

Executive Summary

Kent County Child Care Industry Needs

Impact of COVID-19

Prior to COVID-19, more than 600 licensed child care providers/programs were operating in Kent County. Governor Whitmer's COVID-19 Child Care Executive Order ([2020-16](#)) and the Stay at Home Executive Order ([2020-21](#)) that followed, required child care providers/programs to close unless they were providing care for children of the essential workforce. The child care sector was already at a crisis point in Kent County. The additional impact of the abrupt closings and the drastic reduction of income for child care providers as small business owners have been devastating for the industry.

Crisis Response

On March 20, 2020, the Kent Child Care Crisis Response Team was established to coordinate efforts and align activities in order to provide comprehensive service and support to Kent County child care providers and essential workforce families in need of child care. The team includes representatives from:

- Camp Fire West Michigan 4C
- Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC)
- First Steps Kent
- Great Start Collaborative
- Hands Connected (Refugee Child Care Providers)
- Head Start for Kent County
- KConnect
- Kent County Shared Services Alliance (Pilot Project)
- Kent ISD
- Kent Resource Center – Great Start to Quality
- LARA
- Local Child Care Providers
- Talent 2025

The State of Michigan partnered with Intermediate School Districts, including Kent ISD, to provide a centralized intake process to match essential workforce families with open emergency child care providers in their local communities. To date, Kent ISD has referred 185 children from 114 families to emergency child care placements. Currently, there are 179 licensed child care programs open in Kent County to provide emergency child care with 89 providers still accepting referrals. In partnership with the [Kent County Shared Services Pilot Project](#), the Kent Child Care Crisis Response Team coordinates a weekly supply distribution for open providers to ensure that they have access to the critical items that open providers were having difficulty obtaining – such as food, cleaning supplies and paper products. These supplies are purchased directly from a wholesale supplier using funds that were granted to First Steps Kent from the Coronavirus Relief Fund at Heart of West Michigan United Way. So far, 128 providers have received supplies through this distribution (16 child care centers and 112 home-based providers).

The Kent Child Care Crisis Response Team has also [curated information](#) connecting both open and closed child care providers to local, state and federal financial supports. The National Association for the Education of Young Children conducted [a survey](#) March 12-16 and 30% of providers surveyed reported that they would not survive a closure of more than two weeks without significant public investment and support that would allow them to compensate and retain staff, pay rent or mortgages, and cover other fixed costs. Although funding opportunities and financial support does exist through programs such as unemployment, the Payroll Protection Program and the SBA, many local child care providers report that they have been unsuccessful in their attempts to apply for funding through these sources. The recently established Federal Child Care Relief Fund will help, but payments have yet to be distributed and the majority of closed child care providers have been without income for more than eight weeks.

Considerations for Reopening

As the state prepares to reopen the economy, there is concern that the child care need will be greater than the supply. Child Care providers will require additional financial support due to the fact that they have been without income for weeks and also because they will need to purchase specific items to ensure the highest standards for health and safety are implemented. Although official state guidance for child care reopening has yet to be released for Michigan, it is understood the personal protection equipment (PPE) will be required and many providers will not have the funds to purchase the needed items. With families and child care providers desperate to get back to work, they may be tempted to compromise safety standards. However, funding to assist child care providers with the purchase of PPE equipment will mitigate that risk.

Anticipated PPE Needs for Child Care

- Thermometers
- Face Masks
- Gloves
- Disinfectant Cleaners
- Smocks
- Disposable gowns and goggles (for those who will conduct health screenings required for entry)

Funding Request

Kent County's economic recovery depends on residents getting back to work. This cannot happen unless child care is available and able to operate in accordance with all recommended safety standards. First Steps Kent has secured funding to purchase 200 infrared (no-touch) thermometers for the child care providers who are currently open and serving the essential workforce. However, many more thermometers will be needed (along with the other PPE items listed above) as child care begins to reopen so that Kent County residents can return to work when it is safe to do so. A county investment of \$1.2 Million would provide capacity for the Kent Child Care Crisis Response Team to leverage collective buying power to purchase PPE at a reduced cost. The crisis team can assess the needs across the Kent County child care landscape to ensure equitable distribution of these critical supplies.