



# "Simply Not Sustainable:"

## Georgia Parents' Experiences During the COVID-19 Crisis

In May and June of 2020, GEEARS issued an online survey designed for Georgia parents or caregivers with children ages birth-five to better understand families' experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. The 465 respondents from 78 counties reported a range of disruptions to employment, family routines, and child care arrangements.\*



### FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCED SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTIONS TO BOTH THEIR EMPLOYMENT & CHILD CARE SITUATIONS SINCE THE PANDEMIC HIT.

- The majority of respondents (**83%**) either "strongly agreed" (43%) or "agreed" (40%) with the statement "**the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted my home and family life.**"
- **Over half (56%)** of respondents indicated that an adult in the household had experienced job loss, furlough, or a reduction in pay or hours because of the pandemic.
- **Forty-five percent** indicated they were either *moderately or very concerned about the potential of job loss, furlough, or reduction of hours*; only 10% indicated they were not at all concerned.
  - Black respondents (45%) were more likely to report they were **very concerned** than their white (17%) counterparts.
  - Respondents without a four-year-degree (38%) were more likely to report they were **very concerned** than those with a bachelor's degree or higher (18%).

“

*With two adults working full time and trying to keep a four-year-old engaged, it's impossible. We feel we are doing nothing well, something always suffers: our work, our kid, our house, or us.*

”

\*Convenience sample responding to online survey included 465 respondents and was predominantly female (85%). Forty-seven percent of respondents identified as white (32% Black). Five percent reported they were of Hispanic/Latino origin. Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 65 years ( $M = 35$ ). The majority (56%) were married. Forty-four percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Forty-eight percent were employed full-time, and 12% were employed part-time; 13% were stay-at-home parents, and 2% were full-time students.

On average, **families' child care arrangements look strikingly different** than they did before the pandemic hit.

#### RESPONDENTS REPORTING:

Primary arrangement for their young children was a **formal child care program** (center, school, or family child care home)

Primary arrangement for their young children was staying at **home with a parent or guardian**

#### BEFORE MARCH 13TH

70%

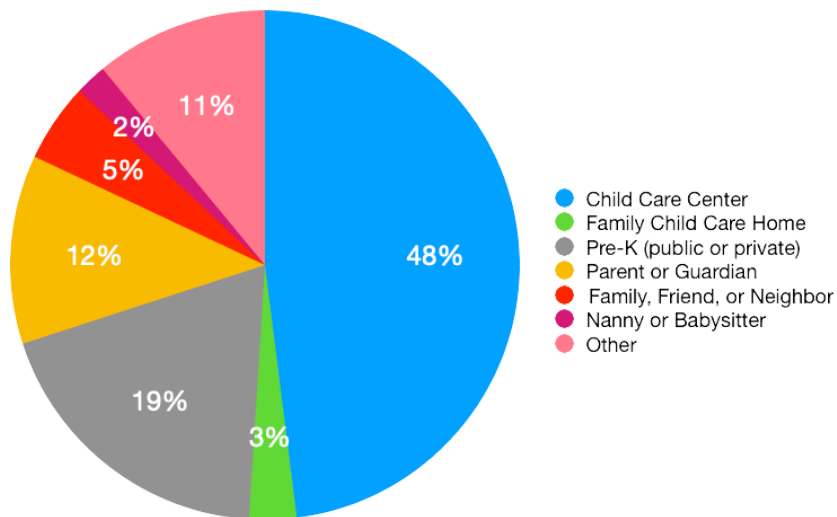
12%

#### CURRENTLY

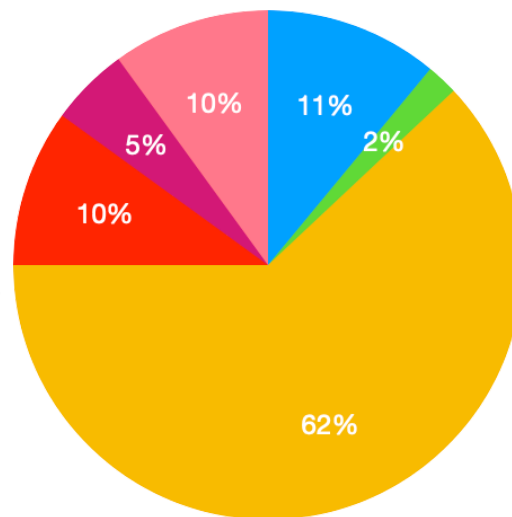
13%

62%

#### BEFORE MARCH 13TH



#### CURRENTLY



Parents' intentions to return to their original child care arrangement were mixed. Of those using a different arrangement than they were in early March, **56% expect to return to their original arrangement, 33% were unsure, and 11% indicated they did not intend to return.**

Parents and caregivers are **making significant adjustments and sacrifices** as they respond to new demands and attempt to juggle work and their children's needs.

Roughly **1 in 3** reported that they or another caregiver in the household had:

- **Alternated work hours** with another parent/caregiver...
- Worked **outside of normal business hours**...
- Worked **fewer hours**...

...in order to provide child care.

Roughly **1 in 3** took **paid leave** in order to provide child care.

- Respondents with at least a 4-year degree were **twice as likely** to report taking **paid leave** compared to those without a bachelor's degree.

Roughly **1 in 5** took **unpaid leave** in order to provide child care.

- Respondents with less than a 4-year degree were approximately **5 times as likely** to take **unpaid leave** compared to those with a bachelor's degree or higher.



“We are working before our child wakes in the morning (4:00-6:00 a.m.) and work long after she goes to bed (7:00-10:00 p.m.). For me, there is very little productivity during 'normal' business hours.”



## NOT SURPRISINGLY, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ARE UNDER A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS



Parents and caregivers have **concerns** and are **unsure** about their **future child care use**.

When thinking about their child care needs for the near future, many parents and caregivers expressed concern that their prior arrangement wouldn't be open or available and that they wouldn't be able to afford child care, as well as about potential exposure to the virus.

- **Nearly 1 in 3** indicated they were either **very** (19%) or **moderately** (12%) **concerned** their **previous child care arrangement won't be open or available**.
- Similarly, **nearly 1 in 3** indicated they were either **very** (19%) or **moderately** (12%) **concerned** their family **won't be able to afford child care**, with non-married respondents (single, separated, divorced, or widowed) more likely to indicate they were **very** concerned (33%) than their married/partnered counterparts (14%).
- **More than half** (51%) indicated they were either **very** (35%) or **moderately** (16%) **concerned** their child and family would be **more likely to be exposed** to COVID-19.



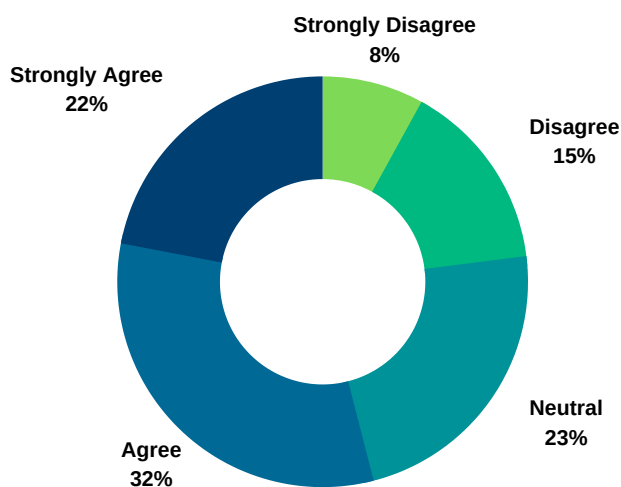
We love and trust our child care program, but have concerns about exposure in group care settings. How will teachers and children be protected? What are the implications for our ability to interact with older/vulnerable family members, especially grandparents? Will we be facing cycles of closures as cases are confirmed in child care?



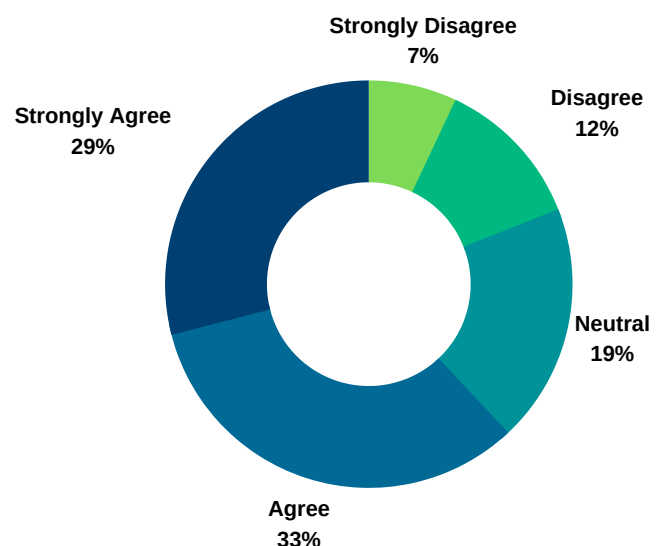
**Three-quarters (75%) of respondents indicated their current stress levels were either somewhat or much higher than usual.**

Parents and caregivers are concerned about the **impact of the pandemic on their children's development**.

Parents and caregivers worry about the pandemic's **impact on their own mental health**.



*"I worry that my child(ren)'s social, emotional, and/or cognitive development will suffer as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic."*



*"I worry about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on my own mental health."*





MANY PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR  
**CURRENT CHILD CARE AND EMPLOYMENT ARRANGEMENTS  
ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE.**



“

I spend my days (and many nights) constantly struggling to juggle the demands of work and child care, and I feel like I am failing at both.

”

Only about **1 in 3** of respondents indicated that their current child care situation was **manageable**.

Georgia **families need support** to face the child care challenges they face during COVID-19.

“

We are able to provide child care for our child, but it comes at the expense of our quality and quantity of work as well as our mental and physical care. It does not feel sustainable.

”

Across Georgia, families with young children face unprecedented challenges as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly overnight, families' employment and child care arrangements drastically shifted, and the survey findings above underscore that many parents continue to face difficult decisions as they attempt to care for their young children and make ends meet in situations described as “impossible,” “not sustainable,” and “incredibly stressful.” Without a clear end in sight, these challenges are likely to persist and have far-reaching impacts—not only on the families themselves but also employers, communities, and the state's economy. Such challenges require solutions that are multifaceted, with employers, policymakers, and education leaders working alongside families to support parents and children throughout the current crisis and beyond.