



Child Care Providers and COVID-19: Prevention and Mitigation Practices

Child Care Aware of Kansas in
Partnership with the United Methodist
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Respondent Demographics

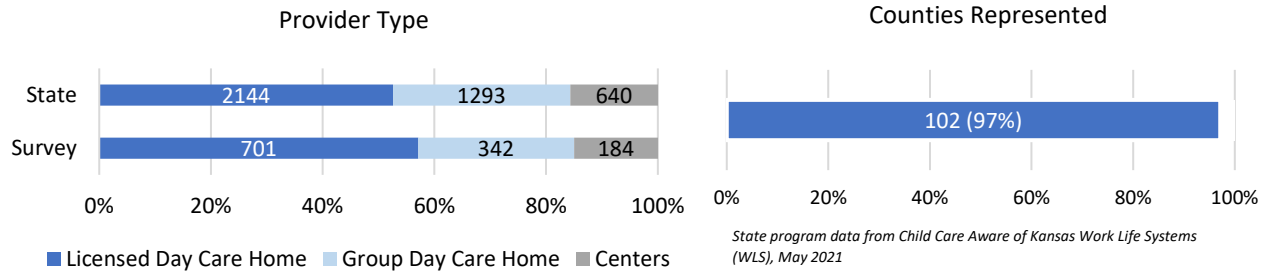
Published on September 7th, Analyzed on October 7th, 2021

Total Responses to Survey: 1,258

Survey Completion Rate: 76%

Response Rate: 28.9% (4,352 providers received survey by email)

Figure 1. Provider Type and Counties Represented*



NOTE: *Several respondents indicated more than one program type. For this analysis, those respondents were removed. There are 1,227 responses without those indicated multiple program types.

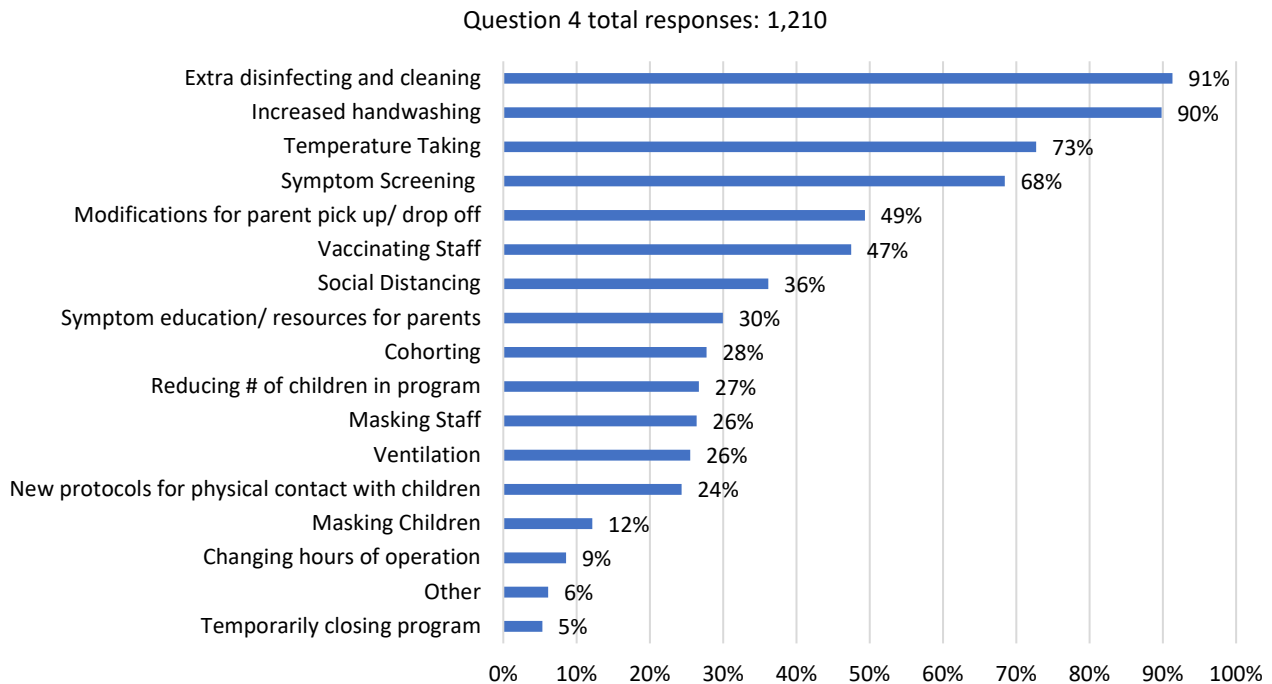
COVID-19 Precautions

Providers were asked if they are taking precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (question 3), and what precautions specifically they are doing/ have done in response to the virus (question 4).

Question 3 total responses: 1,258

Yes	98.57%	1,239
No	1.53%	19

Figure 2. Precautions Taken by Providers



Providers that reported not taking precautions to reduce the spread of the virus were then asked what is preventing them from doing so (Question 5). Of the 1.51% (19) that said they are not taking precautions, 4 said it was due to personal beliefs, 1 said because it is not required, 3 said they were unaware of strategies, and 11 answered 'other'.

Responses from providers that are not taking precautions:

- *The cases in my county are not that high so I am doing my normal precautions for any virus to spread.*
- *just general every day cleaning*
- *I just view it as interventions to reduce the spread of viruses. I don't do anything "special" for Covid-19.*
- *I will not require my 'daykids' to wear masks all day, every day.*
- *Most of the families are vaccinated and I'm vaccinated.*
- *Only have a few kids*
- *All kids/parents coming in/out have had Covid already. They are new to my program but since they've all had it, I didn't I the need to screen/etc.*
- *We already focus on good hygiene practices. Not much else to do with babies and toddlers.*
- *Been operating like normal and no outbreaks at my daycare.*
- *Small group, most are very young*

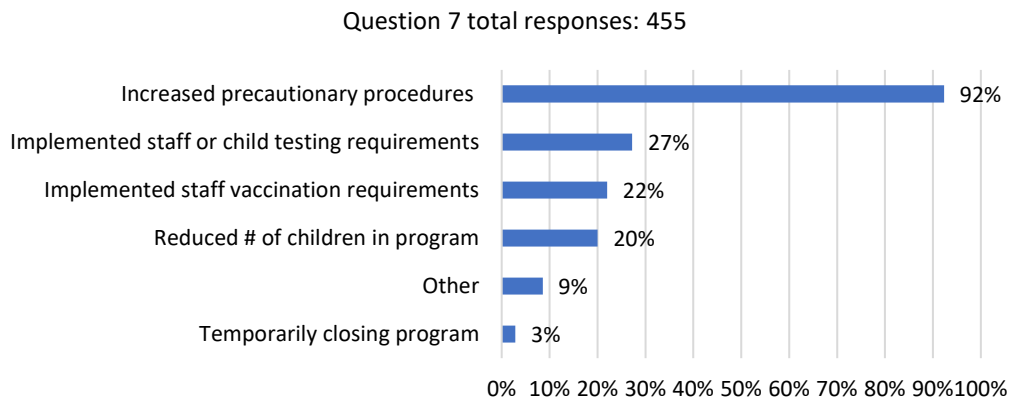
Delta Variant Response

Next, providers were asked if the delta variant has changed their approach or views of the pandemic (question 6) and how they have changed their approach (question 7).

Question 6 total Responses: 1,227

Yes	37.87%	462
No	62.70%	765

Figure 3. Changed Approach from Delta Variant



Out of 39, common ‘other’ responses included considering closing the program, implementing masks for children, staff, and/or parents entering building, only accepting children with parents/guardians that are vaccinated, requiring children with symptoms to stay home, encouraging staff to get vaccinated, and extra vigilance for symptoms of illness.

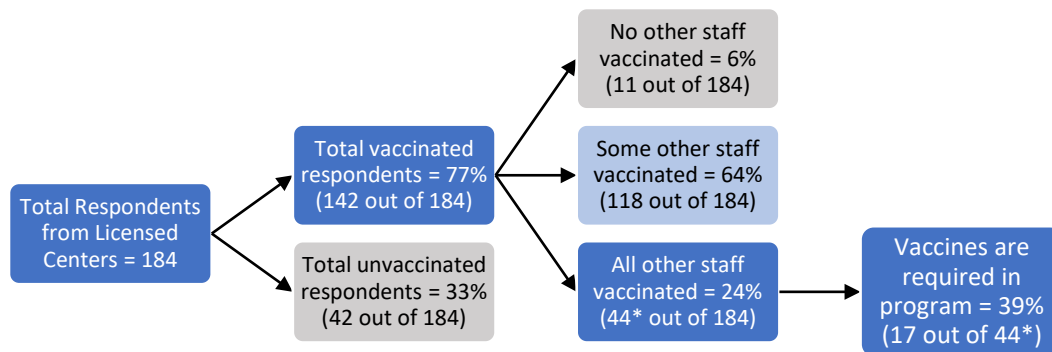
Program Vaccination Status and Requirements

Respondents were asked if they are vaccinated (question 8) and if other staff were vaccinated (question 9) (NOTE: some respondents chose not to answer question 9). If respondents reported that they are vaccinated and all other staff were vaccinated, they were asked if vaccinations are required in their program (question 10). Because Licensed Family and Group homes commonly only have one staff member, the vaccination status of other staff members is not included in this analysis as it was not reported consistently. (For example, some respondents reported that *all their staff* were vaccinated because the respondent was vaccinated and they had no other staff, and some respondents reported that *no other staff* were vaccinated because the respondent was vaccinated and had no other staff). For this analysis, some responses were removed because they indicated more than one program type.

Table 1. Licensed Homes Vaccination Status

Homes		
Total	Vaccinated	Require Vaccinations
1043	58%	27%

Figure 4. Licensed Centers Vaccination Status



NOTE: *The percentage of centers that require vaccinations is out of the 44 total centers that indicated that all staff were vaccinated.

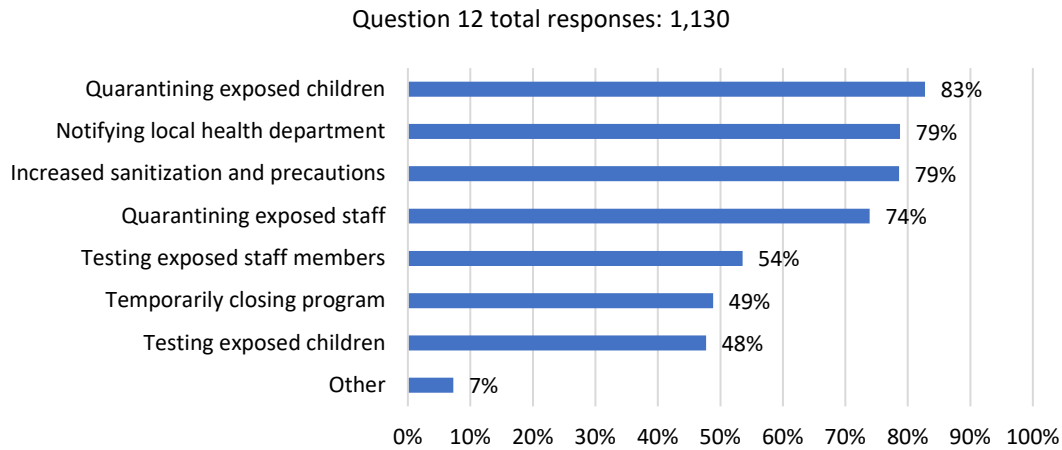
Respondents were then asked why they are not vaccinated and/or why their program does not require staff to be vaccinated (question 11). 64% (511) reported it was because of personal beliefs, .25% (2) said it was because of access to vaccination administration site (distance or transportation), .25% (2) reported it was because they are unaware of where/how to get vaccinated, 1.52% (12) reported difficulty getting a vaccine appointment, and 41% (323) reported it was for other reasons. Some common responses to ‘other’ include staff refusing to be vaccinated, believing it should be a personal choice for staff, medical/health purposes, not enough research and testing on the vaccines to feel comfortable receiving them, not having any other staff, allowing staff choose to do it on their own, not

being concerned about the effects of COVID-19, being pregnant, higher administration (i.e. school district, church) not requiring vaccines, and previously having the virus (antibodies, immunity).

Child Care Provider COVID-19 Exposure Protocol

Programs were asked what they do in response to a staff member or child being exposed to or testing positive for COVID-19 (question 12).

Figure 5. COVID-19 Procedures

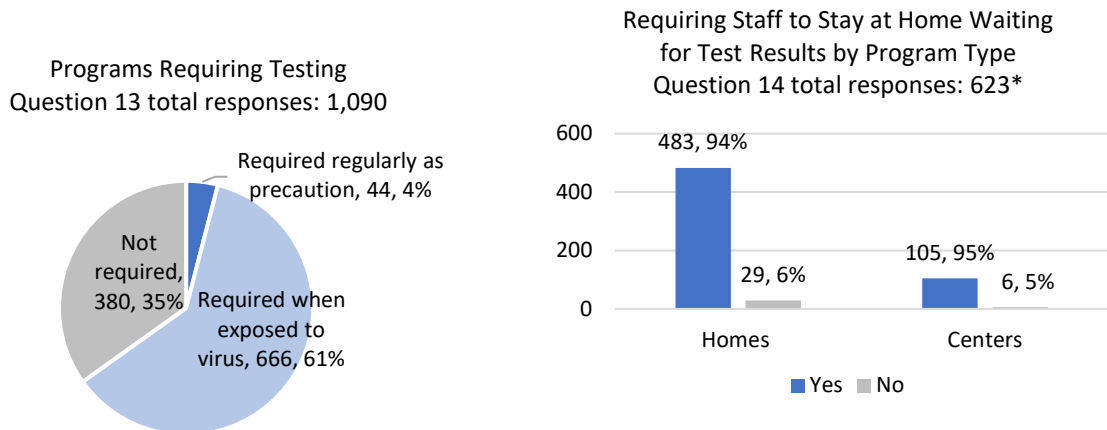


Out of 82 ‘other’ responses, common ones included ensuring those exposed test negative before returning to program, contacting epidemiology or local health department for guidance, quarantining the classroom that had a positive test, and alerting parents.

COVID-19 Testing

Respondents were asked about their testing requirements (question 13) and if they require staff to stay at home while waiting for results (question 14).

Figure 6. COVID-19 Testing Requirements



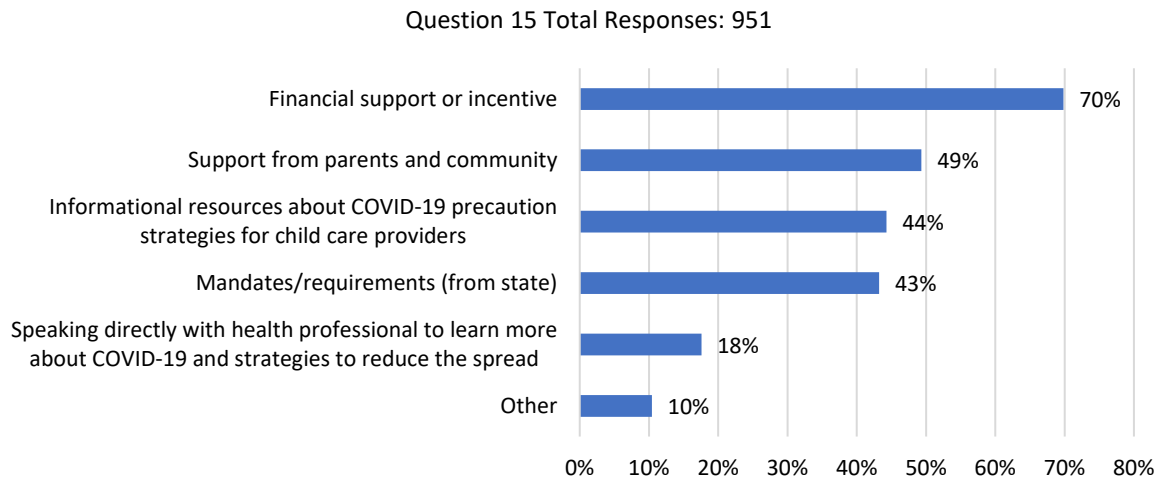
NOTE: Question 14 is analyzed by program type because, like vaccination status, family and group homes reported inconsistently whether they require staff to stay at home because they commonly only have one staff member. *For this analysis, some responses were removed because they indicated more than one program type.

Most responses about why testing is not required for staff members were regarding the respondent being the only staff member. Other responses for not requiring testing included that they only require testing if symptoms are shown, they quarantine and/or close their program, and not believing that tests are reliable.

Motivation or Assistance for Providers to Implement Precautions

Providers were asked about various requirements or incentives that would help them implement COVID-19 precautions (question 15), and if they would do so if these were in place (question 16).

Figure 7. Motivation or Assistance for Providers to Implement Precautions



Some responses in the 'other' category indicated that programs are comfortable with what they are currently doing or even feel like there are too many requirements and/or are not worried about the virus. However, others included encouraging the greater community to follow masking and vaccine recommendations, getting informed and accurate information about the virus, being able to hire more staff members, and being able to have more personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies.

Question 16 total responses: 824

Yes	71.62%	587
No	29.12%	237

In response to question 16, the most common reason for saying 'no' was that they feel they are already doing enough and aren't sure what else they could do. Others said they have difficulty implementing the precautions they already use and are against any more guidelines regarding COVID-19. Most participants reported being willing to do what is necessary to keep families, children, and themselves safe and reduce the number of closures. Some barriers reported in the responses were pushback from parents regarding more strict policies (mask wearing, quarantining if exposed, symptom screening, etc.), possibly

loosing families and income because of disagreements between providers and families, and not having enough staff to implement precautions or not being able to afford supplies.

Some responses from providers who chose 'yes':

- *with more financial resources we could add air purifiers*
- *if required then it's required, but afraid staff will quit!*
- *With more money we could hire more staff and fewer children per class*
- *If mandates were put in place I feel it would be easier to have support from parents*
- *I seem to have the most problems with parents bringing sick kids and not telling me some close/in the family is ill*
- *Yes we are struggling to make ends meet with closures increase in prices etc.*
- *Yes I would offer to close my daycare more often if I was guaranteed pay. It's hard to tell families their kids with colds can't come to daycare and it's hard to keep people when you do. I had people leave because they were mad about policies such as no sick kids and having to do drop off outside rather than inside.*
- *Yes, we have already increased our precautions, but we would be able to do more if we had more funding to keep extra staff in place for even more extra cleaning. Also, it may help us with the push back we receive from parents when we try to implement increased precautions*

Some responses from providers who chose 'no':

- *I feel that we are doing everything we should to prevent the spread*
- *Not if it means get the shot*
- *I feel I'm doing all I can. And I don't want to get vaccine until there's been a long while of seeing what side affects come from it.*
- *Don't need incentives to do the right thing*
- *I believe what we have been doing has worked no one has had covid*
- *It's the flu a virus that spreads the same way and kills just as many*
- *I feel like our bodies have the power to fight things*
- *I feel like I am doing everything physically possible to safeguard my staff and my children and parents*
- *Not really I feel like children need to at some point be kids. I will stay vigilant but I'm done stressing out over it.*

Overall Impact of the Pandemic

Question 17: How has the pandemic impacted you as a child care provider overall? How have you adapted and what were the roadblocks? (894 total responses)

Providers have proven their strength and flexibility through this incredibly difficult time. Many are under emotional strain, as well as facing financial issues due to the pandemic. In response to this question, some providers reported having minimal to no issues. Reasons included being from a rural community, having small programs with few children, having supportive and cooperative families, and/or having no COVID-19 cases in their program or families. However, most programs reported that this time has been extremely stressful and has even caused some to consider closing their centers or home-based programs and seeking other forms of income. There are several common themes expressed by respondents about the overall impacts of the pandemic, the roadblocks they've faced, and ways they have adapted.

Staffing- difficult to find and keep qualified/reliable staff, difficulty compensating staff appropriately because of financial strain

- *The most significant impact is we cannot hire qualified staff. We have had over 40 interviews scheduled who do not show up, just meeting unemployment requirements to stay on unemployment. Have good staff, but some do not qualify to work in infant/toddler rooms until they have at least 3 months experience. Therefore we have to combine rooms so they can work with someone else, but how is that safe when with Covid they need to be separated into smaller groups ... The ability to pay higher wages will attract more qualified staff who can work right away and give us the ability to provide more quality childcare in our rural community. Something needs to be done as soon as possible...*
- *The largest impact has been that we can't get staff to work. Everyone is looking for an excuse to call in, and people we interview [want] too much money with no experience in our field. Also, it is hard to even get people to show up for interviews. Yesterday, for example, we had 3 interviews scheduled & none of them showed up. Today we had 3 interviews scheduled and so far 2 out of the 3 haven't shown up...*
- *It has cause a lot of friction with my employees, they struggle with what they are comfortable with vs. what is best for the children ... Lots of staff burnout, poor morale, frustration with increased precautions now when at the beginning it did not seem like as much of an issue. I have done things to help the staff, decrease stress, feel appreciated but it is still not always enough.*
- *The roadblocks are finding teachers. I would like to require my teachers to all be vaccinated, however some do not want to get the vaccine and I would not have enough staff to operate if I required it.*

- *Our waitlist has increased and our staffing has decreased. We are struggling to find qualified staff. With reduced enrollment, offering more attractive salaries is not an option. I am told people are still afraid to go back to work.*

Enrollment- lower numbers of children, having to turn children away because of lack of staff, adding school aged children to programs

- *I went quite a while with only 1 or 2 children and hardly making ends meet and questioning why I was still in daycare.*
- *HUGE loss of income. All of my kids (7) left when parents worked from home. We are living off of the generosity of friends and family... We have to sell our car just to get groceries and pay insurance. Might have to retire after 35 years. We think that we will have to sell our home if things continue like this. I only have 2 kids right now.*
- *My attendance was down which affected my working capital and my income. Attendance was back up but now that school has started, people are getting quarantined again and my attendance is down again.*
- *I [have] lost a lot of kiddos due to their parents losing their jobs! I'm just now getting new kids in my care! For a while I had to take on a second job to pay the bills!*
- *... Some parents have left. Some inquiring families I have not accepted if they don't seem to care about Covid or vaccination. This impacted me because I could have kept my numbers up and not been impacted financially for 15 months.*

Health and Safety - increased and/or revised policies and procedures, time spent on health and safety overall, staying informed on news and best practices regarding health and safety, more vigilant of child illness or symptoms, increased cleaning and disinfecting, improving the environment

- *Before Covid I thought that I took all the cautions I needed to deal with germs but now I am 100% more proactive on germs*
- *I have become more health oriented, practice continuous disinfecting procedures, temp checks, overall children checks upon arriving and departure, mask wearing, strict handwashing, etc.*
- *Taking temperatures daily, watching for symptoms, not knowing if it's the flu, teething, allergies, or covid*
- *I spend an extra 2 to 3 hours A-day sanitizing the area and toys*

- *We are overly cautious with germs and being too close to each other. Which makes it super hard, kiddos are always leaning on a friend or have to touch an arm! ...*
- *It has been very hard to be a daycare provider during this pandemic. I have had to close. I have had to modify my home as I take care of my elderly mom also, to keep her safe. We are getting through it and trying to figure it all out!*

General financial strain- due to lower enrollment, closures, changing hours of operation, purchasing extra cleaning supplies, toys, etc., catching up on debt and finances, decreased income overall

- *Our business hours remain reduced by 50% (normally open eves and weekends, in addition to weekdays, for 18 years. Obviously, less hours means less revenue and fewer employees... We've sustained a mask policy for staff, parents in the lobby and all children (we begin care at 30 months) since June 15, 2020 - - 15 months. We have (anecdotally) lost more business than we've gained due to the policy but for our staff, and especially the kids, I'm extremely proud of our record of keeping everyone healthy.*
- *it has been difficult to continue operating due to wage inflation and the inability to charge what it actually costs to provide a high quality program. We have been able to navigate the changes and we have adapted as needed ...*

Relationships with families and communities – disagreements between staff and families on policies and procedures, lack of control or knowledge of what families are doing at home, and families not keeping their children at home when sick

- *Made me question parents more as to their travel plans as they are now potential ways to expose the other children and myself ...*
- *the biggest problem is parents not wanting to quarantine their children when needed due to the misinformation out there about covid 19*
- *Parents want more space to distance children and with a small place, there's not enough room to distance AND provide enough floor space to play...*
- *... The most stressful is when you have parents who think it is just like the flu, do not want to wear mask etc. Standing my ground means having discord with some parents.*
- *Last summer I closed down for 5 months. At this point, I am tempted to do it again. So many families are refusing to vaccinate and are careless. They continue bringing sick children to care. Lie about exposure.*

- *It has been very stressful and not for sure if I can continue to stay open due to the division in the community due to my mask requirements and protocols. I have already lost a few children. I don't feel 100% supported by my parents and the stress is really hurting my mental and physical health.*
- *Losing some of our personal connections with parents/families ...*
- *I've had to reassess all the families I give care to. I only kept the families that are taking the pandemic seriously and making smart decisions to help keep it out of the daycare.*
- *Less contact and relationship building with parents*
- *The pandemic has made things very difficult. Everyone has their own opinions about how to stay safe which makes it difficult to make rules, enforce rules, and keep everyone happy without losing families.*
- *... We are taking precautions but families may not be and don't always be honest with providers. State vs county guidelines become very blurred for our area. We understand the need for the guidelines but our community does not and do not support the states guidelines. Parents are very opinionated and choose to express this with providers causing hostility between the family and facility.*

Child care provider emotional stress and burnout - stress of making difficult decisions, dealing with changes and implementing time consuming and pricy precautions, safety of kids, parents, and staff

- *I am about ready to call it quits. Between all the separation of families from the classrooms and the children, the extra laundry, the relaying, the shortage of children, the local covid positivity rates and my staff having to take off to care for their own children who have been excluded from school..... I am losing the joy that this job once gave me...*
- *I feel the pandemic has left childcare provider extremely burnt out...*
- *I got COVID-19 from a daycare child who is asymptomatic and I was extremely sick for three weeks ended up with Covid pneumonia, and my husband was hospitalized for weeks with Covid pneumonia and almost lost his life. In the last week my mother-in-law and father-in-law in Florida lost their lives to COVID-19.*
- *... All the extra cleaning measures take time and energy from already tired educators*

- *The pandemic has impacted my state of mind. I feel I've adapted well, but daily feel the presence of this new challenge as I make every effort to protect myself and all the children and hope all the families are doing the same.*
- *It's mainly mental. I'm bending over backwards to keep things safe for my family and program and for a bunch of families who aren't even trying. It's mentally exhausting.*
- *It has made me wish I was closer to retirement! Lol... it is very stressful to allow potential health risk into your home. It is also stressful to make sure you are doing everything you can to protect the children...*
- *Caused depression. Finding things that give me peace through all this- walks, meditation, working out and being around friends*
- *... I don't want to burnout the great staff we have who have risen to the challenges the past 18 months but they are getting worn out. I would love to be able to reward them more!!...*
- *I'm tired. To the point where I don't know if I want to be a preschool director/teacher any more.*
- *My stress level jumped ten fold. The worry that at any time my business can be shut down due to the pandemic. I am single and this is my only income. All the extra cleaning. The wearing of masks flares my asthma not to mention all the cleaning products. Cutting back in children and my hours. Has not set well with some parents. At first getting a hold of supplies, like mask, cleaning supplies and toilet paper were extremely hard to come by. Having school age children here and having to over see their teaching was very difficult. My ways of overcoming, taking 1 day at a time. Taking a day off if needed. I took 3 extra days off last year. Something I have never done in the 30 years that I have been doing daycare. Applying for the grants. They were wonderful and a tremendous help.*
- *... I haven't had to close my daycare in years due to me being sick. I hate having to close my doors without giving my families at least a one month notice of any planned time off. This situation made it impossible to do that. I have many teachers and school staff in my daycare and a single mom. It hurts my families when I have to close...*
- *It has impacted me financially, and emotionally. It has been a struggle to see how much the children have changed and things they are missing out on.*
- *Honestly it has made me question wanting to stay in this field as a whole. Adapting for a period of time, making changes ok, but moving to such extremes feels so against my own beliefs on how to incorporate families, relationships, social growth. We are still doing it and plugging away, but the continued increased mandates are getting to be too much.*

- *The situation is stressful. No one likes to wear a mask when you are interacting with children. Children take cues from facial expressions and they can't see our faces.*

Ways that providers have adapted and stayed positive during the pandemic

- *It really hasn't too much. I worked all but two weeks when it all started and really haven't had too many issues. My parents are all teachers or nurses and they are a great group to keep their kids home and not exposed to too much and every parent is vaccinated so I think these things contribute a lot for all of us staying healthy.*
- *Learning how to juggle the needs of parents, children and staff has increased the stress level. But it has also increased the compassion and understanding from me and our parents are more understanding and appreciative of the hard work that we do*
- *We are finding creative ways to connect with families and children...*
- *You have to think outside the box. Being flexible and supportive of the families*
- *Trying to get the kiddos to understand you can't get in others kids faces, staying apart. I use carpet squares for the kids and tell them this is your space places don't get in your friends space.*
- *... One benefit--we began drop at the door and our issues regarding separation anxiety has gone [down]*
- *We are trying to keep things fun, while still following guidelines.*
- *... We encourage other ways of friendship other then high fives and touch. We now for example have secret waves and thumbs up! 😊*

Issues the Pandemic Brought to Light

Question 18: Were there issues that already existed that you feel like the pandemic worsened or brought to light?

Question 18 total responses: 975

Yes	27.65%	270
No	72.35%	705

Providers reported, from their perspective, what issues have been amplified by the pandemic and how it has impacted them. It was frequently noted by survey participants that parents often bring (or attempt to bring) children to child care facilities even when they are ill or showing symptoms of illness, causing tension between providers and families and putting providers in a difficult position. Providers have always felt uncomfortable turning a child away because of sickness, but this is especially true during the pandemic. Not only is it more important that sick children stay home, but it also may have a bigger

impact on families because of their economic recovery from the pandemic and the possibility of parents being essential workers. Some other common themes were:

Staffing and compensation – hiring qualified and reliable staff, adequate pay and benefits for child care workers

- *Hiring was somewhat hard at times before, but now it's next to impossible.*
- *I feel that we providers should be or have the opportunity to receive state health care. It is so expensive to get on our own. We follow all the rules and regulations and receive no benefit. We need health care that is affordable now more than ever.*
- *We make such low wages, yet we are expected to work through a pandemic and we are put at risk*
- *The fact that we as providers, especially myself who gets paid by the hour and not weekly, if kids aren't here, I don't get paid, yet they work from home and they get paid and I don't and yet the spots are held by them as I don't get a paycheck*
- *The unfairness of the childcare system. Demanding work, lots of requirements to meet, bad pay, bad benefits, no recognition*
- *Low wages of childcare workers. Long hours and amount of cleaning we already do.*

Respect, appreciation, and support of child care workers

- *I do feel that Daycare Providers, in general, are often taken for granted and that our profession is not given the recognition or respect that we deserve. I believe that most daycares stayed open for the most part during the pandemic and have proven to be essential to our economy.*
- *Childcare is essential!!!! We are teachers too!*
- *Lack of support for the childcare provider from agencies/government.*
- *Childcare providers are undervalued, and can lose income instantly in these types of situations.*
- *Always felt childcare was needed but always lower on the respect totem pole.*

Availability of quality and affordable child care

- *Parents being able to afford quality daycare*
- *Child care spots are difficult for families to find. Now there seems to be fewer spots available*

Other

- *Just the division in people on the attitudes of vaccines.*
- *We have increasingly met children that struggle with social skills, expressive language and emotional regulation (using general developmental guides). Now, we are meeting children ages 3-5 that have been kept home from child care, play dates, activities, preschool and several we've met in the last 2 months likely have developmental delays that either haven't been demonstrated sufficiently to receive attention of parents or where early assessment/education has been postponed.*

Support Providers Need Moving Forward

Question 20: Moving forward, what do you think your program, staff, and/or families still need to recover from the pandemic? (815 total responses)

Survey participants reported needing several different kinds of support moving forward, including financial and social. Many requested financial support from the government to help cover lost income from the pandemic and help them stay open and continue to serve families. Also, providers requested support from families and communities as they continue to try to find the best way to handle complicated and novel situations that arise. Many responses indicated that it is often difficult to communicate with parents and ensure that they are on board with new health and safety policies and procedures. Some respondents called for more strict guidelines that they can lean on to help ensure that parents comply with program regulations to keep their staff, other children and their families safe. Some common themes were:

Financial support and funding

- My hope is that now childcare is recognized as an essential part of the American economy, and there will be financial help in the near future.
- I think having financial assistance for lost wages is huge! Continuing to offer grants is great for keeping cleaning supplies available, as well.
- Grants, [government]t financial help, information
- We still need help with supplies to keep our doors open. Budgets are tight but we are capped on our income, we can not "expand" as other businesses might. What we normally invest back in our programs might be less because of normal operating expenses have increased.
- Some of my families are struggling to pay for daycare. I am struggling to pay for my medical care. Help paying for food or the household bills would help

- More funding to reorganize the daycare and make it more affordable to close the daycare when a child or parents has Covid.
- More funds to keep up with everything to rest assure our children continue to be in safe environment.
- We need more funding to help off set the additional costs of cleaning supplies, food and PPE

Up to date and clear information and resources, strict guidelines to enforce precautions

- ... We also need a list of quarantine rules. The CDC and our county rules for Daycare do not match and I can not find anything to give to parents. A list before exposure would eliminate questions as to how long a child needs to quarantine if they are exposed.
- Just keeping in a good routine of staying home when showing signs of illness, education on the updates
- Stop recommending and start mandating if you want our parents to comply. Recommendations do not work.
- I think we need more resources as a daycare to keep up with the growing need for covid transmission and prevention
- Everyone who can, needs to be vaccinated. More vigilance and openness about symptoms and illness...
- Clear and decisive information that can be passed along to our parents and give the providers, on a whole, a backbone to lean on when having to enforce policies that are recommended, but should just be mandated.
- At this point we all know what we need to do, and routines are in place. It's just a matter of continuing to be consistent and adapting to whatever new information comes up.
- Training on what we should do
- We need everyone to be aware and stay educated on the pandemic as we work together to end it!

Appreciation and support from communities and families

- Community/parent support for new regulations.
- Time, patience, support!!
- Staff needs to know they are appreciated from the parents. We have struggled with most of our parents not wanting to follow rules/guidelines.... this puts us all a risk!

- Make sure that the daycare [providers] have help, cause if we are [closed] then the parent don't have daycares when they do decide to go back to work.
- Grace and understanding. Daycare has been on the back burner for the past 10 yrs...we have had no financial assistance or grants available, it needs to be made a priority. These young children we are helping to raise are the leaders of tomorrow.
- support from my families and community. Not for sure if that is possible.
- Support and recognition that if we were not here daily for all parents, they would not be able to do their job. Teachers are daily hailed as hero's but childcare is just expected. I feel we have been kicked to the ground.

Higher pay and economic value for child care workers – helps to retain staff and make care more affordable for families

- More staff and financial support for the extra staff
- We need staff, actual staff that come to work and want to work.
- We need more continual funding to be able to raise the amount we pay our staff. We can't compete with the other businesses and/or corporate owned childcare centers that can pay \$12-\$15 per hour to their staff. In order for us to do that we would have to raise our rates so much that the parents wouldn't be able to afford childcare for their children. We need some stipends or something that comes monthly year-round to help childcare centers pay a more competitive hourly pay so that we can get staff and keep staff.
- Funds to pay staff a better salary. It's hard to hire new staff at a low wage