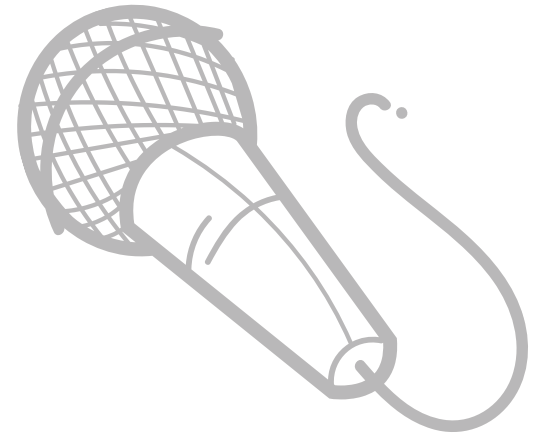


VOICES FROM THE FIELD



CHALLENGES FACED BY THE VIRGINIA CHILD CARE & ECE WORKFORCE

Child Care Aware of Virginia conducted a statewide survey of child care providers from May 13 through September 4, 2020 to capture the challenges faced by the profession as a result of COVID-19. Individuals working in child care and early education programs had multiple opportunities throughout the survey to share their experiences. In total, there were 1,528 comments.



Center-based Comments. *There were 667 licensed child care centers and religious exempt programs that responded to the survey. In total, there were 658 comments from individuals working in center-based programs.*

Home-based Comments. *There were 763 regulated home-based providers who responded to the survey. In total, there were 870 comments from individuals working in home-based programs.*

Although concerns were shared in response to a variety of questions, each response in some way is connected to business viability. For example, low enrollment impacted overall revenue to operate a program and meet fixed costs. Staffing challenges impacted the ability to operate a business. Access to financial relief options impacted a business' ability to temporarily continue to operate. The comments are grouped in relation to the question that was asked; however, each leads to the same result: child care as a business is struggling to stay afloat. A sample of comments is shared below.

STAFFING CONCERNS

Center-based Programs:

Norfolk. "We had to lay off our aides and reduce hours for some of our staff."

Harrisonburg. "I am currently struggling with having enough staff members that are willing to work for the salary offered."



Alexandria. "We changed our hours of operation. We are open from 8-4 PM during this time of crisis."

Fredericksburg. "Adjusted staff hours. Split shifts."

Arlington. "Available staff to work was reduced. We wouldn't take on the liability as an employer to make our COVID 19 high risk employees work. Plus other employees have school-age kids to care for so they needed to be home."

Haymarket. "Could not get staff to return with the lucrative unemployment benefits."

Waynesboro. "Currently our issue is not having substitutes when staff must stay home when exposed to COVID-19."

Chesapeake. "Employees hours had to be cut in order to afford payroll."

Fredericksburg. "Full time staff hours were cut by 50% each week."

Lynchburg. “Had to hire additional workers.”

Blacksburg. “Hiring teachers is an even bigger nightmare. Working on the front lines with extra work/cleaning with almost impossible expectations (social distancing young children) for such little pay?! We had 3 no-show interviews this week alone. We don't want to be forced to hire college students who put us even more at risk but it's just not an option. We can't find enough people want to work in childcare.”

South Hill. “I had many who could not work due to county school children being out. I had to utilize younger, less experienced staff and pay my “senior” on site workers hazard pay as an extra incentive to work.”

Virginia Beach. “It has been a delicate balance of allowing staff (whether or not to work) and families (whether or not to attend) to make a personal decision regarding health and safety. We've been working hard to match size of staff to size of enrollment. However, not being able to combine groups of students throughout the day has inflated the staff need and created a high cost on top of increased costs for PPE, sanitation supplies, etc.”

Bridgewater. “My staff was almost all James Madison University students, who all went back to their respective homes when JMU closed so I needed to hire an entirely new staff.”

Franklin. “Need more staff but having trouble with the fingerprinting process.”

Virginia Beach. “Needing additional staff to meet COVID-19 procedures, but then not taking in as much tuition with less students due to COVID-19.”

Bastian. “We took turns taking days off so that all of the staff could work a few days.”

Chesterfield. “New guidelines require us to run additional staff with a third less children/revenue.”

Chesapeake. “Several staff have health issues or live with a person who is elderly or immunologically compromised.”

Williamsburg. “There has been a huge budget hit to programs who need to keep groups separate (I am not saying we shouldn't do this, but in the past I only needed one person to “open” my program now I need 5 to cover all of the classes - this is true at the end of the day) We would not be able to stay open without the PPE as well as the assistance from the church we are associated with.”

Spotsylvania. “Trying to allow my staff to work around their own children's needs as well as the need at the center.”

Fredericksburg. “Was able to keep staff however all employees were given 4 hours per day.”

Christiansburg. “We are really struggling with getting background checks completed in a timely fashion and finding locations to complete TB testing.”

Home-based Providers:

Alexandria. “Had to go part-time for my 2 employees.”

Sterling. “Had to lay off my assistant.”

Fairfax. “My assistant went to work for Amazon.”

Portsmouth. “Had to stop paying myself.”

Fauquier. “I can't pay for an assistant at this time.”

Alexandria. “I couldn't keep my assistant.”

Lynchburg. “I had to hire additional workers.”

Fairfax. “I have 2 assistants and still paid them when I could. When parents paid me, then I paid them. But when parents were not paying, I could not pay them anything.”

Burke. “Paying staff from savings, but not paying myself.”

FINANCIAL RELATED CONCERNS

Center-based Programs:

Lynchburg. “If not for the PPP loan, we would have had to close permanently. We will be struggling for a while and hope we will survive.”

Chesapeake. “Loss of students would have been catastrophic if it wasn’t for the PPP to pay staff and a small savings.”

Reston. “Before COVID, we were running our school with 185 children and 39 staff members. We closed our center from March 26 thru May 8th. Reopened and started with 19 children on May 11th. Few children are trickling in each week, but we are not even going to break even if we don't have 127 children back in our school because of the over head cost (rent, utilities, loans etc).”

Richmond. “Enrollment fell sharply. Had to lay off staff.”

Lynchburg. “Enrollment was cut in half.”

Danville. “Gloves went from \$9.99 a box to \$32.00 a box. Chlorox wipes are impossible to find. Everything has gone up. Somebody needs to make sure supplies are set aside for child care because if we can't work, they can't work.”

Henrico. “I have had to hire more teachers even with less students in the class.”

Ashburn. “I have to pay \$30,000 for rent, \$18,000 for business loan, around \$20,000 for operating costs, and \$60,000 for salaries per month and it was covering until February. When we closed, staff went on unemployment. From March, we are just deferring those payments and paid 50% rent after we receive PPP. If I think about all this, can't stay alive -- just moving one day at a time and hoping to be rescued from this storm.”

Williamsburg. “If the group size limit isn't increased or the CARES grant from DSS doesn't stay in place and isn't subsidized at a significantly higher level than \$25/per half licensed capacity, we will likely not be able to sustain our business and will be forced to close permanently.”

Herndon. “It has been very hard to keep up, financially. It's been hard. We lost half of our enrollment and I had to cut hours for the staff.”

Haymarket. “It is very difficult to start up a new center. With the ongoing stay at home, and school closings, enrollment is VERY slow. The CARES grant has helped with some payroll expenses, but the rent is wiping me out. It will double in January and I am very concerned about sustainability. Is there any talk of helping with rent payments until things open back up?”

Harrisonburg. “Trying to reopen with fewer teachers, greatly decreased budget and increased expenses is challenging.”

Henrico. “We anticipate significant financial losses this school year and are hoping the school does not close permanently.”

Sterling. “We had to furlough 50% of our staff, cut the remaining staff's salaries by 10-20% and cut hours too.”

Ashburn. “We lost 85% of our enrollment since COVID-19 started. If it weren't for grants (DSS and PPP), we probably would have been forced to close. I feel some families are just keeping their children at home for financial reasons (Ashburn). Other schools in Chantilly, Herndon, Reston, Vienna, South Riding, and Gainesville have regained close to 51% of their enrollment. Ashburn seems to opt to keep their children at home.”

Arlington. “With parents working from home, many have switched to our half-day program. Our financial model collapsed without the requisite number of full-day students.”

FINANCIAL RELATED CONCERNS

Home-based Child Care Providers:

Ashburn. “Parents just stopped bringing in their kids and stopped paying.”

Albemarle. “It was hard to pay for extra cleaning and sanitation supplies and things needed to stay open but I did use my credit cards a lot. Aids work with what I could pay at the time. I did receive some help but not enough.”

Bumpass. “Received PPP!”

Sperryville. “Half of my enrollment were teacher's children. They pulled their kids out and opted to not pay me even though they are still getting paid and my daycare remained open.”

Deltaville. “Lots of our parents had their hours cut or lost their jobs-so in all good conscience-I could not see making them pay me if their children were not there.”

Loudon. “Never head back from CARES grant.”

Herndon. “I lost my tax ID letter and I tried to contact the IRS but they were not accepting any calls due to Covid-19. On their website I searched but couldn't find the right information so I wasn't able to apply for the small business loan or unemployment.”

Bealeton. “CARES grant was a very difficult process. Denied unemployment.”

Remington. “Denied by SBA.”

Alexandria. “SBA was denied. Reason- not enough payroll info, and credit score (I have over 835) so just didn't want to give it as forgivable loan when you ask for \$1000.00 but they don't even know how much I was planning to borrow. It was through paypal loan services!”

Fairfax. “I did apply for unemployment due to the decrease of the operation but didn't get any response, total ignoring!!!”

Falls Church. “This comes down to having some families that could not pay, some families that could, but having to reduce pay for my staff because they were either being furloughed or laid off.”

Fairfax. “Home child care does not qualify for anything else it seems.”

Portsmouth. “I applied for CARES Grant and VEC but haven't received anything from either one of the programs.”

Woodbridge. “I applied for PUA and have not received anything.”

Burke. “I applied for the small business loan but was worried about paying it back so I did not accept it.”

Harrisonburg. “I chose not to utilize the Small Business Loan because I did not want to be in debt.”

Springfield. “I applied for unemployment was approved but haven’t received anything and it’s week 17. My SBA loan was denied due to bankruptcy but that was 5 years ago and was about to be discharged before this COVID crisis broke out. I’m truly struggling.”

Fairfax. “I am applying for aid because even though I am working I have lost half of my income.”

Arlington. “I did not have information on anything that I could apply for as a family provider.”

Evington. “I didn’t get the loan. It said my credit wasn’t good but it’s in the 700’s.”

Portsmouth. “I didn’t know I can get unemployment.”

Chantilly. “I have been refused. This is disappointing considering the new equipment we are having to purchase and not having revenue coming in for 4 months.”

Norfolk. “I sent an email in to apply for the Cares Grant. I needed help filling it out but no one responded to help me. I would like to have filed for the grant, but need help. Not good with a computer.”

Fairfax. “I try to apply for CARES but my application was denied because I have problems with my email and my application was one day late.”

Brandy Station. “I would not like to disclose if I applied for anything or not. The entire process of everything was overwhelming and not simple to follow for the family childcare business owners.”

Fairfax. “I was denied for small business help and denied for unemployment.”

Arlington. “I was not applying for anything and did not understand what I could do as a family provider. Plus my husband was in the hospital with COVID. Very hard time and overwhelming to understand what to do.”

Chantilly. “I was not aware of what I could apply for as a family child care provider. Too overwhelmed to understand what to do.”

Burke. “I’ve had no success with receiving unemployment or any other funding.”

Suffolk. “Wasn’t approved for unemployment or gov.com.”

Martinsville. “Due to COVID, my pay cut. I’m barely making enough to pay my bills and it appears that I can’t even get approved for unemployment.”

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

Center-based Programs:

Henrico. “I have had to pull from our personal family money to stay open. The grant money is nice but for a small daycare like mine it doesn’t cover rent. I am thankful for the help but it just isn’t enough. I haven’t closed a day so that my parents could continue to work as long as they had jobs.”

Sterling. “Lack of enrollment, cleaning supplies, protective gear, revenue, furloughed staff, not prepared, the uncertainty of facts, and lack of resources pertaining to child care and COVID -19 to support us in communicating with our families.”

Danville. “Children not attending caused a financial impact on the center and not having enough cleaning supplies.”

Henrico. “50% of my children are at home with their parents while working from home.”

Reston. “Having been in business for 31 years, this is the 1st time I was concerned about not being able to meet the needs of my families and staff. Having to lay off 2 assistants was hard to do, I kept them on as long as I could and went several weeks without pay myself. Having parents not wanting to pay and/or leaving was also hard because we (myself/staff/children) were not able to say good bye. Financially this has been hard on all of us.”

Spotsylvania. “I have lost so much income due to the state guidelines. Which helps me keep my doors open. I can't find staff to hire. I have had over 100 people apply, have called 22 and only 7 called me back. Out of the 7, 3 showed up for an interview and I hired 1. We had to lessen our hours due to staffing. I cant raise tuition due to COVID because a lot of my parents are working paycheck to paycheck to keep their heads above water. Due to the cut in enrollment (where I was running between 90-95% building capacity and now only able to run at 60%) I am not able to give annual raises and cant afford to bring on new teachers to help because I don't have the money for salaries. Plus once I tell them what I can offer pay-wise, I hear that they make more off unemployment (which is super frustrating). We aren't allowing families into our facility to help with the spread of germs. Which is killing us because we have had to add staff to run children to and from the door. In order to run an effective program and meeting the needs of each child there are no places to cut. We need to open back up. If we are keeping the same cleaning practices, there should be no reason that we can't.”

Palmyra. “In March we had almost 68 kids and now on our best day we have 16. Payroll, rent, insurance, food, vehicle payments, credit card payments etc. are all adding up faster than we can pay them. It has been a true challenge and we are not sure how many more weeks we can sustain ourselves with our lack of enrollment.”

Leesburg. “Increased need for staffing to maintain all protocol and procedures for group sizes, staff fear, unclear guidelines in some areas for what if scenarios and worrying about closing the entire facility for two weeks if an outbreak, the logistics and operations involved with spending more than revenue will bring in to operate, coordinating transitions to keep cleaning procedures, social distancing, sanitizing-all required extra staff. The feeling of not being able to hug an upset child was disturbing to many staff.”

Glen Allen. “Many parents are nervous to return, and will likely keep their children home for as long as they can.”

Pulaski. “Nightmare to our program and longevity. Concerned on keeping doors open as we look at reopening.”

Kilmarnock. “Our program is running at about half capacity and a third of the staff. Our infant center and service to children under the age of 3 has been postponed.”

Woodbridge. “Parents are afraid and not sending their children unless absolutely necessary. With the low numbers we currently have, I wouldn't be able to open if it wasn't for the PPP money we received.”

Fredericksburg. “Research states recovery time for a childcare center is 18 to 30 months after an economic recession. My concern is the ability of recovery under the severity of the immediate impact from the pandemic. As with most small businesses, the future is unknown when working closely with people and young children. Will we be able to survive at the enrollment level for the next 30 months?”

Virginia Beach. “Stress related, for owners and staff. Counseling access mental health would have been appreciated.”

King George. “The stress of operating in this environment will have a lasting impact on our business.”

Williamsburg. “The stress on children, families and staff in the middle of this pandemic can not be overstated. We have been open since June and the level of stress can be felt throughout the school, every day. Everyone is working hard and doing great things, but at what cost to their own mental health? Many teachers are not trained to deal with child trauma and this can be difficult as well.”

Bristow. “This has been a difficult experience for our school community. The strict mandate was certainly necessary to help bend the curve, but the State of Virginia did not provide enough financial support to early childhood programs, and this support is still lacking. I am afraid that the school will not be able to continue operating under these circumstances. Not allowing mixing of groups is a sound public health policy, but it is the one that prevents us from providing extended hours of operations for the families and forcing the school to cut the hours or laying off some talented, hard-working staff members.”

Arlington. “We are CLOSED. We need help to figure out how to reopen safely.”

Norfolk. “We are going to be opening under unsustainable conditions with an unknown level of risk over time. As an industry that is chronically financially stressed and undercapitalized, our businesses and workers are being asked to work under conditions that are high risk, without very much PPE equipment, and many employees without health insurance.”



Blacksburg. “We barely break-even when our program is 100% enrolled. We are only about 60% enrolled now with almost same number of teachers needed (employee expenses, payroll/benefits are 72% of our budget). When PPP and CARES Grant funds run out, I don't know how we will make it. We estimate that at the rate we are "bleeding" financially, in April we will completely run out of funds. If we go backwards in Phases/group sizes/stay-home orders, this timeline shrinks. Extending the PPP date beyond Dec 31 may be helpful for some programs. Another round of PPP funding will be needed to get beyond winter.”

Home-based Providers:

Laurel. “I need to continue my child care service. It's my only income. Bills are stacking up and many owners have closed permanently.”

Alexandria. “Personally, it has affected me a lot, it is my source of employment and I have nothing else to live on.”

Woodbridge. “I never closed but the parents decided to keep their children home.”

Richmond. “A huge impact on us academically, financially, emotionally, economically and so many missed opportunities to learn.”

Stafford. “I have been able to stay open due to the creditors delaying payments.”

Fredericksburg. “All the restrictions and guidelines have cut our income but increased our operating expenses. I feel like none of that is being considered as the government agencies make decisions.”

Spring Grove. “Electric bill high due to extra laundry daily. Finding some food items is a little harder. Finding disinfecting products is difficult.”

Alexandria. “I did not know about what I could apply for as a family provider.”

Virginia Beach. “Stress related, for owners and staff. Counseling access mental health would have been appreciated.”

Tappahannock. “First, we are the only essential personnel that has not been recognized for the sacrifices we have made for our families and our own health. Not even a thank you from our great government. Then we are asked to fill out grant request over 3 weeks ago and haven't heard a thing. There are people receiving unemployment checks every week and making more money than when they worked full time. My income is down 2,000 a month. I still have to feed these children, provide a safe place and keep everything as normal as I can. No help from no one.”

Ashburn. “I am having financial difficulties to keep open. Parents reduce the days they need us. I never know how much money comes weekly.”

Warrenton. “I had 5 kids withdraw within an hour after the Governor closed schools for the rest of the school year because their parents worked for a school district. That's \$5,000 of income/ month lost at the same time! That was everything I use to pay my staff. I'm not having luck finding new families.”

Portsmouth. “I had to go in my savings and use money. Along with receiving money from my children.”

Norfolk. “I had to pay people to take me back and forth to a store looking for sanitizer, tissues and soap. Money I didn't have but had to try to find the things needed. I spent money that I didn't have.”

Stafford. “I had to refinance my house to stay afloat. We are hoping to get our kids back, to pay the bills.”

Martinsville. “I had a decrease in attendance, losing several children during the pandemic which was a great financial strain on my business and my family. Staying open was asked of the childcare community so I did that and have remained open throughout. Operating with a decreased number of children as required by the state made it difficult to maintain the finances needed to remain open. With a strict budget I managed to keep open. I also had and still have some trouble finding proper cleaning supplies and food for meals. There is a drastic increase in my working hours due to the extra cleaning each day, as well as the heavy cleaning which has to occur on the weekends when no children are present. There is a new stress factor along with the pandemic because of the fear of the children in my care, as well as me and my family contracting COVID and/or spreading it to the children or my family. Lots of normal procedures had to change and be replaced which created added stress to the day.”

Danville. “I have had some problems obtaining cleaning supplies. I have had a rude response from a store manager about supplies regardless of the letter presented of our needs.”

Manassas. “I have been very lucky that I did not lose income. However, all the extra purchases to keep the children safe has been hard. Stress level of "what if's" is off the charts. It's a huge responsibility keeping everyone safe.”

Newport News. “I understand how the shortage of safe, quality child care will impact the lives of many families. I would like to help and make changes in my family day care program to accommodate the care for young school age children to provide a safe environment for them to continue their Virtual Learning. Teachers have my support and priority.”