



It Takes a Village...

*The Story of the San Mateo County
COVID-19 Child Care Response Team*



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Introduction

In March 2020, early care and education leaders in San Mateo County came together to form the San Mateo County COVID-19 Child Care Response Team (“Response Team”) to ensure a coordinated child care relief and recovery effort during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team has met at least once a week since then to understand and respond to the impact of COVID-19 on the child care and early learning field. The group’s efforts include:

- Consistent communication,
- Technical assistance for families and providers,
- Coordinated fundraising, and
- Organized advocacy.

The Response Team identified three pressing needs for the child care field during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Establishment of emergency child care for essential workers,
2. Economic relief for child care providers, particularly home-based and other private child care providers, and
3. Emergency child care supplies.

Partner Organization Roles

Build Up for San Mateo County’s Children

Focused on preservation of facilities/spaces, while continuing to shepherd new projects into the development pipeline to meet future needs. Provided technical assistance to child care providers and led policy education and advocacy efforts and community outreach.

Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County (4Cs)

Database of all licensed programs in San Mateo County, maintains a website clearinghouse of COVID-19 information for the field, regularly updates providers open/closed status and communicates to the public, PPE distribution, subsidies for essential workers. Liaison to Public Health.

Child Care Partnership Council

Data collection and analysis on community needs. Convenes regular meetings of key stakeholders, including parents and child care providers. Tracks federal and state legislation and budgets. Shares timely information on events/trainings, funding, and advocacy opportunities.

Community Equity Collaborative

Incubates pilot programs to meet community needs in the education equity space; active social media highlighting importance of child care, impacts of COVID on child care and working families, especially working mothers.

County of San Mateo

Across many departments in the County Government (Board of Supervisors, County Health, County Manager's Office, Office for Sustainability), resources and funding have been mobilized to support the child care sector and include this field in the County's Recovery Initiative.

First 5 San Mateo County

As a funder, First 5 San Mateo County takes a broad view in promoting child and family well-being in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. First 5 staff serves as a liaison to the County Manager and to the statewide First 5 Association and First 5 California.

San Mateo County Office of Education

Early Learning Support Services (ELSS) provides technical assistance and coaching related to COVID-19, such as support for developmentally appropriate distance learning for young children, mental health, family support, etc. Regular convenings of directors of state-subsidized centers and professional development for their teachers. Liaison with Community Care Licensing and host to conversations with Licensing. SMCOE Communications and Superintendent's Office communicate with Schools Districts.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Silicon Valley Community Foundation provided initial facilitation for the Response Team. The Community Foundation has encouraged philanthropic and strategic support for the child care sector.

Our Accomplishments

Essential Worker Survey and Child Care Provider Survey

To determine the demand for child care among essential workers, the response team administered a survey in April 2020. Survey data provided valuable information for the



Response Team’s emergency child care approach. 264 surveys were completed identifying 451 children needing care. The Response Team also surveyed all of the County’s child care programs in June to understand the extent of program closures and programs’ financial status.

PPE Distribution and Emergency Child Care Supplies

In response to child care providers’ difficulty securing basic health and safety supplies such as toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and baby wipes, 4Cs and First 5 worked with the County’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to identify potential sources of local supplies and request supplies from the State EOC and First 5 CA.

COVID-19 Child Care Project

Spearheaded by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and funded by Heising-Simons Foundation, this fund provided \$100,000 in emergency grants of up \$10,000 to family child care providers, paired with technical assistance to access federal and state funding. Build Up for San Mateo County’s Children served as SVCF’s community partner to assist grant administrators (LIIF) with outreach, technical assistance and the grant review process.

Coordinated Communications and Resources

The Response Team collaborated to create and distribute several communications including:

- *Need child care?* flyer for essential workers seeking child care in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), distributed via core service agencies.
- [Child care provider program guidelines](#) and [Guidance for Parents/Guardians Using Emergency Child Care in San Mateo County](#) for operators providing care and families utilizing care during the early days of the pandemic.
- A family information sheet in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [Chinese](#) with COVID-19 general health guidelines and information about core service agencies, food distribution sites, and mental health/legal resources.
- [Financial Assistance Available for San Mateo County Child Care Providers](#) to assist operators with identifying funding resources to keep their programs afloat.
- [Will Child Care Be There?](#) advocating for individuals, companies and cities to invest in the child care infrastructure to ensure a post-pandemic recovery.
- A [Learning Hubs Case Study](#) to document successful models in San Mateo County.

Reopening Forum

In July 2020, the Response Team hosted a webinar to provide essential information and support to early learning and care programs as they made plans to reopen to serve children and



families. The forum featured a panel of center-based and family child care providers who had already reopened sharing their best practices and lessons learned. [[Slides](#); [Recording](#)]

San Mateo County Recovery Initiative

Several members of the Response Team participated in the County's Recovery Initiative meetings, specifically providing leadership on the Education and Child Care Committee.

Child Care Relief Fund

In response to the advocacy of the Response Team in partnership with local city council members Giselle Hale of Redwood City and Amourence Lee of San Mateo, the County of San Mateo allocated \$2M of CARES Act funds in August 2020 to create the Child Care Relief Fund. Grants from the Fund provided one month of operating expenses (up to \$55,000 for child care centers and \$10,000 for family child care homes). In addition, a broad spectrum of donors contributed over \$829,000 to the fund, including local companies, community foundations, cities, faith-based organizations and individuals. In response to additional outstanding need, the County contributed an additional \$2.5M to the Fund in November and December. The total of \$5.3M in grants to 287 child care programs (79 centers and 208 family child care homes) benefited over 8,000 of the county's most vulnerable children. Members of the Response Team served as the Fund's advisory body and administrators alongside the San Mateo Credit Union and County Board of Supervisors.

Parent Town Hall

Members of the Response Team partnered with County Health to hold an online Parent Town Hall in November 2020 addressing "Child Care During COVID-19." The Town Hall was moderated by a parent leader and featured a panel of health care and child care experts sharing information on how to safely provide/attend child care during the pandemic.

Learning Hubs Expansion Grant Fund

As part of San Mateo County's Recovery Initiative, members of the Response Team played a key role in the "Providing Out of School and Young Child Care" task force created in June 2020. In December 2020, the Response Team launched the San Mateo County Learning Hubs Initiative in partnership with Thrive, the Alliance of Nonprofits, in order to raise awareness about, advocate for, and support "learning hubs" (programs that provide supportive places for K-12 students engaged in distance learning). Based upon the Response Team's recommendation and proposal, the Board of Supervisors approved \$1.5M in January 2021 to create the Learning Hubs Expansion Fund, which increased by 29% the number of learning hub slots available for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families for the remainder of the 2020-2021



school year. The Learning Hubs Expansion Fund is administered by Community Equity Collaborative and the San Mateo Credit Union in coordination with the Response Team and Board of Supervisors.

Vaccine Distribution Survey

In February 2021, 4Cs and SMCOE partnered with County Health to survey all individuals working in the child care and early learning field to understand how many of these essential workers will need the vaccine, their insurance status, and any hesitations people may have to getting the vaccine when available.

What is Still Needed

While the Response Team has taken decisive action over the past year to address the pressing needs of the child care field during the COVID-19 pandemic, much is still needed to sustain this essential industry. In the coming year, the Response Team will be focused on the following:

Continued Fundraising and Advocacy for Public Investments

The Response Team is interested in securing funding for another round of Child Care Relief Grants, recognizing that child care providers will have continued challenges to sustainability. Providers may have incurred debt as they kept their businesses going with reduced tuition coming in from families. Providers also need ongoing technical assistance to access grant and loan programs.

Data Collection and Analysis to Understand Ongoing Needs

The Response Team intends to replicate the Child Care Provider Survey that was conducted in June 2020 to understand whether programs are open or have permanently closed, programs' financial sustainability and how child care operations have changed due to the pandemic.

Addressing Long-Term Structural Challenges in the Child Care Field

The pandemic has highlighted long-standing structural problems that impact the child care field. The lack of qualified workers and low wages for child care educators have continued to limit the expansion of child care services. The gap between what parents can afford to pay and the cost of providing high quality care has grown wider.

As the County's commission for child care, the Child Care Partnership Council continues to meet regularly and convene stakeholders to understand the needs of families and providers.



Interested members of the public are encouraged to attend CCPC’s public meetings to learn more about COVID-19 recovery efforts and to voice their needs and concerns. Learn more at <https://www.smcoe.org/about/child-care-partnership-council>.

Reflections

While the global pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the child care field, the strength of the relationships between organizations serving this sector in San Mateo County allowed for a quick ramp-up in the local response. Because two of the partners, Build Up SMC and the CCPC, regularly convene stakeholder meetings, the Response Team came together quickly to identify the emergence of pressing issues. Collectively, the Response Team has invested approximately 1,000 hours in weekly meetings and follow-up. Through this significant investment of “people power,” the Response Team has harnessed significant public and private investment in the child care sector, helped connect essential workers to child care, and used every means possible to sustain child care businesses for the future.

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