

# Caregiver Perceptions and Needs: Post-Pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

The Preschool Development Grant-Renewal (PDG-R) helps states assess and streamline the early learning and care (ELC) mixed delivery system to improve quality. The Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) leads California's efforts to engage families in feedback sessions that inform policymakers on ways to improve the ELC system.

CCRC hosted a feedback session in August 2023 to discuss families' experiences in the post-pandemic transition, with a focus on the shift from distance learning to in-person. The in-person feedback session was held in Placer County with 21 caregivers: 20 parents and one grandparent.

## POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

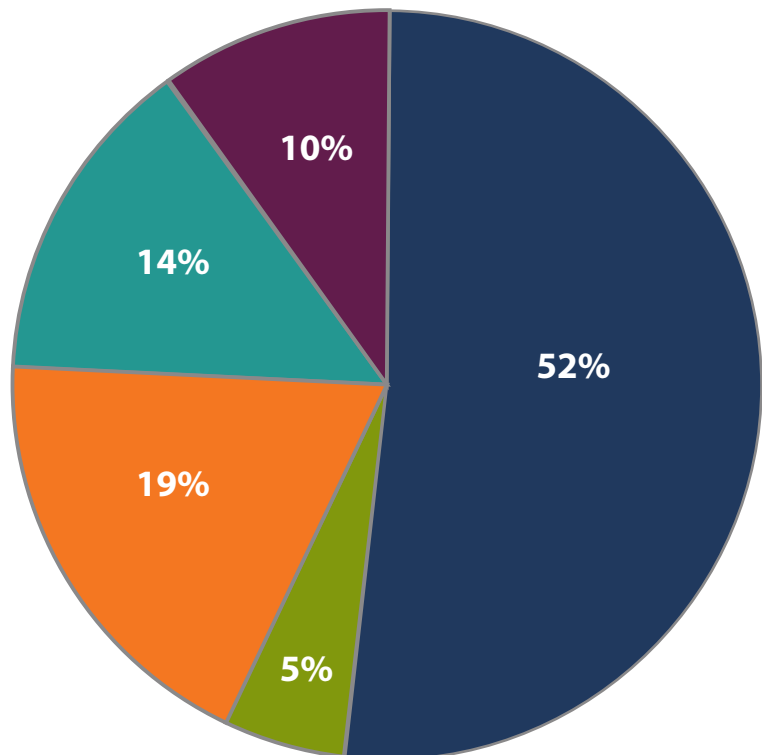
The COVID-19 pandemic raised multiple challenges that impacted families in various ways as they juggled life events exacerbated by the pandemic, including custody hearings and breakdowns in behavioral health. One caregiver discussed financial challenges that started when their food expenses increased with their children being home from school, and their CalFresh benefits did not initially account for that. They used their credit card to make ends meet and are currently facing potential bankruptcy. Caregivers also shared social challenges for themselves or for their children. Two caregivers noted they had children at a young age and have trouble connecting with other parents. A couple of caregivers noted that they gave birth during the pandemic and struggled to raise their children while isolated from their support networks. One caregiver noted that their third child did not socialize in his first two years of life and currently struggles with socializing.



*“My newborn kid is not social he didn't see anyone for over two years. People start saying, he is not like you, they don't understand.”*

## CAREGIVER RACE AND ETHNICITY

- American Indian/Alaskan Native/First Nations
- Asian/Asian American
- Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine/Hispanic
- White/Caucasian/European American
- Not Disclosed



## TRANSITIONING FROM DISTANCE TO IN-PERSON LEARNING: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

In the transition from distance learning to in-person learning, families reported both challenges and benefits. A few families reported social challenges, with their children experiencing social anxiety returning to school. Families also shared that distance learning impeded milestones in their children’s lives (e.g., handwriting). However, caregivers also acknowledged benefits from returning to in-person learning. For instance, many caregivers with children born during the pandemic reported that in-person learning tremendously helped their children’s language development. Additionally, some families reported social benefits, with their children thriving in socializing with other children their age for the first time.

BENEFITS	
Increased Language Development	Social Benefits

CHALLENGES	
Social Anxiety	Lack of Support for Missed Milestones

“With pandemic it created a social anxiety... they are doing a lot better with home schooling.”

“Going to daycare and preschool has helped them start talking. What helped my daughter more was... socializing and being with other kids.”

“Her telling time and her handwriting... milestones were completely missed ”

“ Now that they went back to school, she went to kindergarten... huge benefit because she is very social.”

## RESOURCES TO SUPPORT IN-PERSON LEARNING TRANSITION

When discussing resources, all parents agreed that their number one need was equitable and affordable resources. For example, parents noted that extracurricular activities, like sports, can be expensive and unattainable. A few caregivers discussed the need for updated qualification/eligibility thresholds for government assistance programs that align with the current cost of living (i.e., reflects inflation) where families live. Families agreed that low-cost or free services were important, as well as marketing that helps families learn how and where to find these resources.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES	
Availability of school counselors	After-school programs

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES	
Low-cost therapy	Connect school and mental health systems

Availability of counselors was the most common suggestion. Some schools were reported to have counselors ready to support with schoolwork/talking about feelings; other caregivers noted this would have been beneficial. After-school programs that can provide homework help or targeted curriculum work for grades missed in the pandemic was also a common suggestion.

**Low-cost, accessible therapy** was also commonly suggested by caregivers. One caregiver suggested a **partnership between school systems and mental health systems** to facilitate access. For example, their child’s school has Care Solace, a company that matches children with mental health providers with their insurance. A similar partnership could be considered for child care.



“ When covid hit a lot of families had problems, more divorces, more evictions happened, more stress. More low-cost counseling... just financially can't pay for it.”



## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CAREGIVERS

- **Provide resources that help families connect with each other, like dad groups or parent cafés.** Many caregivers spoke to the benefit of connecting with peers they can relate to, especially after isolation in the pandemic. For example, one caregiver noted that meeting with their AA group helped them manage the depression they developed during the pandemic.
- **Continue providing virtual services that are vital to families.** Caregivers shared that one of the benefits of the pandemic has been virtual services (e.g., distance learning, tele-counseling, virtual IEPs).
- **Provide and promote access to affordable, quality child care or educational programs to foster equity.** Families reported a need for low-cost/free services like tutoring and sports programs; many who do not qualify for assistance programs cannot afford extracurriculars or child care. Caregivers also requested that eligibility guidelines be revised to reflect increases seen due to inflation.
- **Promote/advertise available resources and services to help families connect with these resources and services.** Caregivers noted it would be effective to advertise resources where families frequently visit (e.g., parks, grocery stores, libraries, community centers) or digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, streaming). Caregivers would like to see uplifting language (e.g., “if you need a little boost”) and not negative undertones (e.g., “low-income”). They would also prefer direct wording (e.g., “apply here for [service].”)
- **Provide behavioral health resources, like counselors and developmental screenings.** Many families noted that seeing a counselor at school has helped or would help their children. Additionally, caregivers expressed concerns about missed milestones. Developmental screenings could help identify additional services and resources needed.
- **Create access to a mixed-delivery system that can connect families across different types of programs/services.** A prime example is connecting school systems with child care and mental health systems.

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