

SUPPORTING YOUNG LEARNERS BY SUPPORTING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Equity in Child Care Is *Everyone's Business*

"We are the workforce behind the workforce."

– Center-based provider in Washington state

HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS PROVIDE SAFE, NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS IN WHICH CHILDREN CAN LEARN AND GROW, BUT THE COVID-19 CRISIS HAS DEVASTATED THIS INDUSTRY, WHILE DISRUPTING FAMILIES' LIVES AND CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN THE PROCESS. Before the pandemic, many families — especially Black and Latino families, families with low and middle incomes, and families in rural areas — had far too little access to high-quality child care, making it challenging for parents and guardians to stay in the workforce and make ends meet while also accessing strong learning environments for their young children.¹ The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated this challenge, as scores of child care programs have closed, sometimes permanently, across the country.² The resulting shortage of child care programs, on top of disruptions in early learning brought on by the pandemic, will likely have cascading effects on young children throughout their early elementary school years. And unlike K-12 public schools, in which all children are guaranteed attendance, there is no assurance that a child care program — much less a high-quality one — will have openings for every child who needs one once it is safe to return. In fact, many parents wonder: **"Will there be a program to go back to at all?"**

The COVID-19 crisis has also worsened existing inequities among child care providers, about 40% of whom are people of color and the vast majority of whom are women.³ Historical and institutionalized racism and sexism pervade the systems in which female providers of color do critical work to support our nation's youngest learners.⁴ Before the pandemic, child care workers were already among the lowest-paid workers in the nation, and racial pay inequities meant that providers of color earned less on average than their White counterparts.⁵ Unfortunately, the pandemic hasn't helped matters for either child care workers of color or child care program owners of color. Programs owned and operated by providers of color are in more dire financial straits than those of their peers, another illustration of how the pandemic has augmented the consequences of systemic racism and sexism for Black and Latina women, who also have higher job loss rates than other Americans.⁶

Before the pandemic, Black and Latino/a business owners had less access to capital than their White counterparts. Black Americans were [less likely](#) than White Americans to be able to start businesses and comprised [only 9.4% of business owners](#); they were also [less than half as likely](#) to receive financing as White-owned businesses. Latino/a business owners, meanwhile, were 60% [less likely](#) than White business owners to be approved for loans from national banks. Those inequities have persisted amid the pandemic. For example, White business owners have been approved for Paycheck Protection Program funds at almost twice the rate of Latino/a business owners. These inequities pose particularly grave threats to the livelihoods of Black and Latina women who own child care programs, since businesses owned by women have fared far worse during the pandemic than businesses owned by men.⁷

As our nation recovers from the COVID-19 crisis, young children deserve to be in safe and nurturing learning environments that will help offset the disrupted learning they experienced amid the pandemic. But to ensure that children get the support they need, child care providers will need access not only to resources to reopen or stay open, but also to resources that allow them to provide *high-quality* early care and learning.

“I am here to educate. I am not here to babysit I am here to love and teach kids so that they can have a better future.” – Center-based provider in Tennessee

*“My hope is that [the pandemic] will help us secure increased funding for early childhood education in the future. State policymakers have seen how important the childcare industry is to the functioning of the state's economy. I am hopeful that it will result in continued support and not just support through the pandemic.”
– Center-based provider in Delaware*

“I would really like to see [our country] thinking of childcare not as a business but as a public good that is important to the success of our future citizen[s] and our country. It should be funded like kindergarten because learning starts before kindergarten.” – Center-based provider in Delaware

Child care is too expensive for families — but child care providers often make poverty-level wages. Why? Running a child care program is expensive, and public funding for early care and education is drastically low. Staff-child ratios are much lower for programs serving young children, especially infants and toddlers, which means these programs have higher personnel costs. Add to that rent, utilities, and maintenance, along with materials and administration, and every dollar is stretched to make ends meet.

Source: [CSCCE](#)

How much do early educators typically earn in your state? And what policies does your state have to support child care workers and providers? The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment's State Explorer tool lets you see your state's profile: <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/>



HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT YOUNG LEARNERS BY SUPPORTING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

We talked with child care providers and state and local chamber of commerce leaders across the country to identify ways in which policies can be improved to address the small business challenges of delivering high-quality child care, while also improving child care access and program quality. Better support for child care providers means better support for our youngest learners. **Here's what states can do:**

- 1** **Ensure that pandemic-related federal funding is distributed equitably**, targeting programs that have been hit the hardest and those that have been historically under-resourced, including programs serving high percentages of children of color and children from low-income backgrounds, rural programs, and programs owned by Black and Latina women. Provide free and accessible guidance and training to providers, making these available in multiple languages and during non-work hours, on accessing and using funding.

 - Collect and publish data about programs receiving pandemic-related federal funding, disaggregated by geographic location and type of child care setting.
- 2** **Enact policies that provide more funding for compensation** and benefits for providers across early learning settings, including home-based and center-based settings, and programs serving infants and toddlers. This can include establishing salary requirements for state pre-K programs, linking teacher compensation to high-quality learning environments for children, and requiring that programs receiving state funding use more of that funding for staff wages and benefits.⁸ In the short term, states might also put American Rescue Plan funds toward early care and education compensation.⁹
- 3** **Create new programs, or strengthen existing programs, that connect child care providers to state resources for small business**, including financial capital and assistance in covering mortgage and rent payments. Connect providers to state programs affiliated with the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), which is the only federal agency exclusively tasked with supporting enterprises owned by people of color.

 - Collect and publish data on small businesses' access to financing and business-related resources, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and the geographic location of owners.
- 4** **Strengthen higher education supports for early childhood education degree and credential programs** and work with higher education institutions to make programs more **accessible to working providers**. Programs should be high-quality, culturally and linguistically competent, affordable, accessible, and efficient. States should adopt pay and benefits [standards](#) that set the wage floor at a local living wage and increase compensation as degree attainment rises.¹⁰
- 5** **Provide frequent and ongoing professional development opportunities** that are free, available during non-work hours, culturally competent, and available in multiple languages.
- 6** **Collect and publish better early learning data** that measures racial equity in access and quality in transparent ways at the individual early learning program level, including home-based and center-based settings.

“[Elected officials] just don’t buy into the importance of childcare ... how important it is ... to standup these really high-quality childcare centers that allow parents to go to work and school, that is what ultimately makes our communities resilient.”
– Local chamber member in Louisiana

“I feel like people in this community have written us off as babysitters. Trying to get out from underneath that and having people come visit our center [could] change our image in the community. It would be great to have supportive leaders to help us do that.” – Local center-based provider in Indiana

Education advocates can partner with state and local chambers of commerce to make their case to policymakers about the importance of equitable child care policies. State and local chambers of commerce often advocate at the state and local levels for a variety of policies to support their communities. Many of the state and local chamber leaders we interviewed were already partnering with child care advocates or interested in doing so. Several chamber leaders see championing high-quality child care as an important way to support working families.

Education advocates can also share resources — about the types of programs that are most needed in their communities (e.g., infant and toddler care and programs open during alternative hours) — with state and local chambers to help build support among employers in the local business community for better access to high-quality child care.

In addition to working to enact change at the state level, **education advocates and state and local leaders can also advocate for federal lawmakers to create policies and programs that improve quality and access** in early care and learning and ease the financial burden of working families.

“[Local advocates] are focused on developing programs, policy initiatives, strategies. We look to them to develop that step for early childhood education.”
– Local chamber leader in Arizona



ENDNOTES

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