

Learning from Relief Funding:

A Look at Outreach and Education Efforts Across the Country

Child care received \$52.5 billion in temporary federal relief funding to help the sector recover and rebuild in the wake of the pandemic. [Research shows](#) that the investments have made a difference in lowering prices for families and increasing child care employment and wages, which helped stabilize the market in a time of turmoil. This funding, especially stabilization grants made available under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), gave each state an opportunity to make much-needed improvements to their child care system. States are required to spend any remaining amounts by September 2024 and, unfortunately, further federal investments have not been made.

To underscore the effects this monumental funding had for the sector, Child Care Aware® of America provided subgrants, through the generous support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, to twelve Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies. The goal of this project was to strengthen each CCR&R's capacity to conduct outreach and educational activity that demonstrates the impact these public investments made for families, providers, and communities across the country. While the individual approaches of each CCR&R differed, common themes appeared across projects to inform decisions and investments to build a child care system that is affordable, accessible, and high quality for all.



Themes:

1 Meet the Moment

Over the course of the pandemic, Congress passed multiple legislative packages that invested historic levels of funding into child care. Of these, ARPA invested \$39 billion in child care relief, with \$24 billion allocated for stabilization grants. With this major influx of funding to the system, child care stakeholders had a rare opportunity to demonstrate the impact of this funding, the ways it reached families, providers, and children in their communities. The public eye was also on child care as the pandemic shone a spotlight on the truth that those in the child care sector knew all along, that child care is a foundational element for strong communities. Multiple CCR&Rs in this project focused their efforts on capitalizing on the moment in front of them, whether that was responding to a renewed interest from the news media to tell stories about child care, developing campaigns to tell the story of federal relief funding, or sharing information about the implementation of the funding with policymakers.

- [Child Care Answers](#) in Indiana recorded and compiled [videos](#) reflecting nine individual testimonials from child care centers, family child care homes, and the families they served about the positive impact federal relief funding had for families and providers, bringing awareness to policymakers about both the needs of the child care community and the impact of recent funding.

2 Listening To and Uplifting Providers and Families

Early childhood educators' and families' experiences are central to informing outreach and educational activities to highlight the challenges they face daily with the current system. Each CCR&R included learning from and lifting up the voices of child care providers and families in their project. Many of the funded projects included opportunities for listening to learn, such as town halls, listening sessions, or one-on-one interviews.

- [Child Care Aware of North Dakota](#), Child Care Aware of North Dakota, along with the North Dakota Afterschool Network, partnered with a public firm, the GA Group, to conduct over 35 stakeholder interviews with key individuals and organizations representing various interests in North Dakota's early childhood and school-aged care.

Other projects included surveys to collect data to inform messaging and recommendations to share with policymakers.

- [Starting Point](#) in Cleveland, Ohio, administered a workforce survey from November 6- December 31, 2023, to explore the status of the child care workforce, child care worker pay and benefits, and challenges that programs face in their finances or workforce. The data collected in this effort was used to create both a [Workforce Report and blog](#) that tells the story of the interconnected challenges child care programs face in Northeast Ohio.

3 Connecting People Directly to Policymakers

Finally, one of the most important elements of every project is taking the stories, data, messages, recommendations created through outreach and using it to provide education to decision makers and inform future policy. While this can be done in hundreds of ways, many participants in this project chose to equip families and providers and facilitate their engagement with policymakers directly.

- [The Family Conservancy](#) in the Kansas City Metro, Kansas brought policymakers to the community when they hosted a Child Care Legislative Listening Session to bring federal, state (Missouri and Kansas), and local policymakers together with child care providers and families. They discussed the challenges facing the sector, why child care is important, and what they want to see happen for child care policy. The event was [filmed](#) and shared with policymakers who weren't able to attend in person.
- [Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children \(IDAEYC\)](#) connected community members with policymakers by training eleven cohorts of parents and providers from across Idaho and facilitating meetings for the cohorts and their respective legislative delegations to discuss the early childhood needs in their communities and to ask for support in improving Idaho's early childhood landscape at the [2024 Early Learning Day](#).

The participants each implemented outreach and education projects that were tailored to their stakeholders and policy landscape. They wove in ways to address equity, specifically racial equity, focused on lifting the voices of families and providers, and increased their own capacity to do this work past the end of their project timelines. For a more detailed look at a few of the projects, check out the State Spotlights below.

CASE STUDIES – STATE SPOTLIGHTS

North Dakota

The Moment:

North Dakota received more than \$100 million in federal relief funding for early childhood and child care programs. These [funds were used](#) to increase access to the state's subsidy system and to fund multiple grants for providers, including stabilization, health and safety facility improvement, technology, inclusion, start-up and quality improvement grants. The flexibility allowed under the stabilization grants allowed providers to determine and address their most pressing needs with the funds and use them for a wide array of activities.

The Outreach and Education:

Through the summer and fall of 2022, Child Care Aware of North Dakota, along with the North Dakota Afterschool Network, partnered with the a public firm, the GA Group to conduct over 35 stakeholder interviews with key individuals and organizations representing various interests in North Dakota's early childhood and school-aged care, encompassing children ages 0-12. These [interviews](#) included large and small center providers, in-home child care providers, education officials, business and chamber executives, coalition groups, legislators, and government administrators. The goal of conducting these interviews was to better understand the current challenges facing child care as described by those working in the field, and the policy opportunities to best address those challenges.

A few highlights from the interviews with child care providers include:

- **Tessa**, a provider at a non-profit program in Watford City, shared that the stabilization grant was “huge” for her program and recommending publicizing the opportunity to more providers.
- **Robin**, a CEO of a non-profit school age program in Fargo, spoke about her goal to help families by keeping her rates consistent and using stabilization grants to help the providers at her program. She emphasized the challenge of the short-term funding by posing the question of raising wages in the long-term if the stabilization grants are temporary.

- **Steve and Lorrie**, leaders of a multi-county nonprofit organization that includes five early childhood programs across Cass & Clay Counties, highlighted the challenges of providing infant care. They explain the costs to provide the care to the infants they serve is more than double what they charge families because the true cost of providing the care is more than families can afford.



Alfreidia Gray at Watts Little Tots In North Dakota shares about all that she was able to accomplish with the flexibility of this funding.

Together the North Dakota Afterschool Network and Child Care Aware of North Dakota used what they learned in their conversations with organizations, providers, families, business, and industry to inform [resources and their message to decision makers](#) about the impact of child care relief funding in North Dakota and the need for further state investment and policy action, including “[North Dakota State Agency Recommendations](#)” and “[North Dakota Legislative Solutions](#).”

The Outcome:

Child Care Aware of North Dakota used the perspectives from child care stakeholders gathered during these interviews to demonstrate to policymakers the impact of relief funding for child care and the necessity to continue these investments post-relief funding.

During the following legislative session, [North Dakota invested a one-time increase of \\$65.6 million in state funding](#) for child care. This investment included \$15 million to incentivize providers to care for more infants and toddlers and \$22 million to expand eligibility for the state’s subsidy program for families with income below 75% SMI.

Maryland

The Moment:

Maryland received over \$500 million in ARPA federal relief funding. In addition to funding multiple stabilization grant types, Maryland invested a considerable amount of their ARPA dollars to expand access to the state’s subsidy program and increase reimbursement to providers. The investments supported [three policy changes to the program](#):

- Increasing the subsidy reimbursement rate from the 60th to the 70th percentile of the most recent market rate survey (MRS);
- Reducing or eliminating copayments for families receiving scholarships;
- And expanding eligibility requirements to include families with income up to 75% of state median income (SMI).

The Outreach and Education:

Identifying a need to capture the impact of the investments and policy efforts, the Maryland Family Network (MFN) used this funding to design and distribute a statewide parent survey, which was launched on October 26, 2022, and closed on November 18, 2022. The survey was sent to their entire database, including all licensed child care providers registered in the state. They received just shy of 3,600 responses, 10% of which were completed in Spanish. The results of the survey helped MFN better understand that even with the temporary relief funding, the cost of child care is still very challenging for families across the state, and that families continue to experience challenges in accessing subsidy funding. Through this survey, [MFN also found](#) several alarming racial disparities regarding accessing the subsidy program:

- While Black families were slightly more likely than White families to have applied for subsidy funding (76% vs 72%), they were less successful in gaining subsidy funding (81% vs. 90% of White families).
- Among families who were denied subsidy funding, Black families were more likely than White families to report the paperwork problems as the reason for denial (54% vs 44%).
- Black families reported waiting longer than White families before ultimately being denied subsidy funding (77% waiting longer than 15 days vs. 63% of Whites).

One mother (African American and English Speaker) explained, “It took so long to get approved [for subsidy] that my child was old enough to go to public school when I finally heard. I wasn’t working all those months we didn’t have [subsidy] because I couldn’t afford child care.”

The survey also illuminated issues with language accessibility. Spanish speakers were more likely than English speakers to apply for subsidy (93% vs 73%) and they reported far more obstacles in completing the application, reporting lost paperwork and a generally confusing process.

- Over half of Spanish speakers reported a prolonged subsidy application process: 15-30 days to be denied, and then an additional 15-30 days to be approved.
- Many families who were denied subsidy funding (44% of those who were denied) say it was due to a problem with the paperwork. 1-in-4 (73%) Spanish speaking families who were denied reported the denial was related to paperwork.

Another mother (Spanish Speaking) explained, “I didn’t know what some of the papers I needed were when I applied. No one told me what they were. In the end, a co-worker helped me figure out the missing papers.”

MFN used the findings of the survey to inform the Maryland legislature about the implementation of federal relief funds, the challenges families and providers continue to face, and the importance of making these investments permanent once the relief funds were spent.

The Outcome:

In the following 2023 Maryland passed [legislation](#) that made the investments to improve the subsidy program permanent, including prohibiting the state from increasing co-payment levels, reducing reimbursement rates, and reducing the income eligibility requirements. Maryland Family Network met the moment and was able to demonstrate the profound impact of child care funding on the state and use this example to effectively educate policymakers and continue working to inform future child care policy.

CASE STUDIES – STATE SPOTLIGHTS

Idaho

The Moment:

Idaho received over \$225 million in ARPA federal relief funding and used the funding to establish multiple phases of its Child Care Grant, which provided valuable financial support during gaps in attendance. Idaho also used relief funding to establish a separate Child Care Wage Enhancement Grant, which temporarily supplemented wages for Idaho child care workers. In [June 2023](#), Idaho's legislature voted to reject millions of remaining ARPA dollars for child care.

The Outreach and Education:

Over the course of two grant cycles, Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (IDAEYC) focused on listening to their community members, training families and providers to inform child care policy, educating policymakers, and engaging press to uplift the state's most pressing child care issues. Starting in 2022 and continuing through 2024, IDAEYC:

- **Hosted Listening Sessions:** Idaho AEYC completed four listening sessions from June-September 2023 utilizing the [Beneficiary Voice Framework](#). Through these sessions, IDAEYC captured the successes, struggles, and needs of roughly 100 providers throughout Idaho. They aggregated the feedback from these sessions to help inform their own policy and program priorities and shared anonymous feedback with the state child care administrator to inform outreach programming to providers.
- **Recruited and Trained Families and Providers Across Idaho:** IDAEYC manages a network of locally led Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs) throughout Idaho. Each ELC works to address the early care and education needs of their community through community engagement and program development and is overseen by a local board comprised of parents, child care providers, school district representatives, and business owners. IDAEYC used their existing infrastructure and relationships of each ELC to recruit families and providers and helped to amplify the need to address the systemic challenges of Idaho's early care and education infrastructure and highlight their programs and can be used as a model to address those challenges.

In 2022, they were able to recruit 50 parents from 11 of their ELC communities to participate in advocacy programming where they were trained on how to have a meaningful conversation with policymakers about the need to support early care and education policies and programs. In 2023, they were able to grow seven of their existing cohorts and add four new cohorts to expand from 11 to 15 cohorts, and all new members received training and engaged in legislative activities.

- **Connecting with Policymakers:** Idaho AEYC hosted their third annual [Early Learning Day at the Capitol on February 6th, 2024](#). At this event, the cohorts of families and providers met with their respective legislative delegations to discuss the early childhood needs in their communities and to ask for support in improving Idaho's early childhood landscape.
- **Engaging the Press:** In 2022, IDAEYC was able to generate nine media hits on addressing the early care and education needs of families in their communities. These include one Op-Ed and eight articles representing five regions throughout Idaho. They further built on their news coverage throughout 2023-2024, including an [article](#) that was published by ED Surge and picked up by the Associated Press and another "[I cried if I'm being honest..](#)" that gained national attention about the Idaho legislature's decision to send back federal funds. Many of these articles focus on the same families and providers that the IDAEYC team worked with throughout their outreach and education activities.

- 🔗 [Rising Child Care Costs impacting Treasure Valley Families](#)
- 🔗 [In Face of Child Care Crisis, Collaborative Group Seeks Solutions](#)
- 🔗 [Early Childhood Education Options Lacking in Valley](#)
- 🔗 [The high costs of childcare: Early childhood education critical for economy, community long term](#)

The Outcome:

IDAEYC continues to build momentum in their state, despite setbacks in their policy landscape, by investing in the development of the families, providers, and child care stakeholders to create relationships and educate policymakers. They facilitated 34 legislative meetings at their recent 2024 Early Learning Day at the Capitol, generated 11 earned media hits throughout 2023-2024, and continue to grow and support their 15 cohorts of child care stakeholders across the state.