



SUSTAINING & ADAPTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

The Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Social-Emotional Development & Learning

November 2021

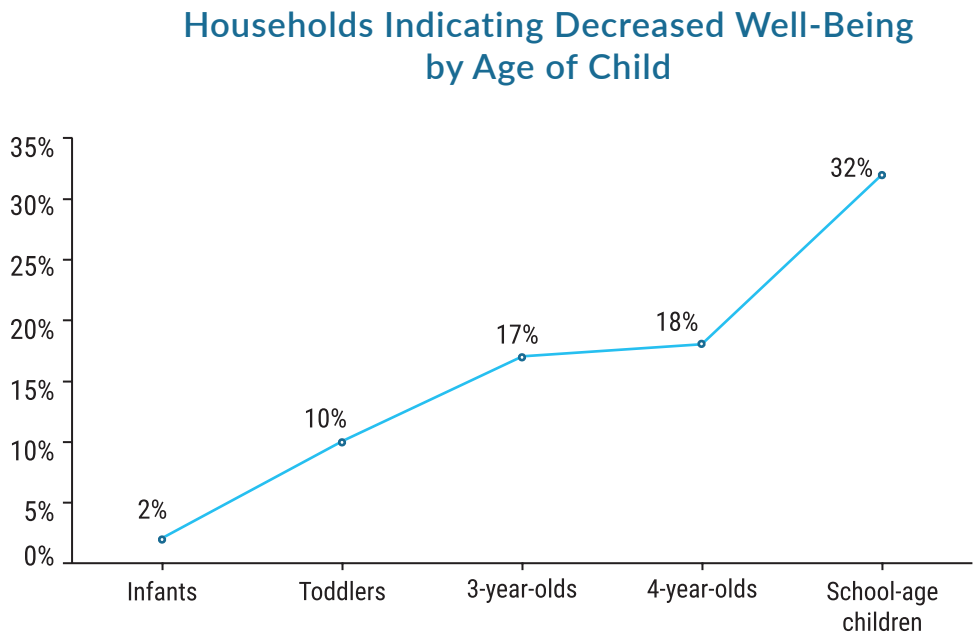


EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact throughout Colorado’s early childhood community. Financial stress, worries about health and safety, and shifting to remote learning each took a toll on educators and families with young children. It is essential to understand how children’s learning and social-emotional development has been affected. This brief explores learning disruptions during the pandemic and their effects on children’s social and emotional well-being as identified through surveys of child care providers, early educators, and families.¹ These findings can help state and local leaders develop the supports families and educators need during pandemic recovery.

THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE

Families and educators worry that children face new challenges as the pandemic continues. One in five parents with three- and four-year-olds said their child was doing worse than before the pandemic. One-third of families with school-age children shared concerns about their child’s overall well-being.

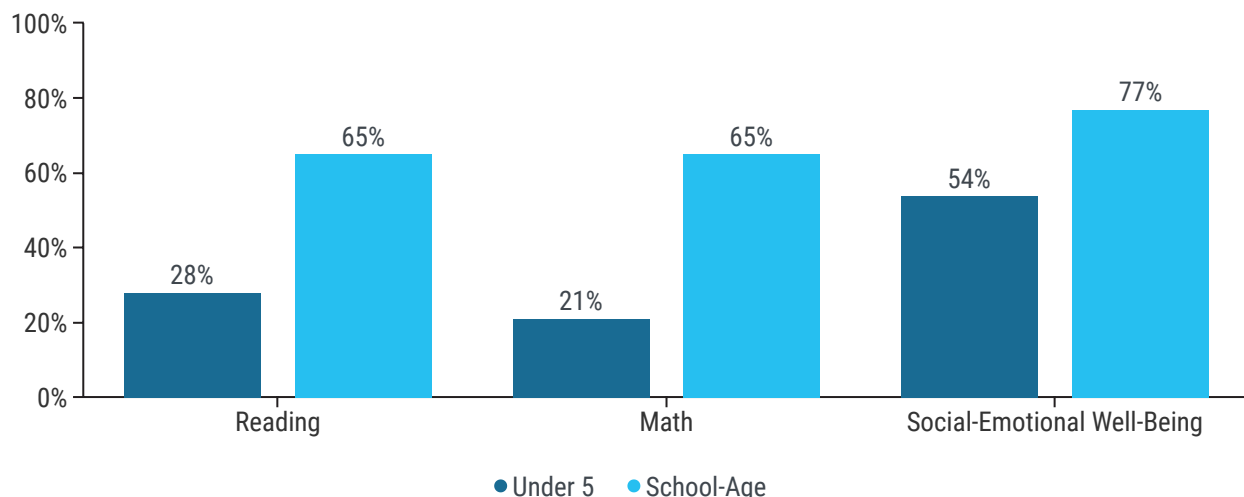


A third of families with school-age children are concerned about learning loss in literacy and mathematics. This compares to a quarter of families with children under five who shared the same challenge.

More than half of families with children under five and three quarters with school-age children indicated concerns about social-emotional effects of the pandemic.

¹ Data in this brief represents findings from three second wave surveys of child care providers (1,550 respondents), early educators (4,316 respondents), and families with children under 12 years old (5,867 respondents), each completed in early 2021.

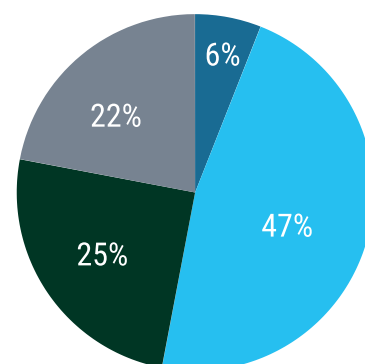
Families Indicating Concern for Children's Learning Loss by Age of Child



REMOTE LEARNING

Many caregivers struggled to find care and other services for their children to meet learning and development needs. Some were forced to supervise remote learning while balancing their own work and other parenting responsibilities. Half of these parents said they need to dedicate four or more hours per day toward their child's virtual learning. This burden most often fell to female caregivers.

Additional Time Parents Needed to Support Daily Remote Learning



PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

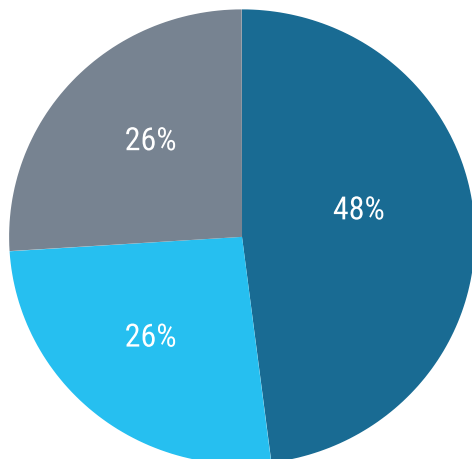
The pandemic has created greater need for mental health services for children and families. However, only about a quarter of child care providers worked with a mental health consultant during the pandemic. The other three quarters reported either not utilizing or not having access to these services. Nearly half of providers who worked with a mental health consultant use these services on an ongoing basis. More than one in three providers sought consultation as a result of new behaviors and mental health concerns in children. About 20% of providers sought pandemic-related support for staff.

- No additional time
- 1 to 3 hours
- 4 to 5 hours
- More than 5 hours

"More children are anxious about when their parents leave them or when they will pick them up at the end of the day. More children are aggressive and more prone to outburst (crying) when they do not get what they want."

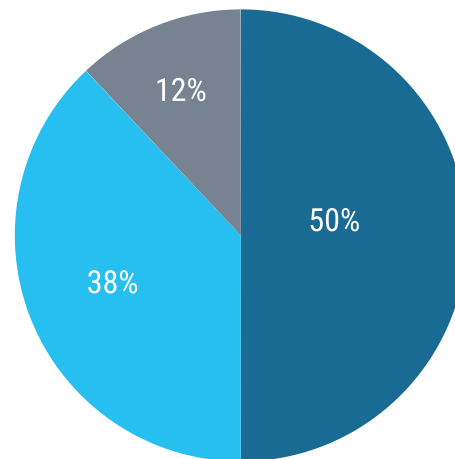
"I am concerned that we had five families divorce during the pandemic. We can spot problems at home through the child's behavior changes. No one is addressing this issue."

Program Work with Mental Health Consultants Since March 2020



- Program has not worked with mental health consultant
- Program has worked with mental health consultant
- Program does not have a mental health consultant

Frequency of Access to Mental Health Consultants

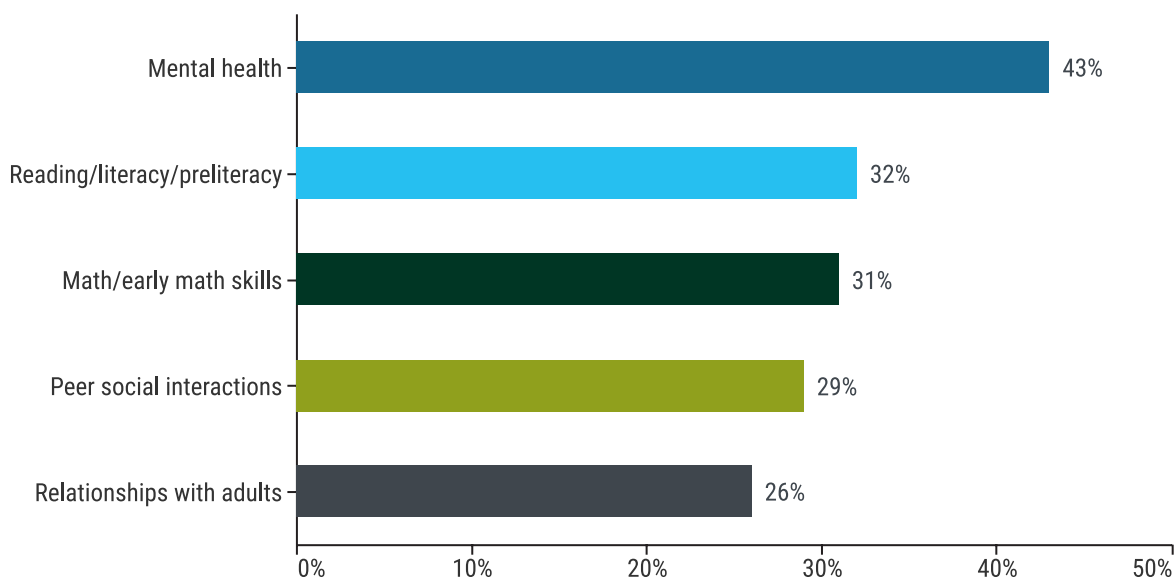


- The same as before
- More than before
- Less than before

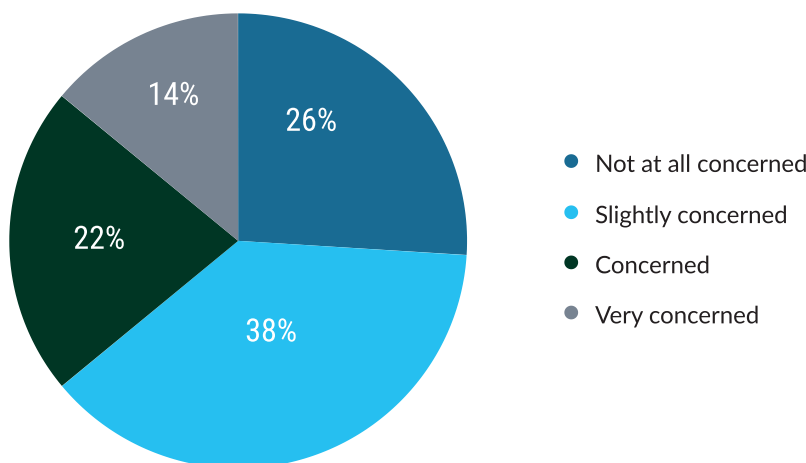
TOOLS NEEDED TO SUPPORT CHILDREN

Early educators have been on the front lines of managing health, safety, learning, and development of children in their care during extraordinary circumstances. Two thirds of educators shared concerns about learning loss among the children they serve with a quarter stating concerns specific to math and literacy. One in three reported increased mental health challenges for the children in their care. Educators also noted changes in the quality of peer and adult relationships since the start of the pandemic.

Percent of Young Children Experiencing More Challenges Compared to Pre-Pandemic



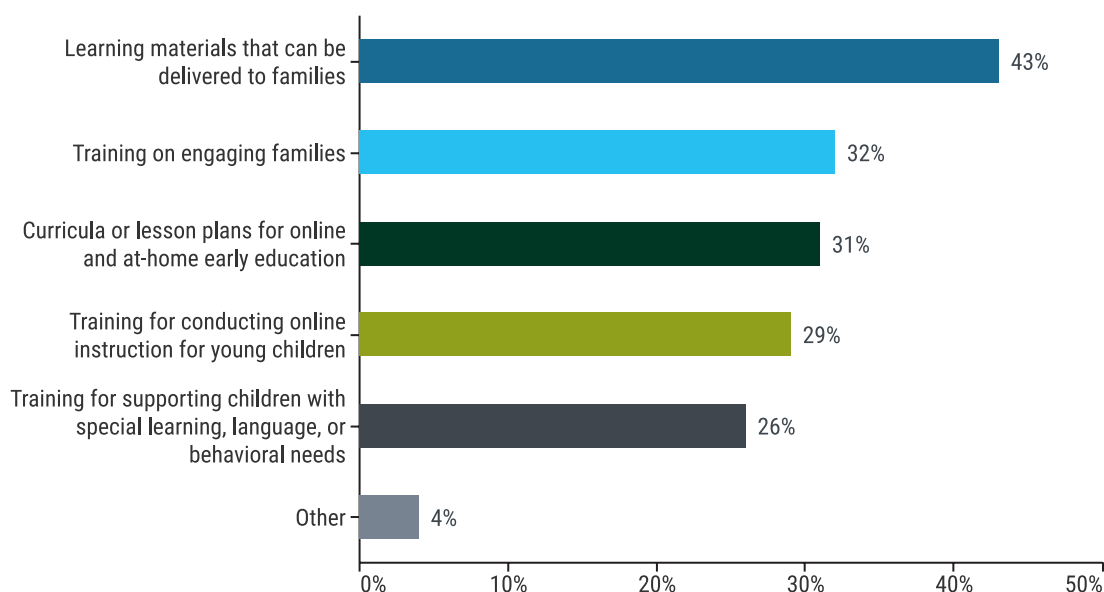
Concern for Young Children's Learning Loss



Nearly 40% of early educators need materials that support social-emotional learning (e.g., toys, curriculum), strategies to address anxiety, and referral services for children with special needs. Almost a third of educators want training to support socialization skills, relationships, and behavior management.

As the pandemic continues, educators anticipate the possible return to remote learning. Over 40% say they need learning materials that can be delivered to families. One third requested curricula and lesson plans for early education, and a similar number of educators requested training to engage and communicate with families. Educators also want training for providing online instruction to young children and supporting special learning, language, or behavioral needs.

Educator Needs for Future Remote Learning



Considerations for Change

Improve Access to Mental Health Resources. Providers need greater access to mental health consultants. Additional supports for children's mental health and social well-being will be needed as the pandemic continues.

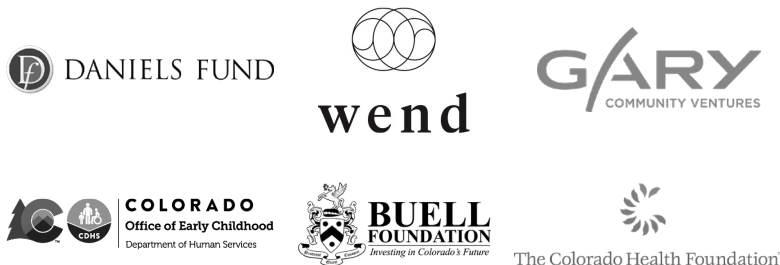
Develop Curriculum and Materials That Meet Current Needs. Educators want a curriculum that is focused on early childhood needs. Materials that can be delivered to families and focus on promoting social skills will provide the greatest impact for educators and the children in their care.

Provide Flexibility for Working Parents. Parents and caregivers are stretched thin between managing their own work and their children's online learning. Employers can continue to adopt flexible policies for working parents. State and local agencies should develop equitably accessible mental health support services for families.

Leverage Data in Decision Making. Each family has unique needs during the pandemic. State and local partners should develop culturally sensitive assessments to gather baseline data on academic and social-emotional development. This data will be valuable in creating programs that help educators, children, and families continue to adapt to the pandemic and measure growth over time.

Partners

Early Milestones is grateful to our project funders, without whom this effort would not be possible. We also thank our many partners who are helping to distribute surveys, interpret data, and develop communication tools.



Suggested Citation

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