



COVID-19 EC RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Impact of COVID-19 on Colorado's Early Childhood Educators

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Key Highlights

The early care and education (ECE) industry has long experienced challenges with recruiting, retaining, and compensating staff. In recent years, **this workforce has seen an annual turnover rate four times greater than elementary school teachers**. Low pay, poor working conditions, and the high cost of entry to the field all contribute to the educator shortage.¹

In July 2020, Early Milestones Colorado collected survey responses from 5,942 of the state's early childhood educators. Unsurprisingly, the data revealed **furloughs, lay-offs, and uncertainty about the future of their career**. Ongoing concerns about **health, well-being, and shortages in child care options for their own families** are big factors facing educators right now.

Workforce Challenges

Compensation. Many of Colorado's early educators earn wages low enough to qualify for public assistance programs.^{2,3} COVID-19 made financial challenges worse, as many have seen a significant decline in household income. Educators of color were more likely to report a decrease in income than respondents who identified as white and non-Hispanic.

Job Security. In a 2017 study, 70% of ECE directors reported difficulty finding qualified staff.^{4,5} COVID-19 worsened this shortage, as nearly 23% of educators surveyed were laid off or furloughed. Among this group, 10% are unsure if they will return to the field.

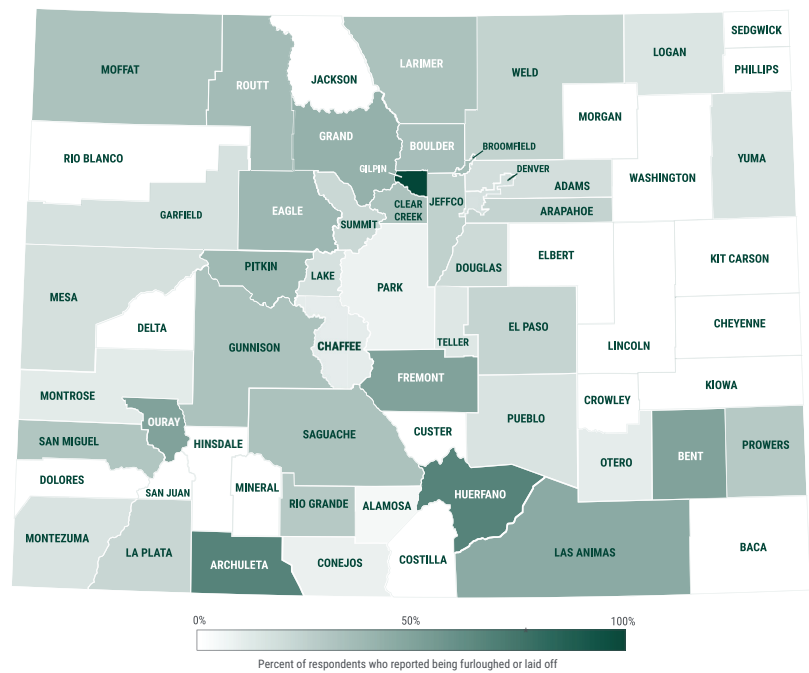
Needed Supports. COVID-19 has revealed a need to provide broader learning supports to families. Educators also need better resources to facilitate virtual learning and social distancing. Priorities include:

- **equitable access to technology and high-speed internet for families,**
- **small-group learning materials,**
- **tools to support a social distancing in the classroom, and**
- **guides for age-appropriate online education and engagement.**

"I absolutely love my job... I've worked there for three and a half years. Due to the pandemic and low enrollment, I have been laid off. I'm heartbroken. I am praying that I get my job back."

Impact on Employment & Income

The pandemic's impact on Colorado's early childhood educators was distributed unevenly when measured against demographics and geographic location. Statewide, 23% of educators reported being laid off or furloughed, and 47% reported household income loss. Respondents identifying as Black, Asian, or other were significantly more likely to report job disruptions than their white peers.

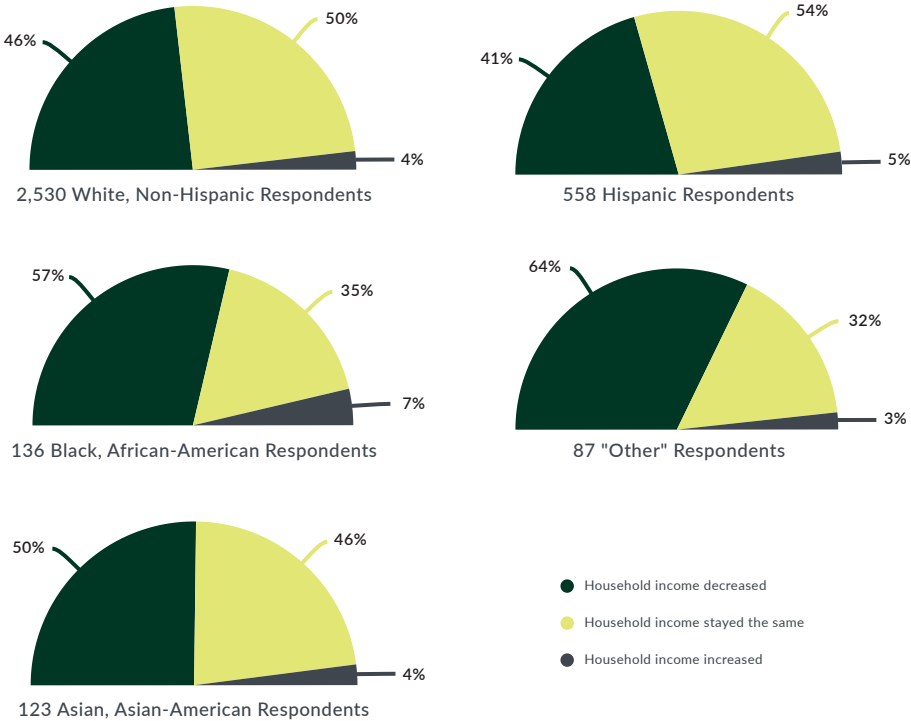


PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS FURLOUGHED OR LAID OFF BY COUNTY

COUNTY	%	n	COUNTY	%	n	COUNTY	%	n
Adams	18%	230	Fremont	50%	24	Morgan	0%	22
Alamosa	4%	25	Garfield	16%	44	Otero	10%	10
Arapahoe	23%	415	Gilpin	100%	3	Ouray	50%	2
Archuleta	67%	6	Grand	42%	12	Park	7%	14
Baca	0%	3	Gunnison	33%	24	Phillips	0%	2
Bent	50%	2	Hinsdale	0%	1	Pitkin	38%	32
Boulder	35%	353	Huerfano	67%	3	Prowers	0%	3
Broomfield	37%	63	Jackson	n/a	0	Pueblo	15%	62
Chaffee	10%	21	Jefferson	25%	404	Rio Blanco	n/a	0
Cheyenne	0%	2	Kiowa	n/a	0	Rio Grande	29%	14
Clear Creek	33%	6	Kit Carson	0%	4	Routt	36%	25
Conejos	8%	12	La Plata	22%	41	Saguache	33%	12
Costilla	0%	7	Lake	33%	3	San Juan	n/a	0
Crowley	n/a	0	Larimer	33%	212	San Miguel	31%	16
Custer	n/a	0	Las Animas	46%	13	Sedgwick	n/a	0
Delta	10%	10	Lincoln	0%	1	Summit	21%	71
Denver	16%	677	Logan	14%	7	Teller	13%	16
Dolores	n/a	0	Mesa	17%	78	Washington	0%	3
Douglas	19%	316	Mineral	0%	1	Weld	24%	134
Eagle	38%	57	Moffat	33%	3	Yuma	14%	7
El Paso	23%	355	Montezuma	15%	20			
Elbert	0%	5	Montrose	11%	18			

INCOME CHANGES BY RACE

Communities of color may be underrepresented in this sample. The impact of COVID-19 on the entire ECE workforce has been severe, but we believe that the effects on educators of color are far worse than what is shown.



Policy Considerations to Support Early Childhood Educators

Financial Stability. Colorado's early educators are underpaid. Communities of color and low-income groups were more deeply impacted by COVID-19 and may require both public and private financial support.

Continuing to fund direct support for child care providers, such as the federal Payroll Protection Program and the state sustainability grant program, will be critical to maintaining employment opportunities. Public investment in the ECE industry should prioritize funding for those most affected by the pandemic (i.e., educators of color).

Workforce Retention. More qualified educators were less likely to be furloughed or laid off. Lead teachers were the least likely to experience job disruptions.

Investing in more professional development and access to early childhood training programs will reduce the risk of furloughs and lay-offs for marginalized populations.

Equitable Access. Both families and educators need access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet and personal computing equipment.

Providing access to technology and digital literacy can reduce equity gaps. Priority should be given to rural and low-income families. Educators should also be given access to the training and guidance they need to effectively serve remote students.

Partners

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References

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- ³ Franko, M., Brodsky, A., Wacker, A., & Estrada, M. (2017). Bearing the cost of early care and education in Colorado: An economic analysis. Denver: Butler Institute for Families, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver.
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