

Providers' and Teachers' Perceptions of Georgia's Pandemic Relief Funding Efforts

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) used state and federal pandemic relief funding to implement approximately 30 initiatives to stabilize the early care and education (ECE) industry and support young children and their families.

This brief summarizes findings from Child Trends' evaluation of DECAL's pandemic relief initiatives that relate to ECE providers' and teachers' perceptions of relief funding efforts. Throughout, we provide quotes from providers and teachers to illustrate findings. Additional evaluation findings, along with details about the study design, can be found in companion briefs and reports on [DECAL's website](#).

Providers reported that the most helpful type of support was flexible funds paid directly to programs, which allowed providers to choose how to spend the funds (e.g., STABLE, which provided stabilization grants to providers).

Over 80 percent of providers surveyed agreed that pandemic relief funds helped them avoid layoffs and retain staff, avoid or delay closing, make needed repairs or improvements, and continue their quality improvement activities (see Figure 1).

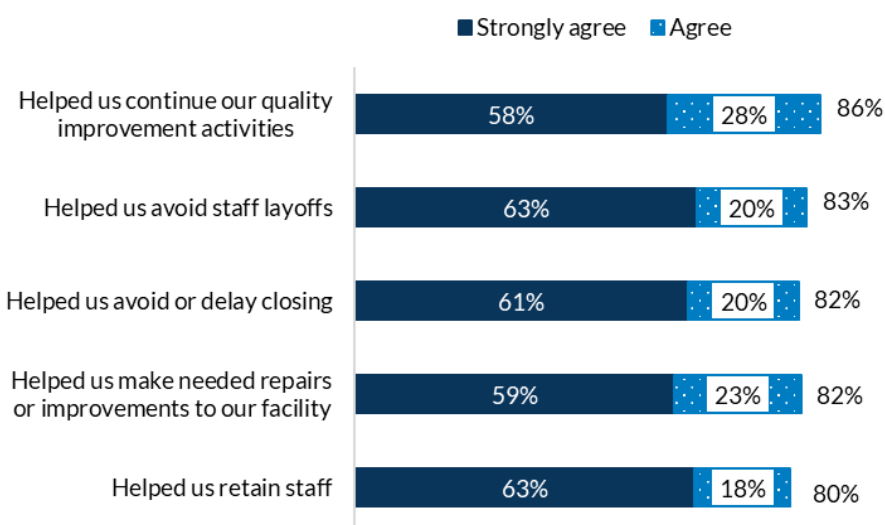


- **STABLE:** Short-Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities
- **CAPS:** Childcare and Parent Services
- **POWER:** Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition



"I started my daycare and got licensed right smack dab in the middle of COVID, like as soon as COVID started is when I got licensed. So it was like a sink or swim situation. So when the funding came about, I can't even tell you how relieved I was. Not so much because I'm getting so much money, but because I'm able to keep my doors open. My dream doesn't have to die, you know, the passion I have. I can continue on with it."

Figure 1. Ways in which providers agreed or strongly agreed pandemic funding helped their program



Source: Child Trends analysis of provider survey data (2024)

Overall, teachers found the pandemic relief projects helpful and appreciated the support, perceiving **POWER (\$1,000 unrestricted payments to staff)** to be the most helpful type of support. The majority of teachers who participated in interviews reported that POWER payments helped them pay for necessities such as rent, bills, groceries, and clothing.



“I felt appreciated for what we put into for the classroom coming in and working during the pandemic with the hours being cut, the classroom sizes decreasing ... Things became overwhelming. So I felt appreciated with those and then it just helped financially for myself in the household for finances.”



“Well, it's definitely the extra security because as early educators, we don't really get paid that much, so we basically live paycheck to paycheck. So when we got that extra like \$1,000, it was helpful because I'm like, well, I don't have to worry about waiting until Friday to get paid. I can put gas in my car now.”

Teachers reported that **POWER payments and classroom supply grants** allowed them to purchase classroom supplies without having to use their own money, something they reported often needing to do. Teachers also appreciated receiving grants directly and having the ability to decide what to purchase.



“Being able to pick the items ourselves, that's going to benefit our class because we as teachers know our students, and we know what they need.”

While providers and teachers generally found the process of applying for pandemic relief supports to be smooth and easy, it was challenging to know what supports they were eligible for. Providers and teachers wanted better communication from DECAL about eligibility requirements and application statuses.

Providers and teachers reported challenges using ClassWallet, a platform that DECAL used to distribute funds for physical resources; challenges included feeling that the platform was confusing, that items were overpriced, and that there were limited vendor choices. Many providers and teachers did not spend all the funds that had been allotted to them in ClassWallet.

Experiences After Pandemic Relief Supports Ended

Many providers reported being worried about their program's financial stability and ability to retain staff now that most pandemic relief supports have ended. For example, many providers said they had to stop paying incentives or bonuses to their staff, reduce hours of operation, reduce support to families, increase tuition, and make other cost reductions such as limiting program activities or updates to materials.

Teachers reported mixed perceptions of the impact of the loss of pandemic relief funding. Some teachers indicated that the loss of funding and support they had been receiving had a substantial impact on them, whereas others indicated that the ending of funds had little or no impact on them.



"Yeah, we took a pay decrease ... It impacted me drastically for my home because I'm a single mother with children. It's [been a] check-to-check basis thing for me, so the decrease was a hardship for me."



"I think it would be nice to continue receiving them, but I don't know that not receiving them has really affected me because I wasn't counting on them for anything."

Teachers indicated that ongoing bonuses or supply grants would be helpful. Several teachers noted that supply grants would reduce their need to use their own money to buy supplies and materials for their classrooms.



"I feel like teachers just lack support overall. We have to deal with a lot—the parents, the kids, and then you got the admin and your fellow coworkers as well ... We just need a support system that's going to stand in our corner and be like, 'Hey, here's a small bonus.' It doesn't have to be as big as the \$1,000, even if it's like half of that, or even if they overloaded us with books or materials. It doesn't even have to always be monetary support. Like if we had the supplies all the time."

Overall, providers and teachers appreciated the support they received from DECAL, perceiving initiatives that had flexible funding as the most helpful type of support as it allowed them to choose how to spend the funds. Providers noted that pandemic relief funds helped them avoid layoffs and retain staff, avoid or delay closing, make needed repairs or improvements, and continue their quality improvement activities. Teachers reported using POWER payments to help purchase both necessities and classroom materials.

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