naeyc® National Association for the Education of Young Children

State Survey Data: Child Care at a Time of Progress and Peril

August 2021

The COVID pandemic has reinforced the essential role of child care and early learning for children, working families, and the economy. Emergency federal and state relief funds have provided critical support for stabilizing child care programs and preventing more widespread permanent program closures, but they do not address the systemic challenges that have plagued the child care market – parents and providers alike – for decades. As such, they are just the beginning of what is needed to recover and rebuild.

To understand the depth of the challenges, how relief is helping, and what more is needed, NAEYC surveyed more than **7,500 respondents** between June 17 and July 5, 2021, working across all states and settings.[1] For access to the national analysis, and prior survey data and analyses from March, May, July, and December 2020, visit **NAEYC.org/pandemic-surveys**.

State data from **46 states** and the District of Columbia are shared on the following pages. (Not included are Nebraska, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Puerto Rico due to low numbers of responses). Despite the variations in the number of responses in the states that are included, the data across states and at the national level are remarkably similar in terms of the story they tell, particularly around the way relief prevented widespread, permanent closures even as programs continue to face intensive staffing challenges, with substantial impact on children and families' access to child care.

The data also tell a story about the impact of state policy and financing choices. **At the national level, more than one in every three of respondents, inclusive of all settings, said they were considering leaving their child care program or closing their family child care home within the next year, with another 14% saying "maybe" they would leave or close.** This percentage rises to **55%** of minority-owned businesses and a full **70%** of those who have been in the field for one year or less, portending disproportionate impacts among educators from communities of color, and a potentially significant pipeline problem for the early childhood educator sector. Yet these averages mask one of the more significant variations across states, with ranges from **14%** to **65%** of educators saying they are considering leaving or closing their program. With the caveats that other factors play a part, and there may be more correlation than causation, there is a potential pattern emerging in the states where positive, comprehensive, and prioritized investments in the early childhood education workforce (in states from New Mexico to Vermont and Georgia to Oklahoma) are aligned with lower percentages of educators who say they are considering leaving the field or closing their program. NAEYC urges states to continue to make priority investments in the early childhood workforce as the key driver of increased quality, access, and equity in the present and future.

It is within our nation's power not only to save child care, but to solve the persistent challenges that have plagued the system for generations. Now is the moment for states to choose wisely in their implementation of relief funding, and for Congress to act, by building on relief, and making the bold, sustainable, and necessary investments in quality child care and early learning that will respond to our communities' short and long term needs and support families' economic security and children's success.

1. More than 10,000 individuals participated in the survey. However, the number of responses from six states was well above the mean, so a smaller random sample from those states was selected for the national-level analysis to minimize a skew in the data results. All respondents are included in the state-level analyses, which is why the total number of respondents in the state-by-state data is greater than the number of respondents referenced in the national data analysis. For additional information on the survey methodology, please see page 3 of the national "Progress and Peril" brief. In addition, because this survey was entirely voluntary and results in a non-randomized sample, NAEYC recommends continuing to seek official sources from states tracking data such as program closures, enrollment, and attendance.

You can find all NAEYC surveys and related information at NAEYC.org/pandemic-surveys. If you have questions or want to share your stories of child care and the pandemic, please email advocacy@naeyc.org.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Federal and state relief funds have helped stabilize child care programs and prevented more program closures. However, staffing shortages, low wages, and a broken market mean that substantial, sustainable public investments are needed for this essential sector to recover and rebuild.

102 total respondents, including **58%** child care centers and **21%** family child care homes. These data are part of a NAEYC national survey provided in English or Spanish, taken by more than **10,000** individuals working in early childhood education settings between June 17 - July 5, 2021. To learn more, visit **naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys**.

Impact and Opportunity of Relief Funding

- Child care centers and family child care homes are operating at an average enrollment rate of 61% of their licensed capacity, with 33% of enrolled children attending on an average day.
- 43% of respondents inclusive of all settings say their program likely would have closed without help.
  - That includes 38% of all family child care providers and 49% of those who are a minority-owned business.
- 38% of respondents working in child care centers and 13% of those working in family child care homes have been able to reduce debt they took on during the pandemic using relief funds they have received to date.
  - Another 55% say they will be able to reduce debt with future relief funds, such as the stabilization grants.
- 71% of respondents in child care centers and family child care homes received an increase in compensation through bonuses or an increase in baseline pay.
- 89% of early childhood educators say they would want their compensation to increase temporarily (for 1-2 years), even if they knew it would eventually revert to what they receive now.
- 58% of early childhood educators working in centers and family child care homes are worried about being cut off from public benefits (like SNAP or housing subsidies) if their compensation is increased, so policymakers must implement solutions that ensure educators who are receiving increased emergency financial support do not find themselves in a situation resulting in a loss of public assistance that is crucial to their families' well-being.

Staffing and Compensation

- 84% of child care centers are experiencing a staffing shortage.
  - 36% of programs impacted by staffing shortages are serving fewer children
  - 29% have a longer waitlist
  - 42% are unable to open classrooms
  - 37% have reduced their operating hours.
- 35% of respondents say it is more difficult to recruit and retain qualified educators compared to before the pandemic.
- 73% of survey respondents identify wages as the main recruitment challenge because they are so low that potential applicants are either relying on pandemic unemployment or are recognizing they can make more money working just about anywhere else
- On the issue of retention, 59% of respondents say that low wages are the most common reason that educators leave the field, followed by 14% who said lack of benefits. 11% of respondents pointed to exhaustion and burnout, while only 4% said regulations were a key challenge.
- In reflecting on their own time in the field, 42% of respondents, inclusive of all settings, said they were considering leaving their program or closing their family child care within the next year, with another 10% saying maybe they would close.
  - This percentage rises to 61% of minority-owned businesses and a full 54% of those who have been in the field for one year or less.