



Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC) Meeting Thematic Summary

January 19, 2022

The convening of the ECPC on January 19, 2022, was designed to capture feedback and input from the Joint Parent and Workforce Advisory Committee regarding current experiences with child care during recent months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a series of questions, parents and practitioners alike shared stories of the myriad challenges they have faced and provided practical solutions to the obstacles the pandemic has created or exacerbated for the child care industry.¹

Across the discussion, pertinent themes can generally be categorized across several key topic areas: challenges, root causes of challenges/systemic problems, and policy recommendations.

Regarding challenges faced by both providers and parents, there was a clear sentiment that the pandemic has continued to take a toll on the way young learners are educated and cared for in 2022. The following lists include articulated challenges.

Challenges for Providers

- Providers have a lack of access to proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep staff and families safe and healthy.
- School/facility closures occur due to (1) a lack of staff (staff facing their own challenges securing child care) and (2) the positive cases among staff and children that lead to quarantining, an inability to work, and an inability for children to attend.
- Providers are dealing with a workforce crisis: they are in competition with the retail and restaurant industries due to low wages for staff.

¹ As a preface to the discussion, ECPC facilitators illuminated that the State is in the process of budget development for 2022–23. Economists have anticipated a surplus of between \$20–\$31 billion for the coming fiscal year. Governor Newsom has already identified early childhood care and education as a priority for use of surplus funds. This additional understanding supported participants to further identify how they believe supplemental funds could be used to support the early childhood care and education industry.



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Challenges for Parents

- Parents are having to miss work because of (1) COVID-19 cases or symptoms and (2) closures of child care facilities that leave their children without another option.
- Parents are experiencing anxiety/stress around having children who are too young to wear a face mask or too young to be vaccinated but have siblings who are back in classrooms and interacting with large groups.
- Parents are experiencing confusion around the differences in process between child care facilities versus school districts, where procedures are much easier to understand and resources are more robust.

Committee members also identified potential root causes of these issues, noting that they are mostly systemic in nature and cannot be solved with simple solutions. The following lists include articulated root causes for challenges.

Root Causes for Provider Challenges

- The child care industry is a perpetually underfunded/under-resourced system, which aligns with historically sexist and racist ideas that undervalue child care as a nonessential, unskilled industry.
- Tribal communities and their providers feel completely excluded from policy decisions, resource allocation, and important discussions about how to ensure quality and safety, which reinforces historical trends of attempted erasure of indigenous identities and perspectives.
- Even though the state has surplus funds, the child care industry is not generally a high priority.

Root Causes for Parent Challenges

- Parents must have a job in order to have child care, though in most cases they need child care to try to find a job.
- Parents feel left out or excluded due to citizenship status, and even get disqualified from eligibility for receiving child care.
- The income guidelines in California are too high.



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Though many of the challenges faced by communities are largely perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, providers and parents offered the following solutions as potential paths forward.

Potential Solutions for Provider Challenges

- **Greater clarity and specificity around requirements**—Providers need clearer mandates and deadlines. For example, providers are currently reimbursed based on enrollment, but clarity and guidance around whether this will continue through June has not been communicated by the State.
- **Hazard pay**—If a facility has to close, child care staff should get paid for all the days that they are unable to work because of the effects of the pandemic.
- **Compensation**—In order to retain quality staff that may otherwise turn to the retail and restaurant industries, they should earn a competitive wage that includes healthcare, paid time off, and retirement benefits.
- **More efficient delivery of resources**—Providers observed that those resources that are actually made available to the community have to go through too many hands before they get to families and providers.

Potential Solutions for Parent Challenges

- **Remove barriers to entry**—Kindergarten (K) and K through grade 12 (K–12) programs don't require the same levels of justification or eligibility to enroll children as child care providers do; eliminating these requirements, such as proof of employment or income levels, could help.
- **Lower child care costs**—The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)² system doesn't cover the other costs families may have that compete with child care costs—especially rent payments, which are the largest costs parents face. Lowering the amount parents have to pay for child care would allow for essential costs, such as healthcare and transportation, to be covered more easily—particularly for families experiencing poverty.

This discussion was meant to act as a predecessor to the full ECPC meeting, which took place on January 25, 2022.

² System used in California for the delivery, redemption, and reconciliation of issued public assistance benefits, such as CalFresh, CalWORKs, and other food and cash aid benefits.