

A SYSTEM IN JEOPARDY

California's Early Learning System and its Dual Language Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Early learning and care programs play an important role for California's linguistically diverse young children by supporting their early language and literacy development prior to kindergarten entry. Eight of 10 early learning programs serve DLLs,¹ and the families of these children rely on these programs for child care and to help establish a foundation for their children's learning and development. To understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these programs, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Early Edge California conducted a survey of a representative sample of licensed early learning and care programs (center-based programs and family child care homes [FCCHs]) in California between June 11 and July 16, 2020. Results of this survey confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially disrupted the early learning and care system, especially for DLLs.

Findings from the survey indicate that more than a third of early learning and care programs were closed for in-person care as of June or July of this year, and those that were open were operating with reduced enrollment. During this time, 78% of children served in early learning programs lost care. And DLLs, particularly those in centers, were hardest hit—89% of DLLs in center-based programs lost care.

Although many programs that closed expect to reopen, they face significant barriers to doing so, including financial and logistical challenges.

Programs are closed or serving fewer children.

As of June or July 2020...

35% of early learning programs were **closed**.

78% of **children** in early learning programs lost care.

89% of **DLLs** in centers lost care.

Closed programs face significant barriers to reopening.

62% of closed centers said they **can't afford to operate** under enrollment limits.

56% of closed FCCHs said their program **space is too small** or not appropriate for new requirements.

¹ American Institutes for Research. (in press). *Quick facts: The landscape of early learning programs serving dual language learners in California*. San Mateo, CA: Author.

All providers identified critical needs for their programs, including funding for basic operating expenses like staff salaries and supplies, protections for their health and the health of their staff and families, and guidance on how to follow new regulations and protocols.

As with all critical elements of state infrastructure supporting children and families, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating. Financial resources are needed to help early learning programs through the current situation and to strengthen the system for the future. Restoring and sustaining California's early learning system will require supporting programs in the months ahead in four key areas:

1. Funding to support operating expenses, to compensate for programs' reduced enrollment and allow programs to reopen or remain open
2. Access to and funding for health and safety supplies, which are additional expenses for already tight budgets
3. Outreach to families of DLLs and support for priority enrollment to address the care gap for DLLs and ensure that children who need care receive it
4. Clear and consolidated guidance on the implementation of new requirements and access to emergency planning information to ensure the health and safety of care providers and the children and families they serve

Providing adequate guidance and funding for California's early learning system to recover and rebuild is critical to ensure that California's linguistically diverse young learners and their families have opportunities for quality care and early learning experiences.

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

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[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.

Programs have significant needs.

88% need **funding for health and safety supplies.**

68% need **funding for staff salaries.**

81% need an **emergency plan** for a future crisis.

79% need **guidance** on how to implement new health and safety protocols.

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