

MEMORANDUM

To: Governor Asa Hutchinson
Secretary Cindy Gillespie, Department of Human Services
Secretary Nathaniel Smith, MD, Department of Health
Secretary Michael Preston, Commerce and AEDC
Director Charisse Childers, Division of Workforce Services

From: Gregg Cooper, President Arkansas Early Childhood Association &
Arkansas Early Childhood Association Board of Directors

CC: Senator Trent Garner
Representative Denise Garner
Keesa Smith, DHS Deputy Director
Phyllis Bell, Child Welfare Senior Advisor

Date: Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Re: Child Care During and After the Pandemic

The [Arkansas Early Childhood Association](#) (AECA) is a non-profit organization, comprised of 1,500 early childhood professionals and parents who share a common concern about the well-being of young children and their families. AECA has worked for more than 50 years to promote quality care and education for the children of Arkansas. **The AECA Board of Directors hopes to provide guidance to the state's leaders in supporting Arkansas families and protecting existing child care capacity during and after this health emergency.**

Recommendation 1: Close all licensed child care programs with the exception of those serving essential personnel as recommended by the [National Association of the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#). States acting on this recommendation, so far include: AL, CT, KY, IL, MA, MD, NC, NJ, OH, OR, PA, RI, VT, WY and the District of Columbia.

As a public health imperative and **in order to flatten the curve to save lives**, AECA believes that if states and districts are closing schools, then they also must close the child care system. **However, select currently licensed child care centers and family child care homes should be allowed to reopen or remain open on a limited basis in order to serve the children of emergency responders and other essential personnel** for whom remote work is not an option.

- As the state coordinates child care of essential personnel, child care providers that are part of the Arkansas Better Beginnings Quality Rating Improvement System should be prioritized.
- Abide by the indoor social distancing directive per [CDC](#) and advised by the Governor, ADH, and the Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (ARAAP) to stable groups of 10 or less (adults and children) in each classroom staying open to serve essential personnel.
- Ensure that child care centers serving the children of essential personnel have cleaning and health-related supplies to meet state directives. Add a representative of the child care industry to the Department of Emergency Management state/regional teams determining access to necessary supplies who can provide guidance on how best to respond to changing circumstances and environments.



- Implement a strong outreach and communications plan, utilizing the child care resource and referral system, child care licensing and subsidy staff at DHS, and human resource professionals within businesses and organizations employing essential personnel to ensure families are aware of their options. Communications should be provided in all relevant languages.

Recommendation 2: Maintain the human, programmatic, and financial infrastructure of the child care sector so it can meet the needs of families when the pandemic is over.

As the state faces weeks or months of uncertainty, the strain being placed on our child care providers, who are already operating on razor-thin margins, could force many of them out of business permanently. **Child care is not like the K-12 system, where building expenses are being covered and educators compensated regardless of the duration of the closure.** If we are to have a child care sector that can support all other sectors after the health crisis has ended, **child care must be treated as the invaluable component of the infrastructure that supports the entire Arkansas economy that it is.**

- Establish payment policies that will cover additional costs, such as meeting health and safety requirements as well as to meet classroom teacher to child ratios that are in line with maintaining stable groups of 10 or fewer people per the social distancing directive for indoor gatherings.
- Deem child care workers essential personnel during the pandemic so their children can access child care.
- Ensure **all** licensed child care centers and family child care homes are included in the state's eligibility definition so ALL employees and owners can access unemployment insurance, loans and grants provided through the CARES Act.

AECA will continue to monitor for changes, new developments and helpful examples in other states and share those findings as they develop. Thank you for taking the time to consider these recommendations that will assist the families of essential personnel and our state's child care industry during this unprecedented time. Please contact info@arkansasearlychildhood.org with any questions or requests for clarification.