

SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND CAREGIVERS

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Brief 2

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Educators and caregivers play a critical role in creating the types of rich, responsive learning environments and relationships that foster young children's healthy development. But when educators and caregivers face high levels of stress without adequate support, it can be **hard for them to enact high-quality practices** or sustain those practices over time.

Our survey of educators and caregivers in Massachusetts illustrates the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood educator and caregiver well-being. Nearly 60% of educators and caregivers felt that the pandemic had affected their mental health and even more (78%) felt anxious about how it would affect them in the future. Yet, despite high levels of educator and caregiver stress, relatively few reported having access to mental health supports (37%).

“ Everything has become more difficult now; just going day by day is a struggle. ”

60% of educators and caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that the pandemic had affected their mental health



Yet only 37% reported having access to mental health supports



Beyond the impact of the pandemic on their overall well-being, the prospect of returning to work with young children also represented a stressor for many educators and caregivers. Nearly half (47%) expressed concerns that their work would pose a risk to their health. This anxiety has implications both for educators' and caregivers' daily well-being and practice as well as the ability of leaders to maintain a stable workforce as programs reopen for in-person learning.



47%
Expressed concerns that their work
would pose a risk to their health

“ Honestly, I am nervous and don't feel safe to return to my teaching job. I love working with young children, but it is too risky. ”

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Supporting the well-being of educators and caregivers as early education and care programs reopen requires action at multiple levels and is critical to ensuring children return to safe, high-quality settings.

Beyond broader policy efforts focused on providing educators and caregivers with livable wages and stable employment, there are a number of ways to support educator and caregiver well-being:



Leverage effective models to support educator and caregiver well-being.

Mental health consultation, in which educators and caregivers are given one-on-one support to manage job-related stressors, can increase educator and caregiver well-being. This model is likely to be particularly helpful as educators and caregivers navigate new safety regulations and support children who carry their own pandemic-related stressors, which may manifest in the form of challenging behaviors and contribute to caregiver stress.



Build networks to connect early educators and caregivers to each other and professional supports.

Professional networks can reduce isolation, prevent burnout, and make work seem more manageable. These networks may also be leveraged to deliver key professional supports to educators and caregivers who might otherwise lack access to research-backed resources, such as curriculum guidance or high-quality, job-embedded professional learning. These types of **professional supports** have been shown to reduce educator stress, thereby contributing positively to the quality of early learning environments.



Provide educators and caregivers with effective supports to alleviate stress and promote well-being.

The pandemic has affected all aspects of daily life, and many educators and caregivers are facing immense personal and economic losses without access to resources or strategies that might help them cope. Connecting educators and caregivers to effective supports for reducing stress and anxiety can promote overall well-being. These supports may range from more intensive services, such as professional counseling and therapy, to more widely available resources, such as web-based applications that help individuals build daily practices that can improve mindfulness and mental well-being.

Methodology: This brief is based on findings from a survey of 693 early educators and caregivers representing 310 early learning programs in Massachusetts. 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](#).

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