Will Child Care Businesses Survive 2021?

Opportunities to Strengthen Child Care Businesses in the COVID-19 Pandemic & Beyond

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by Kara Waddell,
President & CEO of Child Care Associates

with Gary Romano,
President & CEO of Civitas Strategies

Perhaps more than ever before, the U.S. is understanding the value of child care and its critical role as a workforce support towards national economic recovery. However, the child care business infrastructure has been described as fragile for decades. Child care businesses have always operated on razor thin profit margins and the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic is pushing them to a tipping point…a tipping point towards permanent closure.

Currently, the demand for child care has dropped precipitously since many parents are unemployed, are caring for their children while they work at home, or are working to safeguard the health of their children and household. As a result, many child care businesses are struggling to survive while operating with dramatic drops from traditional enrollment numbers (down 25–50% of capacity or more). Enrollment numbers may continue to drop as large employers are announcing work-from-home requirements for all of 2021 or as child care providers temporarily close due to COVID cases or COVID precautions. As cases grow in the U.S., providers are worried about additional stay-at-home orders or closures. Furthermore, many child care businesses in early 2021 will experience additional revenue reductions as higher state subsidy rates (currently an additional 25% in Texas) granted to deal with the pandemic begin to sunset and/or as some states a return to attendance-based subsidy allocations.

Most concerning of all, there's no clear end-point for the pandemic. We continue to hear of providers who have "held on" in 2020 using micro-grants, penny-pinching, donated supplies and credit cards as a means of covering fixed costs. As this document is written, COVID-19 could continue for another 6–12 months or longer (depending on the estimate you rely on) and there is a risk of increased restrictions on child care before they are eased further. Concurrently, while some advocates are encouraged with the prospects of securing significant federal infrastructure funding for child care, these large investment seem unlikely to filter down to local providers quickly enough to provide relief or support in the near-term. And it is near-term that represents permanent child care closures at scale.

Child Care Associates agrees with most national experts who recognize the fundamental need for funding for child care that better reflects the true costs of delivering quality care, yet the likelihood of policy shifts to deliver that funding to provide relief in 2021 is unlikely. The result of all these factors is clear — **if child care providers remain unaided, our community could reasonably see 50% or more child care providers go out of business in the next two to six months**.

In light of this trajectory, Child Care Associates (CCA), a leader in early education in North Texas is taking action to work to mitigate risk to the child care system. CCA and its partners want to ensure that the quality child care providers who benefited from years of investment by philanthropy and public funding alike can continue to operate. CCA has made it a priority to identify practical strategies for child care businesses to increase revenue and decrease expenses during the pandemic and beyond. In working to identify potential strategies for supporting child care providers, CCA adopted four design principles. Specifically, business relief opportunities needed to:

- **Meet Urgent Needs.** While long-term policy and funding changes are needed, providers are fiscally drowning in the near-term so opportunities need to be ones that could provide relief within weeks of adoption.
- **Be Deployable at Scale.** We respect the many pilot and demonstration projects engaging five, ten, or twenty child care providers, but to have a felt impact on providers in North Texas, solutions need to be designed to reach hundreds of providers.
- **Respond to Supply and Demand.** Currently there are not enough families utilizing child care during the pandemic to "save" every provider; instead of saving all providers, there needs to be approaches to saving "most" providers, especially those providing quality child care. When parental demand rebounds, quality care will be available…and will have business models that fit with the changing needs of working families.
- **Have On-the-Ground Impact.** In this effort, the team sought solutions that could be actionable in the near-term and on-the-ground with providers at a more rapid pace than public policy change (although on-the-ground solutions may be useful in informing impactful public policy in the long-term).

What are we talking about?

There are many different terms in the early care and education field and their definition can vary. For clarity, here are the ways we are defining key terms.

Child care provider
A regulated, licensed business providing care to children 0–12 years of age.

Center care provider
A child care provider using a facility (outside of their own home) to provide care for children.

Family care provider
A child care provider who cares for children in their own home.

Quality provider
A child care provider with a national accreditation or a quality rating via participation in a state or local quality rating and improvement system.

Accordingly, the CCA team began to seek out strategies that could child care businesses' resiliency which could be employed at scale throughout the Greater Tarrant County (Texas) region. Data was collected by reviewing numerous national reports and studies and conducting interviews in Fall 2020 with over 25 national, state, and local experts as well as listening to feedback from child care providers. The team analyzed the real-time feedback in order to inform our on-the-ground, immediate services. We decided to create this brief to share our overall findings to respond to the many requests we already received.

Additionally, each of the opportunities identified in this paper were selected because of their potential impact on the business sustainability of providers while also continuing to meet higher health and safety standards and to maintain quality early learning through the pandemic. Furthermore, CCA recognizes that there will be urban-rural as well as regional and state variances in child care demand and impact.

Parents' preferences for child care types may be changing the market and, in turn, how child care should engage in marketing.

We know from dipping enrollment data that fewer parents are choosing to send their children back to child care centers and homes as they reopen during the pandemic. When they do choose to use child care, their decisions are not following the traditional parent selection criterion of assessing the location, cost, and quality of providers. Instead, other factors are in play: fear of COVID, unemployment, high numbers of adults working from home, older siblings at home without enrollment and a decrease in funds available to cover child care fees. Experts are not sure if the shift in parent choice is temporary due to COVID or a seismic shift in the industry. Specifically, there is a sense that families may want to avoid larger providers out of lingering health concerns for years to come. If this is a case, this could benefit family child care providers.

As a result, there are far fewer parents demanding care in the near-term than the supply of care being offered by providers. Child care providers are trying to rapidly reassess their business plans as well as marketing and sales strategies. Providers seem to be welcoming support and new ideas in these areas. Emerging data suggests that promoting the health, cleanliness, and safety of their programs in their communications to families and in marketing, in the short term, could be an effective marketing strategy as the economy recovers and parental demand for care returns. Also, providers may want to consider requesting referrals from enrolled families and employed staff (even considering monetary incentives for a referral resulting in an enrollment) as well as posting on local social media groups or mothers' groups. Furthermore, some child care providers do not have websites (especially home-based providers). Some child care providers may want to pursue shared web hosting and marketing materials since the internet is the most relied upon way for families to currently connect with care. Easy-to-use web page development services could be offered such as Weebly, Wix, or Squarespace and can encourage cohorts of providers learning together.

> "I never had a problem with parental trust before. Now I can't understand how to get parents to trust me."
>
> MASSACHUSETTS CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Child care providers need to fundamentally reset their business model.

Because of the intense current pressures facing child care providers, many are not focused on the future of their business. Providers are not realizing how little time they have before going out of business, potentially disrupting the system of care our workforce and economy depend on. Some child care businesses have detailed operating budgets, but these budgets are often still the ones that they made in the last quarter of 2019. As a result of closures, lower than expected enrollment, and increasing costs, these budgets in no way reflect their current realities. Immediate cashflow forecasting for six-month periods is an important financial exercise for providers because it is based on real costs and revenue at a time when the market is very chaotic. This activity helps providers to consider their near-term business needs, the financial stresses they have, as well as ways to mitigate the issues ahead of time. It should be noted that this activity cannot likely be completed independently by the child care business; business coaches need to help complete the worksheet with providers and then help think through next steps. Resetting a financial plan also means determining how to field temporary financial setbacks that are often a risk, especially during the pandemic. Child care providers need to simply wrap their heads around their losses in order to create a financial plan to help them communicate immediate needs and to weather the storm.

> "My budget is blown. It doesn't make any sense to how I am spending."
>
> NEW JERSEY CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Child care providers are at risk for poor tax preparation services.

According to interviewees as well as current research in the field, child care businesses are not receiving the benefits of professional tax preparation and are often at greater risk for poor tax filings. There is an opportunity to help them maximize quality tax preparation services, potentially resulting in money coming back to providers. Quality tax preparation is especially important this 2020 tax year because it is unclear how the government will handle tax reporting of stimulus funds, and providers may not know how to write off loss.

Additionally, quality tax preparation also has the potential to serve as a source of data for system leaders. As part of a free tax preparation service, with providers' consent, data could be collected from their Schedule C or corporate returns that will provide insights into the profitability and financial model of the individual businesses. Collectively, this information would quickly let system leaders understand the stability and financial resiliency of the child care industry towards identifying ways to further support providers.

> "I just bring everything to my tax guy. I don't understand what he does."
>
> NEW JERSEY CHILD CARE PROVIDER

This is an area of significant opportunity but is also unproven as we currently don't know of a model at scale that has been tested. Identifying accountants and CPAs to work with child care providers has been tried yet this approach had not gained traction as an effective strategy in years past. However, it should be noted that child care businesses are more open to new ways and being helped than in earlier years.

A community intermediary organization or hub could also coordinate a broader tax preparation effort more efficiently and effectively. Additionally, through the tax preparation process, an intermediary could support document retention support, which providers are looking for. Offering providers information about what records to keep and how they should keep them could ready them for more year-end tax preparation success and a more robust analysis on how they are doing or how they could make more money. Further, tax preparation could be tied to sustainability grants or other funding that would provide an incentive and build resiliency.

Child care providers can benefit from seeing themselves as entrepreneurs and business owners.

Currently child care providers are limited in how they advocate for themselves and pursue funding because they often don't see themselves as small businesses. The ability to see and learn from other providers who are successful and see themselves as entrepreneurs is recognized as a significant opportunity for increasing self-identify as business owners. Statewide, regional or municipal grant opportunities offered generally to "small businesses" are frequently overlooked by child care business owners, or owners feel unequipped to pursue without outside help.

> "We need to see ourselves as business entrepreneurs. I love the children I serve, but I also love my business."
>
> TEXAS CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Child care businesses could shift their mindset and tap into larger business advocacy efforts by small businesses by joining chambers of commerce and other business groups, providers, thereby amplifying their voice in support of beneficial policies. Only a handful of chambers are reporting membership that includes child care businesses. Joining such organizations also creates a place for them in networks such as freelancer groups, small business associations and chambers where they can hear about small business grants and other opportunities. This networking activity is low hanging fruit and something that providers could do in the short term that could lead to greater shifts in the field over time. Furthermore, by not seeing themselves as business owners, they are less likely to see the need to continually evolve their business model. By being connected to the larger business community, they could be more likely to continue to assess their business model and refine it on their own or by tapping into supports such as a local business coach or services from their Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

Additionally, there is a hope that a change in provider self-identification as business owners will lead to the emulation of core practices undertaken by business owners such as having a business account and credit card to segregate spending, paying themselves a salary, and considering ways to negotiate rents and mortgages (particularly in the pandemic). Closely related is the idea of better preservation of financial documents (to make applying for grant programs such as stimulus funds easier) as well as having a business relationship with a banking institution. The latter could have additional benefits for larger providers such as access to working capital and knowledge of time-limited opportunities (such at the recent SBA 7(a) loan program that provided payments of principle and interest for the first six months of the loan).

Access to business coaching is important for child care providers.

Both long- and short-term coaching focused specifically on helping child care providers improve the operation of their business is an acute need. While in the long-term business coaching combined with a curriculum to build business acumen could be beneficial, currently providers are overwhelmed by the near-term financial pressures they face thinking more about how to survive the upcoming days and weeks (not months or years). They need specific, individualized help with navigating these challenges and mitigating the threats to their business. Most "coaching" in child care involves those with experience in early education providing many types of quality supports. Few coaching is truly "business coaching" and current models of coaching service delivery are not as efficient or effective as they need to be for services at scale. In order to reach the support levels needed, entities offering coaching should strive for ratios of at least 1 to 40 or 50 and should work to offer coaching remotely. Currently, internet video and telephone coaching have been adopted as a temporary strategy in light of the pandemic response and with the likely continued use of remote models by organizations globally post-pandemic, it should become a permanent part of coaching models to maintain efficiency levels.

> "I don't have time to learn. I need help today."
>
> NEBRASKA CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Feedback was consistently received about avoiding shifting early learning coaches to becoming business coaches. Effective coaching could be provided by early learning organizations collaborating with other organizations dedicated to helping small businesses such as Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) or units within chambers of commerce. These organizations already have experience working with and supporting small businesses. However, these business entities often are unfamiliar with the specific needs of child care providers (such as ratios and licensing requirements) and the specific terminology needed to help them understand key ideas and concepts. As a result, some effort to help SBDCs to "translate" or "transform" content to better serve child care providers is needed. For example, Child Care Associates during COVID began working with the local small business development center and now the SBDC has hired a former early learning provider to offer business technical assistance to other providers. These partnerships could play out in the form of coaching, but also targeted webinars using child care specific terminology and examples to educate child care business owners about funding opportunities and best practices (like many of those provided for other specific industries such as restaurants and real estate). Child care should be supported as a specialized sector of industry.

In this shorter-term COVID relief period, it would be unwise and unproductive to try and solve child care business problems just with trainings. In some ways, you have to "save" an entity that is drowning for working to train them in new practices. Long-term, providers would greatly benefit from ongoing training and skill building to strengthen their businesses including setting short- and long-term goals for their business. This training would ideally be tailored to the provider's goals and compliment individual, one-on-one coaching and could be offered in a group to create connections among directors and owners. Strong coaching curricula would need to be utilized to drive this learning. Also, it is important for facilitators and coaches to be distinctly grounded in small business advisement and focused on business technical assistance so that providers can distinguish between activities that will directly improve educational quality versus activities that will strengthen their financial health (and, in turn, support the cost of quality).

In the longer term the impact of business coaching could be amplified by having clear goals to advance the provider's business to new levels of operation. For example, as a result of business coaching, a family care provider could find herself on a path to eventually adding an assistant, thereby increasing the number of children she can serve as well as her revenue. An effective coaching experience can help each provider identify the steps along such a path and increase the potential that milestones are being achieved.

While ongoing business coaching is a clear need, skill building is a long-term commitment and can take a great deal of time. In addition to pursuing coaching, sharing a set of outsourced skilled services among a network of providers can be a high-impact, short term solution. For larger providers, there is an opportunity to partner with a part-time financial support organization such as Your Part Time Comptrollers. In addition to offering expertise to the providers, the service organization also develops specific experience working with child care providers.

Quality human resources (HR) support is another area where outsourcing professional services could be immediately helpful to providers. This is especially true as providers face the prospect of layoffs over the next six months. HR support can help them understand how they can approach these actions legally, how to maintain a relationship with their staff for rehiring, and also how they can boost the morale of staff who is still employed. Long term, shared HR services can help providers understand how to improve their staffing and management practices and even insurance and benefits. For example, Child Care Associates has introduced Acquire for Hire as an online HR service at a discounted rate via its TX Child Care Tools platform and it has proved to be one of the more utilized tools on the platform.

Child Care Management Systems and other online platforms have the potential to decrease child care providers' costs over time.

While it may seem intuitive that businesses are widely using industry-specific management and information systems to guide efficient execution, this is not the case in child care. In the child care industry, most providers lack a unified management system — called child care management systems (CCMSs) — to guide their businesses. These platforms are most effective when they are user-friendly so that families and providers can easily utilize them. It is also critical that these systems offer the robust information that regional and state leaders need to make key decisions. Currently, CCMSs present challenges that are preventing them from realizing their potential. They often lack dashboards for central data management and monitoring that give an overview of how the "child care system" is doing. Also, they tend to lack the application programming interfaces (APIs) needed for integration with other regulatory and funding systems. In order to improve these CCMS tools, public/private partnerships will likely be needed to marshal the funds and provide the guidance needed for developers to link to existing systems.

> "Who would help me figure that out? I teach all day and then do the business at night."
>
> NEW JERSEY CHILD CARE PROVIDER

While CCMSs do offer potential benefits, there are felt challenges to acknowledge as well. First, a regional organization will likely need to actionize the effort to put the system in place and do the initial population of data in a system. This initial energy of activation to start using a system has been a great hesitation on the part of providers who may want to start using one during the pandemic to cut costs. Some of the interviewees suggested that current CARES or future stimulus funding could be used to help launch a CCMS regionally, including loading historical data and providing training. Even if funding from stimulus or philanthropy is used to launch the use of a CCMS regionally, the challenge of finding sustaining funding was also raised. We also worry about currently introducing CCMSs when child care businesses are still in the COVID crisis response period yet also recognize that providers appear more receptive to using CCMSs that prior to COVID.

The second challenge heard centered around enrollment. CCMSs' cost saves are in part the result of economies of scale. However, providers are reporting that with enrollment down 25% to 50% of capacity, they don't see potential savings to justify the near-term investment of time when they are focused on survival. Perhaps providers post-COVID would be receptive post-pandemic.

Many child care providers are not ready to enter the world of automation and need easy-to-use tools in the meantime.

While the field should be focused on identifying ways to automate provider operations and business processes and they do show promise, many providers critically lack the technological savvy, access to technology, or near-term capacity to transition to a digital system. Concurrently, nationally there are few easy-to-use tools to help providers with their businesses that are not digital. Accordingly, there is an opportunity to develop and disseminate simple "pen and paper" or spread sheet-based tools that could have an immediate impact on strengthening child care businesses. Longer term, child care businesses may be more receptive to an automated approach.

Ultimately, child care providers need to increase revenue.

Child care providers are facing the "worst case" scenario for any business — concurrently experiencing an increase in costs while also decreasing revenues. A number of strategies were surfaced that could reduce providers' costs, but these reductions are not enough to offset loss for the overwhelming majority of providers; they will also need to increase the amount of funds they are receiving. One approach (mentioned earlier in this document) is for providers to change marketing practices to attract as many families as possible to their business. Again, the demand for care is limited currently so, though marketing will help, they will likely still be a need for more revenue. Accordingly, it was recommended that providers add new revenue streams to increase funds. This could mean starting participation in public funding programs. State-funded pre-K delivered in community-based child care businesses is commonplace in many states, but currently greatly underutilized in Texas. Another idea surfaced numerous times was the US Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP). In Tarrant County, TX, only 1/3 of our Texas Rising Star programs are participating in the CACFP with most citing regulatory risk and complexity as barriers to utilization. For those unfamiliar, the CACFP program provides a subsidy for child care providers s who serve free snacks and meals for children, particularly those most in need. This program was repeatedly cited as being underutilized by providers, yet providers who are participating in the Child and Adult Food Care Program report it is a valuable funding stream. So, for providers currently serving food, the program could provide revenue to cover those costs. For those who are not, it could allow them to more readily add a new service differentiating them from other providers while aiding the development of young children in their care.

> "The food program let us keep feeding kids through COVID."
>
> NEW JERSEY CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Similarly, there were suggestions on harnessing "idle assets." Idle assets are assets of any business that are not being used at a given time, though the costs associated with them are still incurred. For example, for child care centers, their facility is idle in evening and weekends. Ideas were suggested on ways that providers could activate their idle assets. For one, there was the suggestion of using that time and space for birthday parties, meetups for the children of stay-at-home parents, or other periodic or one-time events. This revenue can help offset the sunk cost of the facility. Furthermore, existing parents can be a ready source of potential customers for these services.

In a similar vein, many child care providers create idle assets through their current working hours. They set hours for care during "traditional" hours (such as 7 AM to 6 PM) and require each family to pay for a full week of care. As many families continue working remotely or return to work for only part of a working week, the market for untraditional hours and schedules is likely to grow. For example, one provider scheduled three children at the same time slot on different days to ensure they maximized enrollment and met parents' needs (rather than forcing a 5 day per week schedule). Another example was a provider who created an early "before care" time and a later "after care" time, allowing for essentially two shifts of children a day. Further, offering drop-in services could be another way to help parents who need care "on demand."

Child care providers are looking for ways to ease the time and effort needed to receive resources and funding.

COVID-19 has offered different funding opportunities that child care businesses can access ranging from grants to free food to diapers. However, a number of barriers lie between child care providers and the resources they need.

> "Wait. Is that the same [funding] program as this one or a different one? I'm so confused."
>
> ILLINOIS CHILD CARE PROVIDER

First, providers are having a difficult time receiving and processing communications around free resources and funding. Understandably, their cognitive bandwidth is constrained by the stress of running a business during COVID, being a lead educator, maintaining their family, and the constant worry about the safety of themselves and their family. Many times, providers reported not realizing a funding program or free resource was available (even though they were likely to have received emails or other communications around it). To ensure they know about opportunities, a "sales approach" could be employed by a local nonprofit or regional entity aiming to build strong communications utilizing multiple messages and messengers. For example, a provider might get an email from an organization, have a coaching session that also reviews these funding opportunities, as well as social media and text messages with links to resources.

When provider do know about opportunities, the energy needed to activate and apply for these funds, especially during the pandemic, makes it less likely that providers will pursue and ultimately benefit from funding. There are some identified strategies that can help providers ease this burden of application. They include:

- Create a simple decision tree to lead providers to funding opportunities that apply to them, reducing the need to sift through emails and search for relevant opportunities.
- Create step-by-step instructions on how to apply for specific funding program. Even the simplest forms can sometimes be confusing.
- Offer timelines and reminders for managing deadlines for funding applications.

When it comes to reporting, providers struggle to keep with the increasing amounts of paperwork and accounting needed for different funding streams and record keeping requirements. Child care providers needs a single contract with a system for tracking expenses and keeping records. While there are some solutions that could help such as shared services for document management, funders should work to simplify enrollment processes and create streamlined approaches to make compliance easier to achieve.

In the long-term, contracting for federal, state, and local funding bundled by an intermediary organization (where funding is bundled and secured by one entity and distributed to provider) has two benefits: 1) The application, management, and reporting responsibility rests with the intermediary dramatically decreasing the burden on the provider and 2) when providers agree to a "slot" of funding it isn't according to child count, so it becomes a more stable funding stream such as USDA or Pre-K funding, which is important especially as enrollment continues to change along with pandemic related issues or other factors. States and communities could consider introducing a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) contract (versus vouchers) and pay for a child care slot. The slot could represent the real cost of quality and could (temporarily) help cover fixed costs to offset expense during COVID. This "single contract" approach could also pave the way to introduce other simplifying access to various funding streams by introducing a single contract with a single intermediary allows broader participation by providers and reducing administration.

Another idea that arose for the long-term came from policy experiments being undertaken in an analogous subsector-public housing. Specifically, housing subsidy auctions were suggested as a way to optimize public funds in child care. In public housing, these approaches can allow for the variable funding associated with a request for proposal process, while doing so in a less onerous way. In the auction, service providers "bid" a price per unit of service. This allows the provider to set a price for service, but one within a competitive system. In child care, an "auction" could allow providers to set a price for quality that more closely matches their actual delivery costs and could even increase services in child care deserts by allowing a higher rate for care that would incentivize reaching these communities.

Child care providers need focused sustainability grants.

Financial support for child care providers has been crucial for their survival thus far. With few exceptions (like the Paycheck Protection Program and similar short-term mostly CARES Act-funded state and local grants) the resources provided have been focused on personal protective equipment and other new costs directly attributable to care in the world of COVID. However, enrollment is still down to 25% to 50% of pre-pandemic levels meaning that operational costs are not being covered by revenue. Most providers are reporting that they are already using business reserves (rarely) and personal savings or credit cards (more commonly) to keep their businesses afloat. Unsurprisingly, many providers worry about even weathering a two-week quarantine for fear of not having enough funds to re-open.

> "I just had my first case where one of my children may have been exposed [to COVID]. I'm waiting for her results. I'm afraid I'll need to close next week — for good."
>
> NEW JERSEY CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Unsurprisingly, there is keen interest in the possibility of "bridge grants" or loans which could cover the operational or fixed costs for providers for multiple weeks. This funding in and of itself could help providers, especially high quality ones, hold on until demand begins to raise again. Further these funds could be an incentive for adopting other strategies such as applying for new funding streams (such as Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave or the USDA food subsidy) or adopting critical business practices (such as developing a six-month cash flow forecast or participating in business coaching).

Intermediary or hub organizations need funding.

Many of the opportunities described in this document will rely on trusted intermediaries to bridge resources to providers who need it. In some cases, these could be child care resource and referral agencies or larger or even statewide early learning organizations. The intermediaries can be critical to the success of near- and long-term efforts, but funding will be needed to cover the infrastructure which, at least in Texas, is not addressed by current sources. For example, philanthropy could cover startup costs, but longer-term funding, especially multi-year support will be needed to sustain the change warranted by the pandemic's impact.

Next Steps

On the ground in Tarrant County, the Child Care Associates' Team will review the identified opportunities in coordination with regional philanthropic leaders and area workforce boards to determine which near-term options can be pursued to improve outcomes for child care providers. Concurrently, Child Care Associates is disseminating these findings nationally in hopes that other communities will adopt them to the benefit of their child care providers and the families they serve.

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About the Authors

Kara Waddell is the President and CEO of Child Care Associates (CCA), a nonprofit in North Texas that believes all young children deserve the benefits of quality early education and care. Previously, Kara was Oregon's child care administrator and served on the Governor's Early Learning Council. She also brings global experience in poverty alleviation, child wellbeing and community development from her 12 years in China. Kara graduated from Duke University with a B.A. and from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government with an MPA. Kara serves on numerous boards and task forces including TX Governor's Frontline Child Care Task Force, the Early Learning Alliance, the Texas Head Start Collaboration Advisory Board, Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) Fort Worth Chapter Board, and Fort Worth LeaderPrime. Kara is a recipient of the 2019 Great Texas Woman Award and recognized in 2020 as a Fort Worth's "400 Most Influential People."

Gary Romano, President & CEO of Civitas Strategies, is an award-winning strategist, author, and advisor for nonprofit leaders and entrepreneurs whose work has helped grow national and regional organizations, move startups to stable state, and bring new ideas to market. He is the published author of two books, Small But Mighty, which is helping entrepreneurs to launch and grow nonprofit consultancies, and Lean Recruitment, an innovative system to cost-effectively recruit talent. Gary is a SHRM Certified Senior Professional and has a master's degree in Urban Affairs and Planning from Virginia Tech and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Stony Brook University.

About the Organizations

Child Care Associates is a non-profit organization based in Fort Worth, Texas committed to strategically investing in the future of young children, families, and communities. CCA understands that educating children in the early years leads to healthier, more successful adults and stronger, more productive communities. CCA operates 20 early education campuses and 62 Pre-K partnership classrooms caring and educating over 1,800 children 0–5. CCA serves another 12,000 families annually through Child Care Management Services helping offset the high cost of care for low-income families, improving the quality of 197 child care programs through Texas Rising Star, and coaching 404 early ed teachers. For information about the organization and its outreach, visit www.childcareassociates.com.

Civitas Strategies is a national management consultancy established in 2009 to increase the impact of public serving organizations. Civitas Strategies strives to improve outcomes for marginalized children and families through high quality management consulting services including strategic planning, evaluation, and talent recruitment and management. To learn more about Civitas Strategies' services and work visit www.civstrat.com.