



## **CALIFORNIA'S EARLY LEARNING AND CARE PROVIDERS**

### Essential Workers Who Need Support

**The Early Learning and Care system** in California provides one of the state's most critical services: supporting children's early learning and development while enabling parents to work. But the COVID-19 crisis has taken a toll on this system, and Early Learning providers need more support. In May, the American Institutes for Research and Early Edge California conducted 7 focus groups with 32 Early Learning providers across the state. The following themes emerged:

Providers are committed, resilient, and doing their best, despite the considerable challenges they face.

- Early Learning providers are committed to their children and families and are going to great lengths to support them during this crisis.
- Many providers are finding creative and flexible ways to support children's learning and needs during the closures.
- In some cases, providers have taken advantage of the stay-at-home order to strengthen the engagement of families in their children's learning.
- Some providers are finding ways to connect with dual language learner (DLL) families, serving as a valuable support and resource during the pandemic.

But the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic have been extraordinary, and providers urgently need additional support.

- Limited, delayed, and changing guidance has left providers to figure things out on their own.
- The COVID-19 crisis has taken a financial toll on Early Learning programs.
- Programs that are still open struggle to get the supplies they need.
- Distance learning is a significant challenge, and providers need more guidance and resources to do it well.
- Providers are uncertain about how to best serve DLLs, including how to adapt in-person practices to a distance learning context.
- In a crisis, providers may benefit from being part of an established infrastructure.
- The stress of the pandemic is straining Early Learning providers' emotional wellbeing.

Based on conversations with providers across the state, we recommend the following actions to maintain and strengthen California's Early Learning system:

1. Continue to fund state-contracted programs, which serve as a critical resource for families and communities.
2. Support home-based care through local and statewide networks.
3. Support private programs with guidance and access to resources.
4. Provide guidance for all programs on how to operate in the new context.
5. Ensure all programs and families have access to technology and resources to meet basic needs.
6. Share distance-learning resources with all programs.
7. Help programs better support DLLs in distance learning.
8. Capitalize on connections with families to strengthen engagement.
9. Share resources with DLL families to promote home language development.
10. Support Early Learning providers as people, with wellness resources and financial supports.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted—and deepened—cracks in the Early Learning and Care system that must be filled to ensure a stable and equitable system that supports learning for all children.

*To learn more about these recommendations and other findings from the focus group, see the report at the following link:*

<https://www.air.org/resource/california-s-early-learning-and-care-providers-essential-workers-who-need-support>

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*This work was supported by the Heising-Simons Foundation and the American Institutes for Research.*

*Early Edge California is a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to improving access to high-quality Early Learning experiences for all California children so they can have a strong foundation for future success.*

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