

UNRAVELING THE CHILDCARE CRISIS

By Jaimie Hutchison, MA, LPC
Deputy Director, MSU WorkLife Office

School systems across the country are in a fluid planning stage on how to return students to school during the international COVID pandemic. Many of the decisions of how to return y6children to school have created additional childcare responsibilities for working parents. The most significant challenge is trying to work full time while monitoring and supporting your child's online, remote, hybrid or in person learning. This has also led to supervisors and leaders scrambling on how to manage the work getting done with the needs of working parents. Dissecting the data can help see a full picture of what the challenges are.

Most parents of school-aged children work

- In 2019, 76% of mothers and 92% of fathers with school-aged children were employed.
- On average, working parents need at least 43.5 hours of childcare coverage for their children.
- School is normally about 30 hours per week, so most parents need childcare 13.5 hours per week per child (pre-COVID).
- For children doing distanced learning, parents now need 43.5 hours of care for their children (during COVID).

CHILDCARE NEEDS HAVE TRIPLED FOR MOST WORKING PARENTS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC.

How much could this cost families?

- It is hard to estimate the costs of these additional hours, due to the uncertainty of what kinds of care will be available, how much providers will charge, what parents can afford and what parents will use.
- **Costs are estimated to be doubling or tripling for families.**
- Even before the pandemic, parents were struggling to pay for childcare. The estimated childcare cost was \$100-\$125 per week (some costs were much higher), **per school-aged child.**
- Previous childcare providers/centers may not be available at this time.

Challenges facing caregivers and after school childcare centers

- Program closures, temporary and permanent.
- Loss of facilities, if schools are closed, many on-site before and aftercare programs are closed.
- Many childcare providers and aids have not returned to the workforce (34% of childcare workers are no longer in the workforce in this industry-April 2020 vs. June 2019).
- Increased costs due to new health and safety requirements.
- Reductions in number of children served.
- New limitations on group size.
- Changing demands stemming from parental job loss and/or reduced income.
- Changing parent preferences.
- Concerns about possible exposure in group settings.
- Different requirements and demands for children (masks for all kids over 2).
- Concerns about transporting children (buses/vans) while maintaining social distancing.
- Staff and caregiver concerns about being exposed to the virus while caring for groups of children.

Concerns of parents

- Challenges and reductions in capacity in after-school based programs.
- Reduction of childcare center and caregiving staff.
- Health concerns about children in care with others.
- Health concerns if a member of the family is high risk.
- Home based care is more flexible, but more expensive and possibly less available.
- Transportation concerns (bus, hours of transportation needed if hybrid or shortened day, availability).
- If a child is ill, they must be quarantined at home with the working parent.
- If provider is ill, they cannot care for the child.
- Pods are increasing in a home-based care system. This system benefits those who have the financial ability to afford care, and safe, available networks to share duties with.
- The potential for those attending school in person to closures due to the pandemic and have a shift in needs.
- No way to plan ahead or plan for constantly changing demands.
- Feelings of burnout amongst parents who are already reporting an increase in caregiving activities.
- Mental fatigue, exhaustion, anxiety and depression on the rise for children and parents.

ACCORDING TO AN URBAN INSTITUTE POLICY PAPER PUBLISHED IN JULY, 2020, THE IMPLICATIONS FOR **FAILING TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES** WILL CREATE NEGATIVE OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS, CHILDREN, AFTER-SCHOOL AND CHILDCARE PROVIDERS, EMPLOYERS AND THE LARGER ECONOMY. THE COSTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LIKELY TO BE BORNE BY WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, BOTH OF WHICH FACE SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES AND BARRIERS.

Women are more likely to drop out of the labor force and reduce family financial well-being

- 40% of all households, and 67.5% of Black households with children report the mother was the equal, primary or sole breadwinner for the family (Frye, 2020)
- Parents who are unable to afford care they trust may leave their children unsupervised. This was a concern pre-COVID and continues to be.

Recommendations for Employers and Supervisors

While there are no one-size fits all recommendations to “fix” every childcare need (there are not enough childcare providers nor resources to go around), there are several recommendations that may be able to assist with many of the concerns raised by parents and employers. Given that the individual differences of each situation may create anxiety or tension for people, we ask for everyone involved to creatively problem-solve each situation by being flexible and compassionate in order to protect our collective well-being.

- Support a parent’s ability to make the choices they believe are the best for their child, family and circumstances.
- Prioritize strategies that support working families who face the greatest risks and inequities including:
 - Parents who must continue to work outside the home.
 - Parents who have individual or family risk factors for COVID.
 - Parents of children with special needs.
- Accommodate changing schedules/hours of required work.
- Support the ability of parents to care for their children without jeopardizing their employment.
- Follow the [decision making model](#).
- Lead with compassion.
- Provide flexible options for work schedules and locations.
- Put employees first.
- Make employees aware of the [MSU Backup Dependent Care](#) program.
- Share [Care.com/msu](#) resources with employees (free to search with MSU NetID).

- Revisit priorities set before the onset of Covid-19.
- Move deadlines that can be moved.
- Rethink performance reviews.
- Remove low priority tasks from the to-do list.
- Communicate transparently.
- Refer to the [WorkLife Office](#) for family, workplace, career or resource referral assistance.
- Provide information on [quaranteaming](#).

Recommendations for Parents

- Have compassion for yourself and your child(ren), this is hard. You are doing your best.
- Be flexible. There may be times when your child isn't able to complete something without your support.
- Utilize teachers and peers for help with schoolwork.
- Divide and conquer if there are others that can assist, set a schedule. Even older children can help younger children with some tasks.
- If remote learning is new for your student and for you, you'll have to give yourselves time to adjust to a new schedule and a new way of working together. But by being patient, you'll get to see your child make progress.

Routines

- Utilize transparent communication and let your supervisor know what your needs are.
- Create designated workspaces for each person at home.
- Set a schedule. Most people do better on a schedule, including wake and sleep times, meals, etc.
- Discuss boundaries, when can children ask for things, when are you not available except for emergencies.
- Set times to check in on your child's emotional well-being. This is a hard time and a new experience for most of us.
- Get a head start, many parents who work from home say they get their best work done early in the morning.
- Where possible, plan your child's learning schedule around your work schedule.
- Make sure the activities that require the most support and input from you are done during the times you're available to help your student.
- Designate your working hours for independent reading and subjects your child has an easier time digesting.

Planning

- Utilize to-do lists. Without clearly defined to-do lists, your child has a higher likelihood of becoming distracted or straying from his or her studies.
- Make use of planning tools. Get your child used to managing their planner early.
- For full-time working parents, evenings and weekends are usually the best times to dedicate to being a hands-on Learning Coach.

- For part-time workers, it may be mornings, afternoons, or evenings that work best.
- Set aside another time to work on that assignment and encourage your child to continue working on the things that come more easily when you are not readily available.

Every family has different stressors, needs and unique circumstances. These strategies are intended to be a starting point and have proven helpful for many families to navigate their situations. You and your family will know best which strategies to use to continue to adjust to these uncertain times. Similarly, Every workplace at MSU has different missions, priorities, and personnel structures. These strategies are intended to assist in developing an operating framework that supports the people in your organizations while enabling workplace success.

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