



Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Young Children,  
their Families, and Child Care Needs in South Carolina



**COVID-19**  
**CHILD CARE SURVEY**

SEPTEMBER 2020  
\*updated 2/1/2022



## South Carolina is in the midst of a child care crisis. How are parents and caregivers of young children handling it?

The South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council, the United Way Association of South Carolina, and South Carolina First Steps, with the support of the Alliance for Early Success, went directly to parents and caregivers of young children to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their needs, experiences, and attitudes around child care.

Representing the voices of 1,245 parents and caregivers from 42 of 46 counties across the state, the *COVID-19 Child Care Survey* offers policymakers, advocates, and stakeholders timely insights into the status of families with children from birth through age five. This report aims to advance and inform data-driven, family-centered solutions to restoring and strengthening our state's early childhood system.



South Carolina  
**Early Childhood  
Advisory Council**



United Way Association



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*The COVID-19 Child Care Survey was administered online through SurveyMonkey over a one-month period, from Friday, July 10 to Sunday, August 9, 2020. It was offered in both English and Spanish. Less than 1% (9 respondents) completed the survey in Spanish.*

## INTRODUCTION

# Under normal circumstances, the nation's child care infrastructure is fragile and fragmented.

Child care supply is limited, with 51 percent of the nation categorized as a child care desert. According to the Center for American Progress, those disproportionately affected by child care deserts include those in rural areas and Hispanic families. Across the country, the bulk of public investment in child care comes from federal sources. Typically, child care providers are overburdened and under-resourced, and early childhood educators are underpaid, often without benefits.

In South Carolina, the average child care worker makes \$21,000 annually, which for a household of three people is considered at the federal poverty level. When comparing the average hourly wage:

- For every \$1 child care directors make nationally, they make \$0.83 in South Carolina
- For every \$1 child care workers make nationally, they make \$0.82 in South Carolina

There are an estimated 342,999 children under age 6 in South Carolina. Like in most states, child care is a mixed-delivery system and can be difficult for families to navigate. Providers and families blend and braid funding sources for care from an array of options, from traditional child care centers to unpaid and paid home-based care to public schools and everything in between. This array of options allows for family choice; however, families sometimes have to choose accessibility and affordability, at the expense of quality.



My ideal child care situation is not possible because our house is too small. I also do not feel comfortable bringing in a nanny into our house. I do not feel safe, either, sending my child back to daycare right now.

PARENT OF 1 YOUNG CHILD  
Midlands

## INTRODUCTION

# In South Carolina, the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken this infrastructure to its core.

On March 13, 2020, Governor Henry McMaster declared a State of Emergency, as part of South Carolina's initial COVID-19 response. Public schools statewide closed on March 16, 2020. One of the immediate impacts of the pandemic was unemployment. Statewide, the average unemployment rate from March through May 2019 was 3 percent. In 2020, for the same three months, the average rate was 9 percent, a 200 percent increase.

Throughout the pandemic, child care providers in South Carolina have remained open. Some providers have decided at times to close temporarily related to COVID-19 and other circumstances. Providers that temporarily closed are monitored by the SC Department of Social Services, and the closures have been updated regularly on its website, [scchildcare.org](http://scchildcare.org).

As of August 25, 2020, 62 percent of the state is considered a child care desert when temporary closures due to COVID-19 are taken into account. Two out of every three of South Carolina's children under age six reside in these deserts. Even if all centers statewide were open, 42 percent of South Carolina is still considered a child care desert based on licensed, approved, and registered capacity alone, where one out of every two children under age six reside.

<i>As of August 25, 2020</i>	Total providers	Total capacity	Active providers	Active capacity	Difference in providers	Difference in capacity
<b>All licensed, approved, registered providers</b>	2,400	193,526	1,365	106,112	-43%	-45%
<b>Providers located in a public school</b>	277	15,978	1	20	-100%	-100%
<b>Providers located in a child care center</b>	1,379	172,703	822	102,526	-40%	-41%
<b>Group/family child care home providers</b>	744	4,845	542	3,566	-27%	-26%





# COVID-19 CHILD CARE SURVEY

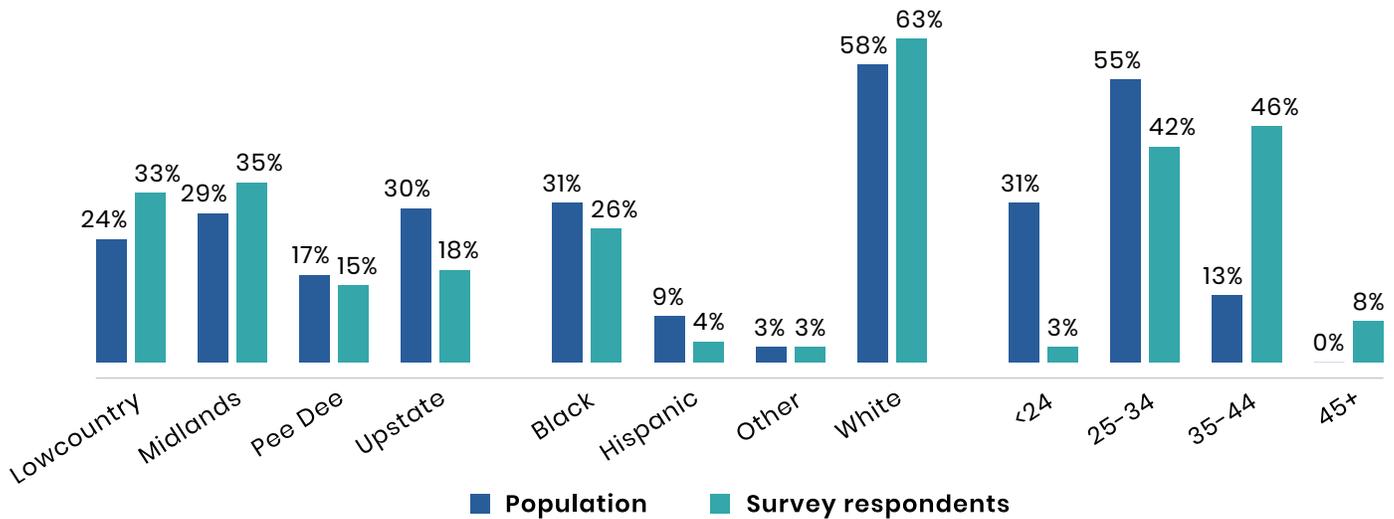
\*updated 2/1/2022

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Disruptions in child care have required parents and caregivers of young children to modify or reduce their work hours.
- 2** Since March 13, 2020, families have relied on unpaid child care as the most common type of child care arrangement.
- 3** Currently available child care options are not adequate for many working families.
- 4** This crisis poses an acute threat to the wellbeing of young children and their families.
- 5** There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

## Respondent Demographics

Our most frequent survey respondents were from the Midlands region; identified as white; and were 35-44 years old. Compared to a proxy population, the following demographics were underrepresented among survey respondents: Pee Dee and Upstate regions; Black and Hispanic respondents; and <35 year olds.



**Figure 1.** Demographic distribution of proxy population (mothers who gave birth in South Carolina from 2014-2018; blue; data source: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, see references on page 16 for details), compared to demographics of survey respondents (teal; number of unknown responses excluded: region [n=285]; race/ethnicity [n=312]; age [n=288]).

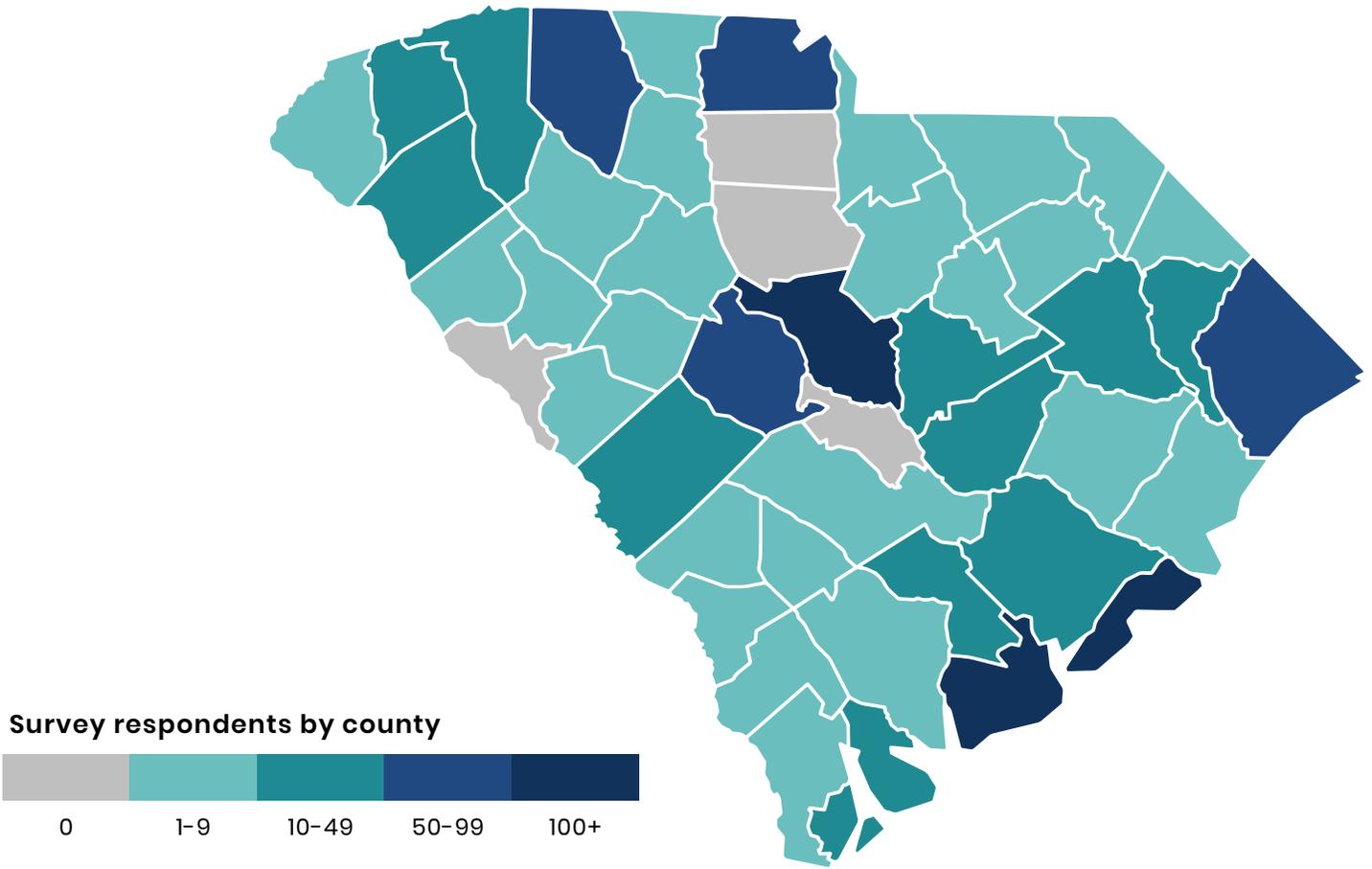
**56%** of respondents worked part-time or full time over the past month

↳ **53%** of them identified as an essential worker



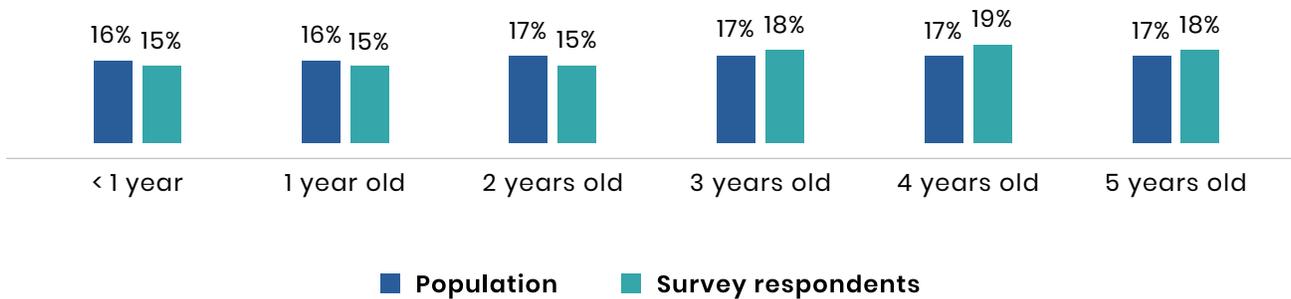
Two full-time working parents cannot possibly provide the optimal level of full-time childcare.

PARENT OF 2 CHILDREN  
Lowcountry



## Young Children of Respondents

Respondents were asked to report the number of children by age who lived in their household. A total of 1,531 children were reported, with all ages represented (figure 2). Compared to the proxy population, those ages 3 and over were overrepresented but not by much.

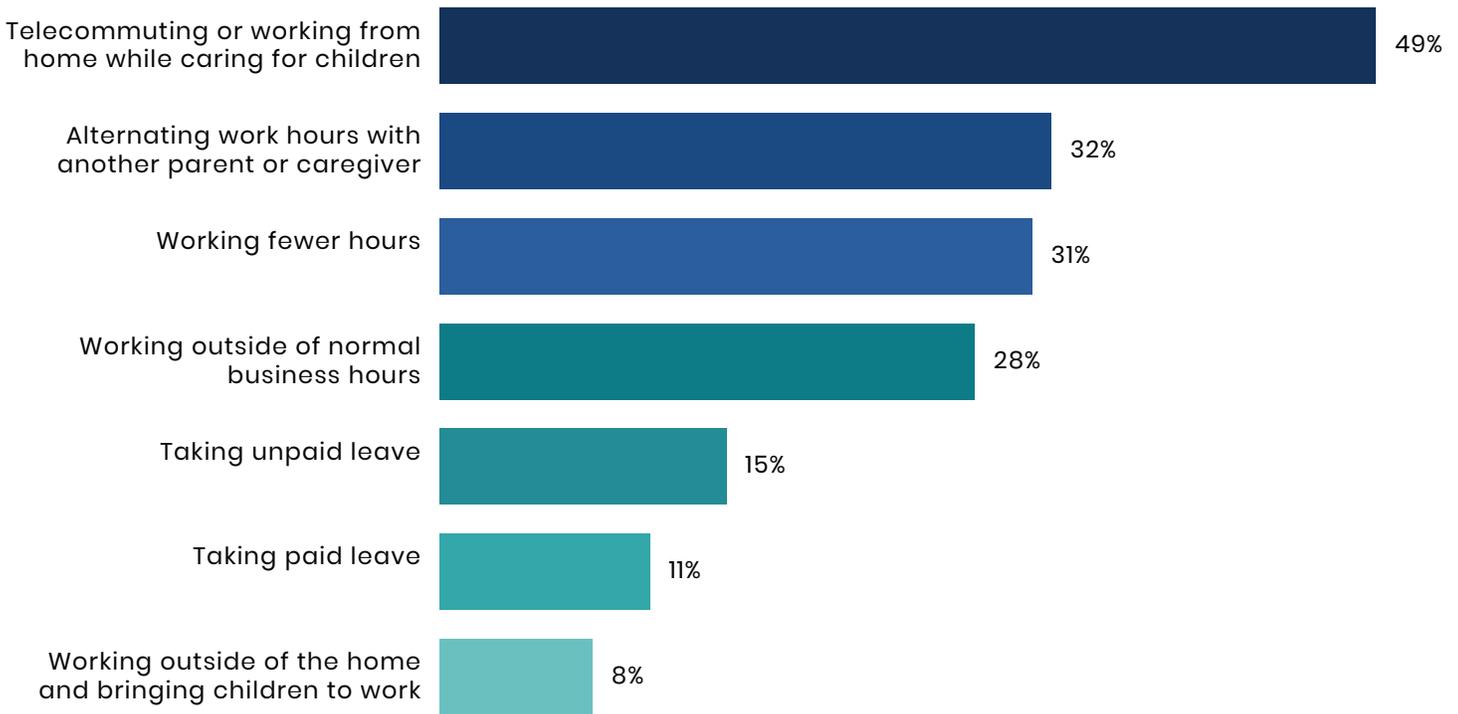


**Figure 2.** Distribution of population by age group (blue; data source: National Center for Health Statistics Bridged Race Estimates, see references for details), compared to age distribution of young children reportedly living in survey respondent’s households (teal; total children reported = 1,531).

# 1

## Disruptions in child care have required parents and caregivers of young children to modify or reduce their work schedules.

Most parents and caregivers are telecommuting, alternating work hours with someone in their household, or working fewer hours in order to provide child care (figure 3). Respondents were asked to report all situations that applied to them or another parent or caregiver in their household.



**Figure 3.** Responses to the question, “Have you or another parent/caregiver in your household experienced any of the following since March 13, 2020? Select all that apply.” Total survey respondents = 1,245.



I’m continuously going from job to job because of child care arrangements. Employers don’t want to work with the hours I can work. It’s hard trying to keep a steady job and having to pay for someone to watch my kids.

PARENT OF 1 YOUNG CHILD  
Lowcountry

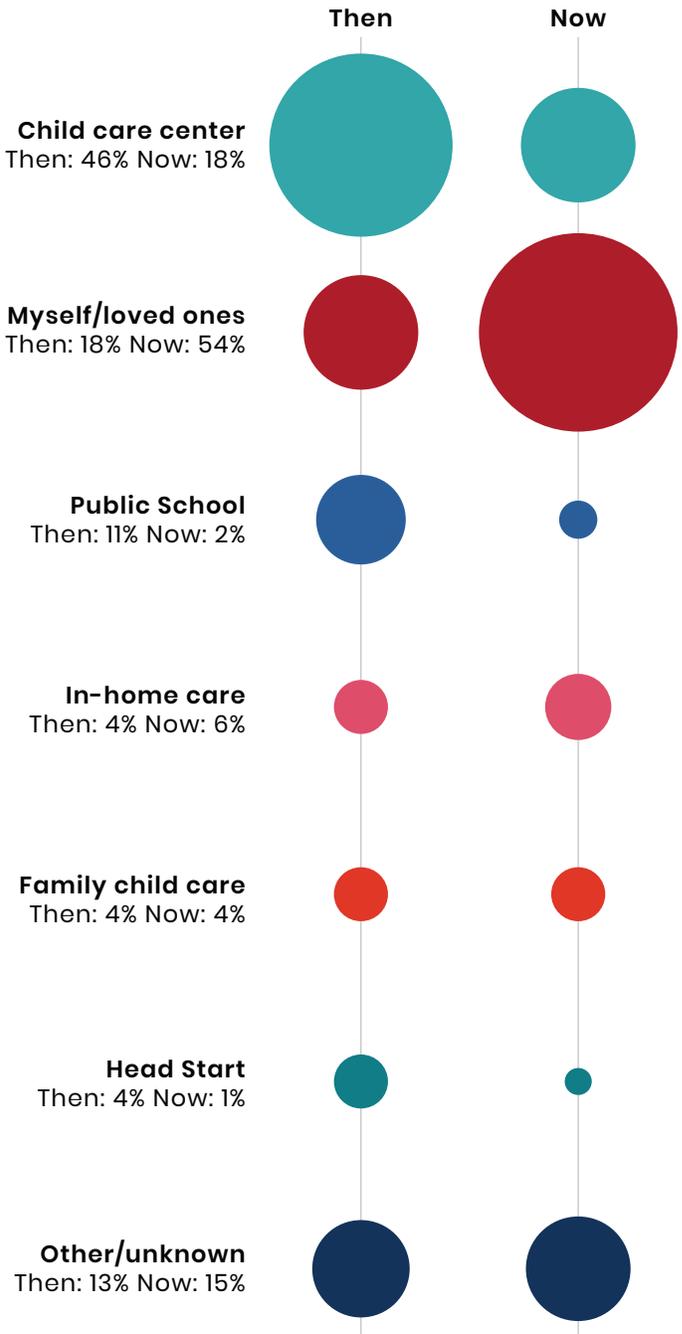
# 2

## Since March 13, 2020, families have relied on unpaid care as the most common type of child care arrangement.

When a state of emergency was declared for the state of South Carolina on March 13, 2020, 46% of respondents were using a child care center, daycare, or preschool as the primary care arrangement for the young children in their households, compared to 18% of respondents at the time of the survey.

Since March, the most common type of child care arrangement has been unpaid care by parents, family or friends. At the time of the survey, 54% or respondents used unpaid care, compared to 18% before the crisis (figure 4).

“  
Unfortunately, we need to be a two income family. With COVID 19 we have become a one income family. We need one parent at home with our immunocompromised child. Before Covid began we weren't as wary of nannies or small daycare centers but now we can not risk it.  
PARENT OF 2 YOUNG CHILDREN  
Pee Dee

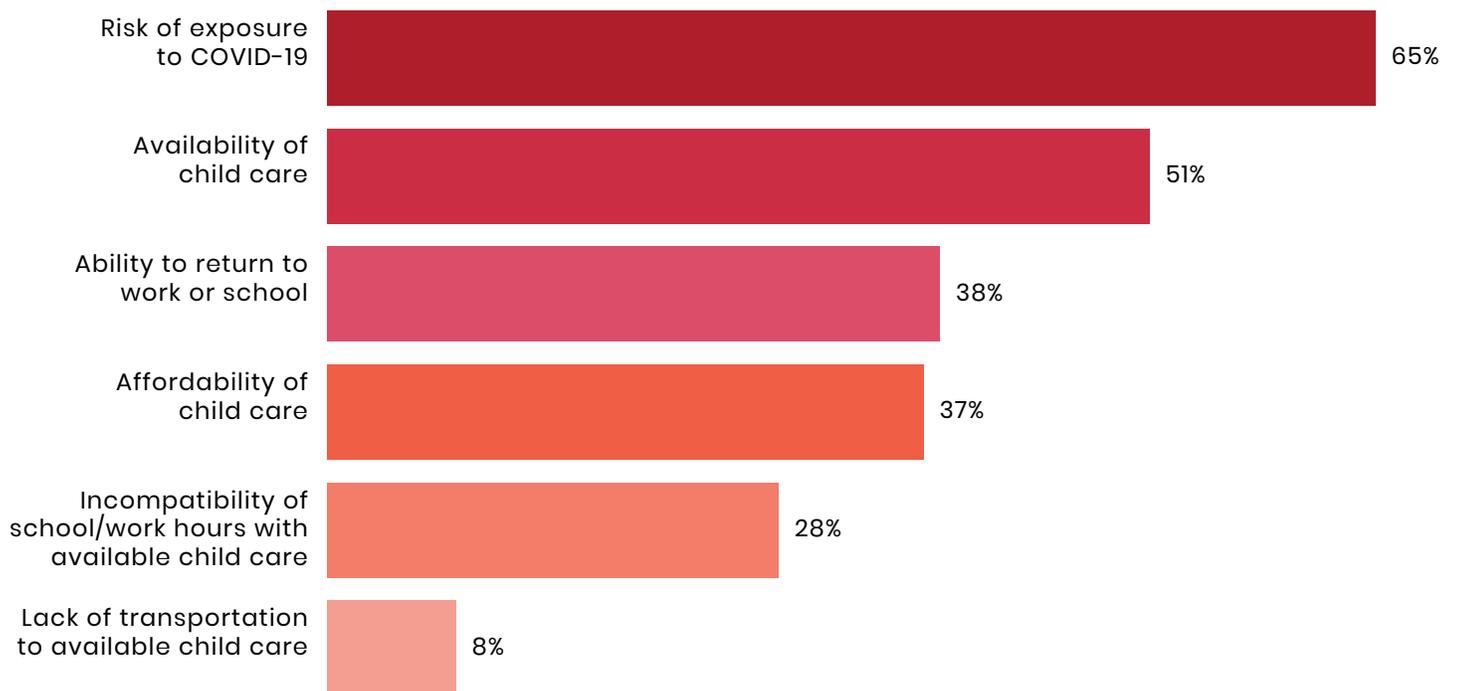


**Figure 4.** Diagram comparing percent of survey respondents' reported main child care arrangements before March 13 ("Then") and at the time of the survey response ("Now"). Total survey respondents = 1,245. "Summer program/camp" not displayed (0% then; <1% now).

# 3

## Currently available child care options are not adequate for many working families.

When thinking about their child care arrangements for the next three months, survey respondents say they are most concerned about the increased likelihood that their child and family may be exposed to COVID-19 (figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Percent of survey respondents reporting that they are very/moderately concerned about these issues; total survey respondents = 1,245 (number of unknown responses excluded: COVID-19 exposure [n=216]; availability [n=214]; return to work/school [n=216]; affordability [n=217]; incompatible hours [n=220]; transportation [n=217]).



My child care was perfect and then my sitter became concerned about leaving her house and catching Covid. I was not worried but she locked herself up in the house and my sitter was gone.

GRANDPARENT OF 2 YOUNG CHILDREN  
Upstate

# 4

## This crisis poses a threat to the wellbeing of young children and their families.



**87%** of parents and caregivers say the pandemic has disrupted their home and family life



**83%** of parents and caregivers say they are more stressed and anxious than usual

**Figure 6.** Percent of survey respondents who reported they slightly/strongly agree to COVID-19 disrupting their home and family life (252 unknown/not applicable responses excluded).

**Figure 7.** Percent of survey respondents who reported that their current level of stress/anxiety as a caregiver is much or somewhat higher than usual (245 unknown responses excluded).



We would prefer to have an in-home nanny to reduce the risk for COVID exposures. At this time, we are not able to afford such an arrangement. We are too concerned about COVID to send our child back to daycare but what we are doing is not sustainable either. I also worry that my child is not getting exposure to other children. Everything about this is hard.

PARENT OF 1 YOUNG CHILD  
Midlands

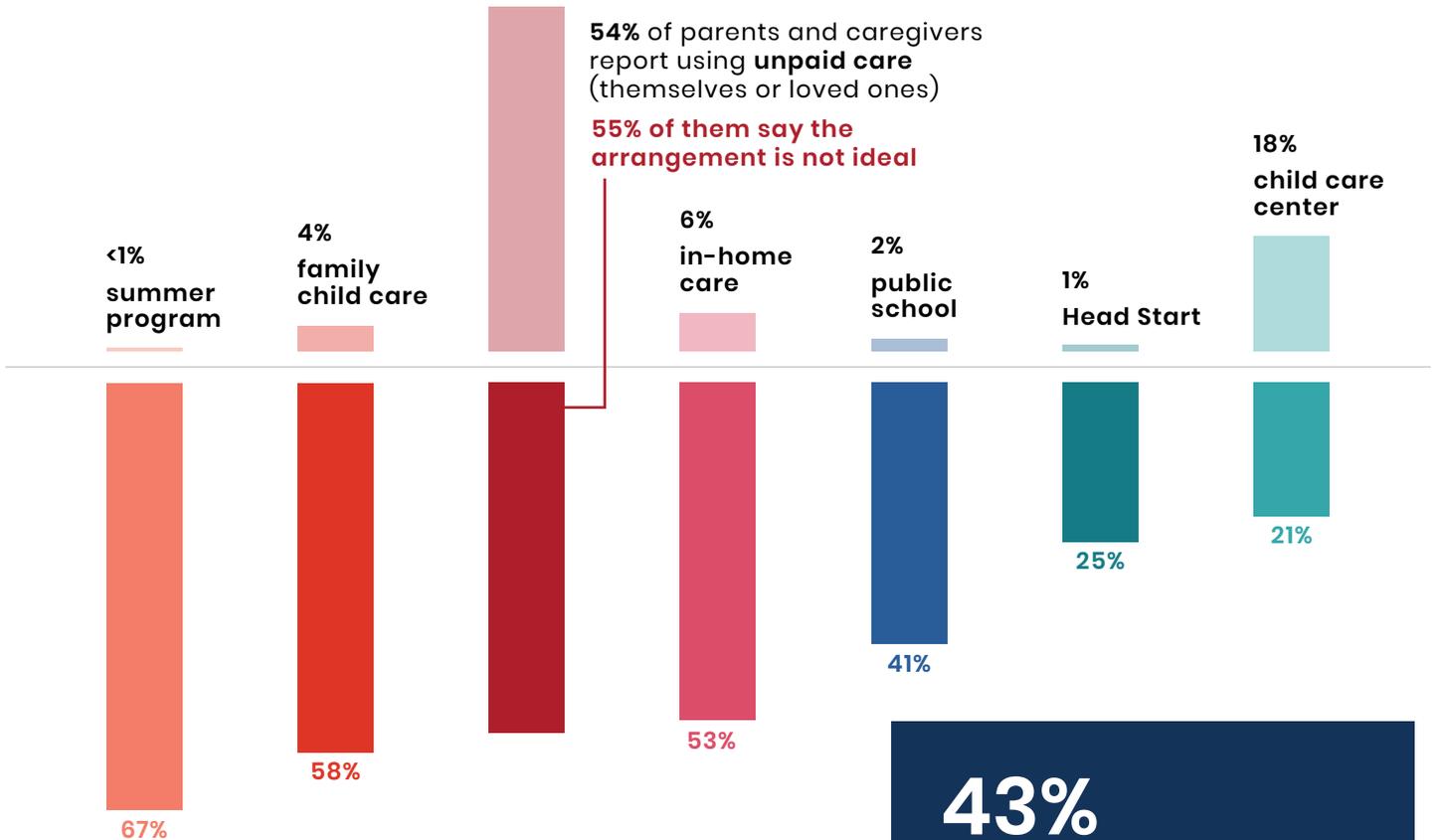
### Parents and Caregivers' Pandemic-Related Worries



**Figure 8.** Percent of survey respondents reporting that they slightly/strongly agree that they worry about these issues; total survey respondents = 1,245 (number of unknown/not applicable responses excluded: opportunities [n=259]; children's mental health [n=260]; respondent mental health [n=262]; basic needs [n=254]; special needs [n=638]).

# 5

## There is no one-size-fits-all solution.



**43%**  
of parents and caregivers say their current child care arrangement is not ideal

**Figure 9.** Percent of survey respondents reporting their main child care arrangement at the time of survey response (above) and the percent of each arrangement who report it as not ideal (below). 15% of respondents who reported “other” care arrangement at the time of response or no response are not displayed, so percentages do not add up to 100%.



My children thrive on routine and right now it isn't there. I have a teenager watching my children because I cannot afford full time daycare for my daughters (aged 14m and 3.5y) and while the kids enjoy her, she isn't the best choice. I'm simply doing what I can make work at the moment. When my kids are in school, they're learning and thriving and recognizing social skills and being stuck at home constantly is not helping them much if at all.

PARENT OF 2 YOUNG CHILDREN  
Pee Dee



## References

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National estimate from “America’s Childcare Deserts in 2018” from the Center for American Progress. Obtained 18 Aug 2020. [Available from: [www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/)]. A child care desert is defined as a census tract with at least 50 children under age 5 with no providers or so few that there are three times as many children as there are child care slots.

Child care director and worker average pay from “May 2019 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates” from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Obtained 18 Aug 2020. [Available from: [www.bls.gov/oes/](http://www.bls.gov/oes/)]. Here, child care directors defined as occupation code 11-9031 (Education and Childcare Administrators, Preschool and Daycare), and child care workers defined as occupation code 39-9011 (Childcare Workers).

2020 Federal Poverty Level from “HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2020” from the US Department of Health and Human Services. Obtained 18 Aug 2020. [Available from: [aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines](http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines)].

Population under age 6 obtained from 2014-2018 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates; Table B17024). US Census Bureau.

### PAGE 5

Unemployment rate. Calculated by Chelsea Richard at SC First Steps using raw data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, SC Dept of Employment & Workforce. Obtained 3 Aug 2020. [Available from: [jobs.scworks.org/vosnet/Default.aspx](http://jobs.scworks.org/vosnet/Default.aspx)].

Child care desert definition from the Center for American Progress. Providers here includes child care centers and group/family child care homes. Obtained 25 Aug 2020. [Available from: [www.schildcare.org](http://www.schildcare.org)]. Calculated by Chelsea Richard, SC First Steps.

Population under age 6 obtained from 2014-2018 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates; Table B17024). US Census Bureau.

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Figure 1: Population based on maternal county of residence, age, and race/ethnicity among South Carolina resident births 2014-2018. Regions based on DHEC definition. Data obtained from South Carolina Community Assessment Network. Office of Vital Statistics, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Obtained 12 Aug 2020. [Available from: <http://scangis.dhec.sc.gov/scan/bdp/tables/birthtable.aspx>].

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Population of children by age group. Calculated by Chelsea Richard, South Carolina First Steps. Raw data obtained from Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Obtained 28 Jul 2020. [Available from [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged\\_race.htm/](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race.htm/)].

## Survey Administration

The “COVID-19 Child Care Survey” was administered through a convenience sample. It was distributed through the Early Childhood Advisory Council, First Steps, and the United Way Associations’ networks via email, social media, and targeted Facebook advertisements. We also engaged statewide and local partners, such as local First Steps partnerships and local United Ways, to disseminate this survey through their networks. The survey was exclusively available online. It was determined that the referenced project is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations, in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

In total, 3,261 responses were received. Those who responded “no” to the question, “Do you live in South Carolina and are the parent or primary caregiver of at least one child under age 6?” were excluded [n=680]. Then, those who reported zero for the number of children under age 6 when asked to report the number of individuals in their household by age group were excluded [n=146]. Finally, for any respondents who entered the drawing for 1 of 10 \$200 Visa gift cards at the end of the survey more than once, only their first response was counted in the final sample [n=4]. The final sample size, after these exclusions, was 2,431 in the first version of the report released on September 1, 2020. Further refinement of our sample was undertaken to exclude those with an IP address outside of South Carolina [n=1,186]. IP addresses were geolocated using [whatsmyip.com](https://whatsmyip.com). While we understand that some South Carolina residents could have IP addresses outside of the state, we decided to be as conservative as possible in our sample exclusions. The final sample size, after these exclusions, was 1,245.

The survey instrument can be found at <https://earlychildhoodsc.org/what-we-do/covid-19-child-care-survey>.

For questions about the survey or to get access to the instrument in SurveyMonkey, please contact Chelsea Richard, Strategic Impact Manager at South Carolina First Steps ([crichard@scfirststeps.org](mailto:crichard@scfirststeps.org)).

## Acknowledgments

First, we would like to extend our gratitude to the survey respondents, as their candid feedback is invaluable to us. Second, we would like to acknowledge the Alliance for Early Success, without whose support and funding this project would not have been possible. Lastly, we would like to acknowledge our national, state, and local partners who gave us feedback on our survey instrument and whose reports were utilized as models for this one, particularly the Children’s Movement of Florida.

## Disclaimer

This report does not represent the views of the South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council, the United Way Association of South Carolina, South Carolina First Steps, or the Alliance for Early Success.

## Suggested Citation

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\* This report title was changed February 1, 2022 to avoid confusion with another similarly-named report/initiative.