

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# **COVID-19 and Child Care**

**A Summary of Findings from the  
2020 Household Survey**

**Report to the Oregon Early Learning Division and the Early Learning Council**

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the input and advice shared with us by our partners at the Early Learning Division.

Our deepest appreciation to the families who participated in the 2020 Household Survey and to the members of Oregon's early learning community who passed on information about the survey to families throughout the state: the Early Learning Hubs, Child Care Resource and Referral Networks, Head Start/OPK program directors and staff, Preschool Promise directors and staff, and all of the other child care programs and providers who helped support this project.

## Recommended Citation

Pears, K.C., Miao, A.J., Green, B.L., Lauzus, N., Patterson, L. B., Scheidt, D., & Tremaine, E. (2021). Oregon Preschool Development Grant Birth to Age 5 Strengths and Needs Assessment: 2020 Statewide Household Survey Results. Report submitted to the Oregon Early Learning Division and Early Learning Council, March 2021.

## Funding Source and Disclaimer

This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90TP0020-01-02 from Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of DHHS or ACF.

## Project Overview

In March of 2020, many services and supports for families were suspended or otherwise disrupted due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This report presents the results of a Household Survey that was conducted in Fall 2020 to learn about how the landscape of child care services and supports changed in Oregon during the statewide closures that occurred in the spring, summer and fall of 2020. The survey was administered to parents and other caregivers of children aged 0 to 5 years. Questions explored a range of topics including whether the COVID-19 pandemic had affected families' usage of child care and early education, whether families' whose care had been disrupted by the pandemic received any services from their former early childhood care and education providers including services to address developmental disabilities and/or chronic health care needs, the challenges and barriers faced by families trying to find early child care and education during the pandemic, families' concerns about and preferences for child care and early education programming in the future, and families' experiences of suspensions and/or expulsions from early childhood care. For some topics, comparisons could be made between the 2020 Household Survey and the 2019 Household Survey<sup>1</sup> conducted in late 2019. However, such comparisons should be considered to be reflections upon differences rather than statistical analyses or tests of change due to differences between the two surveys in sampling methodology and the use of sample weights in analyses.



The final sample of 2,105 respondents answered questions about their child care needs for **one focal child** in their household. The focal child was the oldest child in the household who had not yet started kindergarten. The majority of respondents (82.5%) were biological, step, or adoptive mothers of the children. The term “parents” is used from this point forward to refer to all possible caregivers of children who responded to the survey. Focal children were identified by their parents as White (56.5%), Hispanic or Latinx (21.8%), African American or Black (6.4%), multiracial or multiethnic (5.8%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (3.8%), Asian (3.8%), Middle Eastern or North African (1.0%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.5%) or another race or ethnicity (0.3%). English was the language spoken at home for 73.8% of the sample, 20.3% of the sample spoke Spanish at home, and 5.9% spoke another language such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, or Vietnamese. Parents were asked whether their children “had an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or special developmental or medical needs” and 15.6% of parents indicated that this was the case. Households were considered to be “lower income” if household earnings were at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which translates into an annual household income of \$51,500 for a family of four in 2020. According to this definition, 58.2% of the sample was lower income. Regionally, 66% of the sample lived in urban areas, with the remainder living in rural or frontier areas. All 36 counties in Oregon were represented in the sample.

Survey findings helped to identify a number of current strengths as well as opportunities for improvement of Oregon's early childhood care and education systems. These are discussed below.



1 Burton, M., Green, B.L., Miao, A.J., Pears, K.C., Scheidt, D., & Tremaine, E. (2019). Oregon Preschool Development Grant Birth-Age 5 Strengths and Needs Assessment. Report submitted to the Oregon Early Learning Division and Early Learning Council, November, 2019.

# Patterns of Usage & Satisfaction

## Use of Early Care and Education Services

The majority of parents responding to the survey (53.2%) had at least one child in early care and education services for at least 8 hours a week since March 2020, which was slightly lower than the percentage in 2019 (59.4%). On average, families who were using child care reported using days and hours that represented full-day, full-week care. Across different groups of families, those with children identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Middle Eastern or North African were least likely to have their child in care since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest percentages of children in care were among families with higher income, families living in frontier areas, and families whose primary language was English.

Of parents with children in care, 47.3% had their child in center-based care, a drop of about 5% from the 2019 Household Survey (52.3%). Just over one half (51.2%) of the families reported that the child had been in care in their home with a friend, relative, neighbor, or nanny—14% higher than the percentage of families reporting the use of this type of care in 2019 (37.4%). The changes from 2019 to 2020 were mostly likely due to the closures that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns about exposure in out-of-home care (see below). Across groups, children identified as White, Asian, or multiracial or multiethnic, those whose primary language was English, and those living in frontier areas were more likely to be attending a child care center or preschool. Children identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, African American or Black, or Hispanic or Latinx and those whose primary language was Spanish were more likely to be receiving care in their own homes.

Slightly over one third (35.1%) of parents reported that they had tried to find care for their child during the past year. This was slightly higher than the percentage of families who reported seeking care in 2019 (32.2%). On the one hand, given the disruptions in care that many families experienced (see below), it is surprising that this percentage is not higher. On the other, given historic rates of unemployment due to the pandemic and parent concerns about the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in out-of-home care (see below), a larger increase in the numbers of families seeking care might not be expected. Of those who did not have their child in child care, White and African American or Black children and those in primarily English-speaking homes were more likely to have parents who had sought care in the past year. Fewer pri-

marily Spanish-speaking parents and parents with lower incomes had tried to find care in the past year.

Overall, it is clear that child care and education services in Oregon are being utilized and continue to be needed and valued by parents of young children, although the rates of usage of such care may have altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, challenges finding and accessing the types of affordable, quality care that parents value were common.

## Satisfaction with Current Early Care and Education Services

When asked if they were satisfied with the number of days a week and the number of hours per day that were available for their child to be in care, over three quarters of all parents reported that the amounts were “about right” (78.1% and 75.5% for days and hours, respectively). Parents of children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs and families with lower incomes were more likely to say that they did not have enough days per week of care. Those same parents and parents of American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latinx, and multiracial or multiethnic children were most likely to say that they did not have enough hours per day of care.

When asked to name one thing that they would change about their current child care arrangements other than cost, 42.2% of parents noted that their current arrangements were “just right”. This was by far the most frequently endorsed answer across all groups of parents. While this is a strength, it also suggests that there is room for improvement in the early care and education arrangements of the majority of parents. For example, families with a home language other than English were more likely to want a provider who better represented their child’s culture, language, or ethnicity—while families with lower incomes and families whose child was experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were more likely to want a different type of setting or facility and fewer different arrangements.

Families were also asked how satisfied they were with health and safety procedures that their early childhood education and care arrangement provided. Overall, most parents (86.4%) felt that these were “about right”. This was true across different racial and ethnic, language, and income groups. One important difference was that one quarter of parents of children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs felt that the health and safety procedures at their care arrangements were “not enough”.

# Challenges Faced by Parents

## Availability of Early Care and Education Services

**Parents overwhelmingly indicated that finding the type of care that they wanted and availability of slots were the greatest challenges to finding care.** The overall supply of early childhood education and care decreased during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is consistent with parents feeling that availability was a challenge. However, in the 2019 Household Survey, parents had cited availability as one of the biggest challenges to finding care, suggesting that this is a longer-standing issue that existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Difficulties finding the type of care wanted may be more tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in light of increases in the frequency of children being in an at-home care arrangement and parents' perceptions of the risk of COVID-19 exposure in different types of care (discussed below). It should be noted that in the 2019 Household Survey families in frontier regions were most likely to endorse difficulties in availability and this was not the case in 2020. Given that families in these regions were least likely to report disruptions in child care due to COVID-19 (see below), it may be that some combination of families choosing to take their children out of care because of COVID-19 and the lack of overall disruption led to more availability in these regions. This hypothesis would need to be explored more thoroughly in the future, and it would be important to examine how challenges might change as the pandemic subsides.



## Need for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Early Care and Education Services

The majority of parents of children of color and those who primarily spoke Spanish or a language other than English had **difficulties finding a provider who reflected the family's cultural background and/or who spoke the child's language.** That parents saw this as a challenge indicates their preferences for providers who reflect their cultures and home languages. This is consistent with the findings from the 2019 Household Survey. As Oregon's population becomes increasingly diverse, it will continue to be important to recruit and support providers from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds as well as those who speak languages other than English. Importantly, examining the routes by which people from different traditionally minoritized groups can receive training in early childhood care and education, as well as in setting up their own businesses (if applicable), may help to create a more diverse workforce.

## Need for Services for Children Experiencing Disabilities and/or Chronic Health Care Needs

**Parents in frontier areas of the state and those with children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were most likely to cite difficulties in finding a provider who could support the needs of their child with a physical or other disability.** Parents of children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs also reported higher rates of challenges overall. This suggests that there is a lack of services for these children, especially for those in frontier areas. To address this issue, examining the types of training that are offered to providers—particularly those in remote regions in which services are likely to be least available or accessible—might suggest routes to ensuring a higher supply of providers who are able to meet a variety of needs. Expanding professional development opportunities as well as the availability of consultants with specialized experience (e.g., Early Childhood Mental Health specialists) might also increase families' access to the services that their children need.





## The Effects of COVID-19 on Usage & Perceptions of Care

### Most Families Experienced a Disruption in Care and Special Services

Parents answering the 2020 Household Survey were facing the challenges of the global pandemic, which included effects on the availability of early childhood care and education, historic levels of unemployment, and restrictions on many services designed to help families. Almost 60% of all parents reported that they had experienced a disruption in child care, mainly because their provider was either not providing onsite care or had closed. Although, overall, children identified as being from a racial or ethnic background other than White experienced slightly lower rates of having care disrupted, children who were identified as African American or Black had the highest overall rate of disruption (73.8%). Children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were also more likely to have experienced a disruption in care (63.5%) than their peers (58.8%). Further, parents of children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs reported having difficulties in accessing services, with the majority of parents who used services reporting that they had problems accessing developmental and special education services (62.1%) and mental or behavioral health services (59.9%).

### Families Used Online or Remote Early Childhood Services When Offered

While a majority of families experienced a disruption in care, just over one third (36.5%) were offered any online or remote services. The availability of remote early childhood services varied across racial and ethnic groups. Children identified as Middle Eastern or North African (52.4%), Asian (46.8%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (42.9%) were most likely to have been offered these services, while children who were identified as African American or Black (32.3%) were least likely to be offered online or remote services. Parents who were offered these services tended to use them. The services most likely to have been used were online classes, picking up or receiving worksheets/activities, and utilizing special apps. In contrast, picking up or receiving meals and other supplies were the least utilized services. For the families that did use them, however, picking up or having meals, work-

### Children Being Asked to Leave Care

In a 2019 survey of providers across Oregon completed for the PDG B-5 Strengths and Needs Assessment,<sup>2</sup> 44% of facilities reported having asked a child to leave care either temporarily or permanently. In the current survey, 6.3% of parents reported that their child had been asked to “take a break” or leave care either temporarily or permanently, a slight increase over the rate reported by parents (5%) in the 2019 Household Survey. The most often cited reason for the request was that the provider could not handle the child’s behavior towards others. This was followed closely by the child being unable to adjust emotionally, crying, or having separation anxiety. **Children of color and those experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were asked to leave care at high rates.** The primary reasons for children of color being asked to leave care paralleled those for all groups. Children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were most likely to be asked to leave care because the provider could not manage the child’s behavior or because the provider could not meet the child’s developmental needs. These findings suggest that providers need more training and support around handling behaviors that they perceive to be challenging. They also suggest that providers may need more information about diverse cultural backgrounds and abilities and training about the effects that their own implicit biases may have on the ways that they interpret children’s behaviors.

2 Burton, M., Green, B. L., Miao, A. J., Pears, K. C., Scheidt, D., & Tremaine, E. (2019). Oregon Preschool Development Grant Birth-Age 5 Strengths and Needs Assessment. Report submitted to the Oregon Early Learning Division and Early Learning Council, November, 2019.

sheet/activities, or other supplies dropped off were the services that most parents rated as “somewhat” or “very” useful. Families of children of color, families with lower incomes, those primarily speaking languages other than English, those in frontier and rural areas, and those with children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs were most likely to be offered the services of picking up or receiving meals, worksheets/activities, supplies, and information about caring for their child, and were most likely to utilize these services when offered. These findings suggest that many families, particularly those from traditionally underserved and marginalized populations, were interested in services when they were offered. Given that many of these families may depend on their care arrangements not only for care but also as a way for their children to receive meals and other services, increasing the availability of such services even in the face of site closure warrants further consideration to ensure that families’ needs are met.

### Parents Had Clear Concerns About Exposure to COVID-19

When asked about concerns regarding their children returning to care after a disruption in care, 82% of parents reported being concerned that their child or family would be exposed to COVID-19. Parents with children who were identified as African American or Black were most likely to be concerned about possible exposure to COVID-19 (93.4%). When asked if they were concerned about the potential for exposure in different types of care, parents were much less likely to be concerned about care by a relative, friend, neighbor, or nanny in their own home than for any type of care outside the home, including home-based care in someone else’s home and center- and school-based care. Parents of children of color expressed the highest concerns about all types of out-of-home care. These concerns are warranted when viewed against a backdrop of findings that rates of COVID-19, as well as hospitalization and death from COVID-19, are higher for people of color.<sup>3</sup> These findings suggest that explorations with families from different groups to identify their specific concerns about the potential risks of exposure to COVID-19 would help to better understand and possibly address these concerns moving forward.

3 CDC. *Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>.

### Parents’ Preferences for Different Types of Care May be Shaped by Concerns About COVID-19

When asked what type of early childhood education and care they would prefer “right now, in light of COVID-19”, almost equal proportions of parents said that they would prefer center-based (39.7%) or in-home care (37.9%). Families with children identified as African American or Black, Hispanic or Latinx, and multiracial or multiethnic were generally more likely to indicate that they would rather have their children in care in their own homes. Concerns about exposure to COVID-19 appear to be driving some of these preferences. When the interaction between concerns about exposure in each type of care and preferred type of care were examined, it was clear that parents who said they would prefer in-home care showed the highest levels of concern about exposure in any out-of-home care. It is also notable that families who said that they would prefer any type of out-of-home care judged the risk of exposure in such care to be greater than that for in-home care, which may indicate that these parents are considering factors other than COVID-19 exposure risk when choosing care or feel that the benefits of their preferred type of care balance the risk of COVID-19 exposure. These findings suggest that if families are going to opt for in-home care at higher rates, at least in the short term, considering how to increase opportunities for in-home caregivers to receive information about child development and early learning might contribute to the development of the children in their care. Making such information easy to access would also be important. For families who opt for center-based care, helping those families to understand the precautions being taken to prevent COVID-19 exposure might help to allay some families’ worries.



## Recommendations

The findings from the 2020 Household Survey provide a unique snapshot of the needs for early care and education opportunities across multiple groups and geographic regions at a unique point in time. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly impacted families' abilities to access early childhood education and care and other services. With the advent of vaccines to protect against COVID-19, some of these impacts may ease but there are likely to be a number of longer-lasting effects on both capacity and demand for early childhood education and care. Parental concerns and preferences are likely to shape changes in services over time. This survey has helped to illuminate some of the current patterns of usage and parental concerns. It also allows us to see that expansion and continued support are needed to:

- ▶ Continue to increase the availability of early care and education services around the state, particularly for center-based care as it seems to be one clear preference for parents.
- ▶ Continue to increase services for children experiencing developmental disabilities and/or chronic health care needs and their families with a focus on ways to sustain the availability of these services even if other early childhood care services are disrupted.
- ▶ Continue to diversify the provider workforce in terms of racial/ethnic, cultural, and language diversity, as well as increase professional development opportunities focused on ways to provide culturally and linguistically responsive care.
- ▶ Continue to expand providers' skills in developmentally appropriate practices, teaching social-emotional skills, and managing behavior.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for providers to learn how implicit biases may affect perceptions of and responses to children's behaviors.
- ▶ Consider approaches to and systems for providing caregivers in children's homes with information about child development and early learning.



Many Oregon parents are currently facing multiple family stressors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including disruptions in their early childhood education and care. In spite of these difficulties and concerns about the risk of COVID-19 exposure, parents clearly want and value early care and education opportunities. In a time in which the entire system of early childhood education and care is facing the unprecedented challenge of determining how to maintain quality services to families in the face of a pandemic, Oregon has continued to prioritize early childhood education in legislation and funding. Findings from this survey not only provide support for such efforts, but can also help to further inform these efforts and clarify changes in parental considerations and preferences to help the system meet and move beyond the challenges of this unique period.