



Impacts of COVID-19 on Child Care

Interviews with Parents from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

In November 2020, four interviews were conducted with parents who identify as Native American or of Indigenous heritage and as members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. These interviews were part of a series of interviews and listening sessions funded by the Preschool Development Grant as an expansion of the 2019 statewide early learning needs assessment. The interviews were co-designed, organized, and facilitated by Portland State University and OSLC Developments, Inc., in partnership with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The goal of the interviews was to understand the early learning needs and experiences of Native American, Indigenous, and American Indian families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, interviews will inform the development of the state's early learning plan.

All four of the parents interviewed were mothers, and they were caring for one to three children, ranging from 1-year old to school age. In addition to American Indian heritage, some of the parents interviewed were also Mexican and White.

What does child care look like during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The pandemic impacted child care for all of the mothers interviewed, who reported losing their child care during closures related to the pandemic. All of the parents interviewed ended up using a patchwork of family care (e.g., co-parents, other family members, or friends), informal care (e.g., babysitters), and in some cases, formal care. The parents described how challenging it was to arrange care for their children. It was hard to find anyone available to care for their children, let alone someone the parents trusted. But parents were desperate and some needed to make compromises to get the care they needed during the pandemic.

"Looking on care.com was really just out of desperation... I need [my child] to have daycare. I have to go to work. His dad isn't going to be able to care for him throughout the day like he has been, so I was really just kind of desperate at that point. But like I said, I didn't want to go to anybody that didn't have good references from people that I trust."

The compromises parents made to obtain care for their children included cost, location, and quality of care.

"[At my previous care provider] I only would have had to pay like \$50 a month. And right now I'm paying \$250 a month for my kids to go to somebody for 2...days a week. So money wise, it's been a big impact."

"Especially out here where we live, we have nothing out here. There's nobody out here that I would trust, only because I know so much about this community."

"Once we found out [the tribal school was] not going to reopen, I started doing daycare. [We sent her to] her prior daycare and I felt safe taking her there... I have to spend the night in Salem 2 nights in order to be there in the morning to take her and then I come to work 45 minutes away. And then my husband picks her up. So it's just a lot to coordinate."

"I'm not able to afford somebody who's had years of experience, I can only afford these college teenagers [and] it's not their career choice. They don't understand developmental things about kids this age... Especially coming from him going from Head Start to this, now he's just not getting as many of his needs met."

At some point in the pandemic, all parents interviewed worked from home to care for their children, some using paid time off to make it easier to manage remote work and child care.

"Mondays and Wednesdays I work remote at home 4 hours a day and I PTO 4 hours... So I'm just taking paid time off so that I can be with her and not be on the computer the whole day."

What factors influence families' decisions to send their child to care or stay at home?

Health and safety concerns were a predominant factor in parent decision making about child care. Parents were particularly concerned about contact tracing with other children, families, and caregivers in group care settings.

To what extent do you think it is important for caregivers to help you and your child be more prepared to start kindergarten?

All parents shared that these kinds of supports would be valuable, and specifically said that they would appreciate having workshops about the kindergarten transition and how to motivate children to go to and enjoy school.

"My niece goes to that daycare [with my daughter]... They're both only children... We're like our Corona team. We are the Bubble... It just comes down to the less people you interact with the safer."

"It is really stressful to think about the health and safety of my kids and my family. I already feel like I'm putting myself at risk a lot just in the job that I'm in... We do have elders in our life that we're just trying to keep safe... I feel really fortunate that I do have [a babysitter] that I feel safe with. But if something were to happen to that person, there's not really any options after that."

The interviewed parents shared that, despite the pandemic health concerns, they did not have the option to stop working or to not send their children to care.

"Well, I am essentially a single mother. I don't have a second income. So, I have to work, I don't have the choice to stay home as much as that sounds amazing and so much anxiety and stress would be gone, but I can't. I have to have a full-time job to support my son and keep a roof over our heads and food in our bellies."

"I cannot afford to not work. There's no way that I can't not work, not just financially; but I also have always really enjoyed my career, the job that I'm working. So I felt like not only money wise, but for my own mental health, if I lost that part of me, that would be really hurtful and impact me really negatively."

What are parents most concerned about for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Beyond COVID-related health and safety, one parent was particularly concerned about her children experiencing abuse and neglect from their child care providers.

"I have definitely had a lot of concerns. As somebody that works in a child care program, I've learned a lot of things about just what abuse can look like just all kinds of things that have had my eyes open. So I'm always thinking about, who are these people really? As much as they're friendly to me and I feel like I can trust them enough to watch my kids, what really happens behind closed doors, you know? And that's been something that's been consistently on my mind since they've had to be at home or at other people's houses, just not really just not fully knowing what is happening."

Parents also shared that they were concerned about aspects of their children's academic and social-emotional development over the course of the pandemic.

"I'm grateful she's 4. If she was 14, I don't know I would teach her... [At home,] we do our projects. We practice her letters, we sound out everything, we do a calendar every day...but I know it was a deficiency, because when I took her back to daycare, even for that one day, [she comes home saying] Mommy, we're learning about tornadoes, Mommy. We're learning about weather, we're learning... And I'm like, I was just trying to teach you how to write an essay. So I think it's good but I definitely see how much more curriculum she gets when she goes to daycare, and I'm grateful that the daycare provider is sending me home curriculum and projects for the rest of the week when she's at home with us."

"The Early Head Start program that [my son] was in is really focusing on emotions and emotional control, and he's starting to really come into those emotions. And so I think for his emotional development... I do have the tools to help him learn socially and emotionally; but since I'm not there, he's just not getting any access to it at all during the day, and I think that really has stunted his growth in his social-emotional learning and development."

A couple parents were also concerned about how the pandemic has required their children to have more screen time and receive lower quality virtual services.

"I hate how much she's on screens. I hate how much she watches TV now."

"My one son, we were wondering if he's autistic... We were getting the ball going right as the pandemic hit, so it's kind of hard to keep that ball rolling when there's no in-person anything right... And you know, virtual things, they're just not the same."

What supports are parents receiving and what do they need?

Parents identified a number of helpful supports that they received related to child care. This included their child care programs sending craft projects home, virtual classroom visits, virtual meetings with a Home Visitor, and culturally specific books sent home by reading clubs. While the parents appreciated the support they were receiving, they had some ideas for improvements to these supports.

"They're not doing Zooms... They're doing a FaceTime recorded live, but they're not talking to the kids. And they're not having the kids talk to each other... [My daughter] wants to talk to her teachers and she wants to talk to other students."

How do child care providers include parent voice and family culture?

We asked parents about how their child care providers were seeking their input since the start of the pandemic. Most of the parents' care providers had good communication with the parents. These providers communicated their COVID health and safety protocol expectations in face-to-face conversations with the parents, and the parents were able to share their children's tendencies and unique needs with the providers in return.

One parent, however, had some negative experiences with babysitters throughout the pandemic not following her care instructions or listening to her concerns. Even so, she did not want to push the babysitter too far, because available care was so scarce that she did not want the babysitter to quit. She felt the need to continue with low-quality, and in some cases neglectful, care because there were no other options available.

We also asked parents if their early care and education providers were providing care that met their children's cultural and linguistic needs. Most of the parents' current child care providers that they are utilizing during the pandemic did not specifically support their children's cultural needs, but previous care providers they had before the pandemic began have provided this support in the past.

"Yeah, it's a tribal school. So there is singing and dancing. Our cultural department comes to the tribe, and they rotate the classrooms. I wish there was more of it. They're doing the best they can. They're doing a great job... They bring traditional songs, they speak the language... They do have the tribal library books that are translated into ancient language and then they hold events in the evening in collaboration with culture [department] to provide story time."

"In the Early Head Start program, they often had culture circles and they participated in a lot of the language program activities. Plus, we also went to events and stuff like that. So yeah, before the pandemic, he was definitely getting language and culture stuff in the classroom."

The parents explained why it is important to have their child care providers support their childrens' cultural and linguistic needs.

"I grew up doing it, my brother and my sister grew up in the youth education programs...and a lot of the people that I grew up with are the teachers now. So it's really nice to know that he's interacting with these people that I know and I love and he's a part of the community, in that sense, because it really does build closer bonds, I think."

"I work in prevention because culture is prevention. So for us, to be connected to our culture... It's so hard to put into words because it means everything to me. We go to pow wow. We do Canoe Journey. I take her to our plank house, we eat our traditional foods. I think it's important because it gives you a sense of identity. And as you go through your life you know who your ancestors are, you know the teachings. They provided you know your value. And I believe culture provides value. You are tied into something that's bigger than yourself and to honor our culture is to honor yourself. And so it really teaches positive life skills. And so to me it's, it's very important."

"So my son actually really loves the culture. My family didn't necessarily grow up having a heavy influence with our culture. And so it's been really amazing to see my son just be naturally interested in it, so for him it is very important."

According to these parents, availability of quality child care was a problem in their region, even before the pandemic. One parent recommended that the Early Learning Division invest resources into recruiting people who are willing to do child care.

"I think that if it came up, my babysitter would totally be willing to participate in a virtual Zoom and get a little bit more education on how to care for kids. And just like a basic certification, just for like a babysitter, not necessarily state certified... Not only would my babysitter that I have now be willing, but I think that there's a lot of other people that would probably be willing to participate in that."

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