Parents and the Changing Nature of Child Care

Highlights from a nationwide survey on parent experiences with child care amidst the coronavirus

April 21, 2020
Background and Overview
Background – Goals

What We Learned in October:
• Parents say it is difficult to find quality care within their budget and make significant changes to their budgets to afford child care
• Finding child care impacts a parent’s ability to participate in the workforce
• When looking for care, parents prioritize safety, trustworthiness, quality, and caring and qualified staff

Focus of March/April Survey:
• Impact of COVID-19 on working parents and providers
• Child care needs during COVID-19
• Future implications for the child care industry
• Responsibility of different players in stabilizing the child care industry
Methodology: Conducted from March 31 – April 4, among a national sample of 800 parents who:
- Have children under the age of 5 at home
- Paid for child care within the last three months
- Were employed in the last three months, but whose situations may have changed recently as direct result of COVID-19

Essential Workers: About 20% of respondents were classified as essential - those who work in the grocery, defense, health care, public administration, public health and safety, pharmacy, and transportation industries
Pre-COVID Use of Child Care

- Child care center (family-owned or individual location): 26%
- Family child care home: 21%
- Child care center (with multiple locations): 18%
- Preschool/nursery school program: 13%
- Family or friend cares for child: 13%
- Child care in your own home: 11%
- Pre-kindergarten/school-based program: 7%
- Nanny or nanny-share: 6%
- School-aged child care: 6%
- Head Start program: 4%
- Faith-based program: 3%
- Other: 1%
Key Findings, October vs. April

What’s changed in responses?
• Parents’ work situations
• Child care availability
• Ability to find child care within budget

What hasn’t changed?
• Parents need child care
• Many parents continue to pay for child care
• Parents stress the importance of safety and trust in child care arrangements
Impact of COVID-19 on Work
**Employment Status**

**Status 3 Months Ago**

- One full-time worker: 44%
- Two full-time workers: 50%
- One part-time worker: 5%
- Two part-time workers: 2%

**Current Work Status**

Someone in the household is currently:

- Working Remotely: 56%
- Working Less Hours: 20%
- Furloughed or Laid Off: 19%
- No Change: 14%

*parents could choose all that applied*
Men are more likely than women to be working remotely (50% vs 40%).

Those with higher incomes (<$100k) are much more likely to be working from home than those with lower incomes ($>50k) (57% vs 25%).

As are those with a bachelor’s (55%) or graduate degree (64%) compared to those with less than a college degree (25%).

Almost a quarter of parents with lower incomes (24%) said they had been laid off or furloughed recently, compared to just 6% of those with higher incomes.
Child Care Needs During COVID-19
Need for Child Care

- Just 7% of parents said they are still using their previous child care arrangement.
- Around half of households (54%) say they, a family member, or friend can care for their child(ren) at the moment.
- 39% of households said they still need formal child care during COVID-19.
Essential Workers Have Greater Need

• Among parents still working in person, the percent who need child care during the work day is double that of parents who are working remotely (31% vs. 15%)

• Parents still working in-person are less likely to have someone in their household who can care for their children than parents working remotely (32% vs 42%)
Among parents who have sought child care during COVID-19, **two thirds** (63%) say it has been **difficult to find** quality child care within their budget.
Finding Care More Difficult

The percent of parents who found it “very difficult” to find child care nearly doubled over the last 6 months, from our previous survey.
Urban and suburban parents are more likely than rural parents to say it has been difficult to find quality child care within their budget during COVID-19.

**Parents who find it “difficult” to find child care**

- **Urban**: 41%
- **Suburban**: 37%
- **Rural**: 28%
Impact of COVID-19 on Child Care Providers
Most Parents Impacted by Program Closures

Thinking about the child care program(s) your child(ren) attend previously, what is their current operating status in light of COVID-19 or coronavirus?

- 61% Child care provider closed due to COVID-19
- 11% Child care provider has limited hours due to COVID-19
- 6% Child care provider has limited spaces due to COVID-19
- 21% Child care provider has restricted spaces to children of essential workers only
- 9% Child care provider has made no changes and remains open
Of formal child care programs, **home-based providers** are most likely to remain open than others:

- 28% of family child care homes
- 16% of individually owned child care centers
- 10% of child care centers with multiple locations
Nearly 60% of parents are no longer paying tuition to their child care provider if they have closed.

- Two in five are paying either partial or full amounts to their closed provider.
- Parents are most likely to still be paying their home-based provider than any other program type.
- Of parents who are still paying, a fifth are required to in order to keep their slot.
Impact of COVID-19 on Parents Lifestyles
Parents' Lifestyle Changes

- Alternating work hours with someone in my household to provide child care: 23%
- A family member or friend is caring for my child(ren) at this time: 22%
- Working less hours to provide child care: 18%
- Continued to use previous care arrangement: 15%
- Taking unpaid leave to provide child care: 11%
- Other, please specify: 11%
- Working outside of normal business hours to provide child care: 10%
- Taking paid leave to provide child care: 8%
- Hired informal care (such as nanny or babysitter): 7%

- “Lost job, so I am available to care for my children.”
- “Watch children while working.”
Essential Workers Face More Challenges

• Just 22% of essential workers continue to use their previous arrangement.

• Parents working remotely are much more likely to be alternating work schedules with someone in their household than essential workers to care for their child(ren) (35% vs 16%).

• Parents working remotely are much more likely to work outside of normal business hours to care for their child(ren) than those working in-person (20% vs 6%).
Implications for the Child Care Industry
Is Child Care Essential?

A slight plurality of parents believe child care is an essential service that should remain open in their state.

Half of men (48%) think child care is essential; 11 points higher than women.

Those currently working in-person are more likely than those working remotely to agree child care is essential (49% vs 40%).
Views on State Child Care Plans

• Most parents said they were aware of their state’s plan for child care operations (77%)

• Of parents who knew about their state plan, the vast majority (82%) were supportive of the decision for child care operations

• Lower income parents were less likely to be aware of, and to agree with, their state’s plan for child care operations
Looking Ahead: How to Re-Open Child Care
When thinking about returning to child care, parents have a variety of concerns about safety, affordability, and choice.

Parents who are somewhat or very concerned about the following aspects of returning to child care:

- **Exposure to COVID**: 75%
- **Affording Child Care**: 47%
- **Provider Closure**: 46%
- **Different Teacher**: 37%
Concerns – Availability and Affordability

• Urban parents (54%) are more concerned than suburban (44%) and rural parents (37%) that their current child care provider will not be open

• When thinking about the impact on the household if the provider were not open, parents were worried about their finances, ability to find a job and keep their job, their child’s social and emotional development, and finding another program that fit their needs

• Lower income parents are especially concerned about not being able to afford child care (58% vs 34%)
Providers Could Mitigate Concerns

Implement Changes and Precautions

- "Daily temperatures on every person in the facility."
- "Limit classroom size."
- "If it was limited to a few children and teachers and they controlled the environment greatly."

Cleaning

- "Provide me with proof of proper cleaning."
- "Cleaning and screening."
- "Sanitize building as often as possible."

Communication

- "Assure me that the centers are safe from the virus."
- "Provide me with proof of proper cleaning."

Wait

- "Opening once we are out of this pandemic. Keeping families safe is of utmost importance right now."
- "Wait for the virus to stop."
- "I'm not willing to send my kids back until the epidemic has stopped."

Nothing

- "Nothing."
- "They are doing everything possible."
- "Not sure."
Financing and Support for Child Care
Supporting the Child Care Market

- One-third of parents think the federal government is the most responsible for financially supporting the child care market.

- Republicans are split on whether the federal or state government is most responsible (28% vs 24%).
- Democrats clearly think the federal government is most responsible (40%).
Supporting Child Care for Essential Workers

• Parents are split whether the federal government or parents are most responsible for paying for child care of essential workers.

- The federal government: 30%
- Parents: 25%
- State governments: 18%

• Democrats are more likely to believe the federal government is most responsible, and Republicans more likely to believe parents are.
Discussion: Implications for Child Care
Questions?

Please ask your questions in the “comment” box