

Policymaking Principles for Supporting Child Care and Early Education through the Coronavirus Crisis

As families and communities grapple with the COVID-19 crisis, child care should be a front-and-center issue. Widespread school and child care closures have created an immediate crisis for workers whose jobs don't allow telework options—whether it's those in the health care industry or people employed in grocery stores or other low-wage professions who must continue working.

The possibility of sustained closures will destabilize families who depend on child care and child care workers—who are disproportionately women of color, who often live paycheck-to-paycheck, and who likely lack paid sick days or paid family and medical leave. Child care programs already operate on very thin margins and face the risk of closing their doors permanently before the crisis ends should parents be unable to pay their child care bills. This would leave working parents even more desperate for affordable child care when the COVID-19 crisis has passed. At the same time, child care providers who are keeping their doors open will need assistance with safety and sanitation to ensure workers and families are healthy. Moreover, we must provide child care for the children of emergency responders and other frontline personnel whose essential work will likely be necessary throughout the pandemic.

Federal and state governments must invest significant resources to shore up the child care industry, which has a national economic impact of more than **99 billion annually**, and ensure its continuity to support America's workers during and after the current crisis. State agencies should also take what actions they can under current law and with existing resources to address the burgeoning crisis.

Federal and State Policymakers must move swiftly to respond to the growing child care crisis using the following health care principles

1. The health and safety of children and families, early childhood educators, and the broader community are paramount.
2. Child care centers, family child care homes, and the early childhood workforce must be sustained through this crisis so they can survive economically, remain in business, and reopen afterwards.
3. Children and families need health, nutrition, educational, and economic supports during this time.

4. We must support parents' and caregivers' economic security throughout the crisis.

Adhering to these principles will require states to take all available **actions under current law** and to develop new policies that address the current reality. We must also make significant and immediate investments—particularly at the federal level—so states and localities can act quickly and flexibly in adapting to the shifting public health landscape.

CLASP Child Care and Early Education Principles:

1. **The health and safety of children and families, child care workers and early educators, and the broader community are paramount.** This means some child care facilities and homes will need to close **when appropriate**. It also entails engaging with public health experts to determine how to best serve children and families in the facilities and homes that remain open. This includes putting in place a **range of potential additional precautions** for parents, caregivers, and children, such as conducting health screenings (for fever and symptoms) when children are dropped off and picked up, limiting external visitors, and enforcing **strict hand washing and sanitizing routines**. States should enforce small group sizes, and providers should limit contact by minimizing group activities, modifying care spaces, and limiting activities in common areas. Congress and states should appropriate funding for sanitation needs. Workers in facilities providing emergency child care should receive hazard pay, and policymakers should include funding for substitute educators should workers become ill. In addition, we must provide funding for paid sick days and paid family medical leave should workers become unable to work due to illness or caregiving needs.
2. **Child care centers, family child care centers, and early childhood educators need to be sustained through this crisis so they can survive economically, remain in business, and reopen afterwards.** Without significant public investment, the COVID-19 outbreak could turn temporary closures into permanent ones, significantly reducing the nation's supply of licensed child care. Federal and state policymakers should ensure that policies serving as economic stabilizers for families, such as unemployment insurance and other essential supports, are available to all child care workers, including those who are self-employed in family child care homes. States can use **flexibilities in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** to ensure that providers who care for families receiving CCDBG-funded child care assistance continue to receive payments even when children are not attending child care. Similarly, the federal Office of Head Start has **issued guidance** that Head Start and Early Head Start staff should continue to be paid wages and benefits even as programs close. We must continue CCDBG and Head Start funding to sustain programs serving the families with the lowest incomes. Other programs that rely on a mix of public and private resources will need emergency grants to supplement parent payments and remain afloat.

- 3. Children and families need health, nutrition, educational, and economic supports during this time.** Children and families rely on child care programs and Head Start to meet essential nutrition, education, and other needs. Whenever possible, programs should deliver key services to children and families either virtually, such as using remote home visits, or through modified arrangements such as pick-up stations for meals. Child care providers and families with young children also need mental health supports during this crisis. Federal and state policymakers should provide resources to facilitate the use of technology so that early childhood workers can maintain contact with parents during this time of heightened stress and anxiety. State agencies should consult with public health experts to understand the relative risks of continuing individual services such as early intervention and home visiting.

- 4. We must support parents' and caregivers' economic security throughout the crisis.** Closures will disrupt parents' and caregivers' planned child care arrangements—which often require a taxing juggle during regular times—in significant ways that could jeopardize their jobs and economic stability. To address these needs, parents and caregivers will need cash supports, paid family and medical leave and paid sick leave, and nutrition supports such as enhanced Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. And when the crisis is over, parents and caregivers will need child care to support their search for work if they have lost employment. Therefore, policymakers should support expanded CCDBG eligibility to help families get back on their feet.

Policymakers must move quickly to respond to the needs of children, families, and child care providers during the COVID-19 outbreak. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) have already introduced a **bill** with critical first steps to address the crisis. State policymakers are also making critical headway. But we need additional steps, including significant and flexible financial support, to address the myriad needs of families and child care providers during and after this crisis.