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Impact of COVID-19 on essential family child care industry revealed in new research from Erikson Institute

Research-to-policy brief recommends changes to help heroic providers cope with challenges of pandemic



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, October 29, 2020 — Erikson Institute, the nation's premier graduate school in child development, has released a new report from its Herr Research Center: ***Family Child Care Providers: Unsung Heroes in the COVID-19 Crisis***. The research-to-policy brief, supported by the **Foundation for Child Development**, presents findings from focus groups of family child care providers across four states conducted from March to July 2020. With COVID-19 cases and deaths surging across the country, it is critically important to understand the indispensable role child care providers play during this time, and how the pandemic has exacerbated conditions for a workforce that was already vulnerable.

The brief is available for download in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Family child care is defined as paid care in a provider's own home to a group of children where at least one child is not related to the provider. Regulated family child care includes those providers who are licensed, registered, or certified under a state or local policy. The new report shows that while regulated family child care providers are meeting the needs of children and families during the pandemic, they face an array of challenges around increased costs of offering care, lack of supports, and limited access to supplies.

Key findings of the report include:

- Family child care providers who stayed open during the COVID-19 pandemic faced multiple barriers to offering safe and sustainable child care.
- The COVID-19 crisis highlighted and exacerbated the existing challenges faced by family child care providers.
- Family child care providers' strengths, such as the smaller home environment they provide compared to that of a center, make them uniquely able to meet this moment.

"This brief highlights the essential role that family child care providers play in the lives of families and children across the U.S.," said **Juliet Bromer, PhD**, Erikson's Research Scientist who directs the projects and co-authored the brief. "It brings to light their stories and perspectives that for too long have been unheard in our discussions about child care policy and research."

The report also includes recommendations aimed to inform policies at the federal, state, and local level on how to better support the family child care workforce that is so central to family employment and the economy as the country grapples with the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

Policy recommendations:

1. Increase family child care providers' access to health and safety supplies specific to the pandemic as well as everyday necessities, such as food and diapers, for their programs and the families they serve.
2. Consider bonuses or grants for providers' personal risk and extra time/expenses required to keep their programs safe during the pandemic.
3. Provide clear and timely information about new policies, protocols, and funding opportunities.
4. Ensure equitable access to policy and funding information by disseminating materials in easy-to-read formats and in languages spoken by providers and families.
5. Expand health care access to providers who stay open and cover health care costs in the event of COVID-19 infection of providers and/or their own household members.

6. Pay providers a living wage.
7. Provide support around distance learning for providers caring for school-aged children during the school day.

The focus groups, collected from family child care providers located in California (LA County), Florida, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin, were completed as part of Erikson’s “Multi-State Study of Family Child Care Decline” that is examining the factors behind the decline of licensed care in the four states.

According to the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE¹) family child care providers are more likely to care for infants and toddlers than other regulated child care settings. In geographic areas, such as rural communities where child care options are limited, home-based care fills a critical need for families². Parents may choose family child care for many reasons, such as it being more convenient and affordable. Often, these providers offer flexibility for parents with nonstandard work hours or variable work schedules, which are common among low-wage workers (NSECE). Additionally, family child care can allow siblings to be cared for in the same setting, and caregivers might share the family’s home language or cultural background³.

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Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. We have the premier graduate school dedicated to child development. We provide direct services to our community’s children and families. We are leaders in influencing early childhood policy. We work tirelessly every day so that all children can achieve optimal educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being. At Erikson Institute, we know that investing in the early years of children will last a lifetime.

¹ National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) Project Team (2016). Characteristics of Home-Based Early Care and Education Providers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education. OPRE Report #2016-13. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

² Porter, T., Paulsell, D., Del Grosso, P., Avellar, S., Hass, R., & Vuong, L. (2010). A Review of the Literature on Home-Based Child Care: Implications for Future Directions. Mathematica Policy Research for Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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