Early Care and Education Successes During COVID-19
A Year in Review

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Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has unearthed the many inequities and vulnerabilities that have defined child care in the United States; yet, in response, opportunities have been seized for collaboration, innovation, and solutions. Although there has been extensive loss, challenge, and trauma as a result of this pandemic, our local community’s response this past year includes many accomplishments worthy of celebration.

Children’s brains don’t stop developing because the world has stopped for a pandemic, and many parents/caregivers can’t stop working just because schools/child care programs are shut down or operating remotely. Santa Barbara County’s early care and education (ECE) providers heroically responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by immediately pivoting and offering care to essential workers, and eventually expanding care to the general public. ECE programs have had to significantly modify how care is delivered in order to meet COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. Social distancing and small cohort requirements minimized the number of children a program can serve, thus amplifying the already existing critical shortage for care and financial strain on child care programs. Local foundations responded to these challenges by offering support, funding, and collaboration.

The Early Response of the Emergency Child Care Initiative

In March 2020 Stay-at-Home orders were issued by the State and schools along with nearly all child care programs closed leaving many essential workers without care arrangements for their children. The Emergency Child Care Initiative (ECCI) was quickly developed in Santa Barbara County in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the urgent need for safe child care facilities to serve critical health care providers and essential food distribution employees in Santa Barbara County.

The initial objectives of ECCI were:

- To ensure that frontline essential workers had access to licensed child care for children ages 6 months through 12 years so they could continue working.
- To avoid spreading COVID-19 through child care programs.

The Natalie Orfalea Foundation and Lou Buglioli, and Jane and Paul Orfalea/the Audacious Foundation initiated ECCI in early March 2020. United Way joined the collaborative as the fiscal agent and contracted Eileen Monahan Consulting to lead the efforts with support from Holly Goldberg, PhD. Other funders pledged their support for the initiative over the subsequent months, including Linked Foundation, James S. Bower Foundation, Ann Jackson Foundation, Zegar Family Foundation, Henry and Lola Monroe Foundation, and Santa Barbara Foundation. This funding collaborative was led by a Steering Committee which met regularly and provided updates to the larger group.

The initial ECCI initiative raised $685,000 and provided funding for emergency child care for approximately 278 children of essential workers in Santa Barbara County. In response to the learning challenges students and families faced with distance learning, United Way of Santa Barbara County in partnership with local districts, youth based organizations, and local philanthropists established the Learning and Enrichment Centers Collaborative (L&ECC). United Way raised $1.3 million for the L&ECC which supported over 600 of the county’s most vulnerable students with scholarships to youth based organizations that provided all day academic support during distance learning.
Leaders in local child care systems aligned efforts with ECCI to develop a community-wide response to the pandemic. ECE leaders included the Santa Barbara County Education Office Child Care Planning Care Council (CCPC), First 5 of Santa Barbara County (First 5), and Children’s Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County (CRR).

As the pandemic progressed, ECE programs throughout Santa Barbara County began to reopen yet needed guidance, clarification, and support on the ever-changing COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. Santa Barbara Foundation took a leadership role in ensuring there was a designated consultant. In September 2020 Santa Barbara Foundation contracted Holly Goldberg, PhD to continue managing ECCI’s efforts, which included tracking COVID-19 health and regulatory updates for child care/after-school care operation, disseminating information to partners and providers via a centralized online platform, facilitating collaboration among previously different sectors to best support communication and systems change efforts, tracking local COVID-19 related data and trends, and supporting child care program sustainability during the pandemic.

Core ECCI Partners

**Children’s Resource & Referral (CRR)** is a local nonprofit serving Santa Barbara County for over 50 years. With a commitment to develop strong and healthy families by providing education, care, and resource systems to children, their parents, and caregivers, with a special emphasis on low income and under-represented children and families. At CRR, we believe all children should have access to high-quality, safe, nurturing, and inclusive environments that build a foundation for life-long learning. CRR is able to serve the community through a variety of programs that directly support high quality education for young children, ensuring healthy meals, obtaining child care license, and professional development training for child care providers. All programs established within CRR support the mission and vision of the agency. CRR is dedicated to providing timely, accurate, and relevant resources, information, and emergency supplies to the Early Care and Education field and community partnerships in Santa Barbara County during this pandemic.

**First 5 Santa Barbara County (First 5)** was established in 1999 after California voters passed Proposition 10, a state constitutional amendment. Proposition 10 imposed a fifty cent sales tax on tobacco products and directed that those revenues be used to support early childhood development focusing on prenatal through age five. A driving force behind the passage of Proposition 10 was decades of compelling scientific brain research proving that proper growth and development in the earliest years of life was the factor most affecting children's achievement in their health, education, and success in later life. First 5 is committed to ensuring that during this pandemic the families, children, and those who care for them have the resources, supplies, and support they need to weather these unprecedented times.

**Santa Barbara Foundation**’s mission is to mobilize collective wisdom and philanthropic capital to build empathetic, inclusive and resilient communities. Since 1928, the Santa Barbara Foundation has championed the philanthropic efforts of the people of Santa Barbara County, identifying the areas of greatest need and bringing together generous donors with those who do standout work in the nonprofit community. As part of the Santa Barbara Foundation’s commitment to strengthening working and vulnerable families, we are engaging with our partners to address the challenges of providing quality care for our youngest residents, especially in response to COVID-19. We are working with private and social sector childcare providers to support increased access to affordable and accessible childcare opportunities.

**The Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council (SBCCPC)** operates under the authority of the
County Board of Supervisors and the County Superintendent of Schools. The overarching responsibility of the Council is for planning and coordinating early care and education services in Santa Barbara County. Specific responsibilities include establishing local priorities for state funded early care and education expansion, completing a needs assessment of early care and education every 5 years and developing a countywide strategic plan for early care and education. SBCCPC’s mission is to lead and collaborate in planning, coordinating, and advocating for high quality, affordable, and accessible early care and education for all children in Santa Barbara County. SBCCPC advocates for our Early Care and Education professionals by providing the tools, information, and collaboration necessary to support the health and safety of children and families during this pandemic.

United Way of Santa Barbara County (UWSBC) has the unique and positive vision that in our community, everyone has a hopeful future. Since 1923, UWSBC has served Santa Barbara County community through funding, volunteer development, and by utilizing its own unique initiatives that involve dozens of local non-profit and public sector agencies. UWSBC’s mission is driven by Power of Partnership™ priorities to help children, families, and seniors with a focus on Education, Income, and Health. Right here, right now, with the Power of Partnership, UWSBC is improving lives for children, families, seniors, and you! Our vision is to provide a hopeful future for each person in the community.

Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on the Workforce
At the onset of the pandemic, First 5 took the lead in surveying County of Santa Barbara essential workers about their child care needs. Additionally, First 5 commissioned VIVA Social Impact Partners to conduct interviews with parents and non-profit leaders to better understand the impact of the pandemic. During these early stages, First 5 helped link and refer County of Santa Barbara employees to child care resources.

During the early stages of the pandemic ECCI also developed a child care survey as a means to collect data on essential employee child care needs throughout the county. Interested essential employers sent the survey to their employees, and if parent/caregivers responded that they needed child care, the group was matched with an appropriate provider and offered hands-on support to ensure the program and employer match worked well for children and families. Emergency child care providers were given a grant to help offset the expensive operations required by the COVID-19 guidelines. ECCI grants acted as bridge funding for expenses not covered by tuition or other funds. Employers contributed vital services to the child care program operation, such as facility cleaning, food, and staffing.

A total of four child care sites were funded through ECCI to serve essential workers:
- The Orfalea Children’s Center at Cottage Health
- Lompoc Unified School District in partnership with the Lompoc Family YMCA
- Santa Maria Valley YMCA in partnership with Santa Maria Bonita School District
- Hope4Kids

Two hundred and twenty-three children received care through this model between late March and July 2020.

In the fall of 2020, the County of Santa Barbara contracted Eileen Monahan and Holly Goldberg, PhD to conduct a comprehensive follow up COVID-19 survey to First 5’s initial child care survey in order to delve deeper into how the pandemic was continuing to impact employees. This survey included specific attention to the needs and challenges of parent/caregiver employees, those with caretaking responsibilities (e.g. adult care, elder care, etc.), and managers.
Santa Barbara Foundation also conducted a survey in the fall of 2020. The focus of this survey was on child care providers to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the ECE field. In 2021, Santa Barbara Foundation, in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Workforce Development Board, launched a county-wide workforce survey, which included child care and education specific questions aimed at understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the nonprofit and for-profit workforce.

The Establishment of Partnerships
The establishment of collaborative efforts that bridge different sectors has been one of the greatest successes of the ECCI. Partnerships that have been developed as a result of ECCI include:

1) Philanthropy, Funders, and ECE partnerships
2) Public Health-Child Care Partnership
3) Child Care-School Partner Learning Communities
4) ECE collaboration with Legacy Works
5) ECE partnership with CCL

The following provides an overview of each of these partnerships.

Philanthropy, Funders, and ECE Partnerships
First 5 Santa Barbara County played a primary role in facilitating and connecting state-wide resources with other county departments, which resulted in the formation of many of the essential partnerships that led to the successes of ECCI’s work.

In the late summer of 2020, Santa Barbara Foundation initiated bi-monthly meetings with ECE leaders. The initial objective of these meetings was to establish a baseline of knowledge regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on child care; maintain and improve communications among child care providers, child care and parents, and child care and schools; and address gaps in the services of child care for children 0-5 years of age. The group has been regularly meeting and has collectively addressed ECE sustainability issues, pandemic burnout, and cross-sector collaborative efforts.

Public Health-Child Care Partnership
In August 2020, ECCI established the Public Health-Child Care Partnership in response to the pressing need for a platform for ECE leaders to ask questions and gain clarification from Santa Barbara County’s Public Health Department (SBCPHD) and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) regarding the ever changing COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. This partnership also addressed the need for SBCPHD and OEM to receive input on guidelines from ECE partners prior to release so the guidelines and regulations aligned with daily operations, best practice recommendations, and licensing protocols.

First 5 was central in establishing this critical alliance among PHD, OEM, and ECE partners. ECCI’s leadership role in managing the Public Health-Child Care partnership has been funded by Santa Barbara Foundation. Participating organizations in the Public Health-Child Care Partnership include Community Care Licensing (CCL), CRR, CCPC, First 5, SBCEO, SBCPHD, and OEM, Santa Barbara Foundation, United Way, and ECE local experts.

Monthly meetings and the establishment of this new partnership promoted clear messaging regarding critical COVID-19 related information as well as alignment in understanding of health and safety guidelines and directives. The synthetization and distribution of timely and critical COVID-19 information
and resources have been key in minimizing outbreaks in the child care setting, as well as the community at large.

Through this partnership critical issues were collaboratively addressed, including:

- Protocols for symptomatic persons
- Protocols for after COVID-19 exposure/possible exposure
- Illness Policy
- Hybrid/afterschool/school cohorts
- Substitute teacher guidelines
- Mask use on children
- Holiday and travel guidelines
- Vaccine issues and roll out coordination
- New variants of COVID-19
- Social distancing protocols
- Ventilation
- Parent communication

In addition to the monthly partnership meetings, working alliances across sectors were established. Regular communication among partners has been necessary and critical to supporting the community’s response to the changing guidelines, orders, and local COVID-19 rates.

Child Care and School Partners Learning Communities
Santa Barbara Foundation in partnership with the United Way, SBCPHD, First 5, CCPC, and CRR established the Child Care and School Partners Learning Communities. The objective of the Learning Communities was to establish a supportive and informative space for school district and child care leaders to collaborate to meet children’s learning and care needs in a way that stems, not spread COVID-19. The Learning Communities created the opportunity to discuss and explore system level coordination among different sectors. Two Learning Communities were held (12/2/20 and 1/12/21) and planning is process for next steps. The group had representatives from seven school districts, five school age providers, one community organization, two foundations, three ECE partners, and one city representative.

ECE Collaboration with Legacy Works
As part of the commitment to disseminate critical information, ECCI (funded by Santa Barbara Foundation), CRR, and CCPC worked with Legacy Group to provide critical child care related data to help expand the understanding of the impact of COVID-19 within Santa Barbara County on the SBC Community Data Dashboard. The child care section of the dashboard is in the process of being launched due to these collaborative efforts.

ECE Partnership with CCL
As a result of ECCI’s efforts, a supportive alliance was established among ECE leaders and CCL. The organizations partnered together to support compliance with health and safety guidelines as well as the roll-out of vaccines to child care providers.

Community Care Licensing (CCL) in the Santa Barbara Regional Office licenses approximately 2,000 care facilities for children and has worked diligently to support the health and safety of all children in care,
staff, and consumers in these settings, with a focus on COVID-19 prevention. CCL collaborated with the State of California Research, Automation, and Data Division (RAD) and other state departments to create a child care portal, mychildcare.ca.gov, to help support California workers and their families during COVID-19. This interactive portal continues to help essential workers, families, and caregivers find child care options that are convenient and reliable near their work, home, or preferred location.

CCL issued a series of waivers to ensure there were enough facilities that could remain open to meet the needs of children in care. Examples included a reduction in fees, increase of capacities, classroom changes, pop-ups, staff qualifications etc. CCL engaged with numerous stakeholders to identify the appropriate actions to best support those living and working in licensed settings and “pop-up” facilities.

Dissemination of Critical Information
A fundamental objective of ECCI is to maintain an updated centralized hub of information related to COVID-19 health and safety regulations and resources. The development of the SBC Emergency Child Care website has become a trusted resource in the community for up-to-date COVID-19 related information for families, child care providers, ECE agencies, and employers.

A primary strategy to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 through child care programs and disseminate information regarding regulations, guidance, and best practice recommendations was the development of the Santa Barbara Child Care Guide for COVID-19. This resource compiles the latest health and safety guidelines, directives, and best practices as soon as they are released from the State of California, the County of Santa Barbara, CCL, and CDC into one, easy to use document. The development of this guide helped ensure that providers were spending their limited available time implementing the health and safety guidelines instead of looking for newly released guidelines on multiple sites.

CCL played a key role in disseminating COVID-19 related information to providers. CCL issued and updated guidance via 30 Child Care Program Provider Information Notices (PINs) and participated at local stakeholder conferences to help facilities operate safely amid the pandemic. The Department published a Provider Playbook to synthesize all information in a user-friendly format.

Beyond the SBC Emergency Child Care website, ECCI has distributed information to the community via the following outlets:
- ECCI worked with OEM and developed content for the SBCPHD Child Care webpage.
- Outreach via Mi Vida, Mi Voz – Recursos durante COVID-19
- ECCI delivered presentations at the Directors’ Collaborative
- Bilingual outreach materials to providers, parents, and employers

The SBC Emergency Child Care website was developed under the financial support of the initial ECCI funder collaborative, and translated by CRR. Ongoing maintenance of the website and its associated resources have been supported by funding from Santa Barbara Foundation. CRR designed and translated all of ECCI’s info-sheets and handouts.

Health and Safety Support
In addition to the Santa Barbara Child Care Guide for COVID-19 and the critical information disseminated through the Santa Barbara Emergency Child Care website, the partnerships developed between ECE leaders and SBCPHD were key in disseminating information and supporting compliance with health and
safety guidelines. As a result of the Public Health – Child Care Partnership, CCL began working directly with SBCPHD in response to health order violations, complaints, etc. within child care settings.

Additionally, CCL dispatched Rapid Assessment and Support Teams (RAST) to monitor approximately 480 child care facilities in Santa Barbara County. Through in-person visits and tele-visits, the teams made sure safety measures were implemented in facilities. Every facility with a COVID-19-positive case received contact from CCLD to provide technical assistance and evaluate unmet needs. Additional RAST visits were conducted as child care facilities re-opened.

**Sustainability Support**

**Vaccine Efforts**

ECCI (funded by Santa Barbara Foundation) partnered with SBCPHD to ensure the prioritization and inclusion of ECE providers and staff in the education tier of the vaccine rollout. CCL, CCR, and CCPC compiled a comprehensive list of child care providers (and staff) in preparation for the vaccine roll-out efforts. CRR managed the list of approximately 4,000 individuals. As of April 1, 2021, approximately a quarter of these individuals have been vaccinated. CRR transitioned to a refined model of outreach and support for the harder to reach individuals who may struggle with technology, have a language barrier, or other challenges that impede the ability to connect and register for the vaccination.

Santa Barbara Foundation awarded $12,000 to CRR to help fund CRR’s efforts in providing support to the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination of child care staff throughout Santa Barbara County.

**Distribution Events and Supplies**

In September 2020, First 5 partnered with OEM to secure the most in demand supplies (105,000 gloves, 20,000 disinfecting wipes, and 10,800 masks) and then directly distributed these supplies to 40 child care centers that were open and serving 920 children. First 5 arranged and distributed these supplies directly from Supply Bank as part of OEM’s access to PPE supplies.

In April 2020, First 5 California approved 4 million dollars in emergency funds for supplies to child care programs. First 5 participated in a California First 5 survey that identified local needs and resulted in the distribution of much needed supplies to Santa Barbara County including 51,450 face masks, 38,000 disposable gloves, 5,240 cleaning supplies, hand soaps, and hand sanitizers, 936 boxes of baby wipes and 65,1250 diapers, as well as 120 infrared thermometers. First 5 contracted CRR to distribute these supplies to child care programs and Family Resource Centers. Additionally, First 5 received 5,000 children’s books from First 5 California for distribution to subsidized programs throughout the county. First 5 contracted CRR to distribute these books.

Santa Barbara Foundation awarded $25,000 in 2020 and $25,000 in 2021 to CRR to provide FREE COVID-19 Health & Safety Kits to increase local child care capacity. In addition, CRR received funding from the Department of Social Services to distribute 39,000 face masks, 1,000 containers of hand sanitizer, and 6,400 gloves to 13 Santa Barbara County School Districts.

CRR coordinated eight distribution events (4 in North County and four in South County) and conducted five distribution delivery days. CCPC participated in two supply distribution days with CRR. CCPC purchased 30,000 gloves and 30 gallons of hand sanitizers as well as books on diversity and a self-care book for the ECE programs who were open and serving children in-person in May 2020.
State-wide CCL distributed nearly two million pieces of PPE to adult and senior care residential facilities, children’s residential facilities, and child care facilities across the state. These masks, gloves, gowns, face shields, bottles of hand sanitizer, and thermometers enabled essential providers to safely care for vulnerable adults, seniors, and children.

**Stipends and Community Grants**
CRR distributed more than $500,000 of stipends (funds from CDE and private donations) to ECE providers in 2020.

First 5 Santa Barbara County established a partnership with the David and Lucille Packard Foundation and was able to secure $200,000 to support the Family Strengthening Focus area. First 5 provided 12 Family Resource Centers with funding to respond to the needs of local families through this pandemic.

In 2020, Santa Barbara Foundation awarded $288,500 through Santa Barbara Foundation’s William & Lottie Daniel Fund Child Care Scholarship and another $300,881 in 2021, which opened February 5, 2021 and closed March 19, 2021. Additionally, Santa Barbara Foundation awarded $85,000 in 2020 through ECE grants to support family engagement, professional development, and build content-specific leadership areas. This included funding of SBCEO’s proposal to continue their Early Care and Education Leadership Development Project for 2020-2021. Additionally, Santa Barbara Foundation awarded $12,600 in 2020 to child care programs through Santa Barbara Foundation’s Small Capacity Building Grant. In 2021, Santa Barbara Foundation awarded a grant to CCPC to pay for child development permits, as well as payment for CRR and CCPC’s memberships to the Chamber of Commerce.

In addition to grants and stipends, other sustainability efforts were employed by ECCI (funded by Santa Barbara Foundation) including:
- Comprehensive content and resources on [SBC Emergency Child Care website](#) regarding Funding and TA opportunities specifically targeted to ECE providers.
- Bilingual financial resources for ECE program hand-out (graphic design developed by CRR).
- Technical assistance to providers at the Directors’ Collaborative regarding ECCI and financial resources.

**Provider Support**

**Provider Meetings and Support Opportunities**
The day after Governor Newsom announced the stay-at-home order on March 12, 2021 CCPC launched the first virtual Directors’ Collaborative meeting to support ECE programs through this pandemic. The group has met nearly every Thursday for over a year and has approximately 100 members.

The Directors’ Collaborative became a platform for providers to share best practices and strategies while maintaining the health and safety protocols of the pandemic. ECE programs had to pivot operations due to the Stay-At-Home orders and created learning activity kits and left them at the front door of the school, organized meals for families whose children used to get their breakfast and lunches at school, built study desks for children to do their learning activities, created Zoom story times, and eventually secured Chromebooks for children to participate in distance learning.

The Directors’ Collaborative hosted various experts in the community including:
- Human resource experts
A second Directors’ Collaborative group has been formed for directors of summer camps and school age programs. These efforts will be jointly led by CCPC, SBCEO, United Way, and ECCI.

CRR created a Facebook group for child care providers in response to the pandemic. More than 250 child care providers engaged in this interactive platform and took advantage of the shared resources in addition to bi-weekly coach trainings in both English and Spanish that addressed COVID-19, CDC guidelines, Public Health Department orders, CDE’s best practices, and CCL’s regulations.

CCL hosted state-wide local licensing meetings for child care providers in multiple languages. The meetings provided information about various topics related to COVID-19 and addressed questions impacting child care providers. Promoted transparency by updating the CDSS website with data on COVID-19 at child care facilities. The Department enhanced CCL’s public-facing website by creating a COVID-19 landing page that includes daily dashboards of COVID-19 incidence in CCLD-licensed facilities. Additionally, CCL established a dedicated CCLD COVID-19 e-mail address.

The Santa Barbara Emergency Child Care website maintains a list of webinars and technical support training opportunities to help ensure ECE providers have access to expert as well as peer-to-peer support.

Mental Health
The pandemic has brought stress, trauma, and challenge to everyone’s lives. In response, SBCEO has partnered with CALM to offer ECE providers trainings, monthly social emotional learning meetings, and support. To date, CALM in partnership with SBCEO has offered three Trauma Responsive and Reflective Practice Professional Development Trainings.

Quality Counts Coaching and Professional Development
SBCEO’s Quality Counts coaches have offered COVID-19 Health & Safety trainings, Zoom Tips and Tricks, Family Engagement, and continue their regular quality improvement mentoring and coaching to centers throughout SB County via virtual platforms.

Next Steps
During this past year of COVID-19, ECCI has facilitated collaborations and supports that proved to be essential to the sustainability of ECE programs and the availability of safe child care for working parents. The accomplishments and partnerships highlighted in this report are a result of ECCI leadership, partner dedication, and unprecedented cross-sector support. Formalized and continued efforts are underway to
establish and refine the infrastructures and systems needed for ECCI to continue working with local partners to collectively prepare for and respond to whatever crises Santa Barbara County and our community faces.