

SUPPORTING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND THE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS THEY SERVE DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Insights From a Statewide Survey

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 crisis has dramatically changed the lives of California’s children and their families. As of July, more than three quarters of children lost their child care arrangement due to the pandemic, leaving many children without formal care arrangements. Dual language learners (DLLs)—children who are learning another language in addition to English and who comprise nearly 60% of children birth to age 5 in California—were disproportionately left out, as reported in the [second research brief](#) in a series on COVID-19 and DLLs in the early learning and care system from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Early Edge California.¹ This third brief in the series draws on data from the same survey of a representative sample of early learning and care programs—centers and family child care homes (FCCHs)—in California² and examines the ways in which early learning programs supported these children and their families during the program disruptions this summer.

Overall, we find that many early learning programs made efforts to maintain connections with families and children who could not be served in person during the COVID-19 pandemic and supported them in various ways. Programs faced challenges in doing so, however, especially in terms of reaching and supporting DLLs.

The majority of programs—especially centers—engaged families to support children’s learning at home. Although the loss of child care created a substantial shift in children’s learning routines, most centers and somewhat fewer FCCHs provided families with activities to do with their children to support their learning while at home. Some centers that serve DLLs provided resources in the home language for their DLLs, though few FCCHs did so.

- 86%** of centers (and 62% of FCCHs) offered parents ideas for activities to do with their children.
- 69%** of centers (and 39% of FCCHs) provided books and/or hands-on learning activities to families.
- 42%** of centers (and 27% of FCCHs) that serve DLLs provided books and/or hands-on learning activities *in the home languages to families of DLLs.*

Many centers engaged children directly in virtual learning experiences, but few FCCHs did so, and real-time interactions for DLLs were not common among centers or FCCHs serving DLLs. Limited opportunities for home language interactions with teachers may mean that many DLLs are not able to benefit from the same opportunities to develop language and skills that their monolingual peers have. Most programs reported they needed additional resources and support to provide distance learning for all of their children.

- 74%** of Centers **29%** of FCCHs provided real-time interaction with children via video call.
- 43%** of Centers **20%** of FCCHs provided real-time interaction with children via video call in the home language.

1 Quick, H., White, L., Brodziak de los Reyes, I., Bergey, R., & Carbuccia-Abbott, M. (2020). *A system in jeopardy: California’s early learning system and its dual language learners during the COVID-19 pandemic*. American Institutes for Research. <https://www.air.org/system-in-jeopardy.pdf>
2 For more details on the survey, please refer to the full report at www.air.org/covid-early-learning.

Programs reported challenges including DLLs in distance learning and lower rates of participation for DLLs overall.

Many programs were unsure how best to engage DLLs. Few indicated they had received any guidance or resources for serving DLLs during COVID-19, and many reported a need for this guidance.

41% of programs indicated it was more difficult to provide distance learning for DLLs than non-DLLs.

73% of programs want more guidance or resources for serving DLLs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Programs have focused additional attention on supporting children’s social and emotional well-being. Additional guidance on supporting social and emotional well-being is needed, however.

86% of programs said their distance learning focused on social-emotional well-being.

91% of programs want more resources and guidance on how to support children’s social-emotional well-being during this time.

As the pandemic wears on, early learning providers need support to continue to adapt and respond to the needs of California’s families. Supporting young children, of which nearly 60% are DLLs, requires addressing families’ and programs’ immediate needs as well as developing strategies for reentry when the virus is under control. Specifically, early learning programs need support in the following key areas to ensure that all young children, including DLLs, have the learning opportunities they need and deserve:

- Resources and ideas for activities to help families engage their children in learning throughout the day and to help families of DLLs support their children’s language development
- Training on best practices for providing developmentally appropriate distance learning opportunities, including specialized trainings and supports tailored to the unique needs and contexts of FCCHs
- Training and support to ensure that distance learning opportunities are culturally and linguistically responsive and accessible to DLLs
- Additional training on how to support children’s social and emotional health and well-being
- Access to technology, training on its use, and resources to help parents use the technology for distance learning and communication with families

With the supports and resources needed to provide stimulating and developmentally appropriate early learning experiences for young children during—and after—the COVID-19 pandemic, California’s early learning system can help young children, including DLLs, to be resilient and continue to thrive.

To learn more about these and other findings from the study, visit <https://www.air.org/covid-early-learning>.

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[Early Edge California](https://www.earlyedge.org) 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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