




Child Care and Education During COVID-19: A Report on the Economic and Social Impact on Women in Massachusetts

October 2020



“[Society’s response to] COVID-19 is revealing that American culture is not conducive for supporting parents and prioritizing early education for children. It is proven how important early education is for lifetime success. Parents need to be supported for the long term health and success of our children which is critical for the success of this country.”

Worcester survey respondent

Commissioners: Denella Clark, Chair; Rebecca Bact, Vice-Chair; Marlene Sallo, Clerk; Sara Schnorr, Treasurer; Liz Friedman; Jean Fox; Penny Blaisdell; Ruth Bramson; Marianne Fleckner; Allison Goldberg; Audrey Hall; Patricia Hohl; Nina Kimball; Leslie-Ann McGee; Maria Puppolo; Shaitia Spruell; Wendy Silver; Phyllis Smith; Mary-dith Tuitt

Staff: Jill Ashton, Executive Director; Sasha Heggie-Jackson, Program Director; Mel Soto, Events and Communications Coordinator

Opening Remarks

Current times are proving to be extremely difficult for all of us. As mothers and commissioners, we too feel the building pressures of COVID-19, especially around changes in school structure and the workplace. Traditionally, and even through to 2020, women have been expected to balance work obligations with family obligations. We consistently have been asked to prove that we can maintain professionalism and meet the demands of the job while simultaneously teaching, directing and nurturing young children; caring for our elderly; managing our families; and maintaining our own health. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the burden of this “second shift” - the additional shift of work at home after our daily professional jobs have ended. The second shift is no longer a few hours after work. Now it is all day long, every day of the week. Many women turn to their own parents for assistance, if available. But as so many of our parents are of an age that makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 or its effects, that can be a risky option. Recently women from across the Commonwealth have shared their testimony and personal experiences around COVID-19 with the Massachusetts Commission Status of Women and each voice echoes the desperate need for additional structure and support. Women have always been and remain the backbone of our families and households. We represent a significant portion of our economy. Direct relief or burden-sharing for the mostly invisible and uncompensated work that women shoulder must take priority, especially if women are to remain important drivers of our economy. One important way to provide immediate relief is by taking action on education and child care disparities.

-Commissioner Shaitia Spruell, mother to 8-year old son

Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) has collected and now reports data on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls across the Commonwealth. The MCSW recognizes the critical importance that child care and education play in the lives of women and has thus conducted targeted research through a survey with over 4,000 respondents and a public hearing conducted on September 15 with representation from over 300 municipalities from across the Commonwealth. The MCSW issues this report pursuant to our statutory authority to report on the status of women in the Commonwealth.

THIS REPORT INCLUDES KEY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

- **Women's work, opportunity and achievement**
 - 53% reported that they have reduced their hours or are considering reducing their hours
 - 39% reported that changes in child care and educational arrangements have affected their performance/performance rating
 - 21% reported considering quitting their job
- **Economic impact**
 - 42% of respondents reported that they believed that changes in their child care and educational arrangements will set them back relative to their employment opportunities and/or career
 - 45% of respondents reported that changes in their child care and educational arrangements have negatively impacted their financial security
 - Women with annual family incomes of less than \$100,000 reported higher rates (6.4 out of every 10 women) of disruption in their financial security compared to women with annual household incomes of more than \$100,000 (3.8 out of every 10 women)
- **Essential Workers**
 - 56% of essential workers responded affirmatively that different arrangements in child care and education have negatively impacted financial security
 - 37.3% of essential worker respondents belong to an annual income bracket of less than \$100,000
 - Essential workers respondents earn less compared with their non-essential worker counterparts
 - 13% more of essential worker respondents are concerned with finances compared to non-essential workers

- 8.5 out of 10 essential worker respondents are concerned with their child(ren)'s social and emotional development, coupled with their educational access and progress
- **Access to affordable, quality child care and education**
 - 96% of respondents reported that their arrangements have been in some way affected due to COVID-19-related changes in child care and educational arrangements
 - 61% of respondents reporting that child care and educational arrangements have been “severely impacted”
 - The burden of these changes have been felt most acutely by families at the lower end of the annual income scale, families earning less than \$100,000 a year report higher levels of disruption
- **Severe impact: Women report being at their “breaking point”**
 - 88.9% of respondents expressed concern for their child(ren)'s social and emotional development
 - 73.9% of respondents expressed concern for their child(ren)'s educational access and progress
 - Almost a third (28%) of survey respondents expressed concern regarding their child(ren)'s access to specialized educational services
 - More than 60% of respondents reported that the impact of changes in child care and educational arrangements has impacted their own mental health

About the Commission

The mission of the Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women and girls across Massachusetts and to ensure that they can achieve full equity in all areas of life. The Commission consists of 19 commissioners appointed by the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House and the Caucus of Women Legislators.

It is the Commission's intention to respond to the needs of women and girls, assess the status of women in regard to critical and timely issues and, as appropriate, offer recommendations and point towards policies that address the critical needs of Massachusetts constituents.

Context

Gaps in access to quality child care and education have substantial implications on the economic status of women and their families. In addition to the adverse consequences on child development and educational outcomes, a lack of access to child care and education results in increased barriers to work, disproportionately affecting women. These barriers to work have economic implications for women in both the short and long term. In the short term, women will be forced to reduce hours or lose their jobs in greater numbers than men, leaving them and their families struggling financially, facing food and housing insecurity issues and spiralling into poverty. In the long term, the implications are bleak - economic consequences may result in dramatic increases in the wage gap, substantial decreases in representation in leadership, and significantly diminished economic equality and security for women and their families.

Hearing

On September 15, 2020, the MCSW convened a virtual public hearing with more than 60 attendees. Some shared first-hand experience, while others communicated expertise from the field of child care and education. What was clear from the testimony is that working mothers and parents are at their breaking point, and when faced with options - none of which are good. Choices they are making are the least bad and are often made out of desperation. Participants that work in or represent the child care or education sectors shared testimony regarding years of cumulative underinvestment that was already leading these sectors on a pathway to collapse even before the COVID-19 crisis.

The minutes and the audio file from the hearing may be found on our website:

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-commission-on-the-status-of-women>

Survey

The MCSW launched an online survey (included in the appendix) on September 2, 2020 to supplement the hearing testimony, broaden the Commission's reach into every corner of the Commonwealth, and connect with diverse communities. Only two weeks later **more than 4,000 Massachusetts residents from more than 300 communities across the Commonwealth participated.**

Findings from the public hearing and survey

The information from the public hearing and the survey is concerning and demands attention.

The inequities and challenges women face on a regular basis have been exacerbated by the public health crisis. In many cases, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted pre-existing inequities and the chronic under-resourcing of public needs. In other cases, COVID-19 has brought families that had formerly enjoyed economic stability to the edge of collapse. What is clear from the testimony and survey results is that the impact of this crisis is being experienced across the board by women from all economic levels, ethnic and racial groups, and geographic regions and is at a level necessitating immediate attention.

1. Women's work, opportunity and achievement

Overwhelmingly, participants at the public hearing and survey respondents expressed deep concerns about their ability to maintain the same level of commitment to work - productivity, hours, and income - while simultaneously meeting the increased needs of their families.

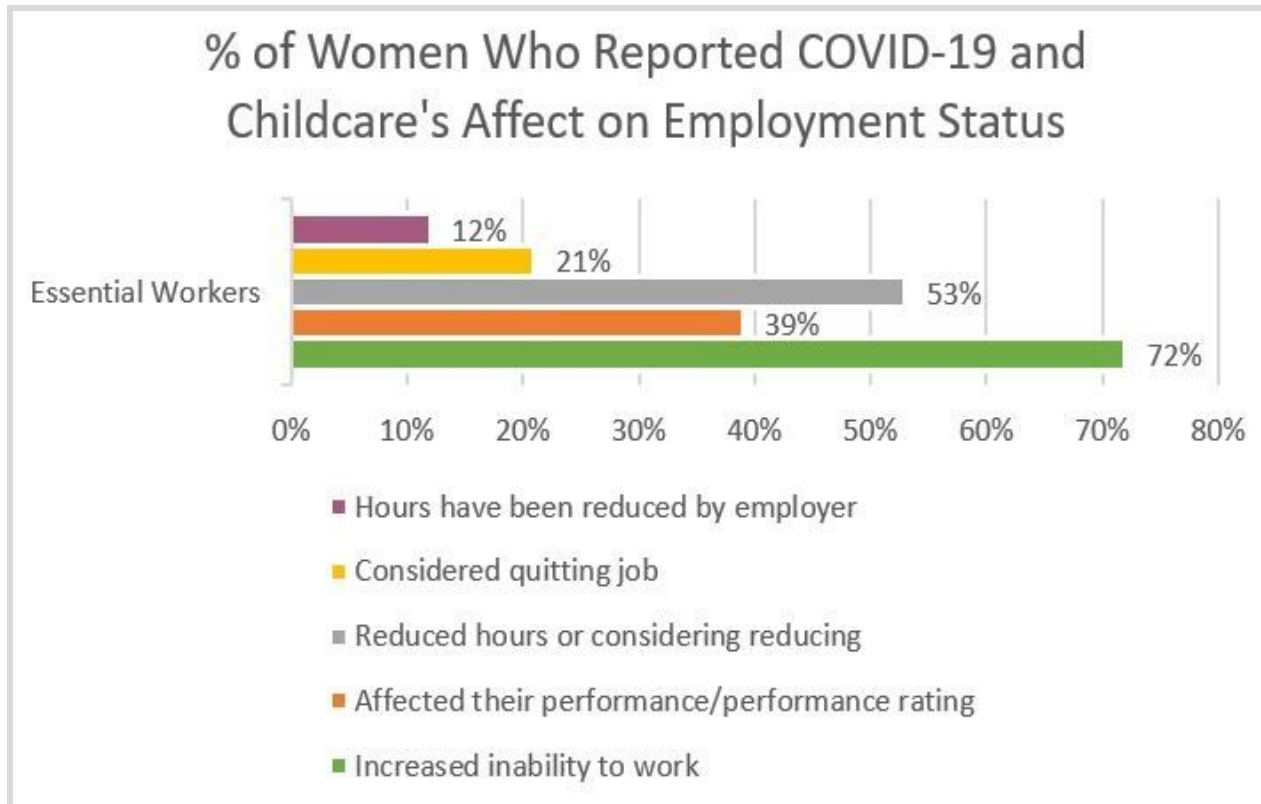
"I am an executive in a predominantly male company. I am the only one on my team who needs to adapt work schedules to help with family and make sure kids are okay and attempting to learn. Before COVID I typically worked 8:30-6:00 and now it's more like 7:30-10:00, yet, because of the flexibility I need, I've had to reduce my hours and get paid less, sacrificing career opportunities ..."

-Needham survey respondent

a. Women's ability to work

72% percent of respondents reported an increased inability to work when asked about the impact of COVID-19 on child care and educational arrangements.

Almost half of respondents (49.4%) reported that changes in their child care and educational arrangements have directly impacted their employment status.



"I've been sidelined from my career as a result of the pandemic... a planned short break is now extending for an indeterminate amount of time. I've worked since I was 15 and I've fought to build a career. I'm very worried about my job prospects once it's safe for young kids to return to full-time care. I also always planned to be a working parent and I'm grieving the loss of my professional identity."

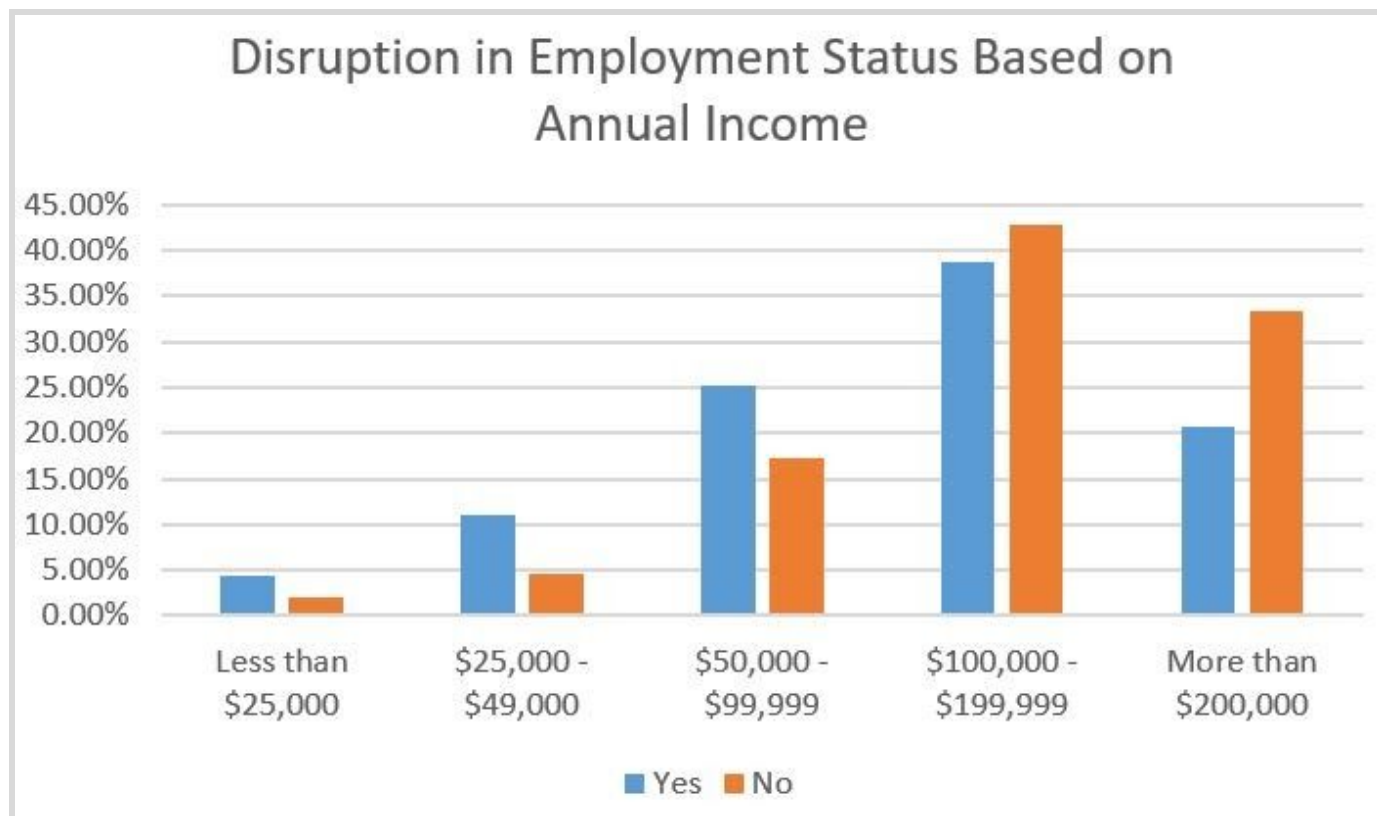
- Carlisle survey respondent

"My school district has decided to be full time remote for at least the first month. This is very detrimental to my career... I've already had to cut back on work commitments and I know I'm not performing at my best. Although my boss is understanding I know I'm going to get passed over for good opportunities at work and future promotions. My kids are heartbroken at being out of school."

- Melrose survey respondent

Of those:

- 53% reported that they have reduced their hours or are considering reducing their hours
- 39% reported that it has affected their performance/performance rating
- 21% reported considering quitting their job
- 12% reported that their hours have been reduced because of changes in child care



Notably, women with annual family incomes of less than \$100,000 reported higher rates of disruption in their employment status.

A small but significant number of survey respondents (7%) had to change their place of employment. Black and Latinx women (6% of survey respondents) are significantly overrepresented in this group (11% of respondents).

Respondents with annual family incomes of less than \$100,000 reported higher rates of a change in place of employment and higher rates of needing to take on an additional job.

"As a full time worker and mother it's hard to have to decide rather to work or be active in your child's education... Currently I have to take an unpaid leave of absence from work to be able to do remote schooling with my child who has an IEP."

- Chicopee survey respondent

"It is impossible to work remotely, take care of a child and assist with remote schooling with no family help or hired help."

- Easthampton survey respondent

"The last five months have been insane ... So many women in my community are at the end of their rope, they've had to quit jobs they love or that their families need to survive because it's been too tough to find childcare."

- Somerville survey respondent

"My children will be doing remote learning. My spouse and I work outside of home. Now I am concerned as to how to have my children do remote learning while we keep our job in order to provide for the family and keep a roof over our head. I wish our workplace were more flexible when and where possible."

- Orleans survey respondent

b. Employer accommodations

Hearing participants and survey respondents reported a range of responses from employers when accommodations were requested.

"My husband and I are both educators. Although we recognize, and agree with the negative impacts of quarantine, and the need for in person education; this is not a burden that belongs solely to the schools- the added anxiety of our family ALL heading into schools - has an additional negative impact on all of our mental health. Employers need to start taking child care on as a responsibility of the workplace- women are overburdened with balancing work and home life - expecting schools to put their lives at risk, and add the additional responsibility of "child care"- for the sole purpose of making life easier for other businesses- is unethical- and will lead to community spread and increased isolation."

- Norwood survey respondent

"I am/was a waitress with wonderful Mothers hours. My boss allowed me to stay home through the summer. But now, having to stay home longer and teach my kids, she fears she will have to hire someone new. Thus, I lose my job. My unemployment is considerably less than half of what I make. I have no options for care or any other family to take on 'schooling' my children so financially and mentally this is and has been a huge burden on us. With no end in sight."

- Greenfield survey respondent

"In March, employers were more understanding of the fact that people weren't using child care outside the home. Now, there's an expectation that people are working full time and have figured out child care. But nothing has changed about the COVID situation, it's still not safe to send a kid to daycare if you're at risk or have at risk family members... We're in the same boat as we were in March, just with a very different set of expectations."

- Arlington survey respondent

"Before COVID, my husband and I shared child care and housework relatively equally. We both worked full time and children had full time child care. I own a small business. He is employed by a large company. Since the shutdown, he has had to continue normal hours from home and I have had to care for the children almost exclusively, with significant impact to my ability to do my job. My employees are also all moms, and most of them have had to reduce hours as well."

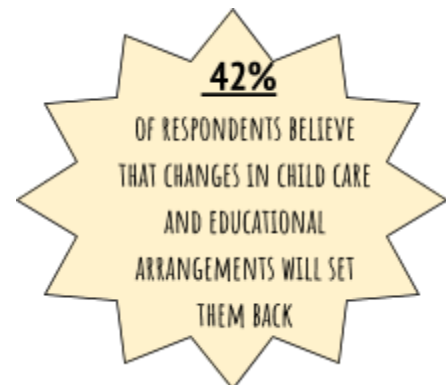
-Arlington survey respondent

c. Challenges to business

Survey respondents also included women business owners. These working mothers reported struggling to balance child care and education responsibilities with the needs of their employers/clients, their businesses, and in some cases the needs of their employees.

"The impact of COVID-19 is tremendous on our family... I am not far from losing my business that has done well for over 17 years. The early education sector is getting hit tremendously hard and there is no support, unless you take vouchers, subsidies or are a center. Family child care is being treated like they don't matter. My family may lose [our] house and dreams due to this pandemic. There is nothing good about anything, even the new regulations."

-Plympton survey respondent

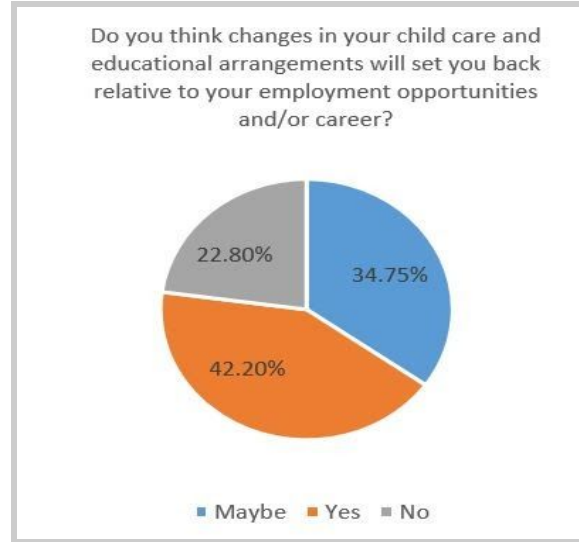


The Commission also heard from care providers, some of them family care business owners who are facing a myriad challenges due to the public health crisis.

2. Economic impact

a. Job access, security and stability

An underlying theme voiced by hearing participants and survey respondents was a lack of security and stability, which limits opportunities for women to plan for themselves and provide for their families.



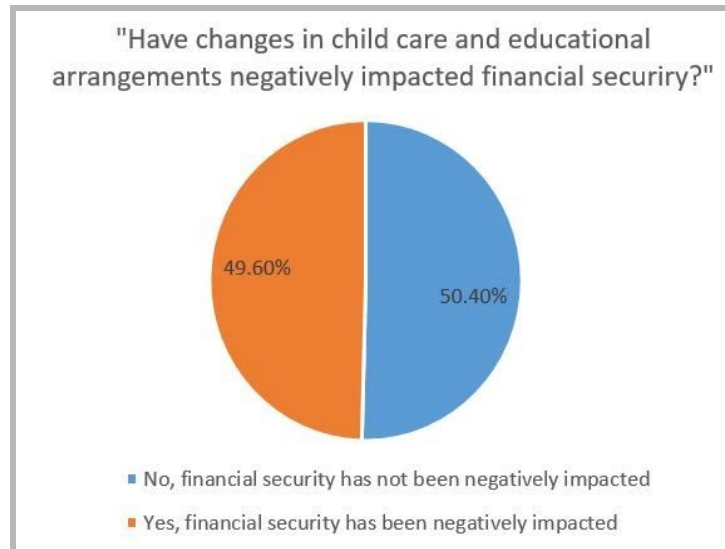
When respondents were asked if they believed that changes in their child care and educational arrangements will set them back relative to their employment opportunities and/or career:

- 42% of respondents reported that they believed it would
- 35% of respondents replied “maybe”
- less than a third had confidence that their status would remain unchanged.

“My youngest was born right before the shutdown... Once my oldest starts her virtual learning program I will be bringing her to work with me several days a week. I am concerned the added task of keeping her on track and working will directly affect my performance and productivity at my job. I had planned to exclusively breastfeed but now the valuable time I would have used to pump needs to go to making sure my oldest does her schoolwork and making sure I maintain my job. I love my children and my career is fulfilling. I just want to find the balance again.”

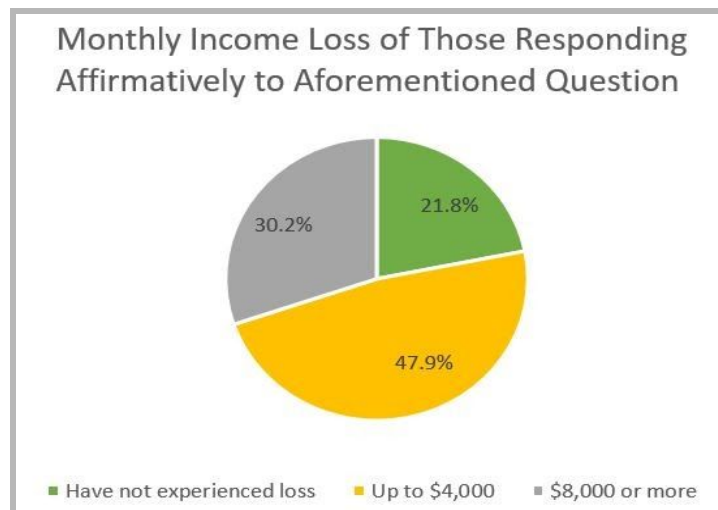
- Pittsfield survey respondent

b. Short term financial loss and impact



More than 50% of respondents reported being concerned about their financial situation due directly to changes in their child care arrangements.

49.6% of respondents reported that changes in their child care and educational arrangements have negatively impacted their financial security.



Of the 49.6% of respondents:

- 47.9% reported a monthly loss of up to \$4,000
- A small but significant number (9%) reported a monthly loss greater than \$4,000 (4,000-7,999, 8,000-15,999, >16,000)

Women with annual family incomes of less than \$100,000 reported higher rates of disruption in their financial security.

i. Food accessibility

"Parents should not have to choose between working to ensure their child is getting fed and making sure their child is getting the most out of their education."

-North Adams survey respondent

"This pandemic has highlighted the fragility and urgent need for innovation in many of our systems around education, health, housing, and food. We know that the parent demand, employer decisions, and what happens in K-12 education will really impact the opening short and long term of our education systems and also our economy."

Amy O'Leary, Early Education for All

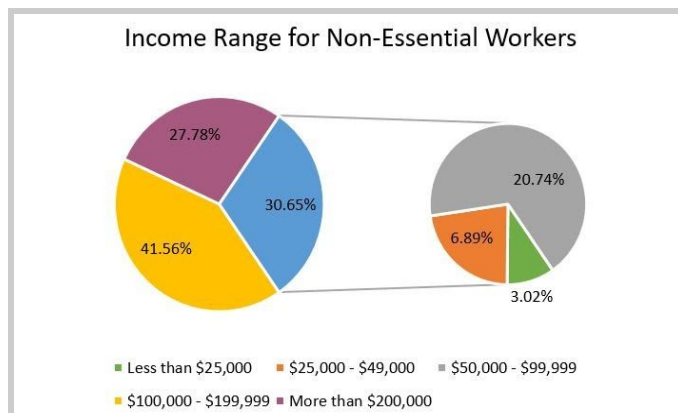
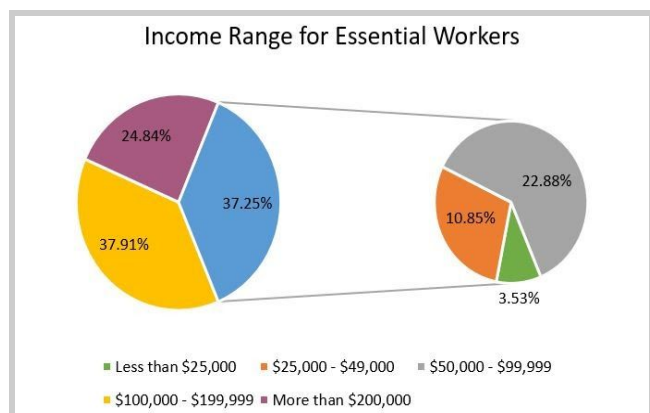
c. Impact on long-term opportunity and economic stability

"I am able to work at home, but it's stressful as I'm trying to parent and work at the same time. I'm not as focused as I should be. I could not even think of looking to advance my career as I need to have a job that has flexibility and that comes from my working where I have been for 7 years. I couldn't start new -- even if it was a step up career-wise -- it's not smart at this time. Too many uncertainties."

-Haverhill survey respondent

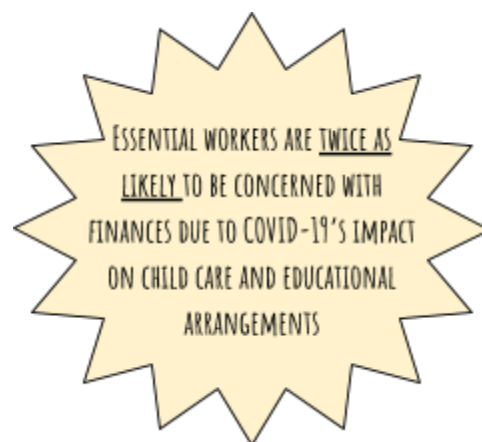
3. Essential workers

Throughout the pandemic, essential workers have continued to serve their communities, but in many cases have not had equal, necessary and essential access to resources they need to meet the needs of their work and of their families. Survey responses showed essential workers overrepresented on the lower end of the income scale as well as overrepresented in metrics gauging negative impacts.



a. Financial insecurity

- 56% of essential workers responded affirmatively that different arrangements in child care and education have negatively impacted financial security, whereas only 41% non-essential workers responded affirmatively.
- Essential workers earn less than their non-essential worker counterparts. A larger percentage of essential workers belong to an annual income bracket of less than \$100,000: 37.25% versus 30.25%.

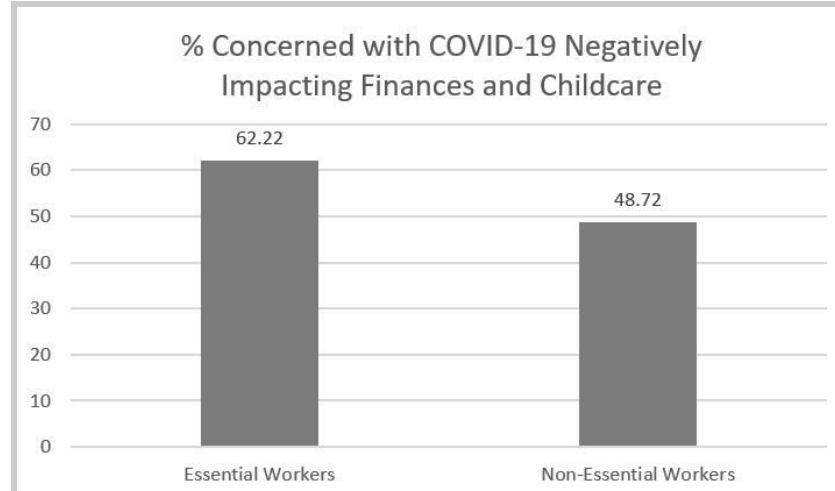


With less income, money once devoted to child care and education is no longer available.

b. Educators and care providers workforces

"I was an early educator before quitting my job, as there was no way to facilitate my child's remote learning. Her district will be fully remote through early November, then hybrid two mornings a week through January. As a single parent there is no way to work around this kind of a remote schedule! I deferred graduate school (accepted for Fall 2020) and accepted a position as a homeschool learning facilitator, and will homeschool my child at the same time."

- Shutesbury survey respondent



The financial strain from COVID-19 employment complications trickles down to child(ren)'s education as expressed by a survey respondent. The financial stress, based on the survey question, reveals that 13% more of essential worker respondents are concerned with finances than non-essential workers.

"I am an educator. DESE gave guidelines that my child should be able to attend all four days of school in her hybrid model as I am also teaching hybrid. Her school's response is that they are not participating in that program. I have not met a single teacher whose district is. How are we supposed to be able to teach if our children have to remain home?"

-Northbridge survey respondent

4 of every 10 essential worker respondents are concerned with leaving children unattended while they work. This puts parents in the no-win situation of having to choose between caring for their children and losing their jobs or working but leaving their children in potentially unsafe, unsupervised situations.

8.5 of every 10 essential worker respondents are concerned with their child(ren)'s social and emotional development, coupled with their educational access and progress.

"My husband and I are both front line workers and must leave the home. We have a 3rd and 5th grader that will be remote learning every other week. My mother has agreed to watch them but she is 77 and does not know how to operate a computer or know what a zoom call is. My husband's employer has agreed to 1-day a week remote and I work three 12 hour shifts so my children will be essentially on their own for education for up to 3 days a week. We petitioned the superintendent and school committee to allow special situations like ours to be part of the in-person cohort and we were denied without consideration."

- Needham survey respondent

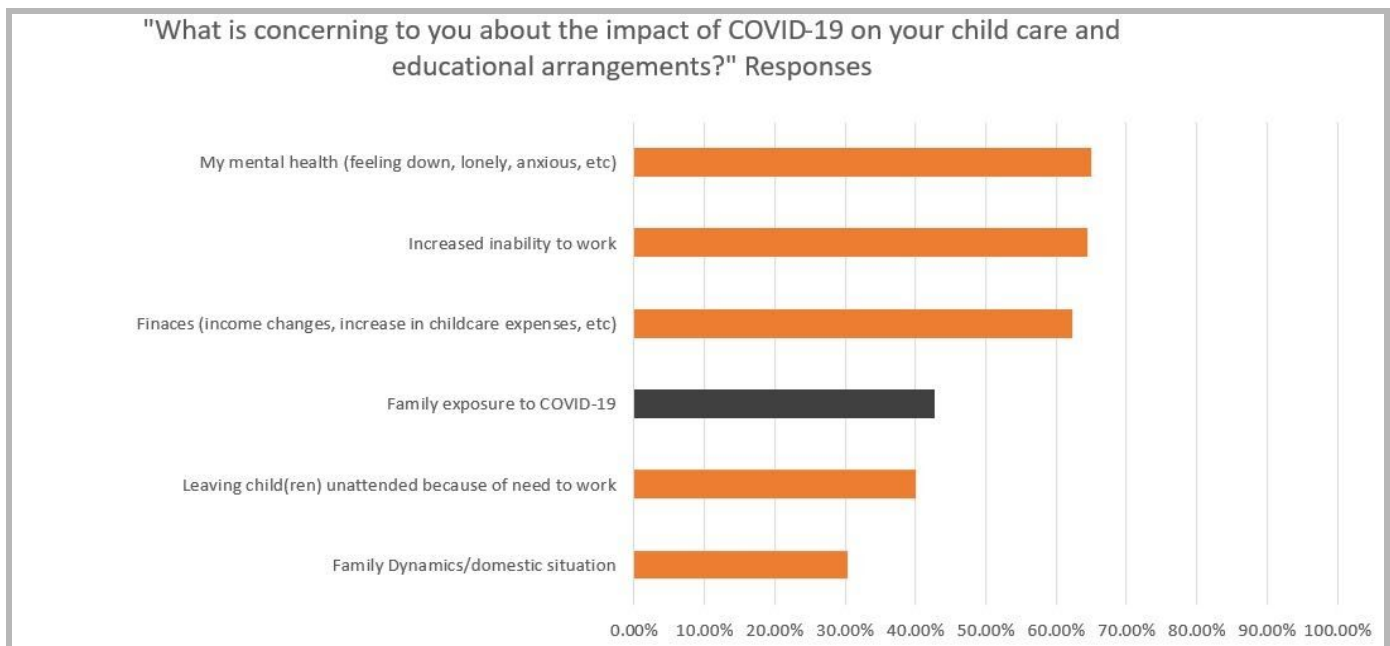
"If our public education systems, which are publicly funded, are restricting education to our children, then there needs to be other support options available to families to help those children continue learning and developing appropriately. Our family is composed of 2 front line workers who work full time out of the home and now, on top of battling Covid on the front lines, we have to come home after a full day and do the job of home school teacher as well."

- Southampton survey respondent

c. Health risks

When asked what is concerning about the impact of COVID-19 on child care and educational arrangements,

- Of the essential workers polled, over 40% indicated a concern about "family exposure to COVID-19"
 - In addition to health concerns, this data points to the gravity and severity of child care predicaments, as health risks of COVID-19 are usurped by finances and providing for one's child(ren)

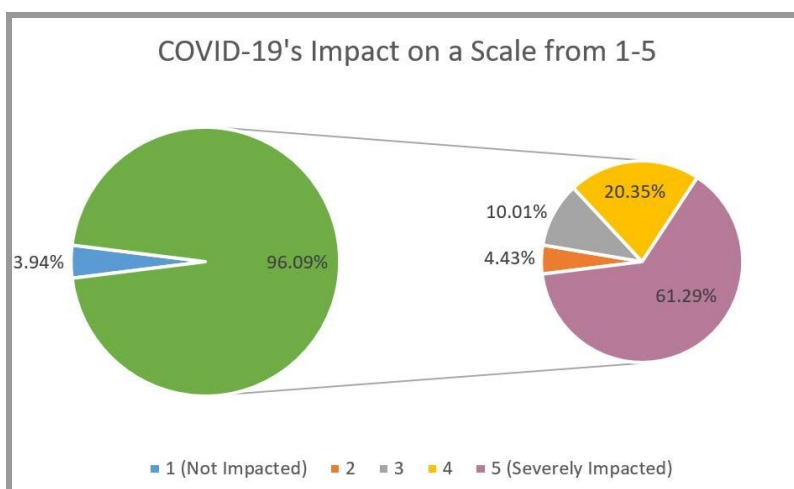


"Early childhood education is a right, not a privilege... families need to all have access to early childhood education that's affordable for them."

Marissa Fay-Martin, Hearing Participant

4. Access to affordable, quality child care and education

Hearing participants and survey respondents struggling with child care and education issues voiced a range of opinions regarding the solutions that are required. In addition, opinions regarding who or which sector is responsible for leading this effort varied considerably. And yet, they were clear in their insistence that critical solutions must be immediately identified to address the essential need of parents and children.



a. Decreased access

61% of respondents reported that their child care and educational arrangements have been severely impacted. When asked on a scale from 1-5, how strongly has COVID-19 impacted respondents' child care and educational arrangements:

- 96% of respondents reported that their arrangements have been in some way affected due to COVID-19 related changes in child care and educational arrangements
- 61% of respondents reported that their arrangements have been severely impacted.

- The burden of these changes has been felt most acutely by families at the lower end of the annual income scale; families earning less than \$100,000 a year report higher levels of disruption

"Many child care [providers] have gone out of business or changed their child care fees due to Covid. There were not many options to choose from in child care after I changed jobs due to low ratios from EEC and loss of wages due to the centers being closed for three months."

-Middleboro survey respondent

b. Increased costs

The increased cost for providers to keep their doors open as well as decreased number of students who can attend to ensure safety, has diminished the number of child care slots across the Commonwealth. Simultaneously, there has been an increased cost to parents, loss of wages for many and no increase of available vouchers even though the need has increased dramatically. Subsequently, child care costs have risen making it inaccessible for many who need child care the most.

"Considering moving out of state due to the cost of child care."


-Framingham survey respondent

"The after school program that my kids were enrolled in last year is now, if you do virtual learning from them, \$13.50 an hour per child. I can't afford to spend \$27 an hour to have my [two] kids in a group program... it's just that the providers can't get paid enough and parents can't afford it."

-Katie Ring, Hearing Participant

"There seem to be plenty of options for child care and remote learning care if you can find it and you can afford it. However if you have previously used vouchers for your after-school care you are out of luck because these remote day child care options are not accepting vouchers."

-Quincy survey respondent

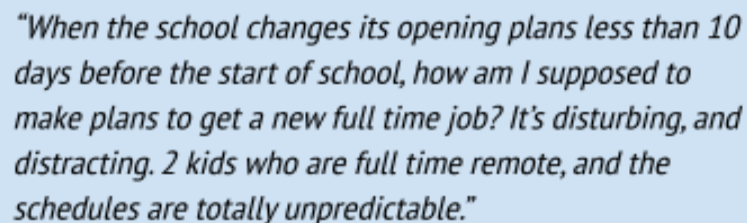


"... this is about sustainability... We know that we were dealing with a very fragmented and fragile industry prior to the pandemic and now, I think the broader public is starting to see some of the issues... I think folks in the child care world understood some of the things that needed to be fixed, but now, the broader communities are being forced to really understand the issue within child care."

- Jynai McDonald, Hearing Participant

c. Lack of reliable and stable implementation

The lack of reliable and stable implementation of child care makes it challenging for parents to find economic stability. Without reliable child care families can not get back to work and the Commonwealth will be left struggling with too many families falling into cycles of poverty.



"When the school changes its opening plans less than 10 days before the start of school, how am I supposed to make plans to get a new full time job? It's disturbing, and distracting. 2 kids who are full time remote, and the schedules are totally unpredictable."

- Needham survey respondent

d. Inconsistent and rapidly changing schedules

Respondents were clear that the policy decisions that came from both the state and local school districts did not allow them the time to plan accordingly, thus greatly impacting their ability to work and leaving them in impossible situations.

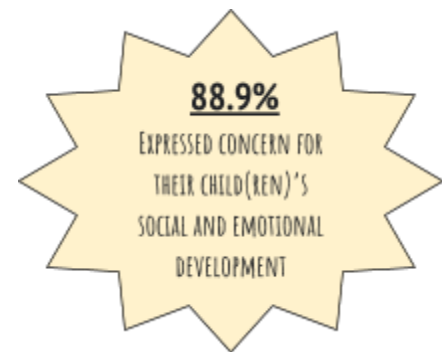
5. Severe Impact: Women report being at the “breaking point”

It was overwhelmingly clear from hearing participants and survey respondents that working mothers are at their breaking point. They expressed concerns for their own wellness, as well as the wellness and stability of their children and families.

a. Concerns for family

When asked what is most concerning about the impact of COVID-19 on respondent’s child(ren):

- 73.7% expressed concern for their child(ren)’s educational access and progress
- 72% expressed concern for their child(ren)’s mental health (feeling down, lonely, anxious, etc.)

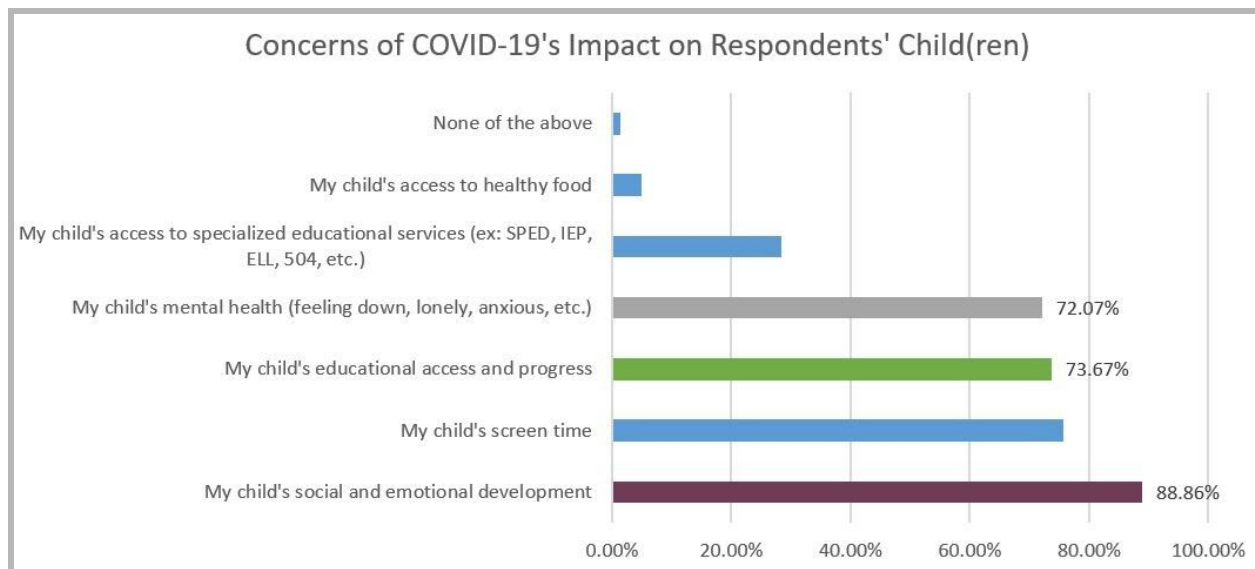


“Kids need to be in school. I have 2 young children who cannot learn via a computer screen. I’m afraid they will never recover from this. Parents shouldn’t be made to choose their careers over their child’s education.”

-Pittsfield survey respondent

“I wish my child’s school district would have gone fully remote. The stress of being worried she will contract COVID-19 and spread it to our family members, especially elderly family members, is putting tremendous stress on me. I wish the state would have implemented a law that would protect my job in the event I need to stay home with her if the school does go fully remote again. The family first coronavirus act doesn’t protect employees who work for companies with greater than 500 employees, and unfortunately I am not covered under this act.”

-Southampton survey respondent



"I'm very concerned that my first grader who has ADHD and autism will learn nothing this year. I am also concerned that I will face repercussions from the school or from cps if he refuses to do his remote schoolwork."

-Sturbridge survey respondent

"As a parent, my 6 year old is struggling significantly, emotionally, socially. I'm not even talking about education. My husband and I are joking at this point that if they're alive and sane by the end of the year, that will be more than ... we can hope for because any kind of educational attainment at this point feels far beyond the pale ..."

-Shiri Dori-Hacoen, Hearing Participant

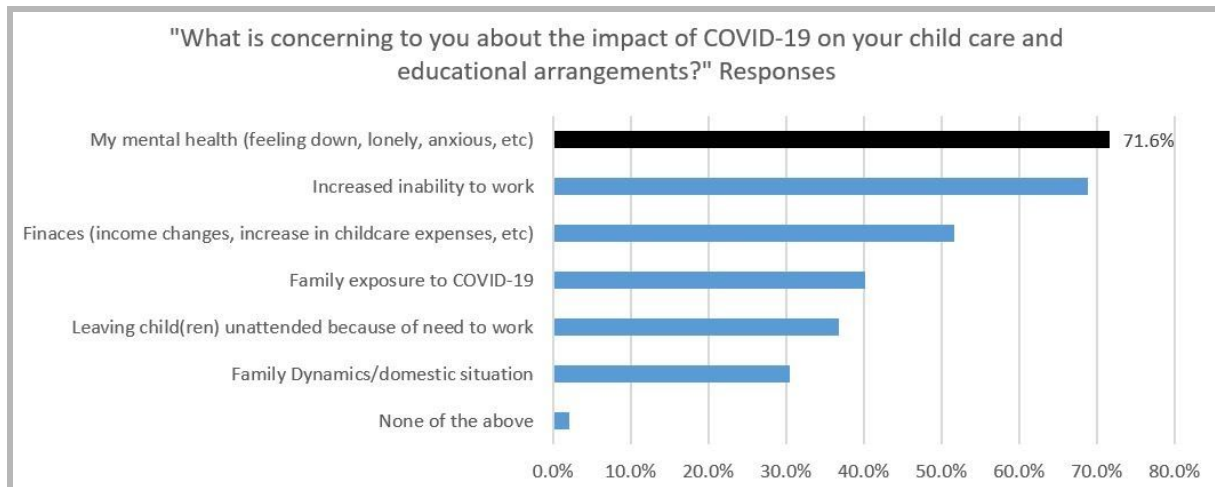
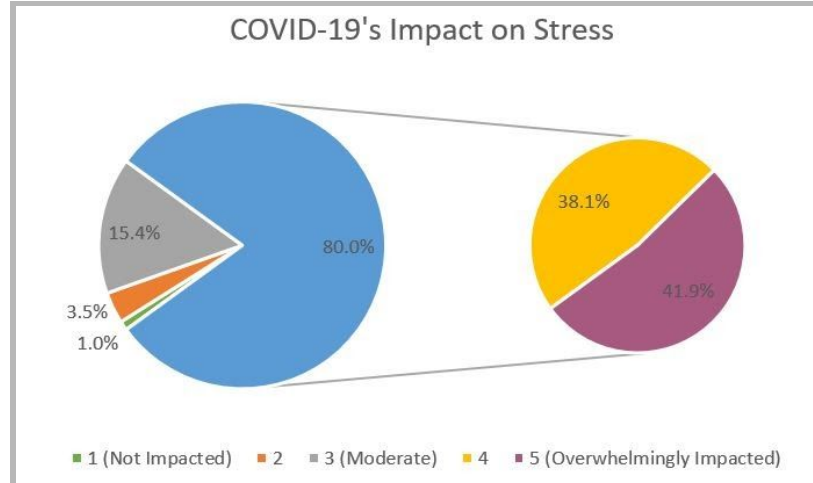
Almost **three in ten of survey respondents** expressed concern regarding their child(ren)'s access to specialized educational services (ex: SPED, IEP, ELL, 504, etc.).

"There are no 'right' answers right now, but there should be more guidance and communication. I can not adequately plan for my employer while having no idea what is expected from me as a parent while my child is remote learning. Parents need to be clued in so that they can make proper arrangements with employers."

- North Adams survey respondent

b. Stress and anxiety

More than two-thirds of respondents reported that the impact of changes in child care and educational arrangements has led them to have concerns about their own mental health. And 80% reported that they are experiencing significant to overwhelming stress.



c. Fragility of families

When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their child care and educational arrangements, 37% of respondents expressed concern about leaving child(ren) unattended because of a need to work.

"I am greatly concerned about losing my employment and income, as well as not being able to find other employment if needed that suits child care issues, etc. For my child, I am concerned that my son will regress with their education and regress with their speech (has a 504 in place). I am concerned for his social and emotional development."

-Montague survey respondent

"Recently, I've just come to realize that this is really boiling down to [the fact] that we still live in a society where women's ... main role or most important role is being caregivers of their children and they're not recognized for their contribution to our economy and that education is only a value to parents and not a value to the entire society. ... I couldn't help but thinking that if this was a society where men were the primary caregivers, they would not be sitting there saying, 'Oh, we're gonna cut care by six hours a day and you're just going to have to deal with it.' I just feel like there's just so much inequality there."

Laura Draucker, Hearing Participant

d. Broken infrastructure will prevent economic recovery

i. Infrastructure broken before COVID-19

While it is clear that COVID-19 has brought the cracks in the child care system to the surface, many of these challenges existed before the current pandemic including low wages, insufficient funding, and lack of adequate governmental support.

"We really have to look at this on a systemic level and ... make sure that we're [able to get] paid family leave, ... paid child care. This is necessary. These kids deserve an education and watching my twins raise themselves in the living room while I'm here doing my work was just too much for me."

- Jillian Philips, Hearing Participant

"I am deeply concerned that child care is reopening too soon and cutting too many safety guidelines out of fear that they cannot stay in business unless they do. I wish there was more financial relief for child care providers as they have to run at reduced capacity in an industry that was already underfunded. There needs to be permanent subsidies to child care, or there will not be enough providers for the state to reopen further."

-Boston survey respondent

Recommended Actions for Consideration


The economy will not be able to recover unless we address child care and education needs of working mothers and parents. In addition, families are suffering. The impact of this crisis is having immediate and long-term impacts on women's economic stability and self-sufficiency. Solutions will require significant commitment from policy makers and leaders to guide our communities through the recovery and beyond to a more equitable future.

Increase economic stability:

- Address financial insecurity of low and moderate income families
 - Extend unemployment benefits to workers separating from employment to provide child care
 - Expand paid family leave to include care for children (extend timelines, employee threshold, and benefits)
 - Extend moratorium on evictions
 - Provide child care subsidies and/or vouchers and extend them to include alternative child care arrangements
- Strengthen workers' rights and supportive workplace policies for mothers and parents
 - Flexibility in scheduling
 - Increase notice for scheduling
 - Parent worker job protection (develop a similar policy to An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Pregnant Workers Fairness Act ([H.1038](#)) to provide protections and reasonable accommodations to parents)
 - Adopt Families First Coronavirus Response Act at the state level as the federal legislation terminates on December 31
- Develop incentives for business to support a workforce managing child care responsibilities, such as:
 - Create on-site child care or access to care resources as an employee benefit
 - Encourage expansion of remote work opportunities
 - Ensure no negative consequences or repercussions for parents who necessitate flexibility to care for children
 - Encourage employers to provide financial support as an additional benefit to cover the cost of child care and to care for a sick relative

Meet the immediate needs of working mothers and parents:

- Prioritize and ensure safe return to workspaces for educators and support staff
- Improving consistent and reliable access to child care facilities and schools
 - Consistent care for children across the Commonwealth
 - Timely scheduling and flexibility in programming
 - Increased care for high-risk and priority children
- Provide financial support and greater access to child care vouchers for low to moderate income parents



Improve access to child care and education systems:

- Significantly increase funding for care providers to meet the needs of the community
- Invest in support and development of care and education provider workforce
- Commit to advancing a coordinated system that will provide education and care for all children, 3 months to 12th grade.
- Provide before and after-school care

Areas of Additional Inquiry

In accordance with its statutory authority, the MCSW remains committed to continuing the work of gathering information about the status of women and girls in the Commonwealth. The following topics have been identified as areas for future inquiry or increased engagement:

- Women of color and their experiences due to COVID-19.
 - Women of color are disproportionately underrepresented in this report. And yet there is evidence that they are over-represented in professions that place them at a higher risk to COVID-19 infection. These professions are important as they are essential and enable our economy to function and grow. This disconnect requires additional attention.
- Housing insecurity
 - As working mothers and parents shoulder more responsibilities related to child care and education and are conversely less able to participate in the paid labor force, families' access to essential needs must be considered. Respondents noted concerns around increasing financial instability. Anecdotally, the MCSW hears regularly about rising concerns related to housing security. This is exacerbated by the high cost of housing in the Commonwealth and the limited availability of low to moderate income housing and/or housing vouchers. This is an issue that is likely to require additional attention in the near term if significant steps are not taken to support families without savings.
- Women's responsibilities relating to the care of family members beyond minor children, including dependent adult children, spouses, and elder parents.
 - Long before the crisis brought on by COVID-19 the MCSW was hearing from constituents about the challenges of the "sandwich generation": caring simultaneously for children and elder parents. Testimony from the hearing and survey indicate that with the added challenges of child care and education as well as health concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19 the tenuous balance many working mothers and parents managed no longer is possible.
- Potential negative impact on workplace culture as working mothers opt out or pull back from advancement or leadership opportunities.
 - At a time when it is so clear that we need to invest more deeply and intentionally in racial and gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace, business leaders may be facing real barriers to achieving that goal.

- Likewise working mothers and parents may be less likely or able to participate in community discourse, service, and volunteerism. The absence of these voices when decisions are being made about recovery efforts has real implications.
- The impacts of systemic and institutional racism and the possibility of additional discrimination leading to unemployment and furthering financial disparities in black and brown women should also be considered.
- Additional stress and even danger in households experiencing domestic violence, especially where abusers are now in the home 24/7, either recently unemployed or working remotely.
 - The natural stressors of COVID-19 significantly increase the likelihood of violence.
 - The continuous presence of abusers has also made it difficult for victims to leave, even when in imminent danger.

Methodology

Survey results were collected using a Google form that was distributed in English by email and social media platforms. With over **162 shares** of the survey post on the MCSW Facebook page, the MCSW reached **26,420 individuals**. With **4,108 survey responses**, the MCSW was able to acquire a **16%** conversion rate of completion between September 2, 2020 and September 16, 2020. Due to the informal distribution as well as known discrepancies in demographic responses, the survey cannot be considered scientific.

At the completion of the survey, the MCSW referenced the 2018 American Community Survey for the demographics of women in Massachusetts and compared them to the demographics of survey respondents. That comparison is as follows:

Massachusetts demographics

As reported by the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) Data:


Caucasian:	78.5%	Caucasian:	82.5%
Black/African American:	7.5%	Black:	2.0%
Asian:	6.5%	Asian:	3.3%
Other race:	4.2%	Other:	.5%
		Latina/Hispanic/Latinx:	3.9%
Two or more races:	3.2%	Two or more:	3.7%
Native American:	0.2%	Native American:	.05%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander:	0.03%	Prefer not to answer:	
			4.1%

MCSW Survey Respondents:

Data Limitations

The data was gathered electronically via a virtual hearing and online surveys. This methodology limited participation to those who had access via phone or the internet. Targeted outreach efforts intentionally sought to reach women in diverse communities but women of color and low income workers are significantly underrepresented in the results.

In addition, the hearing and survey was conducted in English and in Spanish, however interpretation and translation services for other languages were not provided. The MCSW recognizes that this is a barrier to participation for constituents whose first language is other than English. Future information gathering efforts may provide for responses in multiple languages to include, but not limited to Portuguese and Chinese.



The survey did not explore or assess the potential different experiences of same-sex, two-parent households. It must be acknowledged that the report is drafted within a social framework of heteronormativity and is not entirely representative of our communities.

Finally, the information shared above is a snapshot of women's experiences during the period of September 1 to 16. Different results almost certainly would have been reported prior to the outbreak, as well as during different phases of the pandemic.

Request of additional information

In addition to the information reported, we are eager to collaborate with partners in government and the non-profit sector to share the information that we have gathered specific to a topic or geographic area. **Please contact MCSW staff with your [request](#).**

Closing Statement

These are uncertain and unprecedented times. The MCSW commends our partners in government and the everyday heroes in our communities. The MCSW remains committed to serving women and girls by ensuring that their voices are heard and included in policy discussion and advancing towards a healthier and stronger Commonwealth.

Appendix

Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education

The survey was opened on September 2, 2020 and closed on September 16, 2020. The total respondents to the survey was 4,089. The actual survey text is included below.

Survey on Child Care and Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is reaching out to parents and caregivers across the Commonwealth with this survey to hear directly about how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting you. Recent reports indicate that child care and education access is diminishing opportunities and creating additional challenges for women. Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with us.

We will compile and share the data with our legislators and the Governor's Office to influence recommendations regarding policies that address issues women and their families are facing during this time. While this data will be shared, you can complete this survey anonymously. This survey is estimated to take under five minutes.

Please participate in this survey by 11:59pm, September 16, 2020.

1. What were your child care and educational arrangements before COVID-19? (Check all that apply)

- I stayed home to take care of the child(ren)
- My partner/spouse stayed home to take care of the child(ren)
- Another family member/friend took care of the child(ren)
- I employed a babysitter/nanny/au pair
- My child(ren) was enrolled in a child care or educational program
- My child(ren) was enrolled in before and/or after school programming
- My child(ren) was enrolled in an early intervention program
- My child(ren) was enrolled in K-12
- Other...

2. What are your child care and educational arrangements now? (Check all that apply)

- I stay at home to take care of the child(ren)
- My partner/spouse stays at home to take care of the child(ren)
- Another family member/friend takes care of the child(ren)
- I employ a babysitter/nanny/au pair
- My child(ren) is enrolled in a child care or educational program
- My child(ren) is enrolled in before and/or after school programming
- My child(ren) is enrolled in an early intervention program
- My child(ren) is enrolled in K-12
- Other...

3. On a scale from 1-5, how strongly has COVID-19 impacted your child care and educational arrangements?

- 1 (My child care arrangements are unchanged)

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 (My child care arrangements have been severely altered)

4. What is concerning to you about the impact of COVID-19 on your child care and educational arrangements? (Check all that apply)

- Increased inability to work
- Leaving child(ren) unattended because of need to work
- Family dynamics/domestic situation
- Family exposure to COVID-19
- My mental health (feeling down, lonely, anxious, etc.)
- Finances (ex: income changes, increase in child care expenses, etc.)
- None of the above
- Other...

5. What is concerning to you about the impact of COVID-19 on your child(ren)? (Check all that apply)

- My child's mental health (feeling down, lonely, anxious, etc.)
- My child's social and emotional development
- My child's educational access and progress
- My child's access to specialized educational services (ex: SPED, IEP, ELL, 504, etc.)
- My child's screen time
- My child's access to healthy food
- None of the above
- Other...

6. On a scale from 1-5, how strongly has COVID-19 impacted your stress surrounding your child care and educational arrangements?

- 1 (I am experiencing little to no stress)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 (I am experiencing overwhelming stress)

7. Have changes in your child care and educational arrangements directly impacted your employment status?

- Yes
- No

8. If yes, how have changes in your child care and educational arrangements directly impacted your employment status? (Check all that apply)

- I lost my job because of child care
- I am considering quitting my job
- I have been furloughed because of child care
- My hours have been reduced because of child care
- I have reduced my hours
- I have reduced my hours using vacation time, PFML, FFRCA, etc.
- I am considering reducing my hours
- It has affected my performance/performance rating
- Other...

9. Have you had to change your place of employment

- No

- Yes
- Yes, I have taken on an additional job(s)
- Other...

10. Have changes in your child care and educational arrangements negatively impacted your financial security?

- Yes
- No

11. What has your estimated monthly income loss been as a direct result of your child care and educational arrangements during COVID-19?

- I have not experienced income loss
- less than \$2,000
- \$2,000 - \$3,999
- \$4,000 - \$7,999
- \$8,000 - \$15,999
- more than \$16,000
- I prefer to not answer this question

12. Do you think changes in your child care and educational arrangements will set you back relative to your employment opportunities and/or career?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

13. What is your current work location?

- I work remotely
- I work outside of my home
- I work both remotely and outside of my home
- Other...

14. Are you a front-line worker?

- Yes
- No

15. If you would like to expand or share any other concerns and/or you have surrounding the impact of COVID-19 on child care and education, as it pertains to you and your family, please use the space below to do so.

Section 2 of 2

Survey on Child Care and Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic - Demographics

What is your gender Identity?

- Male
- Female
- Gender non-conforming / non-binary
- Other (if you feel comfortable, please feel free to share your identity below)
- I prefer to not answer this question
- Other...

Do you have children? (Check all that apply)

- No
- Yes, at least one child between the ages of 0-5
- Yes, at least one child between the ages of 6-11
- Yes, at least one child between the ages of 12-18

- Yes, at least one child is older than 18

What is your parenting status? (Check all that apply)

- Co-parenting
- Split parenting (child has more than one home)
- Single parenting
- Parenting with family members
- Non-custodial parenting
- Foster parenting
- Other...

What is your age range?

- Under 18
- 18-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 50+
- I prefer not to answer this question

What is Your Race/Ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- Asian
- Black
- White
- Latino/Hispanic/Latinx
- Native American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other/Unknown
- I prefer not to answer this question

What city/town do you live in?

What is your annual household income range?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$199,999
- More than \$200,000
- I prefer not to answer this question

Please provide your first name. (optional)

Please provide your last name. (optional)

If you would like to be informed of the Commission's initiatives and included in future outreach, please provide your email. (optional)