



**SUPPORTING THE EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE
THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC:**
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
September 2020



CALL TO ACTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clearer now than ever before that the Early Learning workforce is essential. Now is the time to support, strengthen, upskill, and adequately compensate the Early Learning workforce, both for our immediate response to this crisis and to ensure that we emerge stronger.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed almost everything about how Californians live, work, and care for our children. It has also highlighted what many in the field of early childhood already knew — that childcare is essential.

Questions about how the state would care for its youngest children during the pandemic quickly surfaced following implementation of Governor Newsom’s stay-at-home order on March 19, 2020. Many Early Learning teachers did what they always do: stepped up to care for young children in spite of massive challenges, limited resources, and inadequate compensation. Early Learning settings also faced a long list of new regulations and health and safety considerations for providing care.

As part of California’s Master Plan for Early Learning and Care (MPELC) process, a team of experts worked

expediently to develop the *Early Learning and Care Playbook*, a curated set of guidelines and resources to help Early Learning teachers and providers plan for operating under new health and safety guidelines; provide high-quality care & learning support; provide confidence to families with fears; and, take care of themselves during these difficult times. However, the Early Learning field has been decimated by the pandemic as a result of new safety requirements, initial limitations on how many children can be cared for in a stable group¹, and concerns for the safety of the Early Learning workforce, among other issues. Furthermore, those providers that are open have concerns about liability should a child or staff member become sick from COVID-19 while in care. Action is needed at the state, local, and philanthropic levels to ensure that Early Learning opportunities are available, both in subsidized and private settings, when California is ready to reopen.

LOSS OF CHILDCARE DUE TO COVID-19

<p>In May 2020, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) released results from a survey of more than 2,000 Early Learning programs (which received 953 responses) throughout California and found:²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 77% of open programs have experienced loss of income from families.• 99% of open centers and 78% of open FCC programs have fewer children attending than before the pandemic (January 2020).• 62% of open centers have staff who are not working due to concerns about the health risks.• 78% of open centers and 61% of open FCC programs have fewer paid teachers now than before the pandemic (January 2020).	<p>According to a survey by NAEYC of over 5,000 providers in late June 2020, nationally, 18% of Early Learning centers and 9% of family childcare (FCC) homes remain closed:³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Of those open, 86% of respondents are serving fewer children now than they were prior to the pandemic. On average, enrollment is down by 67%.• 72% of respondents from large childcare centers said their programs had received Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds compared to 29% of small childcare centers and 17% of FCC homes.• 7% of programs will be closed by the end of July 2020, 22% more will have closed by the end of September 2020, 23% more will have closed by the end of December 2020, and 29% more will have closed by the end of June 2021. Only 18% of childcare programs expect that they will survive longer than a year without assistance.
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California is fortunate to have leaders that recognize the value of early education and have acted to protect the Early Learning workforce. Specifically, the 2020–2021 final budget agreement:

- Included a “hold harmless” provision for state subsidized Early Learning teachers by maintaining current reimbursement rates. This provision helps to protect the current Early Learning teachers and staff.
- Allocated \$198M from the federal CARES Act to:
 - Extend Alternative Payment (AP) care for 90 days for children of essential workers, at-risk children, and children with disabilities (\$73M);
 - Provide hold harmless provisions for AP providers until June 30, 2021 (\$62.5M); and
 - Provide AP Providers: one-time stipends to assist with addressing financial hardships/increased costs incurred due to COVID-19 (\$31.25M); funds to cover up to an additional 14 non-operational days (\$31.25M).

However, the Early Learning workforce also suffered in the budget with the elimination of the Early Learning Workforce Development Grants (\$150M), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Cross-Sector Training Program (\$10M), and proposed 2.31% cost of living increase.

It is clearer now than ever before, the Early Learning workforce is essential: re-opening childcare is not only critical to our economy, but critical for the healthy development of the Golden State’s greatest asset — our children. Furthermore, children are experiencing trauma, learning loss, and social isolation — making it all the more important for Early Learning teachers and providers to have the skills and abilities needed to provide high-quality care. It is an unprecedented moment in history: the MPELC will create the guideposts for recovering and strengthening the Early Learning system. Now is the time to support, strengthen, upskill, and adequately compensate the Early Learning workforce, both for our immediate response to this crisis and to ensure that we emerge stronger.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SUPPORTING THE EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE IN THE PANDEMIC

State, local, and philanthropic entities play unique and important roles in supporting the Early Learning workforce. During this unprecedented time, it is all the more important to identify the roles these entities play in order to leverage the strengths and abilities of each sector:

State Entities (Governor, Legislature, and State Agencies)	Local Entities (Local Governments, County Offices of Education, Local First 5 Commissions)	Philanthropy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the health and safety of the Early Learning workforce by enacting policies, developing guidance, and distributing protective equipment and supplies. • Prioritize and allocate state and federal resources to support the Early Learning workforce. • Collect and synthesize data for decision-making. • Set coherent policy direction and prioritize implementation steps to support and upskill the Early Learning workforce as part of ongoing recovery efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the health and safety of the Early Learning workforce by issuing locally responsive public health guidance and acquiring and distributing protective equipment and supplies. • Supplement state and federal investments with local funding to support the Early Learning workforce. • Provide accessible professional development opportunities and coaching supports (on distance learning, health and safety in a pandemic, etc.) to the Early Learning workforce and target local needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate and invest in public-private partnerships and rapid response grants to address immediate workforce needs resulting from the pandemic. • Make grants to local and state entities to bolster their efforts in supporting the Early Learning workforce. • Invest in Early Learning workforce development tools, structures, and resources, including efforts to increase access and provide incentives for completing coursework and/or professional development.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Early Edge California offers the following short- and longer-term recommendations to policymakers and partners across all levels of the Early Learning system with the goal of 1) rapidly and adequately addressing the current crisis and 2) recovering from this crisis with a well-supported Early Learning workforce and stronger system overall.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

In the **next six months**, policymakers and partners at all levels of the Early Learning system must take action that supports the Early Learning workforce in settings that remain open, and should simultaneously capitalize on the opportunity to invest in members of the workforce who have time during periods of closure to participate in training and educational opportunities.

In support of the workforce in open Early Learning settings or those providing hybrid in-person and distance learning options:

State Entities

- The California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the California Department of Education (CDE), and the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) should ensure that all members of the Early Learning workforce in subsidized Early Learning settings have access to protective equipment (masks, face shields, gloves, etc.) and that the settings in which they work have access to equipment such as thermometers and cleaning supplies to screen children and staff for COVID-19 symptoms and mitigate the risk of spread. This includes the following actions:
 - Support county and local distribution channels and/or purchasing/reimbursement processes.
 - Establish clear guidance and expectations for the use of these supplies.
 - The Governor, along with the CDE, should develop clear expectations for reopening contracted Early Learning providers. Expectations should be tailored to those operating on and off local educational agency (LEA) settings.
 - The Governor, Legislature, and Department of Finance should prioritize future federal funding for hazard pay for the Early Learning workforce in subsidized Early Learning settings that are open and serving children.⁴ Use this funding to incentivize local hazard pay matching.

- The Governor and Legislature should ensure that all Early Learning educators that are serving children in person can access health care through Covered California, including mental health supports.
- The Legislature should offer liability protections for Early Learning providers. If providers are following health and safety standards, they should be protected against lawsuits from parents or staff who become sick or whose children become sick in care.
- The Master Plan team should continue to update the *Early Learning and Care Playbook* to ensure the field has access to regularly updated resources and best practices for supporting young children and their families in care facilities that are providing in-person care.

Local Entities

- Local First 5s, Resource and Referral Agencies, and County Offices of Education should continue to implement and strengthen distribution mechanisms to ensure that all members of the Early Learning workforce in subsidized Early Learning settings receive protective equipment and supplies to screen children and staff for COVID-19 symptoms and mitigate the risk of spread.
- Local public health officials should include the Early Learning workforce as a priority population for COVID-19 testing, and to the extent feasible, offer mobile testing that can come to open Early Learning facilities.

- County Boards of Supervisors, city governments, elected officials, County Offices of Education, and local First 5s should establish locally-funded hazard pay options for members of the Early Learning workforce in subsidized Early Learning settings that remain open during the pandemic.
- County Offices of Education, local Resource and Referral Agencies, and local school districts should support efforts to connect schools with childcare providers to help coordinate care for children who are engaged in distance learning or hybrid models.
- Local Quality Counts California (QCC) Lead Agencies and partners should share resources and establish virtual support groups that focus on the professional supports needed in communities. This includes the following actions:
 - Support members of the Early Learning workforce to access resources by ensuring access to technology, availability of resources in multiple languages, and supports for teachers in communities with limited internet access.
 - Facilitate local opportunities for members of the Early Learning workforce to virtually engage with one another on issues related to health and safety, family engagement, and other pertinent topics.



Philanthropy

- Convene, organize, and fund public-private partnerships to secure and distribute protective equipment, supplies, and distance learning technology for the Early Learning workforce.
- Fund the development and dissemination of:
 - New curricula, resources, and materials for the Early Learning workforce to use across all Early Learning settings to support the academic and social-emotional development of children in this new context.
 - Online trainings, coursework, and virtual communities of practice to ensure the Early Learning workforce has access to professional development related to implementing distance learning, enacting health and safety practices related to mitigating the spread of the virus, supporting language development and meeting the needs of Dual Language Learners (DLLs), and conducting virtual family engagement strategies, including strategies to engage families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Invest in the design and implementation of networks to connect Early Learning teachers and programs to help respond to the demand for care.

In support of the workforce in closed Early Learning settings:⁵

State Entities

- The Governor, Legislature, and Department of Finance should identify ways to utilize future federal relief funding to support private centers, FCC homes, and other members of the Early Learning Workforce that have not benefited from the state's hold harmless provisions in order to maintain the supply of childcare in California.
- The California Student Aid Commission should streamline financial aid awards for the Early Learning workforce in closed settings in order to facilitate easy access for them to increase their qualifications by participating in online coursework.
- The CDE, with the direction of the Governor and the Legislature, should ensure that the use of federal pandemic response resources include a focus on supporting the Early Learning workforce by:

- Establishing incentives for the Early Learning workforce in subsidized Early Learning settings that are not open to increase their qualifications by participating in online coursework (including general education requirements for associate and bachelor's degree pathways) and professional development opportunities.
- Utilizing federal quality resources through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to support the development of new curricula, resources, and materials for the Early Learning workforce to use across all Early Learning settings to support the academic and social-emotional development of children and to support DLLs and their families through distance learning.
- Allocating funding to ensure that the Early Learning workforce has access to technology.
- Allocating funding for reopening supports and hiring assistance.⁶
- Curate a set of resources and best practices for supporting young children and their families through distance learning.

Local Entities

- County Boards of Supervisors, city governments, elected officials, County Offices of Education, local chambers of commerce, and local First 5s should supplement state and federal investments with local funding for incentives and compensation for members of the Early Learning workforce to participate in coursework and/or professional development.
- Local QCC Lead Agencies and partners should work with local community colleges and labor groups to facilitate access to coursework and professional learning opportunities for the Early Learning workforce.

Philanthropy

- Invest in scalable practices to upskill the Early Learning workforce, particularly opportunities to advance along a degree pathway.
- Provide immediate capacity support to state and local entities as they provide emergency response guidance and implement recovery efforts.
- Catalyze investments and public-private partnerships to ensure the Early Learning workforce and the children and families in their care have access to technology to support distance learning.

NOW AND THROUGH THE RECOVERY PERIOD

Over the **next 12–18 months**, California policymakers and Early Learning partners need to take action to ensure that the Early Learning workforce and Early Learning settings are able to serve children and families.



State Entities

- The CDE should develop resources and tools to ensure that Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and traditional Kindergarten teachers have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to support children's transition to school given the disruptions to children's Early Learning and social experiences during the pandemic.
- The CDE, the CDSS, and the California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS) should continue to invest in and develop data systems.
- The Governor and the Legislature should:
 - Restore funding for the ELC Workforce Development Pathways Grant to support the upskilling and professional learning of the Early Learning workforce.

- Ensure future collective bargaining agreements for the Early Learning workforce include a salary structure and quality supports.
- The Governor, Legislature, and Department of Finance should explore and consider implementing a refundable tax credit to increase the compensation of the Early Learning workforce.
- The MPELC should outline a clear pathway to a competency-based preparation and professional development system for the Early Learning workforce that includes a strong focus on serving DLLs, who represent 60% of children birth to age 5 in California.
- County Offices of Education and local First 5s should supplement the ELC Workforce Development Pathways Grant with additional local resources to support the upskilling and professional learning of the Early Learning workforce.

Philanthropy

- Establish training and professional development opportunities:
 - For the Early Learning workforce to support children in the completion of distance learning models and to supplement resources and lessons;
 - For TK and traditional Kindergarten teachers to be able to address the learning needs of children who have been deeply affected by the pandemic.
- Fund grantwriting services at the state and local levels to increase the capacity of state and local entities to successfully apply for and acquire resources to support the Early Learning workforce.
- Support ongoing local and state systems-change efforts through capacity building and research activities.

Local Entities

- Local public agencies and nonprofits should apply for grant opportunities or work with philanthropic partners to acquire additional funding to support the Early Learning workforce.
- Local QCC Lead Agencies and partners should work with local university and community college partners to increase the availability, accessibility, and quality of virtual coursework for the Early Learning workforce and work with local union efforts to implement virtual apprenticeship models.

CONCLUSION

Governor Newsom has repeatedly called on Californians to “Meet the Moment.” This includes ensuring that we take the actions needed to support the Early Learning workforce as a pathway to ensuring our children are well-supported to rebound from this pandemic and thrive, that parents are able to go back to work, and that our economy is able to reopen. We are grateful for all the work that our state and local leaders have done to date and acknowledge there is much farther to go. We look forward to being partners in the work. For more of Early Edge California’s policy recommendations to support the Early Learning workforce, see [*Strengthening and Advancing California’s Early Learning Workforce: Recommendations for the Master Plan.*](#)



ENDNOTES

- ¹ The California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) initially developed joint guidance that limited the number of children that could be cared for in different settings. Those restrictions were in place through June 30th, 2020 (CDE) and July 14th, 2020 (CDSS). CDSS has since reenacted Title 22 ratios. The CDE has directed Title 5 contractors to implement the Title 5 ratios or county-level public health guidance, whichever is stricter.
- ² Sean Doocy, Yoonjeon Kim, Elena Montoya, *Center for the Study of Child Care Employment*, "California Child Care in Crisis: The Escalating Impacts of COVID-19 as California Reopens", July 22nd, 2020, <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/california-child-care-in-crisis-covid-19/>.
- ³ Lauren Hogan, Michael Kim, Aaron Merchen, Johnette Peyton, Lucy Recio, Henrique Siblesz, *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, "Holding on Until Help Comes: A Survey Reveals Child Care's Fight to Survive", July 13th, 2020, https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/holding_on_until_help_comes_survey_analysis_july_2020.pdf
- ⁴ As of July 2020, New Mexico and Pennsylvania currently offer hazard pay to the Early Learning workforce.
- ⁵ This includes subsidized settings that are being held harmless, subsidized settings that are not being held harmless, and private Early Learning settings that are closed.
- ⁶ Many providers are now months behind in rent and have had to lay off staff. Grants to support reopening will be critical to building back the supply of childcare in both subsidized and private market settings.

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