



# On the Path to Recovery:

## The Evolving Impacts of COVID-19 on Louisiana Child Care Providers

STATEWIDE SURVEY FINDINGS  
FROM SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 19, 2021



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## BACKGROUND

### Survey 1: March 16 - 23, 2020

This survey of child care providers was conducted one week after the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Louisiana and one week prior to Governor John Bel Edwards issuing a stay-at-home order for all residents. While K-12 schools in Louisiana were ordered closed effective March 16, early learning centers and other child care businesses were permitted to remain open as long as they followed enhanced health and safety protocols, including lower group size requirements. March 2020 survey findings may be found [here](#).

### Survey 2: April 13 - 20, 2020

This survey was conducted while Louisiana remained under a stay-at-home order, and K-12 school closures were extended through the remainder of the school year. April 2020 survey findings may be found [here](#).

### Survey 3: June 15 - 22, 2020

This survey occurred during Phase Two of reopening, where ratios and group sizes for early care and education providers returned to pre-pandemic levels for children ages 2 and under. Ratios and group sizes for children ages 3 and up increased from Phase One levels, but remained below pre-pandemic allowances. June 2020 survey findings may be found [here](#).

### Survey 4: January 13 - 27, 2021

Prior to this survey, Louisiana moved into Phase Three of reopening in September 2020 but returned to Phase Two of reopening by November 2020. Ratios and group sizes for children ages 3 and up at early care and education providers decreased again in the reversion to Phase Two and both child care providers and K-12 schools remained open throughout the 2020-21 school year, following quarantine and closure protocols as necessary for suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 among children and staff. January 2021 survey findings may be found [here](#).

**The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children (LPIC) is conducting a series of surveys about the impact of COVID-19 on Louisiana child care providers**, in partnership with Agenda for Children, Child Care Association of Louisiana, Childcare Connections for Northeast Louisiana, Louisiana Association of United Ways, Northwestern State University, On Track by 5 Alliance, Pointe Coupee Early Childhood Coalition, United Way of Southeast Louisiana, and Volunteers of America. These surveys provide real-time insights into the state of early care and education over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the evolving challenges and circumstances facing child care providers.

**This report details the findings of the fifth survey of child care providers, conducted September 29 - October 19, 2021**, one month after Hurricane Ida made landfall in southeast Louisiana, causing widespread damage and leaving most residents in the region without power for days. The survey window was over six months into Louisiana's shift to a modified Phase Three of reopening and almost two months into a reinstated indoor mask mandate for all individuals ages 5 and older, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status. In Phase Three of reopening, teacher-to-child ratios and classroom group sizes for all ages returned to pre-pandemic levels for early care and education providers. In addition to loosening COVID-19 precautions, the Louisiana Department of Education continued administering rounds of COVID-19 relief grants, awarding over \$85 million in funds to child care providers throughout 2021. These funds were in addition to almost \$41 million in grants awarded in 2020. The survey again asked child care providers what impact COVID-19 was having on their program or business, including financial losses, temporary closures, and challenges faced.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM FALL 2021 SURVEY FINDINGS

Although results from the September 29 - October 19, 2021, survey show that child care providers in Louisiana may finally be through the worst of their challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for investment and support remains. Most notably:

### A year and a half into the pandemic, COVID-19 closures continue to impact providers.

- **Only one-third** of providers who responded to the survey reported not having to temporarily close classrooms or the entire center because of a potential or confirmed case of COVID-19 in 2021.
- **Almost half** of providers had to temporarily close classrooms in 2021 because of a potential or confirmed case of COVID-19, and **31%** had to temporarily close the entire center. On average, in 2021, providers had to close classrooms **at least 3 times** and the entire center **nearly 2 times**.

### Providers still face operational challenges, but the types of challenges changed.

- Providers reported some staffing challenges at higher rates, including **64%** experiencing employee absences, **55%** hiring or trying to hire additional staff, and **51%** facing increased staffing costs.
- Most providers continued to face increased costs for cleaning supplies (**81%**); however, fewer responding providers experienced difficulty in obtaining needed supplies (**46%**).

### However, the financial strain appears to be easing for providers.

- Fewer responding providers reported experiencing financial losses due to COVID-19, **58%** in Fall 2021 compared to 76% in January 2021. However, reported loss amounts continue to increase, averaging over **\$300,000 per center** as of October 19, translating to an estimated **\$287 million** in collective losses statewide.
- Fewer providers reported having families behind on tuition payments, **43%** in Fall 2021 compared to 60% in January 2021, and the average amount owed to a center decreased to **just over \$7,000** from over \$16,000 in January.
- Providers indicated greater confidence in their ability to continue operations, with **52%** expecting they could afford to operate in the long term based on their current finances and enrollment rates, up from 38% in January 2021. **One-third** of providers remained unsure of how long their business could afford to operate, while only **7%** predicted their business could last six months or less.

### Rebounding enrollment rates and relief grants likely contribute to providers' improved financial positions.

- **Almost half** of providers served at least the same number of children in Fall 2021 as they did in January 2020 before the pandemic. On average, enrollment was just **2%** less in Fall 2021 than it was in January 2020.
- More providers maintained a waitlist in Fall 2021 (**57%**) compared to January 2021 (36%), and **53%** reported being at capacity as a contributing factor for the waitlist.
- **Over 90%** of providers received COVID-19 related grants from the Louisiana Department of Education, and a higher rate used the grant funds to offer employee pay incentives – **70%** of providers in Fall 2021 compared to 58% in January 2021 – while also continuing to use the grant funds for typical operational costs, including utilities (**84%**), cleaning supplies (**84%**), and employee wages (**83%**).
- **Nearly half** of all providers that received LDE grants used the funds to off-set family co-pays and/or owed balances of families receiving child care assistance.

### While many providers offer increased compensation to employees now, raises and paid time off may not be permanent.

- **Over half** of providers reported paying a higher average teacher wage in Fall 2021 than in January 2020, with **32%** paying at least \$12 an hour in Fall 2021 compared to 23% in January 2020.
- Of providers offering benefits to employees, the most commonly available benefits were **bonus pay** and **paid vacation and sick days** for full-time staff. The percentage of providers offering bonus pay and paid time off to both full-time and part-time employees **increased** from January 2020 to Fall 2021.
- **Almost 80%** of providers paid staff their regular paychecks during COVID-19 related classroom or center closures in Fall 2021 compared to 47% of providers in January 2021, and only **5%** of providers did not pay staff during closures in Fall 2021 compared to 25% of providers in January 2021.

## MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM, GROW INVESTMENTS IN CHILD CARE

These Fall 2021 survey results, along with previous results in the survey series, indicate providers are in a better place today than they were at the beginning of the year, but have still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels of service for families. Supports, largely in the form of grants, in 2020 slowed dire consequences for providers, and those in 2021 appeared to help providers move toward recovery. While enrollment rates increased and financial losses decreased, providers are not yet restored to pre-pandemic levels, which still leaves too many families without access to quality care for their children. For Louisiana to truly thrive, it must take the steps necessary to ensure all families can access a robust, affordable early care and education system.

The following actions would further Louisiana's progress in COVID-19 recovery by building on earlier efforts to bolster early care and education and support children, parents, and the economy:

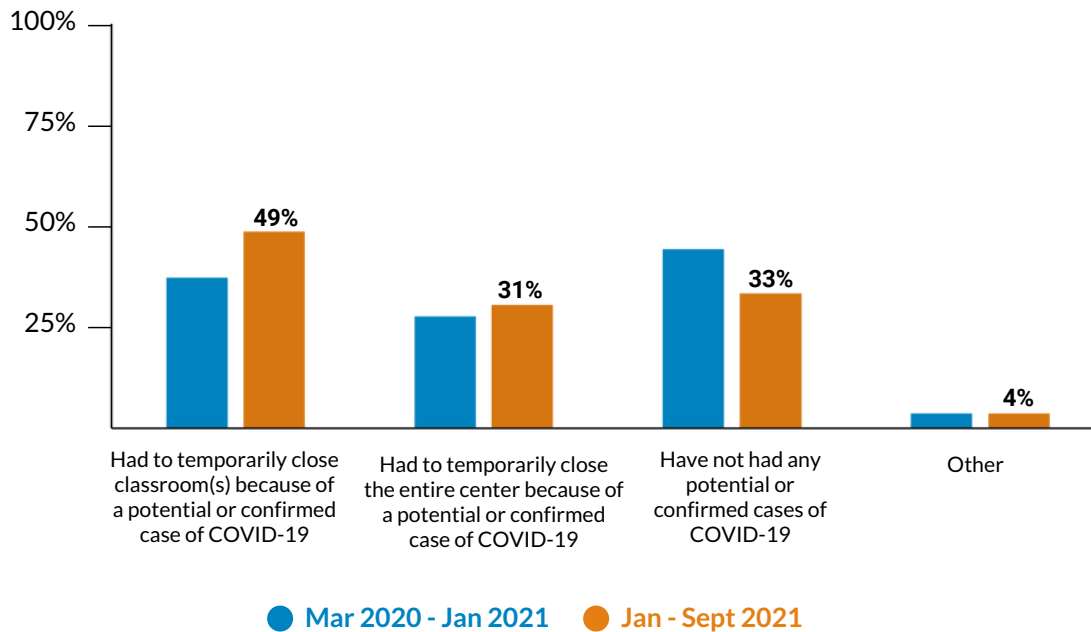
- **Continue to use federal stimulus and COVID-19 relief funds to stabilize the child care sector** through the issuance of grants to child care providers and support wage enhancements for child care staff, who typically earn less than a family-supporting wage and help to keep the economy running in a field that experiences extremely high employee turnover.
- **Support quality providers with increasing enrollment capacity** either at their existing facilities through grants for facility improvements and expansion or by acquiring additional facilities.
- **Increase state investments in early care and education to expand access to high-quality child care**, especially for children birth through age 3, which will prepare our students for a smart start in life, enable families to be productive in the workforce, and serve as an economic engine for local communities.

## SUMMARY RESULTS

**A year and a half into the pandemic, COVID-19 closures continue to impact providers.**

Only one-third of providers who responded to the survey reported not having to temporarily close classrooms or the entire center because of a potential or confirmed case of COVID-19 in 2021.

**Figure 1**  
COVID-19 Exposure Continued to Cause Providers to Temporarily Close Classrooms or the Entire Center



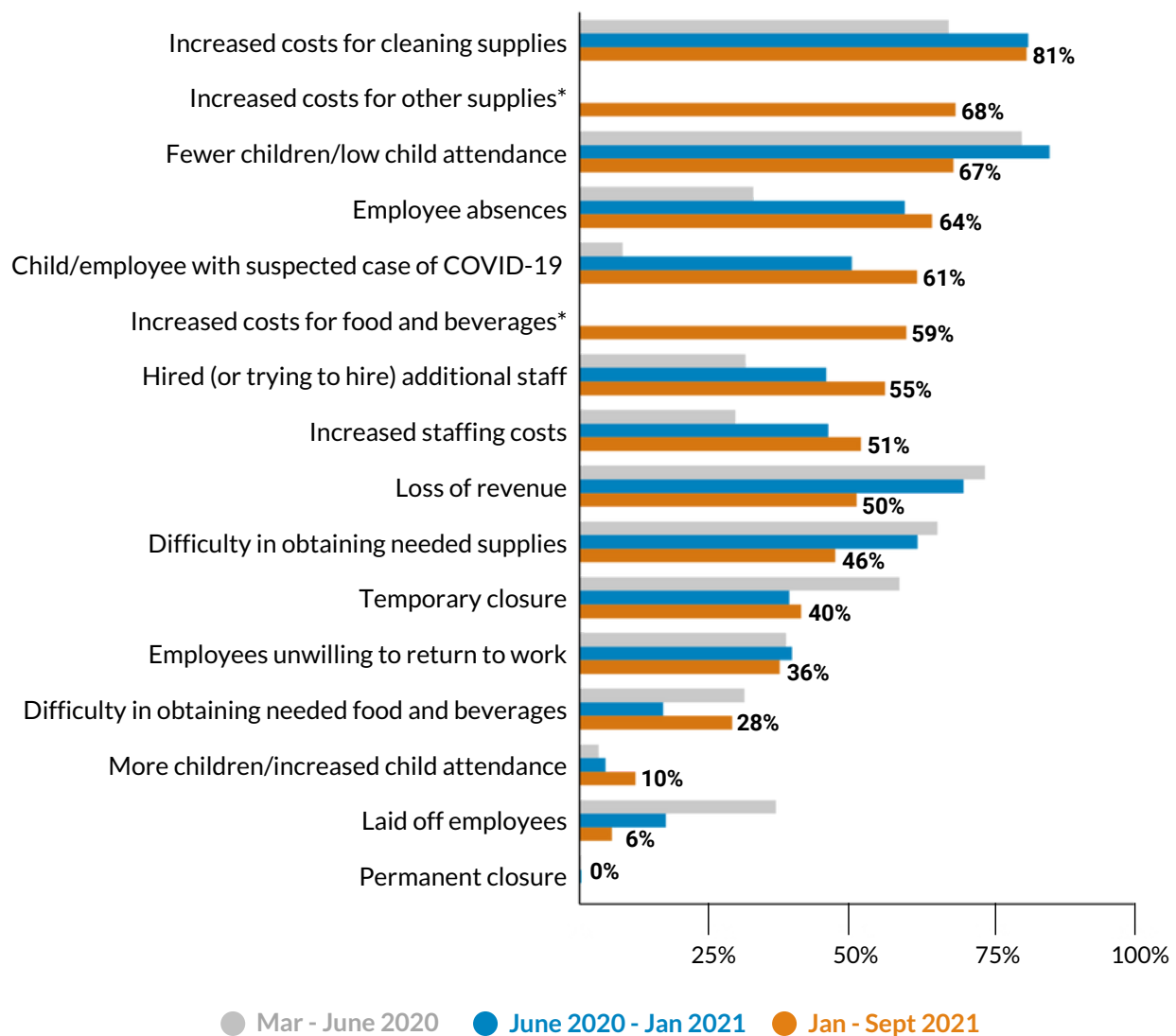
Questions: [January 2021] Has your business/program temporarily closed classrooms or the entire center at any time because of a potential or confirmed case of COVID-19/coronavirus? / [Fall 2021] Has your business/program temporarily closed classrooms or the entire center at any time in 2021 (January 2021 to September 2021) because of a potential or confirmed case of COVID-19/coronavirus? Only respond for closures related to COVID-19/coronavirus. A temporary closure means closing for 2 weeks or less. Please check all that apply.  
Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Almost half (49%) of providers had to temporarily close classrooms in 2021 because of a potential or confirmed case of COVID-19, and 31% had to temporarily close the entire center. On average, in 2021, providers had to close classrooms at least 3 times and the entire center nearly 2 times.

**Providers still face operational challenges, but the types of challenges changed.**

Most providers continued to face increased costs for cleaning supplies (81%); however, fewer responding providers experienced difficulty in obtaining needed supplies (46%).

**Figure 2**  
**Providers Faced Same, Changing Operational Challenges Due to COVID-19**



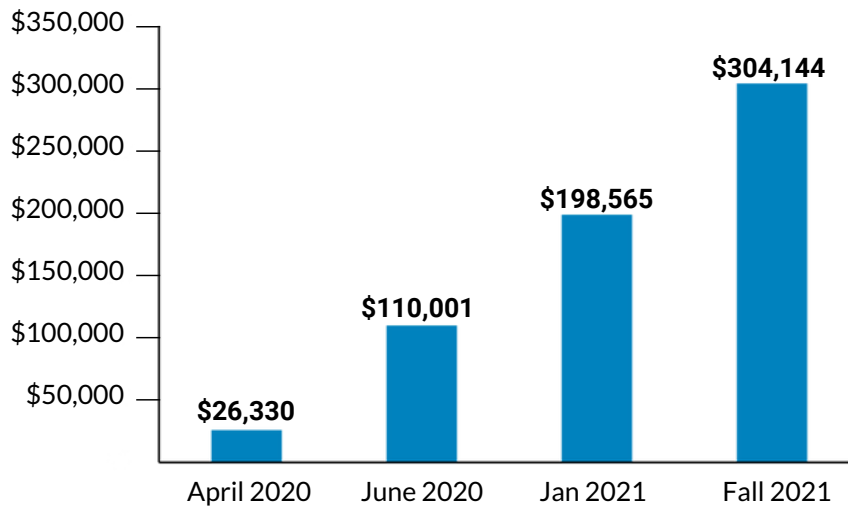
\*Response option not included in June 2020 and January 2021 surveys.  
 Question: [June 2020, if responded "Yes" to previous question, "Since March 1st, has your business/program been impacted by COVID-19/coronavirus?" / January 2021, if responded "Yes" to previous question, "Since June 2020, has your business/program been impacted by COVID-19/coronavirus?" / Fall 2021, if responded "Yes" to previous question, "Since January 2021, has your business/program been impacted by COVID-19/coronavirus?"] If yes, how? Please check all that apply.  
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Providers reported some staffing challenges at higher rates, including 64% experiencing employee absences, 55% hiring or trying to hire additional staff, and 51% facing increased staffing costs.

**However, the financial strain appears to be easing for providers.**

Fewer responding providers reported experiencing financial losses due to COVID-19, 58% in Fall 2021 compared to 76% in January 2021. However, reported loss amounts continue to increase, averaging over \$300,000 per center as of October 19, translating to an estimated \$287 million in collective losses statewide.

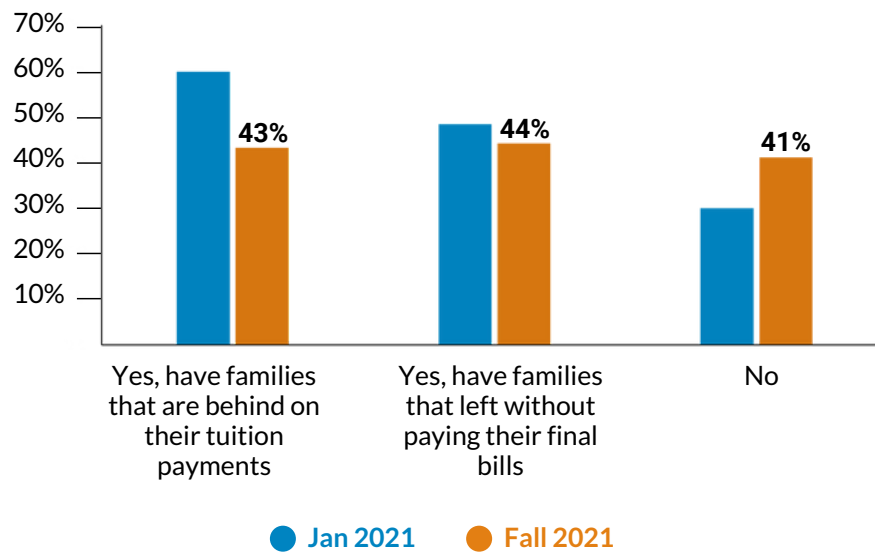
**Figure 3**  
**Average Loss per Center Increased by Over \$275,000 During the Pandemic**



Questions: [April and June 2020] If yes, what is your best estimate of your financial losses to date? / [January 2020 and Fall 2021] If yes, what is your best estimate of your financial losses from March 2020 to now?

Fewer providers reported having families behind on tuition payments, 43% in Fall 2021 compared to 60% in January 2021, and the average amount owed to a center decreased to just over \$7,000 from over \$16,000 in January.

**Figure 4**  
**Fewer Providers Experienced Families Behind on Payments**



Question: As of today, does your business/program have families that are behind on their tuition payments or have families that left your business/program without paying their final bills? Please check all that apply.

Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.



Providers indicated greater confidence in their ability to continue operations, with 52% expecting they could afford to operate in the long term based on their current finances and enrollment rates, up from 38% in January 2021. One-third of providers remained unsure of how long their business could afford to operate, while only 7% predicted their business could last six months or less.

**Table 5**  
Over Half of Providers Expected Being Able to Afford Long-Term Operations

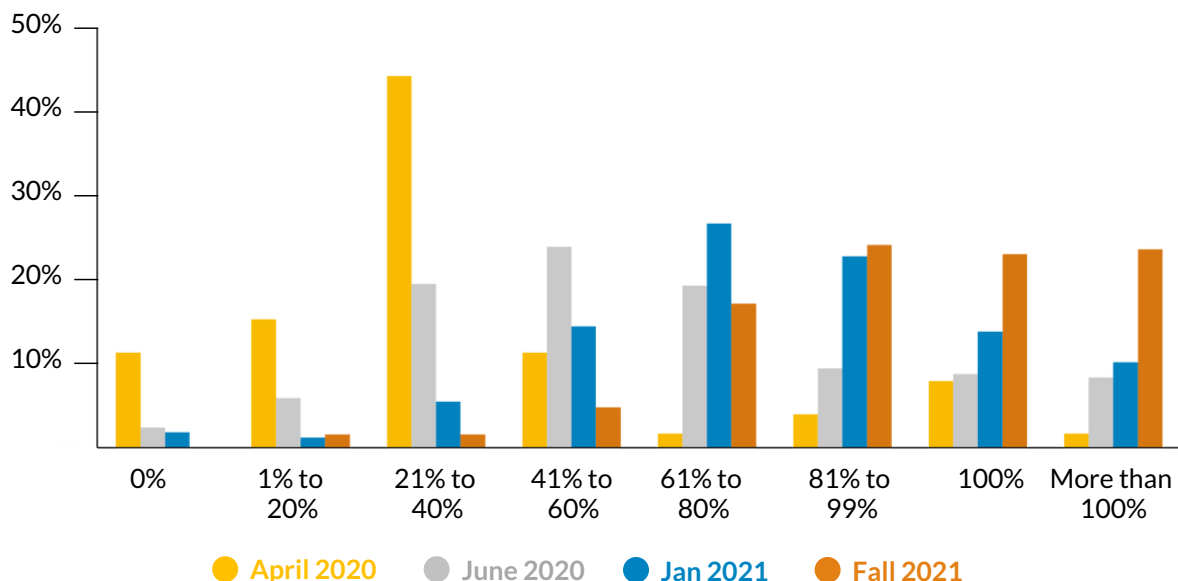
Response	January 2021	Fall 2021
Less than 1 month	1%	0%
1 - 3 months	8%	1%
4 - 6 months	8%	6%
7 - 9 months	4%	3%
10 - 12 months	4%	5%
As long as necessary	38%	52%
Not sure	38%	33%

Question: Based on the current finances and enrollment rates of your business/program, how much longer do you think you can afford to operate your business/program?

### Rebounding enrollment rates and state relief grants likely contribute to providers' improved financial positions.

Almost half (47%) of providers served at least the same number of children in Fall 2021 as they did in January 2020 before the pandemic. On average, enrollment was just 2% less in Fall 2021 than it was in January 2020.

**Figure 6**  
Provider Enrollment Rates Continued to Improve, Trend Toward Pre-Pandemic Levels



Question: What was the typical daily enrollment for each age group at your business/program last week?

More providers maintained a waitlist in Fall 2021 (57%) compared to January 2021 (36%), and 53% reported being at capacity as a contributing factor for the waitlist.

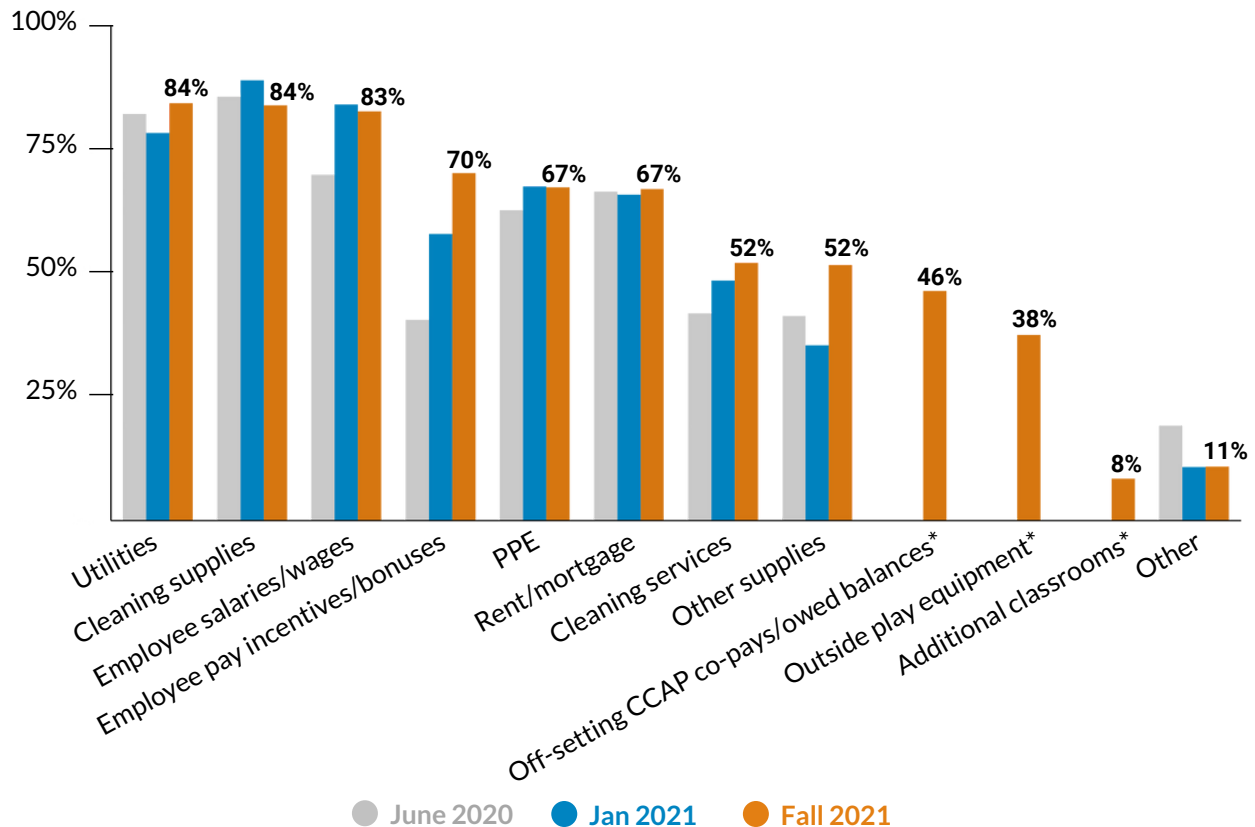
**Table 7**  
**Waitlists Prompted by Capacity Constraints More Than Staffing Challenges**

Response	Percent of Responding Participants
Business/program at capacity	53%
Not enough other staff	44%
Not enough qualified teachers	39%
Other	20%

Question: What factors contributed to your business/program having a waiting list last week? Please check all that apply.  
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Over 90% of providers received COVID-19 related grants from the Louisiana Department of Education, and a higher rate used the grant funds to offer employee pay incentives – 70% of providers in Fall 2021 compared to 58% in January 2021 – while also continuing to use the grant funds for typical operational costs, including utilities (84%), cleaning supplies (84%), and employee wages (83%).

**Figure 8**  
**State Grant Funds Increasingly Used for Employee Pay Incentives**



\*Response option not included in June 2020 and January 2021 surveys.  
 Question: [June 2020] If you received funds from the LDE programs, what did you use the funds for? / [January 2021] What did you use the LDE COVID-19 related grant funds for? Please check all that apply. / [Fall 2021] If yes, what did you use the LDE COVID-19 related grant funds for? Please check all that apply.  
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Nearly half (46%) of all providers that received LDE grants used the funds to off-set family co-pays and/or owed balances of families receiving child care assistance.

**While many providers offer increased compensation to employees now, raises and paid time off may not be permanent**

Over half (54%) of providers reported paying a higher average teacher wage in Fall 2021 than in January 2020, with 32% paying at least \$12 an hour in Fall 2021 compared to 23% in January 2020.

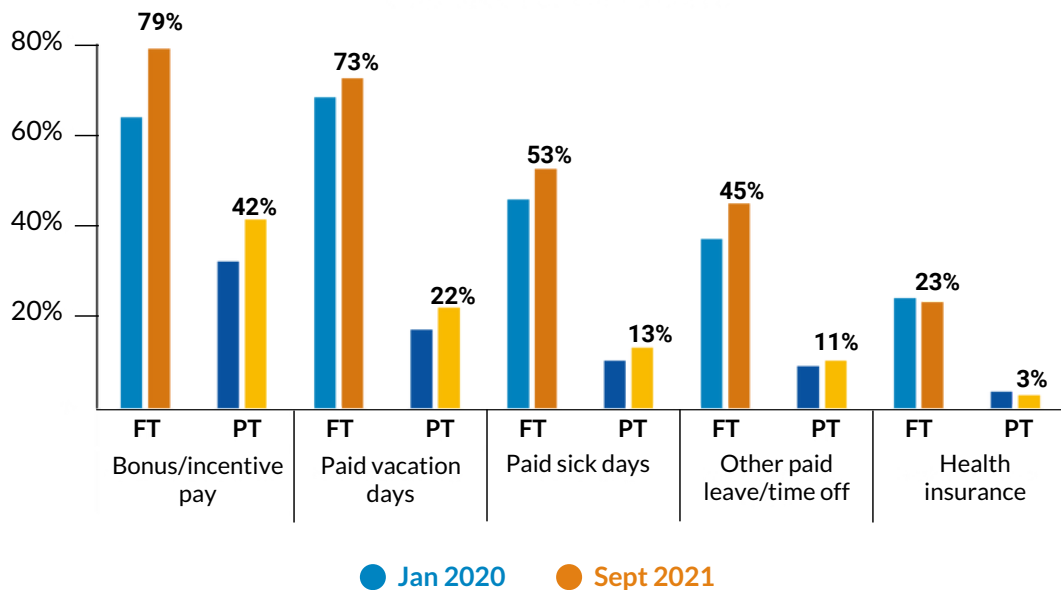
**Figure 9**  
Average Teacher Wages Increased at Most Providers Over the Pandemic

Response	January 2020	September 2021
Less than \$8	10%	7%
\$8 to \$9.99	39%	27%
\$10 to \$11.99	29%	34%
\$12 to \$14.99	13%	19%
\$15 to \$19.99	4%	7%
\$20 or more	7%	6%

Questions: What was your average/typical teacher salary or wage in January 2020 (last year)? Please provide the typical or average amount your business/program paid teachers. / What is your average/typical teacher salary or wage now (September 2021)? Please provide the typical or average amount your business/program pays teachers.

Of providers offering benefits to employees, the most commonly available benefits were bonus pay and paid vacation and sick days for full-time staff. The percentage of providers offering bonus pay and paid time off to both full-time and part-time employees increased from January 2020 to Fall 2021.

**Figure 10**  
If Providers Offered Benefits, Most Provided Bonus Pay and Paid Time Off to Full-Time Staff

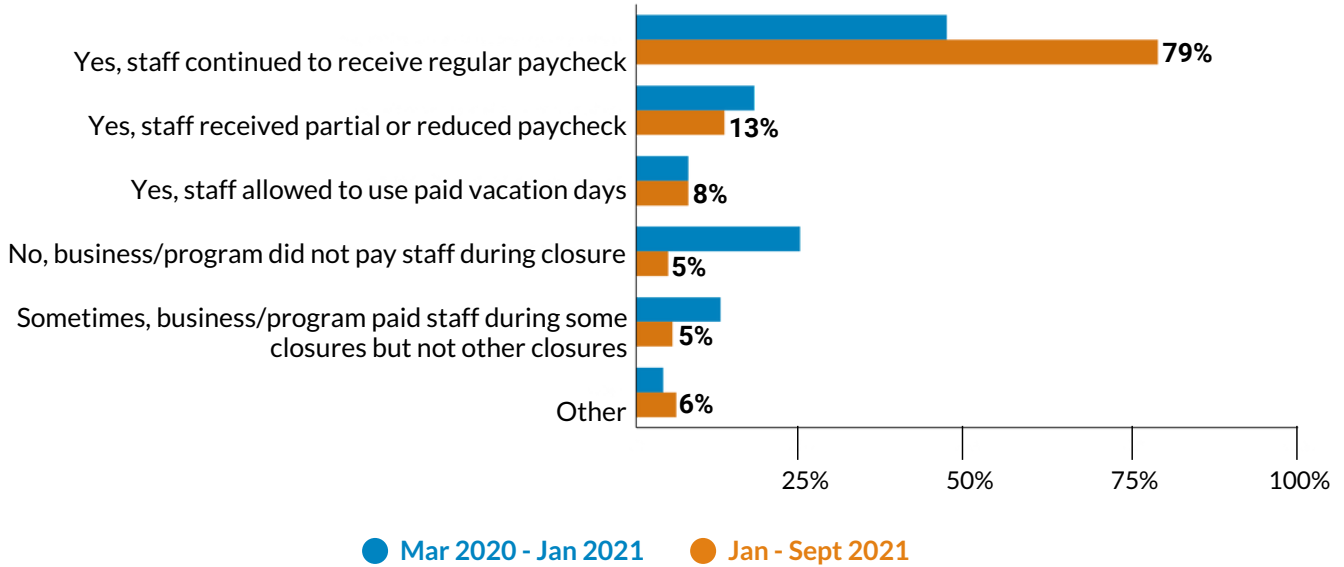


Questions: What types of benefits did your business/program offer employees in January 2020 (last year)? Please check all that apply. Include benefits offered to some or all employees. / What types of benefits does your business/program offer employees now (September 2021)? Please check all that apply. Include benefits offered to some or all employees.

Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Almost 80% of providers paid staff their regular paychecks during COVID-19 related classroom or center closures in Fall 2021 compared to 47% of providers in January 2021, and only 5% of providers did not pay staff during closures in Fall 2021 compared to 25% of providers in January 2021.

**Figure 11**  
**More Providers Paid Staff Full Wages During COVID-Related Closures**



Question: [January 2021] If your business/program closed at any time due to COVID-19/coronavirus, did you continue to pay staff or allow staff to use paid vacation days during that closure? Only respond for closures related to COVID-19/coronavirus. Please check all that apply. / [Fall 2021] If your business/program temporarily closed classrooms or the entire center at any time in 2021 (January 2021 to September 2021) due to COVID-19/coronavirus, did you continue to pay staff or allow staff to use paid vacation days during that closure? Only respond for closures related to COVID-19/coronavirus. A temporary closure means closing for 2 weeks or less. Please check all that apply.  
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

# APPENDIX

## Survey Methodology

LPIC developed and administered this survey online through Survey Monkey from September 29, 2021, to October 19, 2021. The Child Care Association of Louisiana and resource and referral agencies emailed survey links to providers throughout the state. The Louisiana Department of Education also shared the survey link in a webinar for child care providers on October 7, 2021, and in its newsletter to child care providers on October 14, 2021.

Prospective respondents included any child care provider in Louisiana. Of the approximately 1,624 licensed child care centers and family child care providers in the state, 267 providers representing 301 locations responded to the survey, answering some or all of the questions. While response numbers for this survey were slightly lower than for prior surveys, the results continue to reflect a significant sample of child care providers across Louisiana.

For questions where some survey respondents did not provide an answer, the included results percentages reflect calculations based only on the number of survey respondents providing an answer to the question. For example, if only 100 survey respondents answered a question, the results would reflect what percentage of those 100 respondents selected each answer.

## Characteristics of Survey Respondents

**Table A1**  
**Regions of Responding Child Care Providers**

Region (Parishes)	Percent of Responding Providers
<b>Acadiana</b> <i>(Acadia, Avoyelles, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, Rapides, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Vermilion, Vernon)</i>	23%
<b>Capitol Region</b> <i>(Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, Tangipahoa, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana)</i>	15%
<b>Northeast Louisiana</b> <i>(Caldwell, East Carroll, Franklin, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll)</i>	27%
<b>Northwest Louisiana</b> <i>(Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Catahoula, Claiborne, Concordia, De Soto, Grant, Jackson, La Salle, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Webster, Winn)</i>	12%
<b>Southeast Louisiana</b> <i>(Assumption, Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Terrebonne, Washington)</i>	21%
<b>Southwest Louisiana</b> <i>(Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis)</i>	1%

# APPENDIX

**Table A2**  
**Program Type of Responding Child Care Providers**

Program Type	Percent of Responding Participants
Type III Center	77%
Type II Center	4%
Type I Center	5%
Registered Family Child Care	13%
In-Home Child Care	1%