



MASSACHUSETTS

Department of Early Education and Care



FIELD DATA, INSIGHTS AND GUIDANCE TO INFORM REOPENING

From March to May 2020, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) activated multiple channels to solicit ongoing feedback from child care providers, educators and industry leaders, including:

- Field survey of 10,500+ educators and 2,500+ child care providers
- Daily emails, phone calls, virtual meetings, and input from providers, educators childhood advocates, experts, funders, leaders and community members
- Presentations and written feedback from stakeholders and trade organizations
- Weekly Town Hall meetings with educators, providers, advocates and community members
- Regular conversations with business leaders

Throughout this process, feedback has focused on a few core concepts:

THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND CHILD CARE WORKERS IS PARAMOUNT

- Parents and providers alike are concerned for the health and safety of their own families. 60% of parents are struggling to work without child care yet 87% say they would hesitate to return to child care due to health concerns¹.
- 63% of educators say they intend to return to work, with their leading concern being the health and safety of their families².
- Need for adequate preparation, access to cleaning supplies and PPE
- Need for financing to properly prepare sites for health and safety compliance
- Worries about social distancing during typical child care activities, like: diapering, nap time, comforting upset children, escorting kids in and out of school, preparing food, working with children with disabilities, circle time, sensory tables, playground time, etc.
- Need for increased liability protection
- Support for communication systems with families to manage exposure risk
- Concern about how to balance healthy child development with health and safety protocols

THE WORKFORCE IS ECONOMICALLY CONSTRAINED AND MUST BE SUPPORTED AS ESSENTIAL

- Concern that staff will not return to work in a high-risk environment without significant incentives
- Tremendous burnout from high-stress environment
- Almost ½ of agencies and educators report that they or their workforce have been laid off, furloughed, or are working greatly reduced hours²
- Of educators who have been laid off, 70% are receiving unemployment, in many cases making more than they did when working in child care²
- Frontline nature of child care work during the crisis means extra staffing, pay and training is needed

¹ Strategies for Children initial survey data

² EEC field survey



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CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL TO THE STATE'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The business community's needs are evolving as employers adapt to the changing public health reality. Innovative child care models will be required as structural changes in the economy evolve, including:

- Expanded hours and days of care to accommodate staggered work schedules
- Increased numbers of work-from-home families in need of sporadic or non-full day care
- Tailored child care options to meet specific industry or employer needs
- Innovative employer strategies to support working families with limited access to child care in the initial phases

CHILD CARE WILL HAVE INCREASED PRESSURES TO OPERATE IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Emergency child care programs provide helpful guidance for what to expect around reopening. There are currently 520 emergency child care sites across the state with capacity for over 10,000 children—about 7% of the state's total pre-COVID child care capacity. Currently this system serves ~3,700 children daily.

- **Plan for Changes in Parent Demand:** Emergency Family Child Care homes have been utilized almost twice as much as larger group child care centers
- **Plan for Increased Costs:** Providers will incur increased costs including staffing to manage isolation and distancing, cleaning protocols and supplies, gloves, masks and other necessary health protection, materials and space configuration, and hazard pay
- **Plan for Reduced Enrollment and Income:** Fluctuations in enrollment will impact programs' ability to support fixed operating costs
- **Plan for Business to Support Families as Child Care Stabilizes:** The evolving child care landscape will require businesses and employers to support parents as the field stabilizes and adapts

TO SAFELY REOPEN IN PHASE 2, EEC IS WORKING TO ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT AREAS:

- Provide adequate health and safety protocols, verification systems, training and technical assistance to ensure public health and safety of children, families, and the early education and care workforce
- Build in sufficient lead time for programs to prepare their staff and physical space for safe care
- Identify solutions to procure masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and other protective health gear
- Build supports for the workforce to return to the industry and sustain services under the new guidance
- Provide guidance to providers on how to communicate with parents to manage exposure risk