



# Impacts of the COVID pandemic on parents and young children in King County

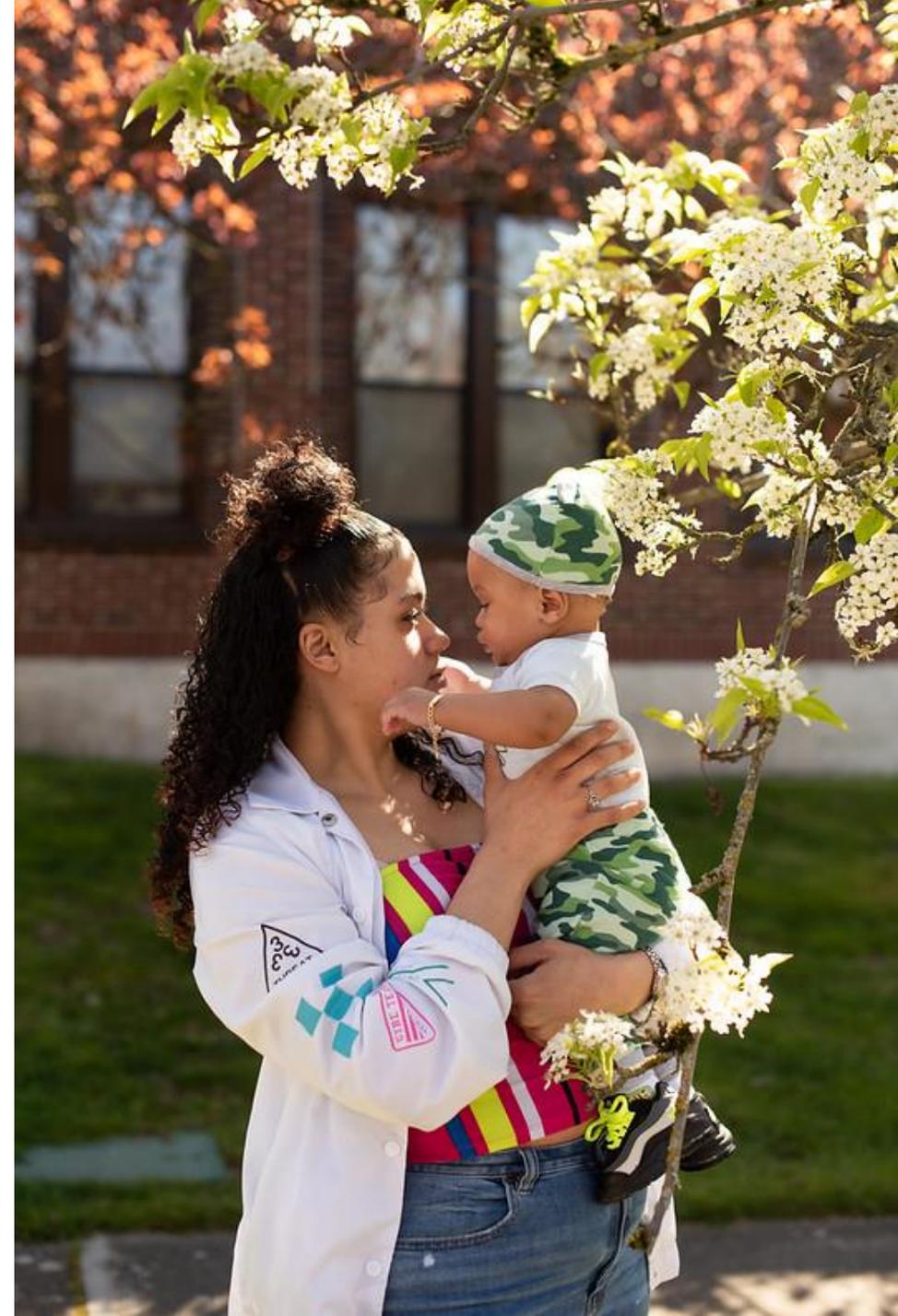
Preliminary Results – Updated June 11, 2021

*\*Final results in Fall 2021*



## PURPOSE

To identify emerging impacts of the COVID pandemic on King County families with young children, particularly related to the ongoing COVID response.



## ● BRIEF METHODS

- Best Starts for Kids (BSK) Health Survey asked parents with children 5<sup>th</sup> grade and younger:
  - *"Please describe any changes, positive or negative, that the COVID pandemic has had on this child/your family."*
- Analyzed a subset of 3,345 written responses from data collected January to mid-March 2021.
- 95% of parents who took the survey answered COVID impacts question.
- Conducted additional review of responses for African American, Latina/x/o, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI), Vietnamese, and low-income families due to disproportionate impacts on these communities.
- Survey numbers include all participants in this time period.
- Results will be updated in the fall of 2021 when all data is collected.

## ● STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

- Provides local, relevant, and timely information about the impacts of COVID on young children and families in King County, WA.
- Most parents took the survey online and more parents will take the survey through the summer of 2021, so these results may not reflect the experiences of families overall in King County.
- We were unable to look at how household composition impacted experiences - mom/mom, dad/dad, mom/dad, nonbinary parents, single-parent, multi-generational, etc. - so this limits understanding of how experiences differed across these groups.



## Initial Findings

# LACK OF SOCIALIZATION AND DELAYED MILESTONES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Many parents worried about limited opportunities for their infants and toddlers to socialize outside of their household, and children experienced heightened anxiety around new people and places.

*“Honestly the COVID pandemic has really affected [my child]. Since lockdown started when he was an infant he still has had barely any exposure to the outside or other people/kids in general. It has made him act nervous and insecure in any other environment besides our house.” -Parent of 0-5 year old*

- Some parents shared that their child was behind in milestones or that their child had regressed in certain areas like managing big feelings.

*“He has regressed in his emotional development and ability to handle his emotions. His lack of social engagement has been detrimental to his mental health. We're currently looking for a counselor or therapist for him... Concerned about our kids not having the social engagement.” -Parent of 0-5 year old*

# UNMET SOCIOEMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS FOR SCHOOL- AGED CHILDREN

- Parents said older children (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) missed their friends, teachers, and relatives, as well as connections from group activities (sports and clubs).

“The social isolation has been so hard on her. She is lonely.” - Parent of K-5th grader

- Some parents shared concerns about declines in their children’s mental and emotional wellbeing, including concerns about children experiencing sadness, loneliness, and anxiety.

“[Child] has become more prone to crying outbursts. When she is disappointed she doesn't bounce back as quickly.”  
-Parent of K-5th grader

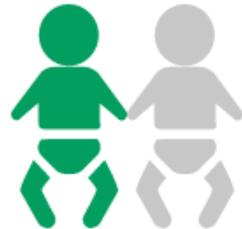
“He seems to have regressed a bit and acts out and has tantrums more like his 4 year old sibling. He's also afraid of everything lately.” -Parent of K-5th grader

# BY THE NUMBERS – MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

**2 in 3** parents said their mental or emotional health was excellent or very good (62%)



**1 in 2** parents said they were handling day-to-day demands of parenting well (54%)\*



## Most children who needed mental health supports received it.

Needed and received mental health supports



Needed and did not receive mental health supports



Did not need mental health supports



**Use numbers with caution.** These are early estimates so numbers may shift as more data is collected.

\*[Based on prior family interpretation of this question](#), this concept may be vague or unclear to some parents, so it may not be a full representation of how parents are meeting demands of parenting.

# LACK OF ACCESS TO CHILDCARE CREATED MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES

- Parents experienced significant stress trying to balance work demands (including while working from home), childcare, and supporting online schooling.

This was especially true among parents with younger kids (0-5 years old) and families with children who had developmental disabilities.

- Families commonly reported an inability to rely on support from grandparents or other extended family members due to the COVID pandemic.

*"Impact on family relationships, especially with grandparents. Not having access to childcare supports is very stressful." - Parent of K-5th grader*

*"I have struggled with finding a trusted nanny that is affordable while I work because my parents are unable to cross the border at this time to do help with this task." -Parent of 0-5 year old*

# WOMEN WERE MORE IMPACTED BY CHANGES AT HOME

- Many moms (or female caregivers) had to stop working in order to provide childcare. This was particularly common among low-income women and Latinas.
- Several moms shared the negative impacts on their own mental health.

*“Dampened our spirits, increased my anxiety and depression, avenues where I was not allowed to work because of COVID, very stressful managing household with 3 kids while school was shut down, not having steady income.”* – Female parent of 0-5 year old

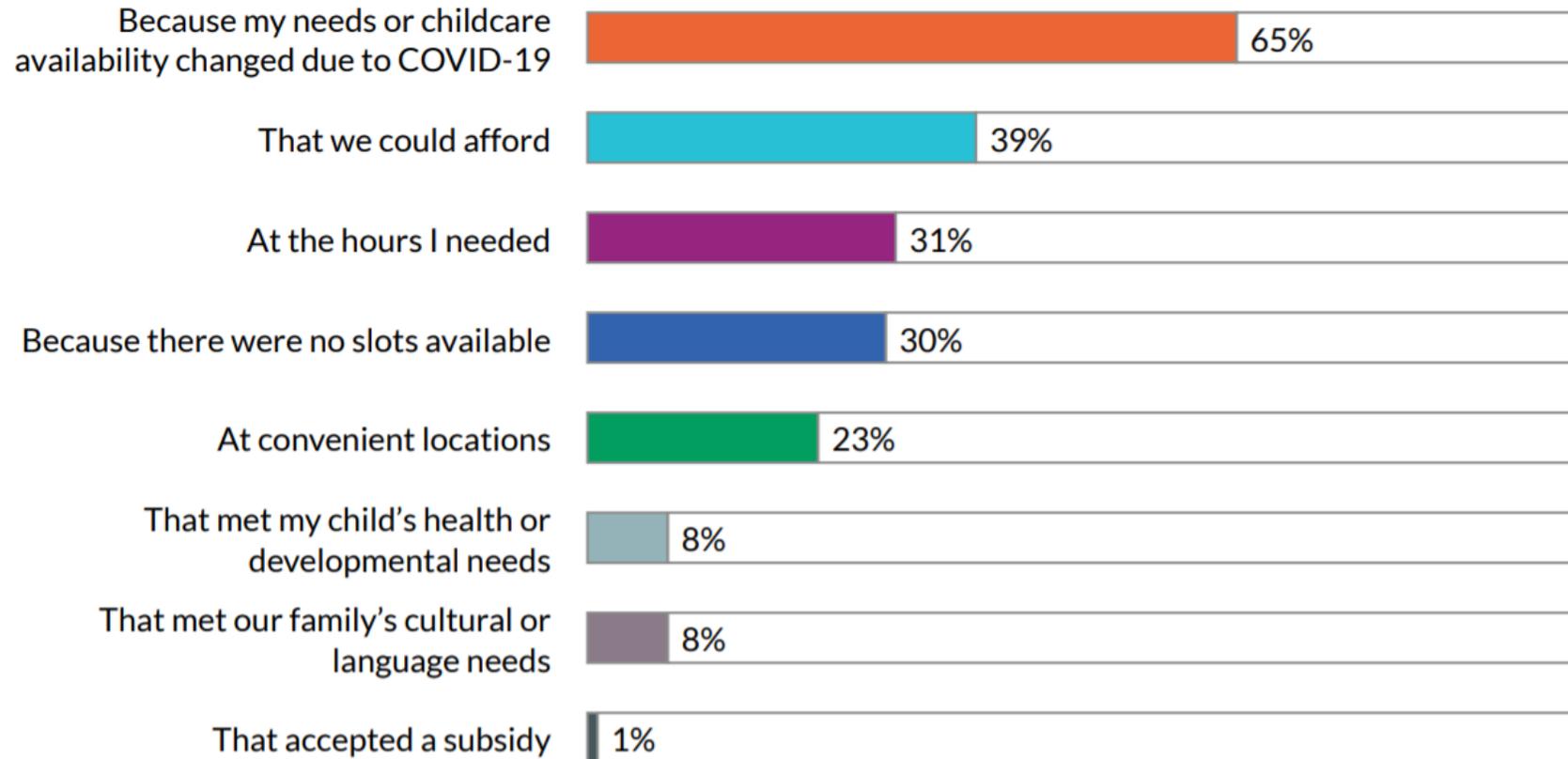
- For a few mom/dad families, moms took on the additional responsibilities of childcare/online schooling, even when both parents were working from home.

*“Well, lots of time spent together and so tension between myself and my partner. I expect more hands on help with the kids and the house but he seems unwilling to do so. We talk about it all the time, but not much has changed.”* – Female parent of K-5th grader

- On the other hand, some moms mentioned how grateful they were for additional support from a partner newly working from home.

*“Post-partum I had a really hard time emotionally. Having my partner home was extremely helpful for my recovery and mental health. I don't know what I would have done if he was not here.”* – Female parent of 0-5 year old

# BY THE NUMBERS – PARENTS HAD CHALLENGES FINDING CHILDCARE



**Use numbers with caution.** Preliminary data only. Data collection is ongoing.

# NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH REMOTE SCHOOLING WERE SHARED

- Supporting online learning, particularly while also meeting demands for work and childcare for other kids, was challenging for many parents.

*“Not interested in online school. Scares mother that reading/writing is difficult right now/ it is hard for mom to stay calm/hard to be a mother and teacher. Thinks he would be doing better right now if he were in school. even took him to doctor to see if there's something wrong/learning disability.” -Parent of K-5th grader*

- Keeping young children engaged in online schooling was hard for many, particularly parents of pre-schoolers. Scholars with disabilities and scholars learning English had a particularly hard time learning from home.

*“Our 2nd grader is not engaged with learning and we don't have time to fully commit to helping him. We do the minimum with assignments and zoom school but nothing extra. We don't have the energy or time. It has been extremely hard to balance work and zoom school and we worry about his education - mostly reading and his lack of attachment to his teachers and friends.” -Parent of K-5th grader*

*“[My child] has been unable to attend a preschool program. The at home program that has been offered does not work for 4 year olds.” -Parent of 0-5 year old*

# NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH REMOTE SCHOOLING WERE SHARED

- Conversely, some parents reported that their child was thriving in the online learning environment.

More BIPOC families reported negative experiences with online schooling than positive; however, those that did report positive experiences were often African American or NHPI. Latina/x/o and Vietnamese families mostly reported negative experiences.

*"Happier spending time with family and connecting with his culture and not experiencing racial bias at school."* -Parent of African American K-5th grader

- Some parents appreciated having more insight into their child's schooling since they were able to "see" more about classes.

*"Got to know the teacher more, I am here so I get to know what they are doing in school more, school work has been better, the change is good."* -Parent of African American K-5th grader

# QUALITY TIME WITH FAMILIES AND FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL TIME

- Several families mentioned stronger relationships between siblings and with the family overall as a result of more time together. Many also mentioned that it was difficult to find personal time.

*"Positive family is more united we depend more on each other and speak with family more. Negative not enough space from each other, can get frustrated with each other" -Parent of K-5th grader*

- Many parents missed seeing their extended families and community during the pandemic.
- Almost all parents framed more time together positively, but some acknowledged accompanying challenges, such as siblings bickering and boredom.

# COVID SICKNESS AND DEATHS IMPACTED FAMILIES

- Some parents were distressed and anxious about the uncertainty of contracting COVID or after having family members fall ill and pass away.

The pandemic heightened existing mental health concerns for some families, including anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

- This was especially true among respondents who identified as low-income, African American, NHPI, or Latina/x/o:

*"We've lost several family members to COVID, 3 on my side, 2 on my husband's. Meanwhile, we have a few more family members from my side in Mexico fighting the virus currently. It's been a very sorrowful year." -Parent of 0-5 year old*

- However, many parents mentioned they experienced fewer colds and respiratory viruses than before.

# JOB LOSSES, FINANCIAL STRUGGLES, AND MEETING BASIC NEEDS WERE CHALLENGING

- Many families experienced financial uncertainty in the face of a job loss, reduced hours, or the inability to meet basic needs and relied on community or family support instead.

*"When COVID started I lost my job, I was scared to go to work, I missed a couple of days and I got fired, it was a hard time for me, I tried to apply for unemployment, me and my wife she was home too before the COVID, until May we had a difficult time paying rent, we had to use our savings, it was very hard for us, she applied for unemployment too and then after that we didn't have a choice, we had to go back to work, we got a lot of difficulties in this period." -Parent of 0-5 year old*

- Low-income and parents of color more often reported financial struggles, job losses, and limited work-life balance.

*"Difficult in the beginning- hard to pay bills. scary not to know if we will have lights on/food on the table for the kids. doing ok right now." -Parent of K-5th grader*

# BY THE NUMBERS - HELP WITH COST OF BASIC NEEDS SINCE CHILD WAS BORN

Needs were highest among lower income\* families

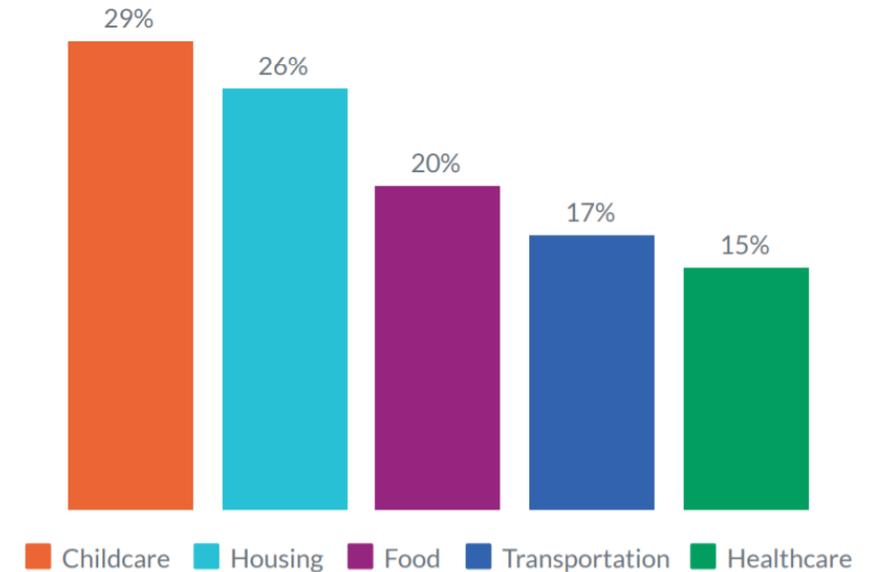


2 in 3 low-income families needed help with childcare costs (67%)



1 in 2 low-income families needed help with housing costs (47%)

Overall, many families needed help affording basic needs since their child was born. Almost 1 in 3 families needed help affording childcare (29%).



**Use numbers with caution.** These are early estimates so numbers may shift as more data is collected.

\*Low-income defined as income of \$50,000 or less per year.

# SOCIOECONOMIC PRIVILEGE PROVIDED SOME FAMILIES WITH STABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Some families felt privileged to have a job, save time and money, and be able to work remotely.
- Unlike families with lower incomes, families reporting high incomes did not highlight financial stresses or mention using resources for basic needs (such as WIC, shelters, and food banks).
- Families across the income spectrum expressed gratitude for having basic needs met, but high-income families were more likely to describe themselves as having stability and flexibility.

*"We have one parent working, one parent not working and full time dedicated to in home teaching. Our friends are in the same category. All have jobs and stable housing. We understand that we are extremely fortunate in this crisis and are doing better than many at adjustments. Of course, there are very few social interactions for our son, but overall we are stable. I wish all members of society were able to be stable in this way or given the opportunity for stability in income, child care, and medical care. It would offer children and families less anxiety and trauma in events such as these." -Parent of K-5th grader*

# TECHNOLOGY WAS A DISRUPTOR AND A CONNECTOR

- Several parents were unhappy with increased screen time for younger children due to remote schooling or entertainment needs while the parent worked.

*"Juggling work from home, so having to distract her so now increased tablet time to keep her distracted so Mom can work." -Parent of 0-5 year old*

- However, some parents mentioned that they were connecting more virtually with family and friends through Zoom/Facetime than they were before the pandemic.

*"We have spent much more time video chatting with grandparents who live on the east coast than we probably would have under normal circumstances so they now feel like a regular part of our son's life (albeit virtually)." -Parent of 0-5 year old*

# DISRUPTIONS TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TIES

- Family connections and bonding have been important sources of support in some communities, such as NHPI communities.
- It was particularly difficult to not be able to gather during the pandemic and families expressed a loss of cultural connection as a result.

*"In our culture we stay and get together and we don't have that luxury anymore we don't see our people anymore." -Parent of 0-5 year old*
- There were missed opportunities to build relationships with grandparents and family, especially among immigrant families.

## PARENTS SHARED EXAMPLES OF RESILIENCE

- Many parents reported deeper and more meaningful relationships between children and their siblings due to extra time together.

*"I have been pleased to see how our kids have bonded together, their friendship, we have seen their sibling relationships blossom" -Parent of 0-5 year old*

- Parents of children in K-5th grade noticed how children became more self-sufficient during the pandemic.

*"She is more independent in doing homework and using a computer" -Parent of K-5th grader*

- Some parents also saw how their children were demonstrating resilience, despite the challenges created by the pandemic.

*"[My child] has stepped up well to keep engaged in school and with local neighborhood friends. He is emotionally, physically and developmentally healthy. However, COVID has taken a toll on his joy." -Parent of K-5th grader*



# SUMMARY

## SUMMARY OF WHAT PARENTS TOLD US

- Profound changes in children's social-emotional development and mental health may need supports to help children move forward.
- Parents appreciated more insight into what happens in the classroom, and some scholars did thrive with an online learning environment.
- Government programs and financial assistance were important sources of support.
- Access to open, affordable, and stable childcare were critical in supporting families and children.
- Women have been disproportionately impacted by the stressors of COVID and the trade-off between working and childcare.

# KEY DIFFERENCES ACROSS COMMUNITIES

- Financial struggles, job losses, and limited work-life balance were particularly pronounced among BIPOC communities.
  - Many have relied on the **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**, other **government programs**, and **community-based resources/non-profits** for help
- Among low-income groups, families commonly reported deaths and poor health due to COVID.
- While some African American and Latina/x/o families adapted well to **online learning**, many said that online school does not work as well for young kids: "*smaller children need constant structure.*"
- **Lack of access to preschool and childcare** has been a challenge, especially for mothers and families with children who had developmental disabilities.
- **Family connections and bonding** have been important sources of support, especially in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities.
  - **Limited social interactions** with family, friends, and loved ones, has been especially difficult in this cultural context.

## ● NEXT STEPS

- These results are preliminary.
- Final results in the fall of 2021 after all data collection is finished.
- Opportunity for input – would a mid-point analysis this summer be helpful?





# THANK YOU!

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Thank you to all the families  
who took the survey!

 King County

Best Starts for  
**KIDS**