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Poll: Nearly 9 in 10 parents of infants and toddlers worry their child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development will suffer as a result of the ongoing pandemic

Faced with the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, parents of infants and toddlers overwhelming support additional public investment in child care, basic needs support, and policies that ensure children are developmentally on track

NEW YORK – Nearly a year into the pandemic, the coronavirus crisis continues to be incredibly disruptive for New York families with infants and toddlers, with more than four in five (83%) parents reporting higher levels of stress than usual and almost nine in 10 (85%) worried that their child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development will suffer because of the crisis, according to a [poll](#) released today.

The poll, released by the Raising NY coalition of parent, early childhood, education, civil rights, business, and health organizations and conducted by Global Strategy Group, also revealed that many of parents’ concerns have been heightened since the start of the pandemic, with the percentage of parents worried about their child’s development increasing an alarming 17 percentage points since an [April poll](#) and the percentage of parents worried about the impact of substance abuse and domestic violence on their families increasing seven percentage points.

Parents also expressed concerns about how the pandemic is impacting their financial security and ability to work, with 60% of parents of infants and toddlers indicating they are worried about job loss or a reduction of hours and 52% saying they are worried about paying for basic expenses.

The poll also found that parents overwhelmingly support investment in programs and supports for families with infants and toddlers, with more than 90% of parents saying they support investment in child care for New Yorkers who live in “child care deserts;” early intervention and preschool special

education evaluations; early childhood education programs that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and linguistically responsive; and home visitation programs.

Among other poll findings:

Pandemic Disruptions

- The pandemic continues to be disruptive to parents and families, and disruptions have disproportionately impacted low-income, Black, and Latinx households who indicated they felt uneasy when thinking about their family's personal financial situation over the next few months (71% low-income, 63% Black, 51% Latinx).
- Parents remain concerned about the health impacts of the coronavirus on their families, with 85% of parents worried that they or someone in their family will contract the coronavirus as a result of their child being in child care/daycare.
- More parents are experiencing an increased level of stress since the start of the pandemic. The poll found that 83% of parents reported an increased level of stress, up from 77% in the April poll.
- Food insecurity continues to be a significant issue for families with infants and toddlers, with 38% of parents reporting they reduced their own or their child's meals during the pandemic. That figure was higher among parents earning less than \$50,000 (52%, up from 39% in April) and Black parents (41%, up from 39% in April).

Concerns about the long-term impact of the pandemic

- Parents are concerned about the long-term impact of the pandemic on their children and families, with 73% concerned about their child being educationally and socially prepared for preschool/kindergarten and 62% of all parents concerned that their child has lost developmental and educational skills they have already learned.
- The majority of all parents (51%) and parents of color (54%) think their child might need counseling or other social emotional support.
- Parents also indicated concerns about their family's well-being, with 75% of parents indicating they worry about their family's mental health and 32% reporting increased worry about the impact of substance abuse and domestic violence on their family, up from 25% from April.

Disruptions to schooling, work, and careers

- Access to affordable high-quality infant and toddler care continues to be a significant issue for parents of infants and toddlers, with 76% of all parents indicating they are concerned about the lack of access, a figure that was even higher among Latinx parents (89%) and New York City parents (81%).
- For many families, the lack of access to affordable high-quality child care comes with financial implications, with 72% of parents saying they have missed work or lost shifts to take care of their child.
- The lack of access to child care is impacting parents at work, with 60% reporting that the limited access impacts their productivity and 56% reporting it has affected their ability to retain a steady job.

- Parents and families are increasingly relying on support from government programs during this time, with 51% saying they are on food assistance programs to help cover the cost of groceries.

Support for increased investment in child care and other supports

- There is overwhelming support for increased investment in high-quality affordable infant and toddler care and other supports that will provide much needed relief to families, with more than 90 percent of parents indicating they support investment in child care for New Yorkers who live in “child care deserts;” early intervention and preschool special education evaluations; early childhood education programs that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and linguistically responsive; and home visitation programs.
- Parents also support additional ways the government can help provide relief and assistance to New York families, with 97% of parents indicating they approve of extending New York’s Empire State Child tax credit to include children under the age of four years to over 400,000 working families and 89% of parents say that they support streamlining the state’s rules around child care co-pays to make it more consistent and affordable for all working families.

These findings underscore the critical need for state leaders to act with the greatest urgency to take steps to support families of infants and toddlers including:

- **Adopting a plan to improve access and affordability of child care.** The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed New York’s long tenuous child care system to the brink and demonstrated how critical high-quality child care is to the state’s economy. In a recent statewide poll, a majority of New York State businesses reported that the lack of accessibility and availability of high-quality child care for infants and toddlers negatively impacted their business, which underscores the importance of high-quality child care to New York’s long-term economic recovery. Federal funding should prioritize infant and toddler child care subsidies for communities hit hardest by the impacts of the pandemic, including communities of color, low-income, and immigrant communities. Federal funds should be used to expand access to high-quality child care and provide financial stability to providers, which will ensure that existing capacity for infants and toddlers is maintained in the short term and expands as the economy recovers.
- **Improving access to technology that will increase the availability and quality of infant and toddler support services like early intervention and home visitation for low-income families.** The first three years of a child’s life are a critical time for their lifelong development. Policymakers should increase resources, alignment, and coordination for Early Intervention (EI) and Preschool Special Education programs to ensure that families have access to all the support they need during a formative period in a child’s life. Furthermore, the State should move forward with Medicaid investments in home visiting and other “First 1,000 Days” initiatives.
- **Prioritizing mental health support for families who have been most impacted by disruptions in employment and child care.** Families of infants and toddlers have been hard hit by the pandemic and are worried about their children’s emotional development and their family’s well-being. Mental health services for communities that have been hardest hit by the child care crises, namely child care deserts, should have access to emergency and acute mental health support which could include community-based organizations, telehealth, social workers and family counselors.
- **Continuing pandemic supports that supplement the costs of family basic necessities.** Financial stability can help reduce the devastating effects of chronic stress on families with young

children. Last year's Executive Budget proposed an expansion of the Empire State Child Credit to include children under 4 years old and would help address child poverty by offering relief to the families of the youngest New Yorkers. In addition, two bills (S.9012/A.11063) commit the state to reducing child poverty by half by 2030, with requirements for specific steps to reach that goal.

"Families with infants and toddlers have been facing an escalating level of stress as the pandemic continues to persist after nearly a year," **said Hope Lesane, senior advisor for early childhood for The Education Trust–New York.** "We know that even before this pandemic, families of color and families from low-income backgrounds were disproportionately affected by financial insecurity and limited access to high-quality early learning experiences. It is crucial that New York act with the greatest of urgency to invest in programs and support to help families get through this difficult crisis."

"We know that the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will extend beyond the chapter of this virus," **said Melodie Baker, national policy director for Just Equations and co-chair of Raising NY.** "We can see from the poll that Black, Brown, and economically disadvantaged young children and families are suffering the most, but they do not have to. Adequate investments in early childhood development must be a priority if these damning trends are to be reversed."

"In Raising NY's latest poll, New York parents confirm what we have suspected: New York children and families are not all right," **said Kate Breslin, president and chief executive officer of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and co-chair of Raising NY.** "Nearly a year into the pandemic, far too many New York families with children are still struggling with food insecurity, mental health concerns, and child care challenges. Parents are also clear in their nearly unanimous view that New York should increase investment in high quality child care and expanded income supports for families. We hope New York leaders read this poll, and take all steps necessary to shield the state's children from any further hardships, and to place our children at the center of the state's recovery efforts."

"As the poll results indicate, parents of young children continue to struggle as the pandemic endures," **said Heather C. Briccetti, Esq., president and chief executive officer of The Business Council of New York State, Inc. and co-chair of Raising NY.** "Even as employers have offered more flexibility than ever before with work schedules, parents still have limited access to affordable, high-quality child care. Also, it is no surprise that parents almost universally approve of extending New York's Empire State Child tax credit to include children under the age of four. While the state is facing budget challenges at this time, this would be a huge support for children and families across the State."

"Almost a year into the pandemic, these findings show that New York must respond quickly to the immediate needs that families face and must prepare for the long-term impact that the pandemic will have on young children," **said Kim Sweet, executive director of Advocates for Children of New York.** "An overwhelming number of parents expressed concern that their child's social, emotional and cognitive development will be impacted because of the pandemic. We hear similar concerns from families who have contacted us because their child has not received crucial developmental and special education services during the pandemic or has not been able to attend a full-time child care center. We join these families in supporting increased access to high-quality early childhood education programs and investing more in early intervention and preschool special education services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities."

“The lack of quality, affordable childcare in New York State has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As parents return to the workplace, access to infant and toddler child care is a critical piece of jumpstarting the economy,” **said Meredith Menzies Chimento, executive director of the Early Care & Learning Council.** “The Early Care & Learning Council supports a network of CCR&Rs that are on the frontline working to ensure that parents find access to care. These Resource Centers work with providers to ensure that the mental health of children and providers is addressed and work tirelessly to increase the quality of care across the state. As referenced by the poll, parents recognize that the early years are the most critical years in the development of healthy children, and they count on quality child care programs to support their families during this crucial time.”

“The escalating devastation of the pandemic on working families with infants and toddlers is breathtaking. The data continues to show the overwhelming impact on family financial, physical, and mental well-being, with a disproportionate impact on families with low-income and families of color,” **said Ramon Peguero, Esq., president and chief executive officer of the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families.** “With three out of four parents concerned about their own and their family’s mental health; and nearly nine in ten parents carrying the worry of their child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development suffering because of the COVID-19 crisis, New York must take rapid and proactive action to address the present state and long-term impact of family trauma. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF) joins its Raising NY partners in urging New York State to accelerate efforts to expand and increase access to quality affordable care for working families with infants and toddlers as a key component of rebuilding support and healing for families with young children.”

“The ongoing pandemic continues to take a tremendous toll on New York’s youngest children and their families. Parents are experiencing an increased level of stress and concern about their children’s development,” **said Sherry Cleary, executive director of CUNY Professional Development Institute.** “The first three years of a child’s life are a critical period – when the very foundation of growth and development is established – and it is crucial that New York take steps to support families with infants and toddlers to ensure these children do not suffer lifelong consequences.”

“COVID-19 continues to have an outsized effect on immigrant families with young children who are struggling with food insecurity and a lack of affordable childcare,” **said Liza Schwartzwald, senior manager of education policy for the New York Immigration Coalition.** “The results of this poll show what we have long known – that we must work hard to support New York’s families in this time of immediate crisis and build the early childhood system that most New Yorkers want with programs that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and linguistically responsive. New York can only begin its recovery when all New York families and children can thrive.”

“The consistent struggles for the basic needs of families from the beginning of the pandemic is alarming,” **said Kathy Jamil, director of education at the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County.** “Time would suggest that we would have learned how to better support families, however, these polls imply that our local efforts are limiting and that this level of need requires change in policy and systems. Families are skipping or reducing meal sizes in greater numbers than last year, and this is even more so for families of low income. Forty-seven percent of families intentionally reduced work hours to care for their children at home and over 50% of all families are stressed by increasing income insecurity to provide for their basic needs. There is a very strong need for economic security for families; extending the tax credit and providing affordable, high-quality child care is a solution that the majority of families state they’d support. The United Way of Buffalo and Erie County and our partners in the Birth to Eight

Coalition are committed on this front and seek legislative action and policy changes to support the needs for families in New York State.”

“The results of this poll show that so many of our families continue to struggle to meet their basic needs.” ***said Sheena Wright, President & Chief Executive Officer of the United Way of New York City.***

“We know the health and wellness of children and their families is critical to our recovery, and yet, parents of young children, particularly in New York City, have skipped or reduced the size of their own or their child’s meals due to the pandemic. We stand with our partners and Raising NY, and urge leaders to ensure that parents of young children get the financial assistance, food security, and investments in early childhood programs that they desperately need.”

The poll memo from Global Strategy Group and a summary of poll results can be found at RaisingNY.org/coronavirus.

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About Raising NY

Raising NY is a diverse statewide coalition of parent, early childhood, education, civil rights, business, and health organizations dedicated to increasing the number of children who are on track for school readiness. Learn more at RaisingNY.org.