



# PANDEMIC CHILD CARE LESSONS FROM CENTRAL OHIO

In the COVID-19 crisis, child care providers answered the call to care for children whose parents work in essential services. Child care in the pandemic also means many programs are shuttered and parents are struggling to find makeshift arrangements for children while they work.

More than 70 percent of the 1,125 licensed child care providers operating in Central Ohio in February were closed with estimates as high as 11,690 employees out of work.

The pandemic has revealed underlying realities: child care is essential, and the child care sector is strained. **Child care is not just a business. It's vital infrastructure like roads and schools.** It requires additional support so families and business can count on child care the same way they count on other infrastructure.

The experience of two months of operating under the Temporary Pandemic Child Care license for essential families suggests areas of concern ahead:

- Strained business model
- Staffing challenges
- Adequate resourcing for pandemic operation

**70+%**

child care programs closed

**11,690**

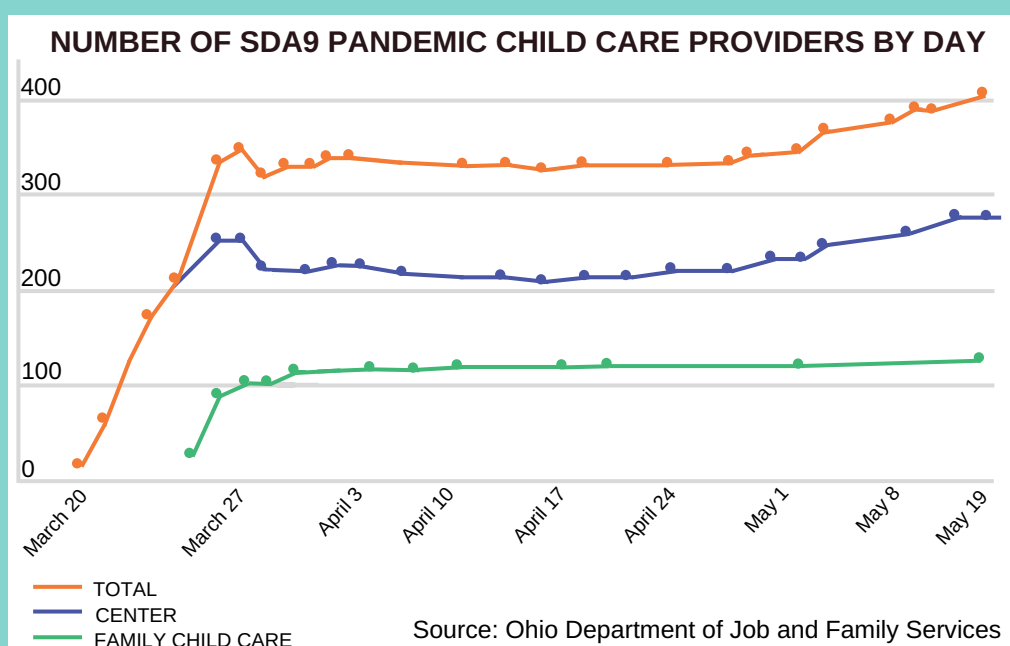
employees out of work



## WHAT IS PANDEMIC CHILD CARE?

To stem the advance of COVID-19, between March 26 and May 31, 2020, Ohio restricted child care to essential workers and limited it to providers who were approved for a new Temporary Pandemic Child Care (TPCC) license.

These licenses require *lower teacher-child ratios, smaller group sizes, and enhanced cleaning and communicable disease prevention steps* specified by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). On May 31, child care, under similar requirements in Ohio was reopened to all families.



## STEPPING UP FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Of Central Ohio's 1,125 pre-pandemic child care programs, nearly 800 were closed at the state's order on March 25. However, one-third of those pre-pandemic licensed programs answered the call to serve the child care needs of families with essential workers under the new temporary pandemic license.

# INVESTMENTS IN QUALITY, SUBSIDY AND HOME-BASED CARE PAID OFF

Three sometimes overlapping child care groups that answered the call are:

1. Child care providers who participate in Ohio's Publicly-Funded Child Care tuition assistance program.
2. Child care programs that demonstrated commitment to quality.
3. Family Child Care providers.

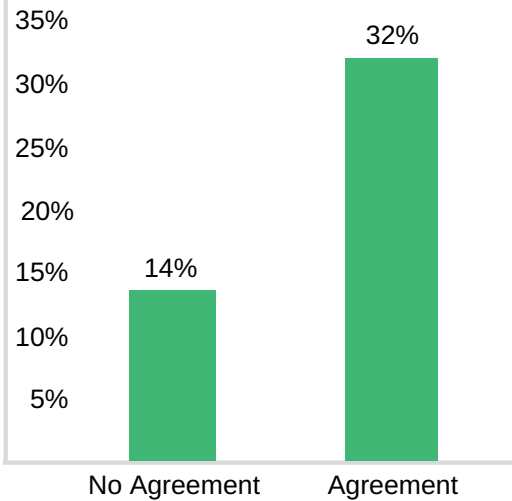
**Data show that state and federal investments in subsidies to access these three types of programs proved their return during this crisis.**

Child care providers participating in the PFCC program, which assists eligible families in affording child care, were more than twice as likely to provide licensed pandemic child care than providers who are wholly privately funded. During the pandemic closure period, ODJFS continued to make "closure payments" to PFCC providers, which also may have helped ease the burden of operating under a pandemic license.

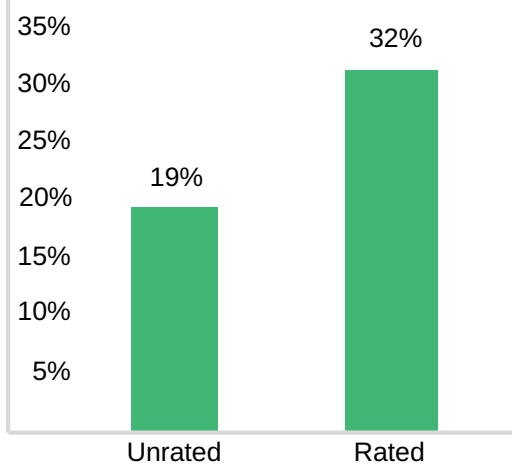
Providers participating in Ohio's quality rating and improvement system, Step Up To Quality, also were more likely to provide licensed pandemic child care. However, the highest rated 5-star child care programs were only marginally more likely (23%) than unrated providers (19%) to operate under a pandemic license.

**In-home Family Child Care programs were almost twice as likely to operate under the TPCC license than were centers.** These are largely 1-woman sole-proprietor businesses for which closing was not an option, and the TPCC child:adult ratio and group size limits were similar to pre-COVID-19 requirements.

**PFCC AND PANDEMIC CHILD CARE**



**SUTQ AND PANDEMIC CARE**



## TOP 5 REASONS

### For Becoming a Licensed Pandemic Child Care Program

1. To support the broader community
2. To continue to support the families of essential workers already enrolled in my program
3. To support the families of essential workers
4. To avoid financial implications of closing
5. To keep current staff employed

Source: Groundwork Ohio, COVID-19 Survey Response, April 2020

# PANDEMIC CHILD CARE IS DIFFICULT AND MAY NOT BE SUSTAINABLE

Most child care providers could not provide pandemic child care, and some who did had to eventually pull back. In fact, one in five providers (19%) approved to operate under the temporary pandemic license, closed or never actually provided pandemic-licensed care. The quit rate was three times greater for centers than for In-home care providers.

Why so difficult? Child care administrators described several challenges with operating under the TPCC license. **At the heart of it is a math problem: too few children could be enrolled at prevailing tuition to yield enough revenue to cover increased costs.**

New rules, intended to reduce the virus' spread, limited adult-to-child ratios to 1:6 and capped each room at 6 children. With rates set by the state and limited ability to raise tuition, given this math providers in many cases were losing thousands of dollars per center per week. Faced with this reality, for some it made more sense to lay off staff who could earn more from pandemic unemployment than the center could support serving a lower student enrollment.



## TOP CHALLENGES

1. Health concerns and risks
2. Strict rules for ratios; 6 per room per teacher
3. Not enough qualified staff
4. Higher operating costs
5. Lack of supplies and access to PPE

Source: AFC Provider Survey, May 2020

## LOOKING AHEAD

The two months experience of providing child care for essential workers suggests continuing concerns as child care reopens:

**Strained business model** – If the pandemic requires that ratios and group size remain low, unless tuition or government payments increase significantly, revenue will remain below operating costs. Child care programs will continue to close, straining our families and restricting our economy.

**Staffing challenges** – Providers remain concerned about the availability of staff. Already a challenge in Central Ohio's tight pre-pandemic labor market, recruiting and retaining child care teachers may be made more difficult given pandemic safety concerns.

**Adequate resourcing for pandemic operation** – Operating under the new pandemic rules requires even more cleaning supplies, safety materials and personal protective equipment than normal. With nearly 70 percent of providers reporting difficulty in obtaining supplies needed, it remains to be seen that child care providers' needs can adequately be met from existing supply chains.

## Commonly Needed Supplies

- Disinfectant wipes & spray
- Hand sanitizer
- Disposable gloves
- Face masks
- Thermometers (esp. touchless)
- Paper towels
- Hand soap
- Toilet paper
- Food
- Laundry detergent

# ALL CHILD CARE PROVIDERS ARE HEROES

Whether choosing to operate under a Temporary Pandemic Child Care license, or closing their doors to stop the spread of COVID-19, child care providers were doing what's best for our community and the children who grow up here. They did so while facing uncertainty and at considerable financial cost.

Now, some of those programs that have been temporarily closed are reopening their doors to all families, but under challenging circumstances. Will families return, and when? How do we keep operating if revenue remains below expenses?

We count on child care to be there, just like the roads that take us to work daily. These everyday heroes deserve our respect, recognition, and reward.

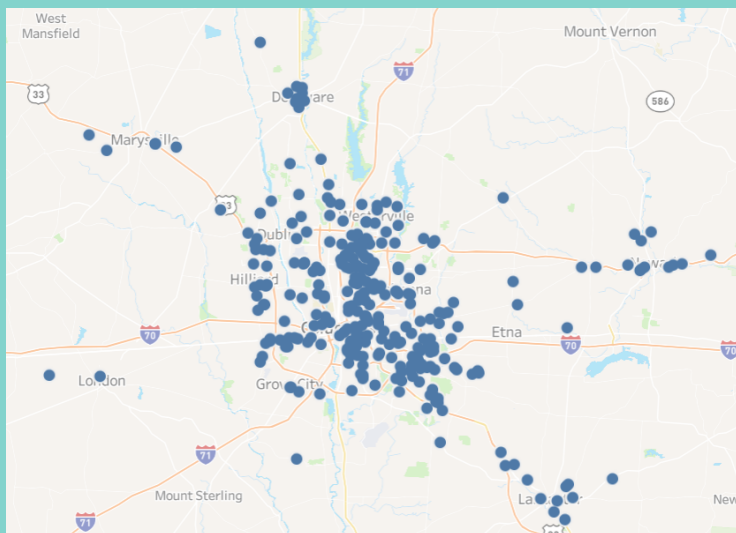


## HOW WE CAN HELP

Understanding the strains these everyday heroes are working under and showing them the kindness they deserve is a good place to start. Action for Children has taken a number of steps to support families and providers during the pandemic:

- **Deploying a displaced child care worker interest tool** to identify trained and skilled professionals out of work and connect them with open centers
- **Convening a Critical Child Care Network** where child care providers can connect with each other and find resources, identify issues, and develop and advocate for solutions

### Temporary Pandemic Child Care Programs in Central Ohio



view the map at [www.actionforchildren.org/choosing-child-care](http://www.actionforchildren.org/choosing-child-care)

- **Connecting families to child care programs** – with the use of our first-in-the-state interactive map, parents found it easier to find pandemic care close to work/home, and our staff received calls and emails to help them meet their needs even further
- **Launching the Child Care Affordability Scholarship Fund** to assist families in paying pandemic tuition when they are do not qualify for PFCC
- **Marshalling public and private funds** to provide grants for supplies and establish an Early Childhood Resource Bank to improve the experience providers are able to offer young children

## ABOUT US

Action for Children is the child care resource and referral agency for Central Ohio; serving Columbus and Franklin County, as well as Delaware, Fairfield, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union Counties. Our mission is to transform the lives of children through the adults that matter most in their lives – their parents, caregivers, and teachers.

## JOIN US

Visit [www.actionforchildren.org](http://www.actionforchildren.org) to sign up for our newsletters and take action for child care. Share your story on social media to tell everyone that **#ChildCareIsEssential**



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