Historic Crisis, Historic Opportunity:
Using Evidence to Mitigate the Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis on Young Children and Early Care and Education Programs
#LiveAtUrban
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Historic Crisis, Historic Opportunity:

Using Evidence to Mitigate the Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis on Young Children and Early Care and Education Programs

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COVID-19 upended life for young children, families, and early care and education (ECE) programs

Early childhood policymakers had to quickly make high-stakes decisions with significant consequences for young children and the ECE programs that serve them

Researchers around the country wrote over 300 reports to capture the impacts of the pandemic on young children and ECE programs

As the U.S. begins to recover from the pandemic, ECE leaders continue to need a clear understanding of the pandemic’s impact both on young children’s learning and on the ECE programs and teachers
Historic opportunity

- The American Rescue Plan signed into law in March 2021 was the largest public investment in early care and education in U.S. history.

- American Jobs Plan would provide another $25 billion to build child care facilities, long in short supply.

- American Families Plan would reduce low- and middle-income parents’ child care expenses, fund universal preschool, invest in early educators, and improve quality across the range of ECE programs in which children learn and grow.
Why a consensus-style synthesis?

- We drew on the insights of 16 leading ECE scholars and 10 ECE policy and practice leaders from around the country.
- Goal: Pair research expertise on child development and ECE programs with policy and practice expertise of those with 15 months of experience making high-stake decisions in the crisis.
Review process: Identifying studies

307 studies across 48 states and DC

76 studies
- 16 national
- 45 from 31 states
- 31 local studies

Urban list
Conferences
Web search, reference mining, expert additions
Effects on children’s educational experiences and outcomes

Note: Our review also included 14 national studies and 2 local studies in unspecified locations (1 study in a large U.S. city and 1 study in 5 districts in the South, Southwest, and West).
Children’s educational experiences and learning outcomes

- Some of the necessary changes that were made to young children’s in-person learning environments to enhance safety were not conducive to learning and social skill development.

- Remote/hybrid learning was challenging for children, families, and teachers and resulted in significantly less learning time and lower-quality instruction.

- Young children’s learning and development suffered setbacks during the crisis.

- Effects of the crisis have not been born equally. Children of color, DLLs, and children from families with low incomes appear to have been more negatively affected. Young children with special needs may not have been identified and may not have gotten the services they needed to thrive.
Enrollment drops

**COLORADO ENROLLMENT**
- August 2020
  - Infants: 42%
  - Toddlers: 32%
  - Preschool: 41%

**LOUISIANA ENROLLMENT**
- January 2021
  - 0-5 Enrollment: 22%

**FLORIDA ENROLLMENT**
- Fall 2020
  - Preschool: 34%

**VIRGINIA ENROLLMENT**
- Fall 2020
  - Preschool: 20%
  - Kindergarten: 13%
  - Grades 1-5: 4-6%

About half of K-2 students were remote in Fall 2020 and families were generally overwhelmed by remote learning.

- **37%** in-person school
- **15%** hybrid
- **48%** remote only


- **47%** very overwhelmed
- **23%** moderately overwhelmed
- **26%** slightly or not at all

Note: Data collected in December 2020.
Young children’s educational experiences suffered

- **Less time on learning**
  - In fall 2020, Louisiana ECE providers reported spending only a median of about five hours per week interacting with remote learners (Markowitz et al., 2020).
  - In a survey of Washington state parents of K-5 students in February 2021, 39% of households reported that their children spent much less time on schooling than they had before the pandemic and only 19% reported that they spent the same amount of time as before (Kwakye & Kibort-Crocker, 2021).
  - Program type mattered: center-based more likely to provide synchronous interactions than family child care homes & public Pre-K more so than other preschool program types (Head Start, private, home-based) (Barnett, Jung, & Nores, 2020; White et al., 2021).

- **Quality declined**
  - Spring 2020: about half of teachers in remote child care and school-based programs in Virginia reported declines in the quality of interactions compared to about a third of those working in person (Bassok et al., 2021).
  - Fifty-six percent of first-grade teachers in Tulsa reported motivating children to engage with remote learning was very challenging (Tulsa SEED team, 2020).
Young children appear to have experienced learning setbacks

![Bar chart showing percent scoring below benchmark for different groups.](chart)

**Source:** OH data are from the Ohio Department of Education, 2021; VA data are from McGinty, Gray, Herring, Soland, and Partee, 2021; Data from 41 states are from Amplify, 2021.
Setbacks larger for groups typically marginalized in the U.S. education system

Source: Amplify, 2021.
Note: Sample included children from 41 states.
Effects on ECE programs and the workforce

Note: Our review also included 8 national studies and 2 local studies in unspecified locations (1 study in a large U.S. city and 1 study in 5 districts in the South, Southwest, and West).
Effects on ECE programs and teachers

- Child care centers and family child care homes much more affected than public schools and Head Start.

- Early stabilization efforts left substantial unmet need, particularly in child care centers and in family child care homes. Recovery uneven.

- The pandemic increased the complexity and stress of early educators’ jobs across all program types, in ways that negatively impacted teachers’ mental health.

- More challenging working conditions, financial concerns, and mental health struggles may have contributed to programs’ challenges recruiting and retaining teachers.
Destabilization and uneven recovery

- Great uncertainty (particularly March-June 2020); financial losses for child care and family child care homes; tremendous stress for providers and teachers.

- Across the country, group size restrictions, price increases on food, cleaning products, personal protective equipment (PPE), and labor to implement stringent new cleaning requirements all increased the cost of care, even as demand for care remained low in some communities.

- Federal and state pandemic relief efforts supported all ECE providers, but reach was limited—especially in child care.

  - Example: In Maine, 30% of child care programs accessed Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans in spring 2020, including 15% of family child care homes and 65% of centers (Maine AEYC, 2020).
Working conditions + new PD needs

- Health and safety practices + remote learning meant increase in demands and complexities of teachers' jobs.

- Teachers wanted more training on health & safety, how to address DLLs’ leaning needs, remote learning, and mental health supports.

Source: Guerrero-Rosada et al., 2021.
Note: Data are from centers’ 2020 re-opening plans.
Teachers were overwhelmed and stressed

60% of educators in schools and child care centers said COVID was negatively impacting mental health.

29% of early educators in schools, centers, and Head Start experienced clinically relevant depressive symptoms.

70% of educators in family child care homes and child care felt negative or anxious about the future.

Source: Daro and Gallagher, 2020; Hanno et al., 2020; Markowitz, Bassok, and Kiscaden, 2021.
Staffing challenges are likely to hinder the recovery

- Mandatory quarantine policies, illness, and family caregiving responsibilities led to increased absences in programs that were operating in-person.

- Whereas overall turnover among public school teachers appears to have either stayed the same or even declined compared to before the pandemic, child care teachers’ job commitment decreased and turnover increased during the pandemic.

- ECE programs are struggling to find qualified teachers.
Evidence-backed, equity-centered solutions

Accelerating children’s learning
- Act on the best science of teaching and learning
- Make the most of summer
- Tutoring
- Hire Assistant teachers

Support the whole child
- Extra weight on socio-emotional development & consider trauma-informed approaches
- Prohibit harsh discipline as children return

Partner with families
- Continue virtual options for connection
- Consider free, technology-based learning supports
Evidence-backed, equity-centered solutions

Increase support to the workforce

- Living wage and parity policies
- Additional healthcare subsidies
- Prioritize ECE educators if vaccine boosters are necessary.

Accelerate creation of a coherent ECE system

- Expand publicly funded ECE options
- Use public funding to stabilize child care providers
- Anticipate and stave off cuts to Head Start and the public schools
- Invest in data systems and analytic capacity.
The role of research in the recovery

- **Additional research is critical** for tracking recovery for children, programs, and teachers, and to support policymakers’ efforts to target resources to areas of need.

- **Target important but difficult-to-study dimensions** (e.g., classroom quality, social and emotional development, learning outcomes for the youngest children, staffing and teacher training) as well as **key populations** (e.g., children from homeless families, DLLs, young children with disabilities, children experiencing bereavement due to the pandemic, Asian-American children amid the spike in Asian-American hate).

- **Research partnerships and enhanced research capacity within ECE agencies** are two ways to aid efforts to identify, implement, and monitor the success of recovery efforts.

- **Quick-turnaround studies are needed to inform local action.**
Thank you!

- We thank the Heising-Simons Foundation and grant officer Kimberly Brenneman for their support for this work.
- We also thank Jasmina Camo-Biogradlija, Nicole Wagner, and Olia Vradiy for invaluable support and we thank Julia Isaacs and Laura Wagner for meeting with us and providing insights into the Urban Institute’s list of COVID-19 child care surveys and data analyses.