

2 WEEKS READY

Emergency Preparedness in Oregon's Child Care & Afterschool Programs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Launched in 2019 by the Office of Child Care, OregonASK Expanded Learning Partnership, and the Willamette Education Service District, the *2 Weeks Ready* Campaign strove to better understand how prepared Oregon's child care and afterschool providers are for emergencies, and to support increased emergency readiness within the child care field. The campaign included two primary goals: first, to gauge how prepared (or not prepared) afterschool and child care providers are for emergencies, to identify barriers providers face to being better prepared, and to propose recommendations for addressing those barriers. Second, the campaign aimed to raise awareness among child care providers, afterschool programs, and related organizations about the importance of adequate emergency management.

While conceived and launched before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, much of the *2 Weeks Ready* campaign took place amidst the height of the crisis, during Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2020. Instead of spotlighting general emergency preparedness for theoretical situations, the campaign (and indeed, all of Oregon's child care community) was forced to focus on emergency response and recovery in reality. This shift narrowed campaign activities to focus primarily on the specific response to a particular emergency (COVID-19) rather than on preparation for emergencies in general, but it also offered a unique view into real-life emergency response procedures, because we were able to examine experiences that are actual, not predictive.

METHODS

2 Weeks Ready Campaign activities included the development of a campaign framework, identification of a variety of resources to assist child care and afterschool providers in creating emergency preparedness plans, and structured conversations with CCR&Rs, child care and afterschool providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders. These structured conversations, or focus groups, presented toolkit resources, raised awareness about the need for emergency management, and gathered feedback about current preparedness levels, barriers to being better prepared, and needed resources and support.

15 virtual focus groups, co-hosted by regional CCR&Rs, took place between April and September 2020. Focus groups were attended by 204 participants from 28 counties, representing 113 child care and afterschool providers, school districts and ESDs, CCR&Rs, government agencies, and community-based organizations. One focus group was held in Spanish, the rest were conducted in English.

KEY FINDINGS

Focus group participants surfaced a wide range of topics on emergency preparedness, from communication challenges with families to emergency backpack kits and evacuation procedures to considerations for trauma-informed policies and procedures. The majority of these topics can be consolidated into three main themes: Communication Systems, Procedures & Protocols, and Resources & Community Support. These three themes emerged prominently in both conversations about existing practices and in discussions of barriers and challenges. Key takeaways from each theme are summarized below

Communication Systems

- Many providers are confident in their ability to communicate with families about emergency preparedness, but successful communication often requires significant time and effort. Some providers still experience challenges in reaching families or conveying important information in ways that ensure families understand and process the information.
- Feedback from focus group respondents suggest that emergency communication between state agencies and providers is disjointed and decentralized, and ultimately that the Early Learning Division and the Office of Child Care were unprepared to manage communication with providers during a large-scale emergency (the COVID-19 pandemic).

Procedures and Protocols

- Focus group responses indicate that many providers are prepared for the basic initial response (often evacuation) to a discrete emergency (like a building fire or earthquake), and have established procedures in place for smaller scale emergencies, like a missing child.
- Preparing adequately for emergencies requires significant time and capacity, which can be a heavy lift for already busy child care and afterschool providers. Barriers to developing comprehensive, thoughtful procedures and protocols are particularly exacerbated by the overwhelming variety of potential emergency situations (both big and small), and the decentralized nature of resources and support.

Resources and Community Support

- Resources are available to child care and afterschool providers from various community organizations and agencies, including CCR&Rs and ELHs, and many providers make use of these resources to some extent. Providers are also likely to have food and water and first aid supplies on hand. Providers also serve as a resource to families, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Access to tangible supplies can be challenging for providers during all stages of emergency management (particularly during the response and recovery phases of long-term emergencies), with cost being the primary barrier. Providers also underutilize existing community and agency resources, and have limited access to training resources for staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are key elements of emergency management already in place in Oregon’s child care system. The findings from this report highlight areas for improvement within that system. The recommendations below build off of these key findings, and offer actionable recommendations that fit within Oregon’s existing framework and resource networks.

Centralized Communication: Feedback from focus group participants suggests that emergency communication between state agencies and providers is disjointed and decentralized. A key recommendation, therefore, is to centralize communication between state agencies and providers and establish roles and responsibilities dedicated to emergency preparedness.

Quality Supports and Training: Providers would benefit from high-quality resources and training, provided through a central authority, that support emergency preparedness. These supports build upon and expand currently available resources. Current licensing rules require emergency preparedness training only to the extent that is included within the two-hour Introduction to Child Care Health and Safety training. ELD maintains an Emergency Preparation and Response webpage with resources available.

Workgroup Oversight: We suggest convening a short-term workgroup to oversee and support implementation of resources, training, and communication strategies. The workgroup must take into account the language and cultural barriers many Oregon child care providers and families face in accessing accurate and updated information, and ensure all implemented strategies are responsive to these barriers.

Funding: In addition to the actions recommended above, we propose several additional areas for increased funding to better support emergency preparedness of child care and afterschool providers, including direct funding support to providers and communities, and funding for infrastructure to support long-term system development and implementation.

For more details, please see the full report. Report prepared by OregonASK Expanded Learning Partnership, with support from the Early Learning Division and the Willamette Education Service District
