



Massachusetts's Response to COVID-19: Child Care Actions

Fact Sheet | January 2021

On March 27, 2020, the CARES Act was signed into law, including \$3.5 billion in supplemental appropriations for the Child Care and Development Block Grant to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus. This funding represents a 60% increase in total discretionary appropriations for fiscal year 2020, which amounts to \$9.326 billion. States were given broad flexibility for how to use this funding and have therefore taken a variety of approaches to help address needs of working families and providers through COVID-19. However, as the funds ran out during the ongoing crisis, many states began pulling from other sources to continue supporting parents and providers alike. This fact sheet explains the actions Massachusetts took to support the child care industry and working parents through 2020.

Massachusetts received \$45.7 million in supplemental CCDBG funds through the CARES Act.

The state temporarily closed all nonemergency child care programs through June 29 except those providing care for vulnerable children and the children of essential workers. Providers who remained open as Exempt Emergency Child Care Providers were able to receive grants to help defray the cost of operations. Centers received \$2,500 each week per classroom—for up to 2 classrooms—and home-based providers received \$1,000 each week for up to 8 children. A total of 500 of the state's 8,000 providers remained open through this program.

All other child care programs were authorized to reopen on June 26, and the designations of Emergency Child Care Provider were rescinded.

In anticipation of reopening in early July, Massachusetts announced that it would offer reopening grants to providers who participate in the state subsidy program, in order to support child care programs through periods of low attendance and capacity restrictions. Providers who remained open as Exempt Emergency Child Care Providers were also eligible for these grants. The state indicated that grants would be offered on a per-provider basis for family child care providers and a per-classroom basis for centers and school-age care programs. However, since the announcement in July, details of these opening grants and how to apply were not publicly available.

The state continued to reimburse providers for all child care subsidies based on enrollment regardless of their operating statuses. To support families, the Department

of Education covered the costs of parent fees for subsidized families for child care enrollment.

The state also produced guidelines indicating that licensed child care providers could start serving school-age children during virtual or remote school hours. On August 28, Governor Baker (R) authorized the creation of "remote learning enrichment programs" under the direction of the Department of Early Education and Care. Providers were also allowed to apply for new licenses through an expedited licensing process in order to further expand their capacity to serve school-aged children.

Families were allowed to set up informal arrangements under the shared supervision of parents or guardians to support children during remote learning activities without any licensing so long as they complied with criteria such as restrictions on group size, type of supervision, and compensation.

In December, the state reported that about 82% of licensed child care providers were open, and that of those providers open, their capacity was at 87% of pre-pandemic levels. Enrollment in these programs was about 63%, while utilization was at 54%.

Based on a survey of 2,600 providers (about 40% of the state's providers), average operating losses in November were about \$600 for family child care providers and as much as \$6,000 for group care. Half of providers serving school-aged children or offering group care said they would be unable to meet the increased demand for care during the 2020-2021 academic year.

The state continued to provide enrollment-based subsidy payments to child care providers through the end of 2020. The state has said it has no immediate plans to reverse to its pre-pandemic policy of attendance-based payments as it had seen the benefit of enrollment-based payments.

At the time of publication, Massachusetts had yet to announce any additional grants or funding for child care programs or for programs serving school-aged children heading into 2021.