partnerships and networks that connect family child care providers through professional development and technical assistance can increase educators' job satisfaction, well-being, and the quality of their professional practice.

Methodology: This brief is based on findings from a survey of 693 early educators and caregivers representing 310 early learning programs in Massachusetts. Among these, 120 were educators and caregivers working in 112 family child care programs. Surveys were completed between April 21 and June 17, 2020, a period when early education and care programs were still shuttered under state mandate (with the exception of a small number of emergency child care programs operating for the children of frontline workers and vulnerable families).

For additional information, see the full report: [Pandemic Meets Preschool: Impacts of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Early Education and Care in Massachusetts](#).

Suggested Citation: Gardner, M., Hanno, E. C., Wiklund Hayhurst, E., Jones, S. M., Lesaux, N. K., Hofer, K., Checkoway, A., Goodson, B. (2020). *A Focus on Family Child Care: Helping those Hardest Hit by the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Brief 1). Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education.