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March 24, 2020

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## **Coronavirus pandemic highlights importance of child care in Idaho**

*Survey demonstrates the tenuous nature of child care facilities in the state*

(Boise) As the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact every aspect of our state and our economy, they are driving home the critical importance of child care in Idaho. While the Idaho State Board of Education closed all schools until April 20, the choice to keep child care programs open across the state remains discretionary. So far, 124 child care programs out of approximately 1,100 have closed, displacing over 4,000 children.

Many child care programs do not have the reserves on hand to continue to pay basic operating costs or cover payroll. The stark reality of the situation is made clear by the findings of a recent survey, conducted March 12-16 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children:

**In Idaho**, of the 132 child care providers who responded:

- 33% say they would not survive closing for more than two weeks, *without significant public investment and support that would allow them to compensate and retain staff, pay rent, and cover other fixed costs*
- 20% would not survive a closure of any length of time without these supports
- 25% do not know how long they would be able to close their doors and be able to reopen without these supports
- 45% have parents who cannot pay fees or copays
- 27% have lost income because they are paid by attendance rather than enrollment
- 54% have lost income based on families' own inability to pay.

“Child care professionals and families across our state face tough choices and it is more important than ever that we support this vital system,” said Beth Oppenheimer, executive director of the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children.

Prior to the current developments with COVID-19, Idaho AEYC released a report with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on February 29, 2020 that [estimated that Idaho loses \\$479 million annually as a result of childcare breakdowns](#). If child care programs aren't able to continue operating in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, the impacts will be even more severe.

"If we see hundreds of child care programs closed in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic the impact to Idaho's economy will be dire," Oppenheimer continued.

Last week, Idaho AEYC called on the Governor to take steps to ensure that targeted programs continue to provide a safe, nurturing environment for children during this outbreak, for essential workers. Attention to this issue is particularly critical given that the need for child care from first-responders, health care professionals and other essential workers will increase during this crisis due to school closures.

Closures of additional child care programs are imminent – either through a mandate or as a result of child care providers choosing to close. Idaho AEYC recommended that **Idaho provide significant and flexible state and federal emergency funding to ensure that targeted child care programs remain open during the crisis in order to ensure that critical workers can continue to work.**

"The threat that COVID-19 poses to our already under-resourced child care system is alarming," concluded Oppenheimer. "Families and early learning professionals across Idaho need our support in this critical moment. The actions that we take now will have an impact on Idaho's response to this crisis and this important issue deserves attention at all levels of government."

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*The nonprofit Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (Idaho AEYC) is dedicated to advancing Idaho's early learning profession and advocating for children and families. The organization was founded in 1984 and is headquartered in Boise, Idaho. For more information, visit [www.idahoaeyc.org](http://www.idahoaeyc.org).*