

UNITED FOR OUR FUTURE

**Accomplishments and Recommendations from the San Diego Early Care
and Education Advocacy Coalition's COVID-19 Response**

March – August 2020

INTRODUCTION

On March 16, 2020, school districts in San Diego County responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by suspending all in-person classes and moving to distance learning. Just three days later, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced a statewide stay-at-home order, asking residents to limit recreation and traveling to work unless their work fell into the categories deemed essential in an Executive Order.

These decisions, made within a matter of days, upended daily life. Essential workers, many of whom were in the healthcare sector responding to the early days of the pandemic, suddenly had to find and pay for child care for their children who would normally be in school. Other parents found themselves taking on dual roles of employee and teacher as families adjusted to working from home and distance learning. Many other parents lost their jobs.

The impact on our child care sector was devastating. As families stayed home and limited activities to prevent contracting and spreading the COVID-19 virus, and/or stayed home because they were laid off, child care providers' revenue plummeted. They adopted increased sanitization, distance and hygiene protocols based on confusing guidance. Supplies and food were difficult to obtain due to scarcity and hoarding. Many child care teachers chose or were forced to stay home because they were at elevated risk from contracting the virus or they had children at home doing remote learning. Yet San Diego child care providers knew that if they ceased operations, many essential working parents would have to quit their jobs.

The gravity of the situation necessitated a quick response from the previously formed San Diego Early Care and Education Advocacy Coalition (ECE Advocacy Coalition) to meet the child care needs of families and ensure the sustainability of the local child care sector. On March 19, the group held the first meeting of the San Diego Emergency Child Care Task Force, which met daily thereafter for weeks, then weekly, then monthly as the crisis footing was managed. Members of this group included nonprofit and coalition organizations, the local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (YMCA of San Diego County Childcare Resource Service), Alternative Payment Program agencies, family child care home education networks, child care providers, community organizations, representatives from government agencies, members of essential worker and child care unions, and the philanthropic community.

By mobilizing quickly to form a trusted node for action, pairing immediate relief with rapid policy advocacy, and pivoting rapidly in the face of rapidly evolving conditions and information, the ECE Advocacy Coalition secured a region-wide prioritization of and investment in the child care sector during the pandemic. Public and private funding for child care relief in San Diego County totaled more than \$50 million since that fateful March 16. And while the child care sector and the region's working parents remain in crisis, the collective actions taken averted some of the chaos and crisis experienced by families in other major metropolitan regions of the country.

This publication captures our experience to:

1. *Describe the strategies of the San Diego Emergency Child Care Taskforce;*
2. *Highlight how the systemic inequities inherent in the child care sector manifested and deepened during the crisis; and*
3. *Present opportunities to build the system back better to improve child and family well-being while rectifying the historic bias and inequities plaguing child care providers and the families they serve.*

CELEBRATING OUR LOCAL CHILD CARE HEROES

COVID-19 has proven what we, in the local early care and education sector, have known all along: San Diego has the people, passion, and partnerships in place to ensure all families can access the resources they need to thrive. Our sectors are collaborative and ready to deploy proven models that improve child and family well-being as soon as funding is made available.

The pivot to distance learning in March catalyzed the formation of the San Diego Emergency Child Care Taskforce, a group of individuals from community organizations, government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and child care businesses determined to keep child care open for essential workers and economic recovery.

The vision of the Taskforce lives on in the continued work of the ECE Advocacy Coalition, which builds on the Taskforce's achievements to strengthen the child care sector and foster youth and family well-being in San Diego. The San Diego Emergency Child Care Taskforce intentionally disbanded to allow members to actively participate in other conversations addressing COVID-19, and their accomplishments as a short-term response body are worth celebrating.

The objectives of the Taskforce were two-fold. One, advocate for the provision of child care vouchers that would help families pay for child care and help child care providers stay operational during this crisis. Two, coordinate efforts that helped families and child care providers navigate the crisis by providing targeted support, access to supplies, and advocacy on their behalf.

This resulted in the first-ever local government investment in child care from the City and County of San Diego through CARES Act funding, the distribution of hygiene supplies to thousands of local child care providers, and millions in philanthropic funds for child care provider emergency needs. From March through August, the Taskforce proudly accomplished the following:

The need for childcare is critical for workers who are on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis so they can continue to do their jobs at full productivity despite the shutdown of schools and some childcare centers. Essential workers, like those of the Downtown Partnership's Clean & Safe team, which provides sanitation services, homeless outreach social services, and safety teams that monitor storefronts while business owners shelter in place, are needed now more than ever. For these workers, childcare comes as an added concern to the work they perform day in and day out.

Betsy Brennan President & CEO Downtown San Diego Partnership



MEETING EMERGENCY NEEDS OF PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES

PROVIDERS



- Added child care to County emergency operations plan to reinforce the importance of child care as a resource for the community, particularly essential workers.
- Set up weekly child care sector calls with County emergency operations and Community Care Licensing to share timely updates and regulations with child care providers. Attendance averaged 250 providers each week.
- Resource & Referral Agency provided consistent email updates and occasional text messages to providers to share information and rapidly changing guidelines in real time, reaching more than 125,000 individuals (duplicated) over six months.
- Resource & Referral Agency established and hosted 30 virtual support groups for child care providers, who often operate in isolation, to stay connected, share best practices, and air frustrations during this crisis.
- Established distribution network throughout the county to provide more than 1,600 PPE and cleaning supply kits so thousands of child care providers could operate safely.
- San Diego For Every Child, Child Development Associates and YMCA implemented the COVID-19 Children's Fund providing over 1,040 microgrants, exceeding \$249,000 to support providers.
- Resource & Referral agency, Alternative Payment Program, Child Care Providers Union, Child Care Home Education Networks, and others elevated provider voices by surveying providers and sharing their needs and challenges among decision-makers and prospective funding sources.
- Utilization of Alternative Payment Program network and payment distribution system to quickly disperse funds to child care providers.
- The task force supported the distribution of sanitization and child safety best practices to child care providers.
- Task Force members developed and communicated state policy recommendations to state officials including increased payments to providers, payment of childcare if closed, and other emergency policy changes.

The availability of child care for children of all ages is critical to ensuring our health systems' ongoing ability to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you again for recognizing the urgent need to keep child care providers operational to safely support children and families in our region.

**Dimitrios Alexiou, FACHE
President & CEO, Hospital
Association of San Diego
and Imperial Valley**

FAMILIES



- Resource & Referral Agency provided more than 2,800 enhanced referrals to help working parents in essential sectors find, select, and pay for child care.
- Resource & Referral Agency offered no-cost behavioral and parenting consultations to help parents adjust to parenting in a pandemic and reduce stress in moments of adversity.
- San Diego for Every Child, Child Development Associates and YMCA implemented the COVID-19 Children's Fund providing over 2,429 microgrants, exceeding \$425,000 to support families including childcare services, diapers, and food.
- Elevated parent voices to demonstrate need for vouchers to cover cost of child care.
- Task Force members developed and communicated state policy recommendations to state officials including vouchers for essential worker parents, preservation of child care subsidies and slots for families temporarily unable to work, and allowing paid child care while school-age children are distance learning.
- Task Force Member, The Chicano Federation led a County-Wide conversation, and research project to address the racial inequities of COVID-19 that impacted families of color. Through the collaboration of trusted community-based partners, the San Diego Latino Health Coalition works to reduce Covid-19 infection rates, increases access to vital information, increase participation in COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, and most importantly, saves lives.¹

For us to continue to provide the essential services to the residents of San Diego County we need to know our children are in a safe environment and cared for. With the closure of schools, essential workers have taken on the roles of teacher, caretaker and essential worker. The lack of childcare has presented incredible challenges. Childcare is cost prohibiting and options have been extremely limited. Providing quality childcare and homeschooling after an exhausting shift of 12, 24, 48 hours or more isn't realistic. This is not sustainable and an exhausted parent is an exhausted essential worker.

**Tony Tosca Secretary-
Treasurer San Diego City
Firefighters, I.A.F.F. L145**

¹The Chicano Federation. "San Diego Latino Health Coalition". Retrieved from <https://chicanofederation.org/sdlatinohealth>

ADVOCATING FOR FINANCIAL INVESTMENT IN EMERGENCY CHILD CARE



- Secured \$10 million in local CARES Act funding for child care vouchers for eligible families:
 1. Effort championed in partnership with Supervisor Nathan Fletcher at the County of San Diego and Councilmembers Cate, Ward, and Montgomery at the City of San Diego, demonstrating their commitment to all San Diego families.
 2. Funding benefits families in need of child care to remain employed and child care providers in need of financial assistance to maintain their businesses.
- Secured \$25 million in local CARES Act funding for child care provider grants
 1. Effort championed in partnership with Supervisor Nathan Fletcher at the County of San Diego, demonstrating his commitment to all San Diego families.
- Resource & Referral Agency provided weekly data updates to elected officials and other stakeholders to track child care facility closures and capacity to make the case for financial support to stabilize the sector.

I strongly believe that improved investment in quality childcare is a key part of tackling the cycles of poverty. Countless studies tell us that accessible, quality early opportunities for all children will increase not only the education, but the health, and workforce development opportunities, and can help lift generational cycles out of poverty.... Yet significant investment in the system has been slow.

**County of San Diego
Supervisor, District 4
Nathan Fletcher**

LEVERAGING PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS TO SCALE SOLUTIONS



- Secured and distributed approximately \$2.5 million in philanthropic and First 5 San Diego funds for child care emergency needs:
 1. Processed more than 3,500 micro-grants in partnership with San Diego for Every Child, Jewish Family Services, Child Development Associates, and the YMCA of San Diego County.
 2. Distributed truckloads of donated diapers from Price Philanthropies to families in need through the network of task force members.
- Partnered with The San Diego Foundation and San Diego for Every Child to quickly and efficiently distribute local child care vouchers and child care provider grant funds to provide financial assistance to San Diegans in need.
- Mobilized efforts quickly to meet early care and education sector needs while public agencies were focused on public health infrastructure in early days of the pandemic.
- Provided a framework for local emergency child care response once public funds became available.

ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

The COVID-19 pandemic that the Taskforce responded to intensified the widespread child care crisis, but it did not create it. In the United States, the early care and education sector has been undervalued for decades, resulting in inadequate wages for child care providers and ECE teachers while parents simultaneously struggle to find and pay for child care that meets their needs. As it is currently structured, the child care sector is an industry where providers are undervalued and compensated, yet parents are overly burdened by the costs of child care – an arrangement that would be unsustainable by traditional business standards.

The inequities in the current child care system are the result of a long history of discriminatory ideas, policies, and practices rooted in both racism and sexism. Inequity in the child care sector has its roots in slavery, and Black women are considered some of our country's first child care providers based on their roles caring for White children.² Even after slavery was abolished, career opportunities for many Black women were limited to domestic work – a field that has been hampered by racist and sexist beliefs that work done by women and/or women of color is not worth taking seriously.³ This belies the dedication, expertise, and commitment that many child care providers possess and perpetuates a system where generations of women, women of color, and their families are denied access to opportunity.⁴

Data from San Diego's Child Care Resource & Referral Agency find that it typically costs a child care provider in Central San Diego roughly \$252.53 per week to care for one infant.⁵ Yet, providers can only earn as much as families are able to pay and/or what the state will reimburse, so the average take-home pay of a California family child care provider is \$9.76/hour. When adjusted for cost of living, this amounts for nearly \$3 below California's \$12.00 minimum wage and below the living wage threshold for a single adult with one child.⁶

Child care providers are not the only ones who suffer in this arrangement. Families of color disproportionately face limited access to child care subsidies and care that is affordable and available in their community. When a family cannot access child care, two important things occur: first, the child is denied the experiences necessary to build the brain architecture during a crucial phase of brain development. Second, the family is forced to make sacrifices in their working life that jeopardize their economic stability and mobility. Neither situation is ideal for family and child well-being, and solutions for this issue merit further discussion.

This reality has significant implications for San Diego, a diverse majority-minority region where no single ethnic group accounts for more than 50% of the population.⁷ This demographic composition coupled with what we know of the sector's history of ethnic inequity and occupation segregation creates a situation where a significant number of San Diegans are affected by how we invest in, or ignore, the early care and education field.

While it is tempting to surrender to the belief that systems are immovable and that attempts at change are futile, this thinking is unproductive and categorically false. Systems can change because people recognize the opportunity to do better, and the turbulence of this moment should drive all of us to examine how to reimagine our systems in the interest of equity and opportunity.

² Sethi, S., Johnson-Staub, C., Gallagher Robbins, K., "An Anti-Racist Approach to Supporting Child Care Through COVID-19 and Beyond." Center for the Study of Law and Social Policy. Retrieved from: <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/anti-racist-approach-supporting-child-care-through-covid-19-and-beyond>

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ YMCA CRS data

⁶ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, "Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018." University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://csce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/3-Earnings-Economic-Security.pdf>

⁷ Kidsdata.org, All Data: San Diego County - Demographics 2017, Retrieved from: <https://www.kidsdata.org/region/368/san-diego-county/results>

THE OPPORTUNITY BEFORE US

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fragility of many industries in our economy, and the early care and education sector is no exception. While child care providers experienced challenges before COVID-19, the pandemic exacerbated those difficulties. First is the matter of revenue and enrollment. Immediate action is needed to increase revenue for child care providers including access to higher compensation, increased government subsidy reimbursement rates, and financial/material resources to support extraordinary costs of operating in a COVID-19 environment. Enrollment in child care programs dropped sharply because of ratio requirements and fewer parents sending children for care. This shrinks child care program revenue and jeopardizes the financial stability of local child care businesses.

The second issue involves adapting to public health protocols. Child care providers must sanitize their facilities more than they already did before the pandemic, and they need to secure more supplies at a time when everyone else in the community is procuring toilet paper, hygiene wipes, and hand sanitizer. Their daily schedule caring for children leaves them little time to shop in store, and the providers who do are often met with empty shelves.

Families, in turn, continue to face economic uncertainty and urgency as it relates to finding and paying for child care that is already out of reach for so many. Widespread layoffs, food insecurity, and the ever-present threat of housing instability put increasing pressure on families and underscore the need for immediate financial support and access to child care so families can work and earn the wages that meet the high cost of living in San Diego.

The specific issues that we are confronting in this pandemic present opportunities to provide immediate relief for San Diego child care providers and families in need at this moment. We engaged with child care providers using focus groups, weekly County forums, formal surveys, and provider support groups to develop policy recommendations and accurately represent the needs of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AUGMENT THE CHILD CARE DISASTER COUNCIL'S RECOVERY PLAN INCLUDE:

- Invest in Direct and Immediate Resources to Child Care Providers:
 1. Monitor need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies, utilizing Office of Emergency Services supply chains and State stipends for providers.
 2. Provide access to education supplies to support distance learning and accommodate providers caring for school-age children.

In making decisions about reopening our local economy, we must first recognize that there can be no recovery without first addressing the needs of children and families. All other efforts to reopen our economy depend first on a safe, timely, and equitable return to school and childcare provision.

**City of San Diego Mayor
Todd Gloria's
Back to Work Plan**



- Invest in Systems to Build Child Care Business Resilience:
 1. Utilize community-based partners as trusted messengers to coach child care providers to maximize access to and implementation of existing grants, loans, and benefits.
 2. Prioritize support for private-pay providers who are not supported by public programs; specifically, analyze stability of child care business to determine the additional resources needed beyond upcoming state and federal investments.
 3. Support costs for staffing required to meet needs of distance learning and smaller ratios.
 4. Provide mortgage/rental assistance to ensure that child care providers do not lose their facilities/home due to pandemic-driven economic issues.

- Invest in Working Families:
 1. Monitor implementation and coordination of child care vouchers for essential workers between state, local and philanthropic initiatives.
 2. Expand rental assistance programs to prevent housing instability and associated stress and adverse effects from lack of housing
 3. Position child care as a critical component for holistic family support, including food security, mental health services, and COVID-19 monitoring and testing for underserved communities.
 4. Encouraging family-friendly employer policies, including flexible work schedules, onsite child care, and generous paid-time-off or sick leave so parents can stay home when children are COVID-19-positive or sick and unable to attend child care or school.

The child care problem is a national issue, which will require all levels of government to work together to address.

**San Diego City
Councilmember, District 6
Chris Cate**

Even before COVID-19, we were losing parents from the workforce because they couldn't find affordable childcare, or they were settling for low quality care negatively affecting their child's development. If we've learned anything in recent months, it is this. We must work together to give parents the peace of mind of knowing their children are safe and the cost of keeping them that way is affordable.

**Mark Stuart, President
and CEO, The San Diego
Foundation**

The pandemic has also offered valuable lessons for reimagining our child care infrastructure to prevent the sector from collapsing in future crises, both those that stem from unexpected circumstances and those that were born from a broken system.

High quality, affordable and widely available child care impacts a community's success, yet nearly 50% of children with working parents are left without a licensed child care slot in San Diego County. Even when a slot is available, quality of care varies widely, and the costs are often out of reach for families. San Diego is the 13th most expensive metro area in the nation, and the average price of child care for two young children in the San Diego region accounts for 40% of the budget for a typical family of four.⁸ When child care is not affordable, working parents – often the woman in the home – will leave the workforce and create a significant impact on the economy. Nationally, this accounts for as much as \$57 billion in lost revenue, productivity, and earnings.⁹

⁸ San Diego Workforce Partnership. "Childcare + Workforce." Retrieved from <https://childcare.workforce.org/>

⁹ Ibid.

We recommend targeted child care funding to address a lack of facilities, improve the quality of care, and provide immediate, affordable access to families.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LONG-TERM CHILD CARE SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY INCLUDE:

- Invest in Child Care as a Career Field:
 1. Support a professional wage that matches the expertise and commitment of child care providers.
 2. Implement child care provider benefits pools.
 3. Increase access to continuing education to generate higher wages, leverage partnerships with community colleges for ongoing, culturally competent education opportunities.

- Invest in Long-term Approaches for Child Care Business Resilience:
 1. Adopt a shared-services model that pools resources to build organizational capacity.
 2. Fund facilities upkeep and support to reduce overhead costs to providers.
 3. Explore and promote innovative business models for child care such as employee-owned child care cooperatives.

- Invest in Unique Public-Private Models:
 1. Identify where County facilities may incorporate or be repurposed to include early care and education facilities and charge little or no rent to lower the cost of care for providers.
 2. Incorporate mixed-delivery early care and education options into housing or multi-use developments and incentivize developers to incorporate early care and education in projects.
 3. Integrate child care spaces in civic planning for housing and commercial developments, including incentives for creating child care space through permitting allowances and processes.
 4. Partner with school districts to convert unused classrooms or buildings into licensed child care or license-exempt after-school program space with very low facilities fees for providers.
 5. Work with Navy Region SW to support expansion of a military-connected child care network.

Averaging nearly \$12,000 per year, the cost of childcare is one of the single largest barriers for families to enter the work force. Impoverished and working-class parents too often find it impossible to find jobs that allow them to both care for their children and pay the bills each month. California's children deserve a strong start, and families need support to create work/life balance that leads to a happy and healthy workplace, and an even happier and healthier home.

**California Assemblymember,
District 78
Chris Ward**
(Previous City of San Diego
Councilmember, District 3)



- Incentivize Family-friendly Practices Among Employers:
 1. Position public jurisdictions as exemplary employers and engage the business community and other public employers to adopt:
 - a) schedules that meet the needs of parents, whether they need predictable or flexible schedules;
 - b) generous paid-time-off or sick leave benefits;
 - c) child care benefits, including on-site or nearby discounted child care;
 - d) dependent care assistance plans or flexible spending accounts so parents can use pre-tax dollars to pay for child care.
 2. Provide paid family leave for parents.
 - a) If the employer does not currently participate in the state disability program, consider allowing employees to opt into it;
 - b) Employers can choose to augment the state paid family leave benefit, which does not fully replace the parent's income and is limited in duration.

- Invest in Long-term Support for Working Families
 1. Continually engage community organizations to assess and respond to evolving family needs.
 2. Consider investing in comprehensive services for working families:
 - a) Including child care vouchers in Rapid Rehousing programs for families;
 - b) Include child care vouchers in workforce development programming.

The cost of raising a child has increased dramatically; for many, child care costs each month are roughly equal to the cost of rent or a monthly mortgage. And for many women, lack of affordable child care is a main barrier of entry into the workforce. We need to invest in better payment assistance programs for families, pre-K for every child, more after-school options, and finally pass paid family leave and create a culture in which people of all genders take that time with their families.

**United States Representative,
District 53
Sara Jacobs**

With strategic investments in the ECE sector, we have an opportunity to address the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism impacting our communities. Increased funding will ensure that the sector can emerge from this moment of crisis stronger and foster the recovery that results when parents can continue to work and drive our economy. This will foster economic growth while simultaneously increasing provider wages and economic stability for families of color to undo generations of inequity.



CONCLUSION

Much will be written about this time in our history, and while we still face a number of unknowns as a society, one thing is clear: this is an opportunity to take what we know and build back better. Seeing the field on the brink of collapse should ignite a fire within all of us to seek solutions that create sustainable, local funding for San Diego's child and youth sectors.

Families do not exist in isolation, and a network of individuals and resources must be committed to ensure families have access to the resources they need to be financially, physically, and emotionally secure. For generations, the underfunded early care and education system has made this disproportionately difficult for women and families of color. We can no longer ignore this reality, and we have a moral obligation to rebuild these systems in a way that promotes equity and opportunity for all.

We are proud of what we have accomplished as the Early Care and Education Advocacy Coalition and the Emergency Child Care Taskforce to support families during an unprecedented crisis. The results we were able to celebrate this year, in partnership with our elected officials, community organizations, philanthropists, and child care providers, and families, give us hope that long-term solutions are possible.

We know that strengthening the child and youth sector is an enormous task, and we cannot do it alone. The commitments we, as a community, make to invest in programs, services, and resources for children and families will pay dividends as we see parents increase their economic stability and mobility and watch the next generation of San Diegans thrive together.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The San Diego Early Care and Education Advocacy Coalition wishes to recognize the contributions of Luisa Montes, for authoring this publication, as well as the important partnership with San Diego Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, and Councilmembers Chris Cate, Monica Montgomery, and Chris Ward.

Above all, thank you to childcare providers, teachers and staff who are our essential heroes.

Attendees of the emergency task force included:

Child Development Associates

The Chicano Federation

Children's Paradise

Educational Enrichment Systems

First 5 San Diego

Kids on the Go

MAAC Project

Neighborhood House Association

San Diego for Every Child

San Diego County Office of Education, Early Learning and Care Division

The San Diego Foundation

San Diego Grantmakers

SAY San Diego

The Workforce Partnership

Tootris- Childcare On Demand

YMCA Childcare Resource Service

UDW-CCPU

For more information about the Early Care and Education Advocacy Coalition, including ways to partner and invest in this work, please contact the group's convener, **Courtney Baltiyskyy** at **cbaltiyskyy@ymcasd.org**.