

CHILDCARE AND COVID-19: HOW STATES AND CHILDREN'S CABINETS ARE FUNDING NEAR-TERM CAPACITY AND PLANNING FOR LONG-TERM NEEDS

With approximately 40% of U.S. childcare centers and programs anticipating closure without public intervention¹ and an estimated 60% of K-12 students starting school virtually,² millions of children face an urgent need for safe, supervised environments that also allow families and caregivers to work. This is especially true for younger school-aged children who are ineligible for school-day childcare programs. As a result, childcare capacity and accessibility pose major challenges—on top of ongoing challenges to ensure that all care and learning environments provide the [quality](#) necessary for children, families, and the economy to reap the right benefits.

In response, some states and children's cabinets are taking quick action to meet these needs, in many cases leveraging the critical federal support provided through the CARES Act while also building upon existing programming. Moreover, many stakeholders are using the [childcare crisis](#) as an opportunity to redefine the narratives, definitions and roles of childcare in the future to foster stronger systems for the long-term.

While quantitative insights bring important perspective to this crisis, the data represent very human experiences that often reflect inequitable contexts. Most closing childcare programs are operated by women of color.³ Single parents are choosing to go on unemployment because it is the only way they can afford to care for their children. Mothers from two parent families are pausing careers so that one parent can stay home, adding to the [already declining reduction of the female workforce](#). Childcare workers across the country, who already earn less in wages than 98% of US workers,⁴ are having to make grave decisions when choosing whether to simply show up to work every day. Both immediate capacity and long-term strategies directly matter to the economic security of families, healthy development of children, and equitable opportunities across race, gender, and other demographic factors.

How States and Cabinets Are Building Immediate Capacity for Childcare That Includes School-Aged Children

New Jersey: \$250 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund, over 10% of the state's total allocation, is dedicated to a Governor's Child Care Initiative. The existing state Childcare Subsidy Program will now apply the state's existing subsidy rate to school-day hours for ages five to 13 through the end of 2020. In addition, families earning up to \$75,000 annually who are not otherwise eligible for the Childcare Subsidy Program can use the same subsidy for full- or part-time care needed due to remote learning.

Georgia: \$17 to \$19 million from the Governors Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund will provide childcare options for students ages five to 12 whose schools have opted for virtual learning through [Supporting Onsite Learning for Virtual Education Program \(SOLVE\)](#). Families can receive scholarships for licensed childcare learning centers, family childcare learning homes and providers with an approved day camp exemption.

Oklahoma: \$15 million has been allocated to stand up approximately 30 [Community Hope Centers](#) as multi-service places for children whose schools are virtual this fall, primarily utilizing Boys and Girls Clubs of America centers.

Vermont: The Department of Children and Families is facilitating the allocation of \$12 million from multiple CARES funding streams to develop "[childcare hubs](#)." This funding will work to establish 73 childcare hubs that will be distributed based on need. Additionally, restrictions for in-home care providers will be relaxed to enable them to take in more school aged children and be fast tracked for licensure.

Across states: The U.S. Department of Education announced its intended [emergency waiver process for 21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) to newly allow for school-day services during remote learning. [Stronger Together](#), California's robust guidance on school re-opening, explains in a [dedicated section](#) the importance of such out-of-school-time partners "to build the positive relationships, safe and supportive environments, and engaging activities that students most need in this time of uncertainty and stress."⁵ While the waiver does not increase funding available, the flexibility may help states effectively meet COVID needs.

Prioritizing Childcare for the Future

COVID-19 has made it evident that childcare plays a critical role in not just children's lives but in the wellbeing of families (13% have scaled back or quit their jobs⁶), communities (childcare deserts are rapidly expanding in BIPOC communities⁷) and the economy (lack of childcare options costs the United States \$57 billion annually before COVID-19⁸). With its impact being felt across all sectors, stakeholders are committing to prioritizing childcare systems for the long term.

While states and cabinets work to address short-term capacity and access needs for younger school-enrolled children, they will eventually go back to the classroom. However, the underlying inadequacies and inequities of the childcare systems will not go away. Many stakeholders are developing solutions that will keep childcare at the forefront of decision- and policy-making post-pandemic. Working through their children's cabinets, states like Kansas are implementing sustainable plans that commit to greater equity and access in childcare while states like South Carolina are gathering critical data on issues like childcare worker pay and childcare deserts to understand the multi-generational, educational, and workforce impact of this crisis in order to support longer-term improvement.

South Carolina: On September 1st, South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council (SCECAC) released the [Build It Back Better Survey Report](#). This report highlights the impact that COVID-19 has had on 2,431 families with young children who need childcare. It also marks the launch of a multi-part campaign that will be dedicated to identifying innovative approaches to “building back childcare better,” specifically for how the state can address childcare deserts. This campaign marks an aggressive push by South Carolina stakeholders to galvanize the “political will” of decision makers at a time when the [supporting data](#) is as pertinent as ever.

Kansas: The Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund developed a “[Blueprint for Early Childhood](#)” anchored in seven goals over the course of a five year plan. Its first goal centers on state-level coordination to streamline childhood decision-making structures and processes, especially to bridge the silos between childcare and K-12 systems. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven how critical streamlining is as states like Kansas work to ensure childcare programs and networks are receiving equitable support and CARES funding. Additional goals such as equity and access, quality and environments, and workforce—among others—demonstrate the scope of change needed so that childcare can successfully help all children thrive.

Endnotes

¹ Beer, T. (2020, July 15). 40% Of U.S. Child Care Centers Say They'll Close Permanently Without Public Assistance

² Burbio (2020, September 15). Burbio's K-12 School Opening Tracker. Accessed cai.burbio.com/school-opening

³ Beer, T. (2020, July 15). 40% Of U.S. Child Care Centers Say They'll Close Permanently Without Public Assistance

⁴ Beer, T. (2020, July 15). 40% Of U.S. Child Care Centers Say They'll Close Permanently Without Public Assistance

⁵ California Department of Education (2020, June). Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California's Public Schools. retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/sandtinsexpllearning.asp>

⁶ Long, H. (2020, July 04). The big factor holding back the U.S. economic recovery: Child care. Retrieved from washingtonpost.com

⁷ Rasheed Malik, K. (n.d.). The Coronavirus Will Make Child Care Deserts Worse and Exacerbate Inequality. Retrieved September 15, 2020, Rasheed Malik, K. (n.d.). The Coronavirus Will Make Child Care Deserts Worse and Exacerbate Inequality. Retrieved from americanprogress.org

⁸ The Hidden Cost of a Failing Childcare System: Toolkit. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://interactives.americanprogress.org/childcarecosts/>