A grayscale photograph of a woman washing a baby in a sink. The woman is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. The sink is filled with water and bubbles. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a kitchen or bathroom setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange rectangle on the right side, which contains the title and subtitle text.

Women and Child Care in Illinois

*A Survey of Working
Mothers During the
COVID-19 Pandemic*

May 5, 2021

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PROJECT FOR MIDDLE CLASS RENEWAL

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted economic and educational systems. The economic downturn caused by the pandemic has had substantial and potentially long-term implications for women, with their labor force participation rate falling to its lowest level in three decades. Additionally, following the advice of public health experts, Illinois restricted face-to-face activities and closed in-person schools and day care facilities, exacerbating the existing child care crisis.

Child care needs have become more acute for working parents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- There are 1.6 million Illinois workers who have at least one child under the age of 14 years old.
- There are 2.1 million children in Illinois under age 13, including 928,000 ages 5 and younger.
- Just 19 percent of workers have access to paid family leave.
- Prior to the pandemic, 24 percent of Illinois' child care-aged children participated in a day care center or State-recognized family home, including 34 percent of children ages 5 and younger.
- Surveys show that 60 percent of working parents have no outside help in caring for children.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 percent of working parents had to resign or reduce work hours due to lack of child care, and working mothers have been more likely to leave their jobs than working fathers.

The demands of caring for children increase inequality for women in the workforce.

- While women are less likely to be employed than men in Illinois, gender disparities in both employment and pay increase dramatically as workers become parents.
- Having young children decreases the overall employment rate for mothers by between 5 and 9 percent.
- While all working women face a pay gap relative to working men in Illinois, working mothers experience an additional 6 percent pay gap relative to working fathers.
- Prior research has linked access to affordable child care with higher workforce participation rates and wages for women.

A fall 2020 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois who were employed in March 2020 reveals the extent and impact of COVID-19 on the state's child care system and working mothers.

- 83 percent of working mothers experienced child care, school, or summer camp closures.
- Almost 40 percent of working mothers lost their jobs or were working fewer hours. For working mothers of color, nearly half reported similar outcomes.
- Among mothers who were able to continue working, only 35 percent were able to work from home, while 13 percent divided work time between household and job duties, and 52 percent were essential and frontline workers.
- 37 percent of working mothers spent at least 11 hours per week helping children with schoolwork. A total of 11 percent reported spending at least 30 hours per week aiding children with remote learning.

Pandemic-related child care demands created additional economic and career hardships for mothers who continued to work, particularly for women of color.

- Among mothers who continued working during the pandemic 55 percent worked fewer hours, 54 percent earned less income, and 60 percent reported that their job performance suffered.
- Negative economic consequences were more severe for working women whose children's schools and child care facilities had closed—60 percent worked fewer hours, 58 percent earned less income, and 66 percent reported that their job performance suffered.
- Among mothers of color still employed, more than half passed up work-related opportunities due to pandemic-related school and child care closures compared with 39 percent of White respondents.
- Working mothers compensated for income losses by delaying rent or mortgage payments (26 percent), spending less on food (26 percent), pulling from savings or retirement accounts (23 percent), delaying medical treatments (18 percent), and increasing credit card debt (17 percent).

A data-driven analysis reveals five key potential policy options to improve labor force participation, boost earnings, and help close gender pay gaps for working mothers.

- Safely reopen schools and child care facilities: The closures of schools and day care centers during the pandemic were directly linked with a 23 percent increase in working mothers reporting that their job performance had suffered and a 21 percent increase in working mothers reporting a loss of income.
- Implement flexible work schedules that promote work-life balance: Flexible work scheduling increased the likelihood of a working mother remaining employed by 9 percent and has been found to boost productivity, reduce absenteeism, and reduce worker turnover.
- Adopt paid family leave and paid sick leave policies: Access to paid leave increased the probability that a working mother remained employed by 10 percent and reduced her likelihood of experiencing a loss of income by 14 percent. Eight states have paid family leave policies and 13 states provide at least 5 days of paid sick leave for workers.
- Expand access to quality, safe, and affordable child care by doubling the investment in the Child Care Assistance Program and enacting a refundable child tax credit: Working mothers with high child care costs were 10 percent less likely to remain employed and 24 percent more likely to report that they suffered a loss of income.
- Strengthen workers' rights and increase union membership: While the probability that a working mother had access to onsite child care at her workplace was just 8 percent, it increased by 7 percent if she was a union member, nearly doubling her chances.

While COVID-19 exposed the fragility of Illinois' child care system, the child care crisis will continue well after the pandemic has ended. Businesses and elected officials in Illinois could consider increasing access to affordable child care programs, funding more before-school and after-school programs, and expanding flexible scheduling, paid leave, and collective bargaining rights to address the child care crisis and support working parents across the state.

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About the Project for Middle Class Renewal

The Project for Middle Class Renewal's mission is to investigate the working conditions of workers in today's economy and elevate public discourse on issues affecting workers with research, analysis and education in order to develop and propose public policies that will reduce poverty, provide forms of representation to all workers, prevent gender, race, and LGBTQ+ discrimination, create more stable forms of employment, and promote middle-class paying jobs. Each year, the Project publishes critical research studies and holds education forums on contemporary public policies and practices impacting labor and workplace issues. If you would like to partner with the Labor Education Program in supporting the work of the Project or have questions about the Project please contact Robert Bruno, Director of the Labor Education Program, at (312) 996-2491.

About the Illinois Economic Policy Institute

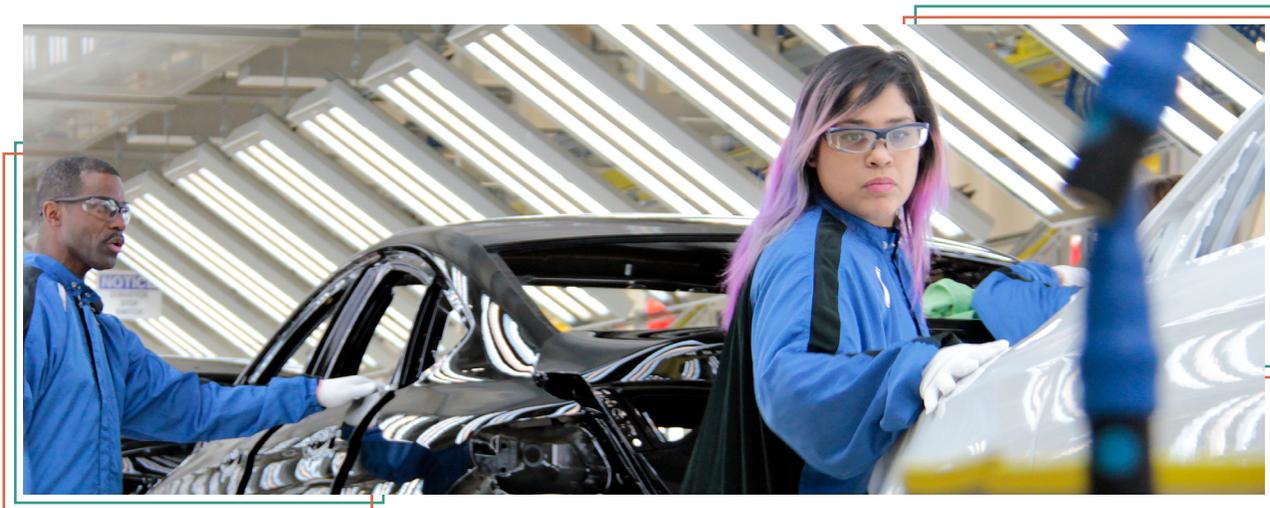
The Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) is a nonprofit organization which uses advanced statistics and the latest forecasting models to promote thoughtful economic growth for businesses and working families in Illinois and the broader Midwest. ILEPI is committed to providing timely, rigorous, and methodologically sound analyses that advance high-quality jobs, foster accountable governments, and positively contribute to the policy dialogue. To learn more about ILEPI, visit www.illinoisepi.org or call (708) 375-1002.

Introduction

Unemployment data and findings from recent studies indicate that the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will have substantial and potentially long-term implications for women both in the workplace and at home ([Taub, 2020](#)). Compared to previous recessions, which have tended to affect men's employment more acutely than women's employment, the loss of jobs related to the current crisis has impacted service sectors with high female employment shares. In January 2021, the labor force participation rate among women was just 57 percent, its lowest level recorded since 1988, more than three decades ago ([Connley, 2021](#)).



Following the advice of public health experts, many states and localities decided to restrict face-to-face economic activity and to temporarily close in-person schools and day care facilities at the onset of the pandemic. Nationally, this effort to mitigate the spread of the virus sent nearly 55 million K-12 students home by the end of March 2020. An additional 5 million children in day care and preschool were also affected ([Education Week, 2020](#); [Becker, 2020](#)). While some child care facilities remained open to provide care for the children of essential workers—including the Illinois Department of Human Services' (IDHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provided financial aid to pay for care to low-income working families in health care, human services, infrastructure, and government services—many working families had few child care options ([Illinois Action for Children, 2020](#)). With both children and parents required to stay at home, an unprecedented child care crisis developed in all 50 states. The drop in labor force participation among women was also at least partially driven by these closures of schools and day care centers. Unpartnered mothers, for example, experienced a 9 percent drop in labor force participation, the largest among any group of parents ([Attia & Blum, 2021](#)). Of the working mothers who remained employed, many had jobs but were not working or reduced their hours as a result of school closures and stay-at-home orders ([Heggeness, 2020](#)).



While the economy has started recovering from the COVID-19 recession, millions of parents and guardians have not been able to return to work or reopen their small business because they cannot find child care. Nearly one-third of workers in the United States—or about 50 million workers—live in a household with a child under the age of 14 and must consider child care obligations before returning to work ([Dingel et al., 2020](#)). In Illinois, more than 1.6 million workers have at least one child under the age of 14 ([CEPR, 2020](#)). Low-income households and people of color—who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and were more likely to work in “face-to-face” sectors with the highest risk of exposure to COVID-19—have also been the least likely to have backup child care options available during the pandemic ([Manzo & Bruno, 2020](#); [Sasser Modestino, 2020](#)).

The child care crisis has likely been exacerbated by a lack of paid leave and a lack of affordable child care. Despite a growing body of evidence which suggests that paid leave policies improve productivity and promote strong families, only 46 percent of American workers have access to paid personal leave and only 19 percent of American workers have access to paid family leave ([Sakaria & Tosto, 2018](#); [Berger et al., 2005](#); [Petts et al., 2018](#); [Rossin-Slater et al., 2013](#); [Cornfield, 2018](#); [ECLC, 2014](#); [BLS, 2019a](#)). The lack of paid leave disproportionately impacts low-wage workers, who are least likely to be able to afford unpaid time off but “are also least likely to have access to any paid sick days or paid family or medical leave” ([Johnson et al., 2018](#)).

Even before the pandemic, the annual cost of child care exceeded the cost of in-state college tuition in 28 states, and was nearly the same (\$13,800 per year) as tuition and fees at public colleges in Illinois (\$14,000 per year) ([Digg, 2018](#); [EPI, 2019](#)). Moreover, the average cost of child care for a single child was between 9 percent and 36 percent of a household’s total income ([CCAoA, 2019](#)). In Illinois, the 10th most expensive state for care, infant child care for one child accounted for 20 percent of the median family’s income ([EPI, 2019](#)). As a result, two out of every three families had difficulty finding quality care that met their standards ([Glover, 2017](#)). During the pandemic, 42 percent of companies did not have a dedicated plan to support workers with child care responsibilities ([SHRM, 2020](#)).

COVID-19 has exacerbated child care challenges that persisted for working families and has revealed the fragility of the child care systems in Illinois and across the United States. As of February 24, 2021, close to one year after Illinois school districts first sent children home to commence remote learning, a majority of the state's public schools were not providing all-day in-person education. Of the approximately 500,000 Illinois children enrolled in public early education through 8th grade, over 60 percent were attending blended remote and in-person learning, while an additional 18 percent attended schools that were still fully remote ([ISBE, 2021](#)). The job losses and other negative employment and career impacts will have a disproportionate negative effect on women and their future employment prospects long after this public health crisis has waned.

This report, conducted jointly by the Project for Middle Class Renewal (PMCR) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI), assesses the child care crisis in Illinois. This report explores data on children up to 13 years old and examines how the unprecedented decisions to close schools and move to remote learning impacted children and working parents. Then, results from a survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois conducted between August 20, 2020 and October 27, 2020 are presented, including data on employment status, worksite location, school and child care facility closures, child care responsibilities, and usage of child care supports. The next section explores the statistical impact of COVID-19 and school and child care facility closures on employment and economic outcomes for working mothers in Illinois before outlining potential policy solutions that could help businesses and elected officials address the child care crisis in Illinois. A concluding section recaps key findings.

A History of Child Care in the United States

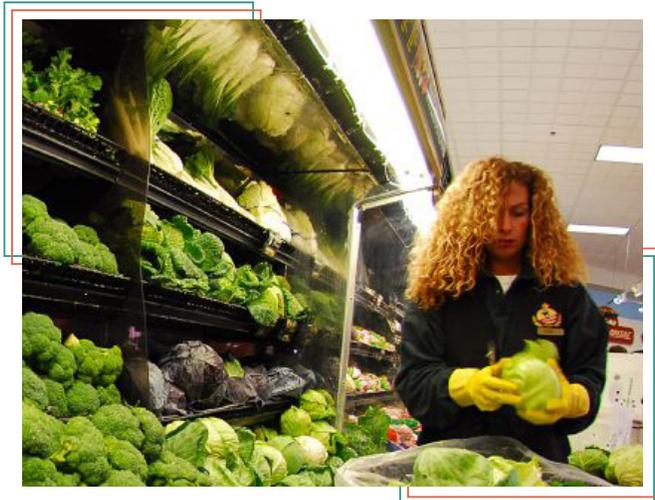
During World War II, the exodus of women into wartime jobs meant that the need for comprehensive child care grew to crisis proportions. In response to the need, Congress passed the Lanham Act (1943) which provided comprehensive child care to families working in war-related industries. Between 1943 and 1946, the federal investment in child care programs “exceeded the equivalent of \$1 billion today, and each year, about 3,000 child care centers served roughly 130,000 children” ([Cohen, 2015](#)). By the end of the war, over half a million children had been provided care through the program. Despite the war’s end, the need for child care persisted and advocates began to lobby Congress to continue to provide federal funding for a national child care program.

However, the post-war era was fraught with ideological battles focused on the role of the nuclear family in American society. The nuclear family was considered the standard of democracy – a heterosexual, white suburban family with a single male breadwinner, a stay-at-home mother, and the kids. This standard was promoted not only by the government but through a vast media industry and other American institutions. Even, labor unions used the sole breadwinner model at the bargaining table to secure wages. This model, however, did not represent a large portion of the population. Many families required two incomes and among African American and Latinx households which already faced a large wage gap relative to their White counterparts, the American standard was unattainable.

Only six days after the surrender of Japan, the Federal Works Agency (FWA) announced that federally-funded Lanham Act child care centers would be closing. The anticipated closure of the centers threw families into turmoil. As Mrs. Novares, a San Francisco post office clerk, widow, and mother of three young children told a reporter, “Honestly, I haven’t been able to sleep nights – wondering what I am going to do...I will be forced to apply for relief or see my children run loose on the streets.” ([Fousekis, 2011](#)) While the impetus to open and fund child care centers throughout the United States was the war, the reality was that the demand for comprehensive child care pre-dated the war. For example, of Californians using the Lanham Act centers in August 1945, “51 percent did not have husbands who were or had been in the service, implying theirs was not a war-related need” ([Fousekis, 2011](#)).

The reality for the majority of war-time working women was that they needed income-producing jobs. Most of the women working in war industry jobs had been wage earners prior to the war. For white women, wartime jobs were better paying jobs than clerical work. And, for African American women, wartime jobs meant leaving behind domestic service jobs in exchange for factory work which came with many more benefits and security than domestic service. As historian Natalie Fousekis’ research highlights, roughly 84 percent of female wartime workers who wished to continue working claimed they had “no other alternative” ([Fousekis, 2011](#)).

Two decades later, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration launched the Head Start program as part of the "War on Poverty." The objective of the Head Start program was to target low-income children at birth through five years of age to promote school readiness. The program continues to this day but fills the child care needs of a very limited pool of families. During President Nixon's administration, there was a strong coalitional push to return to a federally-funded child care model that did not use income as a determinant for access. In 1972, after pressure from a wide variety of community organizations including the National Organization for Women, the National Welfare Rights Organization, labor unions, and civil rights groups, Congress passed the Comprehensive Child Development Bill ([Karch, 2013](#)). However, the margin was not significant enough to override President Nixon's veto. Nixon argued that a national child care program took a "communal approach to child rearing" which had "family-weakening implications" ([Karch, 2013](#)).



In the midst of the demands for federal child care, business interests capitalized on the failure of the federal government to pass child care policy. A May 1970 Department of Labor report highlighted the shortage of child care centers, noting that "the widespread shortage of day care has brought many businessmen into the field. Numerous companies are setting up chains of day care centers under the franchise system." A few months later, Business Week profiled the industry and concluded that "the future may hold a billion-dollar bonanza for the fledging industry" (cited in Karch, 2013). This has been the reality ever since.

Child care needs in the United States are met by a complex system that supports a multi-billion dollar day care industry, neighborhood-by-neighborhood home child care, income-driven public programs which often segregate children at an early age by race and income, and—for some workers—subsidized workplace day care centers. This hodgepodge of a child care system has consequences for all working families as they struggle to secure safe, stable, and affordable options for their children. This became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed child care challenges faced by working parents.

Illinois' Child Care Crisis: Children, Parents, and the Impact of COVID-19

Following the guidelines set by public health experts and health care professionals, the Illinois State Board of Education, local school districts, and public and private child care facilities worked to provide education and care in the safest way possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some public school districts gave parents the choice of whether they wanted their children to do full-time in-person learning, part-time, “blended,” or “hybrid” in-person learning, or full-time remote learning, but many schools started the 2020-2021 academic year exclusively with remote learning ([ISBE, 2020a](#)). Additionally, many day care facilities and providers either did not reopen or did not enroll their usual capacity of children. This more limited care model has greatly impacted working parents and working guardians, reducing economic activity and deepening existing economic, gender, and racial inequities.

Children, Child Care, and Schooling in Illinois

Children are generally considered infants from birth until they are 12 months old, toddlers from ages 1 to 3, preschoolers from ages 3-5, and school-age children from ages 6 to 12 ([ChildCare.gov, 2020](#); [Stanford Children's Health, 2020](#)). School-age children develop new abilities, learn how to use tools and groom themselves, understand important concepts such as numbers and time, and socialize and develop friendships before they reach puberty and transition from childhood to adulthood ([Stanford Children's Health, 2020](#)). Child care is most needed for children from the infant stage through the school-age phase. In Illinois, there are 2.1 million children under the age of 13 years old, including about 928,000 ages 5 and younger and 1.2 million school-age children (Figure 1). Approximately 51 percent of these children are boys and 49 percent are girls.¹

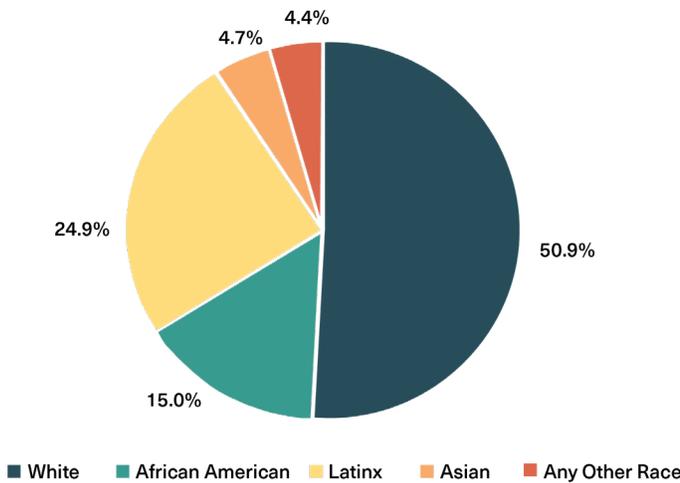
Figure 1. Estimated Child Care-Aged Children in Illinois, 2018

Children in Illinois	All Children	Boys	Girls	Share of Girls
Total Child Care-Aged Children	2,078,000	1,060,000	1,018,000	49.0%
Children Ages 0 to 5 Years Old	928,000	475,000	453,000	49.2%
Children Ages 6 to 12 Years Old	1,150,000	585,000	565,000	48.8%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau ([Ruggles et al., 2020](#)). All estimates for the number of children are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Children under the age of 13 reflect the growing diversity in Illinois (Figure 2). While the adult population of Illinois is approximately 64 percent white, only a slim majority of child care-aged children (51 percent) are white (Ruggles et al., 2020). About one-quarter (25 percent) are Latinx or Hispanic more than one-in-seven (15 percent) are Black or African American. Nearly one out of every 20 child care-aged children is Asian or Pacific Islander (Figure 2).

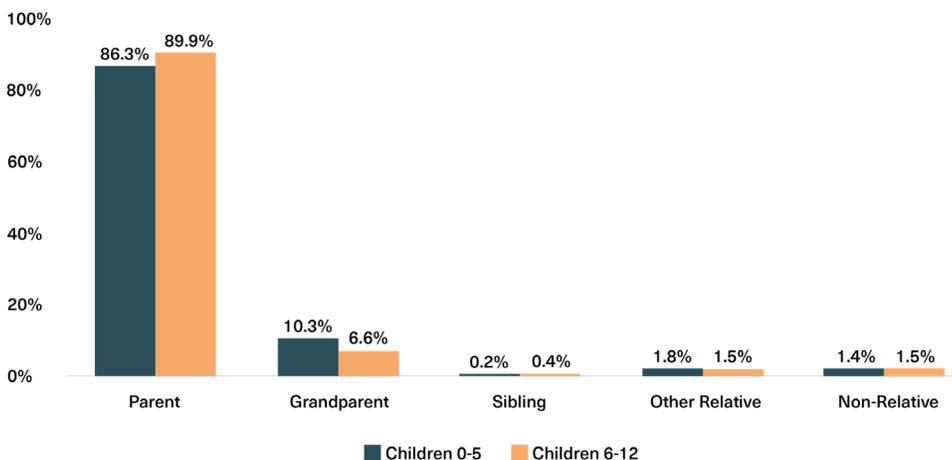
Figure 2. Demographics of Child Care-Aged Children in Illinois, 2018



Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau (Ruggles et al., 2020).

Most young children in Illinois live with their parents or their grandparents (Figure 3). Fully 86 percent of children ages 5 and younger live with at least one parent and another 10 percent live with at least one grandparent. Among all school-age children, 90 percent live with one or more parents and 7 percent reside with a grandparent or grandparents. About 2 percent of children live with siblings or other relatives and 1 percent of children live with a non-relative.

Figure 3. Living Situation of Child Care-Aged Children in Illinois, 2018



Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau (Ruggles et al., 2020). All estimates for the number of children are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Quality child care is a valuable tool in preparing young children for school and helping to close the achievement gap between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Research finds that every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood education and child care saves communities between \$4 and \$17 in future costs of special education, crime prevention and corrections, and government assistance programs while also improving educational attainment and employment outcomes for participating children over the course of their lifetimes ([ECLC, 2014](#)).

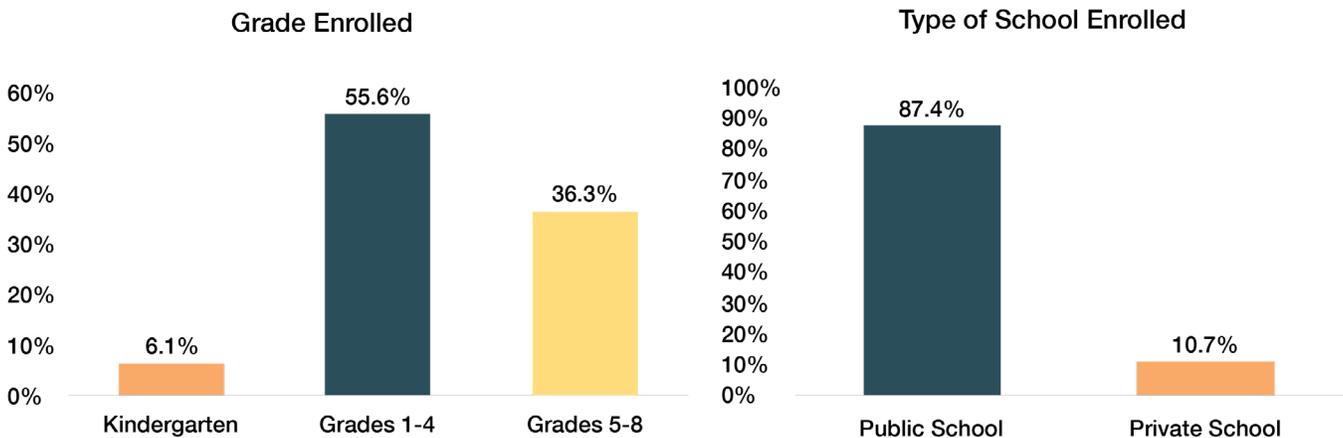
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Illinois had more than 13,800 child care providers serving nearly 496,000 children ([IDHS, 2019](#)). This includes about 8,300 licensed and license-exempt family homes serving 75,000 children and 5,500 licensed and license-exempt centers serving about 421,000 children. This means that about 24 percent of children younger than 13 years old participated in a day care center or family home recognized by the State of Illinois (Figure 4). However, participation in weekly nonparental care arrangements was higher for Illinois children younger than 6 years old. An estimated 34 percent of the 928,000 children younger than 6 years old participated in center-based care and another 26 percent were cared for by a relative or non-relative ([Redford et al., 2017](#)).

Figure 4. Child Care-Aged Children and Child Care Capacity in Illinois, 2018

Child Care-Aged Children and Child Care Capacity in Illinois	Estimate
Total Child Care-Aged Children (Younger than 13 Years Old)	2,078,000
Licensed and License-Exempt Family Homes	8,300
Child Capacity at Licensed and License-Exempt Family Homes	75,200
Licensed and License-Exempt Centers	5,500
Child Capacity at Licensed and License-Exempt Family Homes	420,500
Total Licensed and License-Exempt Providers	13,800
Total Child Capacity at Licensed and License-Exempt Providers	495,700
Total Child Capacity as a Share of Child Care-Aged Children	23.8%
Share of Children Ages 0-5 in Center-Based Care*	34.0%
Share of Children Ages 0-5 Cared for by Relative or Non-relative Only*	26.0%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau ([Ruggles et al., 2020](#)); data on child care providers and facilities from the Illinois Annual Child Care Report FY2018 from the Illinois Department of Human Services ([IDHS, 2019](#)); and *national estimates from *The Years Before School: Children's Nonparental Care Arrangements from 2001 to 2012* from the U.S. Department of Education ([Redford et al., 2017](#)). Estimates for the number of children younger than 13 years old are rounded to the nearest thousand, while data for child care providers and capacity are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Figure 5. School Enrollment Data for School-Age Children (Ages 6 to 12 Years Old) in Illinois, 2018



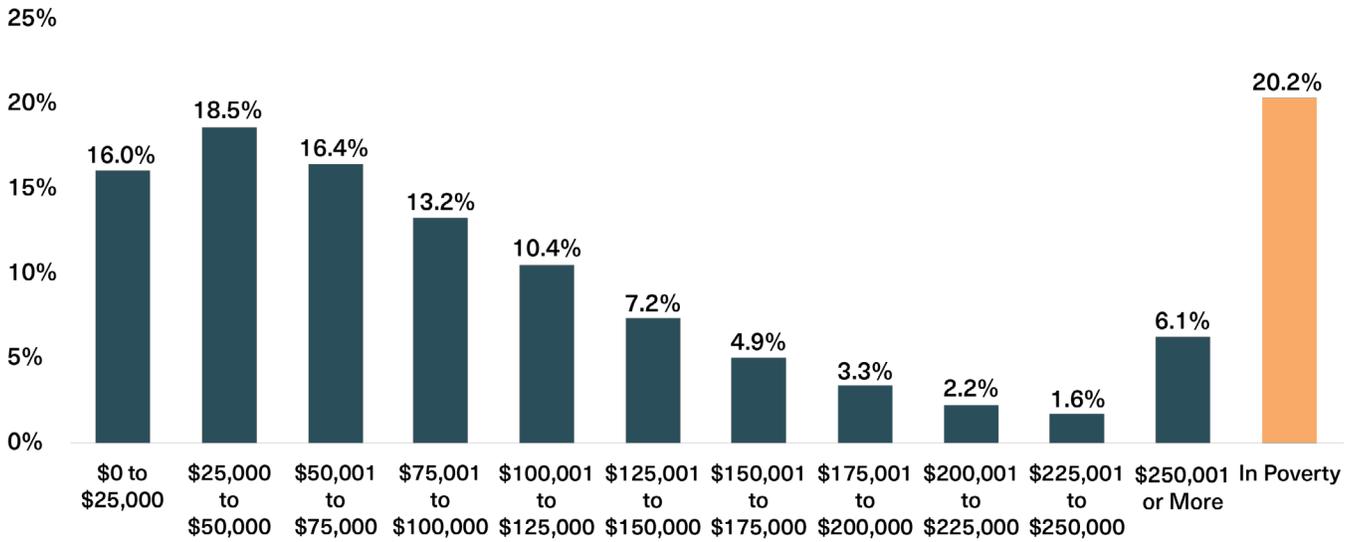
Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau ([Ruggles et al., 2020](#)). All estimates for the number of children are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Of the 1.2 million children between the ages of 6 and 12 years old in Illinois, nearly all (98 percent) are enrolled in school and were affected by the March 2020 state-mandated closure of all public schools and private schools ([ISBE, 2020b](#)) (Figure 5). These children were expected to participate in remote learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, and many began the 2020-2021 school year fully remote or in “hybrid” model with some remote learning and some in-person instruction. Most of these 6 to 12 year olds are enrolled in the first grade through the fourth grade (56 percent). A little more than one-third (36 percent) are in the fifth grade through the eighth grade and the rest (6 percent) are in Kindergarten. In addition, the vast majority of young children in Illinois, more than 1.0 million students, are enrolled in public schools (87 percent) while about one-in-ten are students at private schools (11 percent).

Research finds that household income is an important indicator that impacts children’s educational attainment and future economic success. A 25 percent increase in earnings for low-income households has been found to increase educational attainment for children by one year, on average, by the time they reach age 21 and reduce their chances of committing a minor crime by 22 percent ([Akee et al., 2010](#)). Household income also has a significant impact on children’s cognitive health, social development, and physical health ([Cooper & Stewart, 2017](#)). In total, about four out of every five children under the age of 13 (82 percent) live in households with annual household incomes of \$150,000 or less, and one-half (51 percent) reside in household with incomes of \$75,000 per year or less (Figure 6).

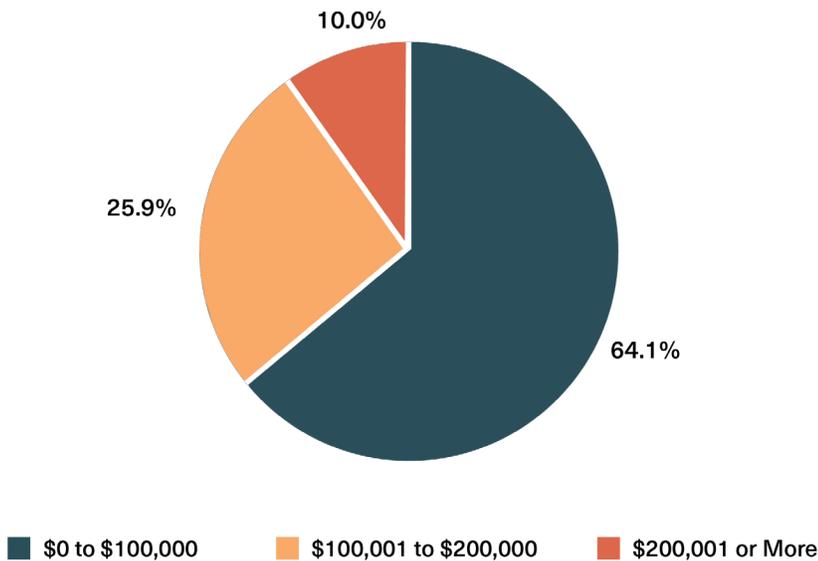
One major argument in favor of reopening schools was to provide school lunches for children in need. In Illinois, approximately 20 percent of children live in poverty (Figure 6). This includes 16 percent of children under the age of 13 who live in households earning less than \$25,000 per year. However, free lunch and reduced-price lunch is also available to students who live in working-class families that are slightly above the official poverty line. As a result, nearly 63 percent of all children in participating schools are eligible for free lunch and reduced-price lunch in Illinois ([IDHS, 2020a](#)). This corresponds to the share of child care-aged children (64 percent) who live in households earning \$100,000 or less per year (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Household Income and Poverty Rate of Child Care-Aged Children in Illinois, 2018



Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau (Ruggles et al., 2020). All estimates for the number of children are rounded to the nearest thousand.

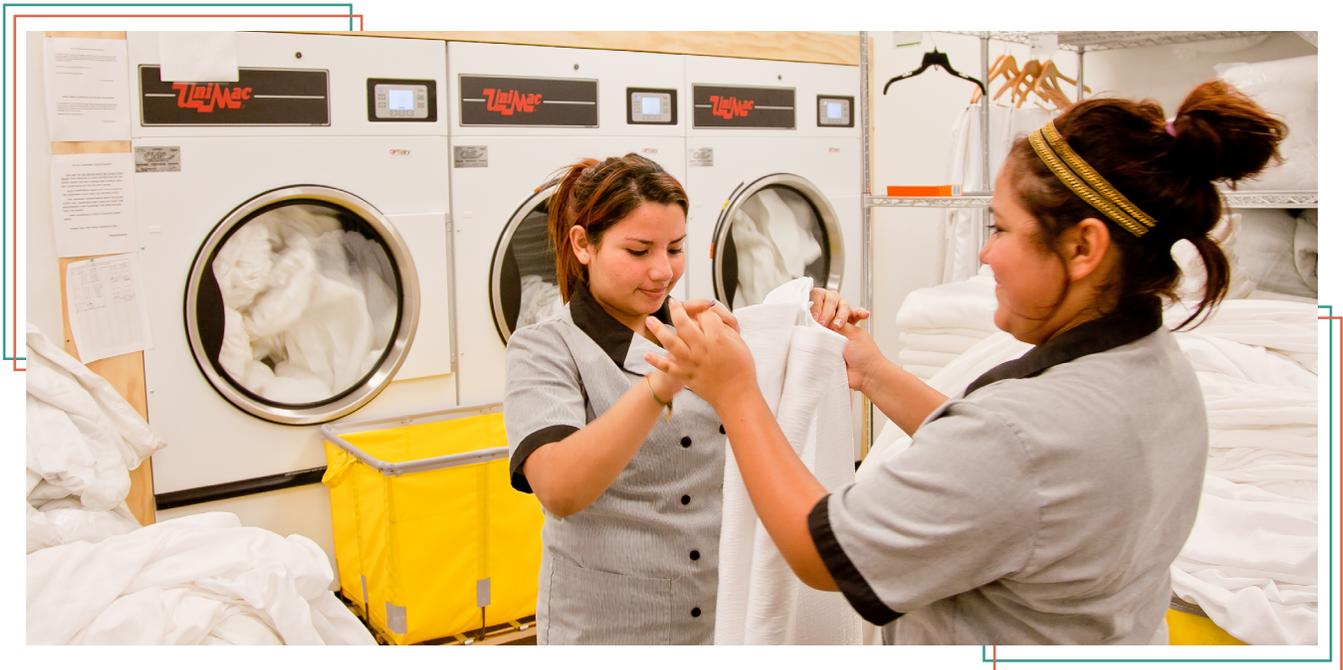
Figure 7. Share of Child Care-Aged Children by Household Income Bracket in Illinois, 2018



Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates) from the U.S. Census Bureau (Ruggles et al., 2020). All estimates for the number of children are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Working Parents, the Gender Pay Gap, and the "Motherhood Penalty"

According to data from the *Current Population Survey*, there are 2.4 million people in Illinois who report that they have children under 18 years old—including 1.1 million men and 1.3 million women (Figure 8).² Nearly all of these 2.4 million parents (99 percent) are “working age” between 20 years old and 64 years old. In total, 32 percent of working-age men and women have children under 18 years old. Among these working-age parents, an estimated 1.9 million residents have at least one child who is younger than 13 years old, including 1.6 million workers.



A **gender employment gap** occurs when women drop out of the labor force to care for young children. As a result, women experience a **“motherhood penalty”** upon returning to work due to time away from work and missed opportunities and promotions. The gender employment gap has a long-term effect on hourly wages for working mothers, contributing to the **gender pay gap**. The gender pay gap also refers to the predominance of women in lower-paid occupations and industries, despite their relatively higher levels of educational attainment when compared to men. In contrast, men are more likely to increase their work effort as women leave the workforce, and accordingly experience a **“fatherhood bonus”** by having children ([Budig, 2014](#)).

Figure 8. Estimated Population, Parents, and Working-Age Parents in Illinois, 2018

Number or Share of People in Illinois	All	Men	Women
<i>All People Ages 16-85</i>			
Total Population	10,049,000	4,864,000	5,185,000
Residents without Children Under 18 Years Old	7,605,000	3,770,000	3,835,000
Residents with Children Under 18 Years Old	2,444,000	1,094,000	1,350,000
<i>Share with Children Under 18 Years Old</i>	<i>24.3%</i>	<i>22.5%</i>	<i>26.0%</i>
<i>All People Ages 20-64</i>			
Total Population	7,527,000	3,737,000	3,789,000
Residents without Children Under 18 Years Old	5,120,000	2,657,000	2,462,000
Residents with Children Under 18 Years Old	2,407,000	1,080,000	1,327,000
<i>Share with Children Under 18 Years Old</i>	<i>32.0%</i>	<i>28.9%</i>	<i>35.0%</i>
Residents with at Least One Child Under 14	1,939,000	877,000	1,062,000
Workers with at Least One Child Under 14	1,584,000	818,000	767,000

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS ORG) from the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Census Bureau (CEPR, 2020). All population estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand, and may not sum perfectly due to rounding.

Mothers are less likely to be in the labor force than fathers (Figure 9). In Illinois prior to the pandemic, 75 percent of working-age men without children had at least one job and 72 percent of working-age women without children had at least one job, a 3 percent difference. However, among working-age parents, fully 93 percent of fathers were employed compared with just 72 percent of mothers, a 21 percent gender employment gap. The gender gap was highest for parents with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Mothers with children younger than 6 years old were 23 percent less likely to be employed (69 percent) than men (93 percent). Mothers with children between the ages of 6 and 13 years old (71 percent) were 22 percent less likely to be employed than men (93 percent), while mothers with high school-aged children (73 percent) were 20 percent less likely to be employed than men (93 percent).

Figure 9. Employment Rate of Working-Age Illinois Residents, By Parental Status, 2018

Employment Rate of Illinois Residents Ages 20-64 (2018)	All	Men	Women	Women vs. Men
Residents without Children	73.6%	75.0%	72.0%	-3.0%
Residents with Children	81.5%	93.0%	72.1%	-20.9%
Residents with Children Ages 0-5	79.7%	92.6%	69.1%	-23.5%
Residents with Children Ages 6-13	80.9%	92.9%	70.8%	-22.1%
Residents with Children Ages 14-17	81.9%	92.9%	73.2%	-19.8%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS ORG) from the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Census Bureau (CEPR, 2020).

As the gender employment gap widens for parents, so too does the gender pay gap (Figure 10). In Illinois, women without children earn an average hourly wage of \$24 per hour, 17 percent less than men without children (\$29 per hour). However, because women are more likely to drop out of the labor force when they have children and men are more likely to increase their work effort, women experience a “motherhood penalty” and men experience a “fatherhood bonus” by having children (Budig, 2014). In Illinois, men with children see their average hourly earnings increase to \$35 per hour while women with children experience wage stagnation at around \$25 per hour, a 28 percent difference. Furthermore, the gender pay gap worsens for mothers as their children develop. Relative to their male counterparts with children, the gender pay gap in hourly earnings is 25 percent for women with children younger than 6 years old, 29 percent for women with children between the ages of 6 and 13 years old, and 31 percent for women with high school-aged students (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Average Hourly Earnings of Working-Age Illinois Residents, By Parental Status, 2018

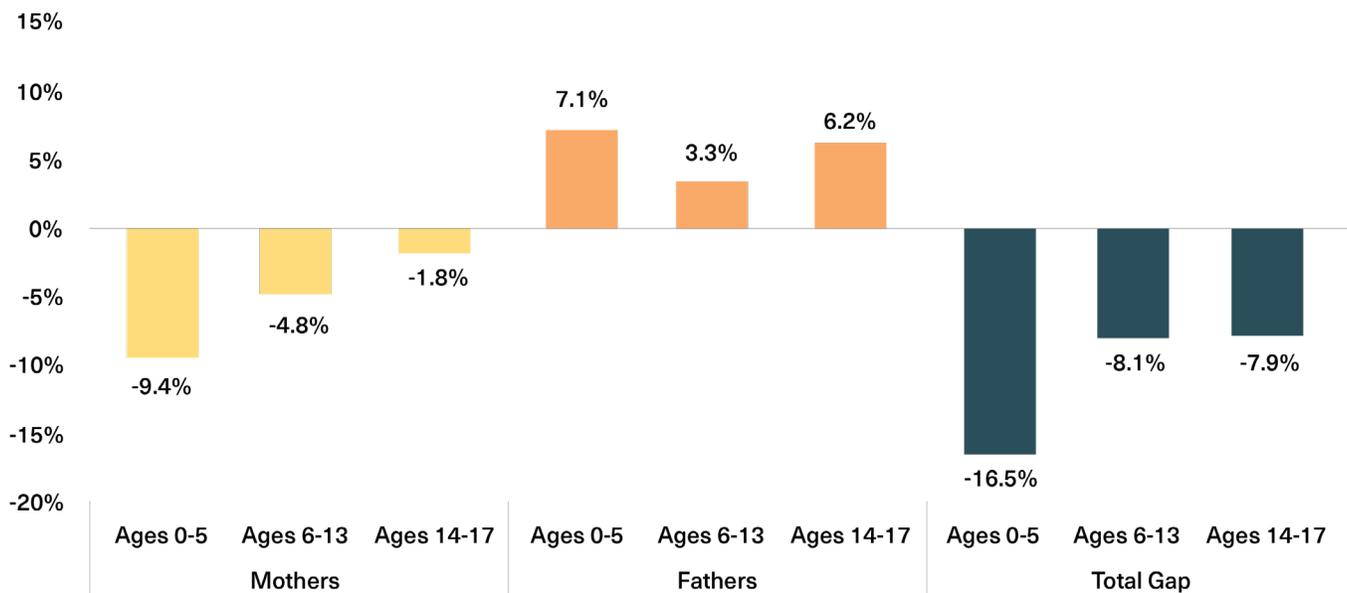
Average Hourly Earnings of Illinois Residents Ages 20-64 (2018)	All	Men	Women	Women vs. Men
Residents without Children	\$26.67	\$29.02	\$24.12	-16.9%
Residents with Children	\$30.31	\$35.19	\$25.39	-27.9%
Residents with Children Ages 0-5	\$28.92	\$32.81	\$24.64	-24.9%
Residents with Children Ages 6-13	\$30.31	\$35.23	\$25.15	-28.6%
Residents with Children Ages 14-17	\$29.94	\$35.72	\$24.50	-31.4%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2018 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS ORG) from the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Census Bureau (CEPR, 2020). All population and worker estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand.

The gender gaps presented in Figure 9 and Figure 10 may overstate or understate the “motherhood penalty” because women may earn lower wages for other reasons, such as their occupation and industry of choice (Chamberlain, 2016; Baxter, 2015). On the other hand, more working-age women hold bachelors, masters, and advanced college degrees (41 percent) in Illinois than men (36 percent), which tends to increase wages (CEPR, 2020; SSA, 2015; Torpey, 2018; Carnevale et al., 2011). As a result, statistical techniques called regression analyses are utilized to control for these and similar factors in order to isolate the independent effect of having children on the wages of parents and the likelihood of parents being employed (Figure 11 and Figure 12).³

After accounting for age, racial background, urban status, and education, women are statistically less likely to be employed when they have children while men are more likely to be employed (Figure 11). The gender employment gap is highest among parents with the youngest children. Having at least one child younger than 6 years old is associated with a 9 percent decrease in employment for mothers and a 7 percent increase in employment for fathers, a net 16 percent widening in the gender employment gap. As children get older, mothers are more likely to rejoin the workforce. The motherhood employment penalty falls from 9 percent for women with children younger than 6 years old to 5 percent for women with children between the ages of 6 and 13 years old, and subsequently to 2 percent for women with high school-aged children. Fathers, however, remain more likely to be employed. As a result, the gender employment gap for parents only falls from 16 percent for parents with children younger than 6 years old to about 8 percent for parents with children between the ages of 6 and 17 years old (Figure 11). The gender employment gap is both real and significant for new mothers, and diminishes—but nevertheless persists—as children grow.

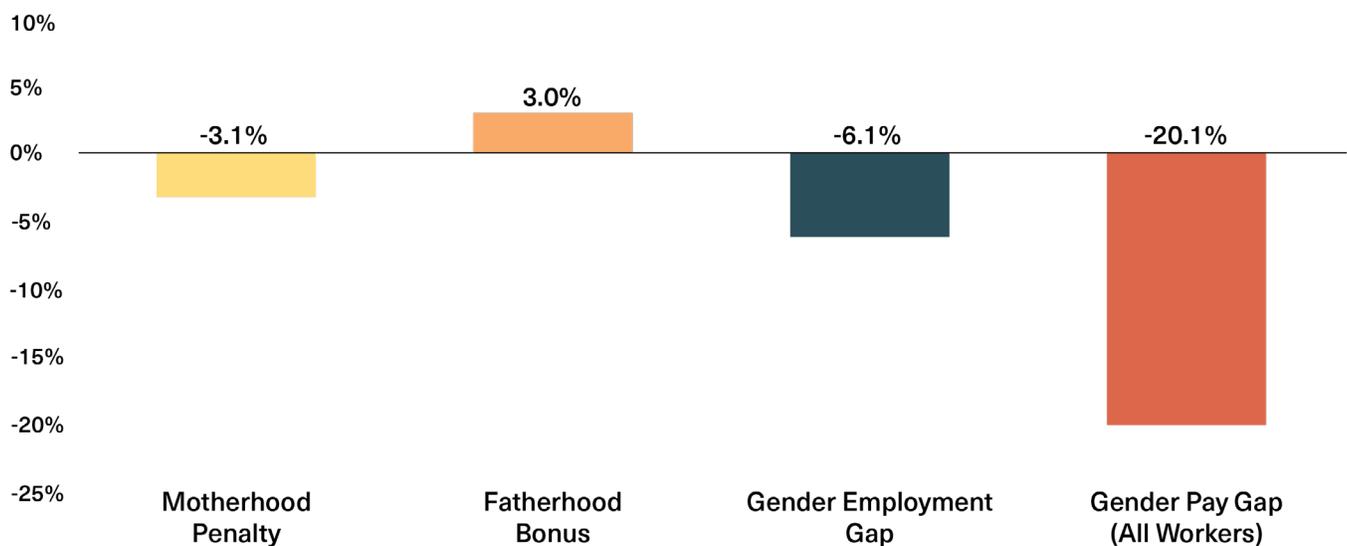
Figure 11. Statistical Impact of Children on the Likelihood of Being Employed in Illinois, 2014-2018



Source(s): Regression results from authors' analysis of 2018 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS ORG) from the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Census Bureau (CEPR, 2020). For full regression results, see Table A in the Appendix.

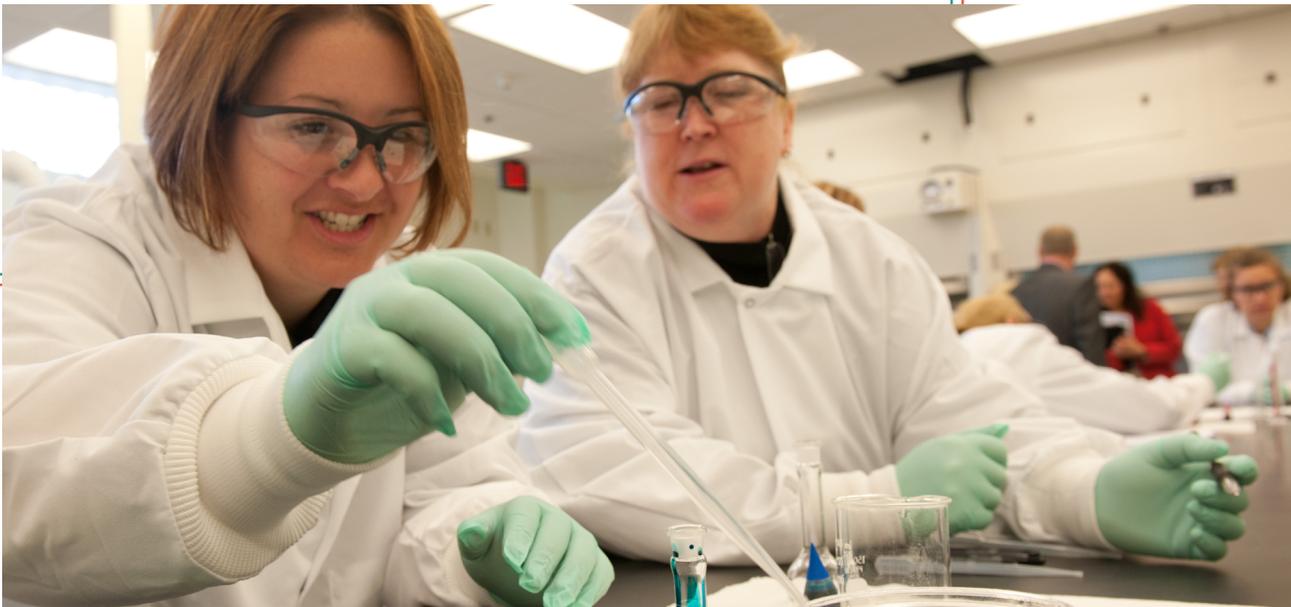
The gender employment gap has a long-term effect on hourly wages for working mothers (Figure 12). After accounting for age, racial background, urban status, educational attainment, union membership, sector of employment, occupation of employment, industry of employment, and hours worked per week, women in Illinois statistically earn 20 percent lower wages, on average, than men—regardless of whether or not they have children. Mothers with children suffer a second decrease in earnings by having children.⁴ For example, in addition to the 20 percent gender pay gap, women with high school-aged children experience a 3 percent average motherhood wage penalty. At the same time, men with high school-aged children experience a 3 percent average fatherhood wage bonus. This implies that, even after accounting for occupation and industry, the total motherhood earnings gap is 6 percent over the long run, which negatively impacts women.

Figure 12. Statistical Impact of High School-Aged Children on Hourly Earnings in Illinois, 2014-2018



Source(s): Regression results from authors' analysis of 2018 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS ORG) from the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Census Bureau (CEPR, 2020). For full regression results, see Table A in the Appendix.

The finding that motherhood has long-term earnings consequences for women aligns with previous academic research (Kahn et al., 2014). Research suggests that “firm-specific skills depreciate” due to absences from the labor market, meaning that mothers who temporarily leave their jobs to take care of their children are less able to keep up with changing technologies, systems, and procedures that occur during their time away (Anderson et al., 2002). In addition, some employers consider children a distraction for mothers that could cause them to be less-dedicated workers (Glynn, 2014). As a result, time away from work after childbirth decreases the chances that mothers will be promoted and increases the chances that they will be demoted to part-time status (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). These effects compound over time, leading to lower average wages for mothers over the course of their careers. Dropping out of the labor market—even temporarily—has long-term financial repercussions.



There is a strong link between quality, affordable child care and the employment rate of mothers ([Schochet, 2019](#)). Research reveals that countries that have a higher availability of affordable child care also have higher labor force participation rates among mothers ([Vuri, 2016](#); [GAO, 2007](#)). One study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that tripling the federal investment in the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) would attract and retain 14 percent more low-income women with children into the workforce ([Enchautegui et al., 2016](#)). Additionally, 42 percent of mothers say that they would look for higher-paying jobs and 31 percent of mothers would ask for more hours at work if they had better access to child care ([Schochet, 2019](#)). Expanding access to quality, affordable child care would increase employment among mothers and reduce the gender pay gap ([Gould & Schieder, 2016](#)).

The Economic and Social Impacts of COVID-19 on Working Parents and Working Guardians

Child care needs have become more acute as working parents and working guardians have had to search for temporary options due to school closures, school district decisions to educate remotely, and day care centers either closing or enrolling a limited number of children. In a 2020 survey of working parents, 60 percent said they have no outside help in caring for or educating their children and 10 percent said they have less help now than they did prior to the pandemic ([Krentz et al., 2020](#)). Moreover, with the elderly at the highest risk of COVID-19-related mortality, grandparent-provided child care has also been discouraged ([Berezow, 2020](#); [Guilmoto, 2020](#)). As a result, U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 49 years old reported the highest levels of anxiety and stress during the pandemic ([Palsson et al., 2020](#)). In particular, women in these age cohorts had the highest distress scores because they assumed more of the household, child care, and remote schoolwork responsibilities ([Palsson et al., 2020](#)).

For parents who have remained employed, juggling working, parenting, and schoolwork responsibilities has been difficult. Fully 57 percent of working parents surveyed during the pandemic said that both working and assisting their children with remote schooling has been “too much to manage” ([TD Ameritrade, 2020](#)). Another 50 percent of working parents said that their work performance had suffered as a result of managing these responsibilities ([Krentz et al., 2020](#)).





Many parents and guardians have decided to take time off from work or completely leave the labor force to care for children until the virus has been contained or eliminated—a decision that can impact their family’s economic security and financial future. A recent survey by Northeastern University found that 13 percent of working parents had to resign or reduce their work hours because of lack of child care during the pandemic ([Sasser Modestino, 2020](#)).

Working mothers have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because mothers have been more likely to be primarily or solely responsible for child care as schools and day care centers have gone to remote learning or closed altogether, they have also been more likely than fathers to leave their jobs ([Cohen & Hsu, 2020](#); [Long, 2020](#)). Similarly, of all the workers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19, 60 percent have been women ([North, 2020](#)). People who become unemployed tend to experience poorer health, lower overall well-being and satisfaction, and lower earnings when they find new jobs ([Nichols et al., 2013](#)). Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to widen gender gaps after 30 years of gains in women’s economic opportunities ([Tappe, 2020](#)).⁵

Survey of Mothers in Illinois: Employment, Responsibilities, and Child Care

A 60-item online survey was issued by the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in August 2020 to Illinois women who had been employed as W-2 workers at the time of the COVID-19-induced economic shutdown in March 2020. To qualify for participation, respondents had to provide residence for at least one child under 13 years old during the pandemic. A total of 3,128 respondents took some part of the survey, but the number with child care-aged children working in Illinois and answering all the survey questions resulted in a sample size of 1,030. The sample is divided by respondents living within the City of Chicago (36 percent), outside Chicago but in Cook County (20 percent), and outside Cook County but in the State of Illinois (44 percent).⁶

"I feel like I'll be fired any day now. They already took me off the schedule until I find out from [the] school district if they are going back..It's very tough to be doing this all on my own⁷."

Participation in the survey was also limited to working-class and middle-class mothers from households with total household incomes of \$150,000 or less.⁸ Over two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) resided in households with less than \$70,000 in combined income (Figure 13). This generally mirrors the household incomes for Illinois residents. In Illinois, the median household earns \$69,187 in annual income and 64 percent of all households under the \$150,000 threshold earn between \$0 and \$75,000 ([ACS, 2019](#)).⁹

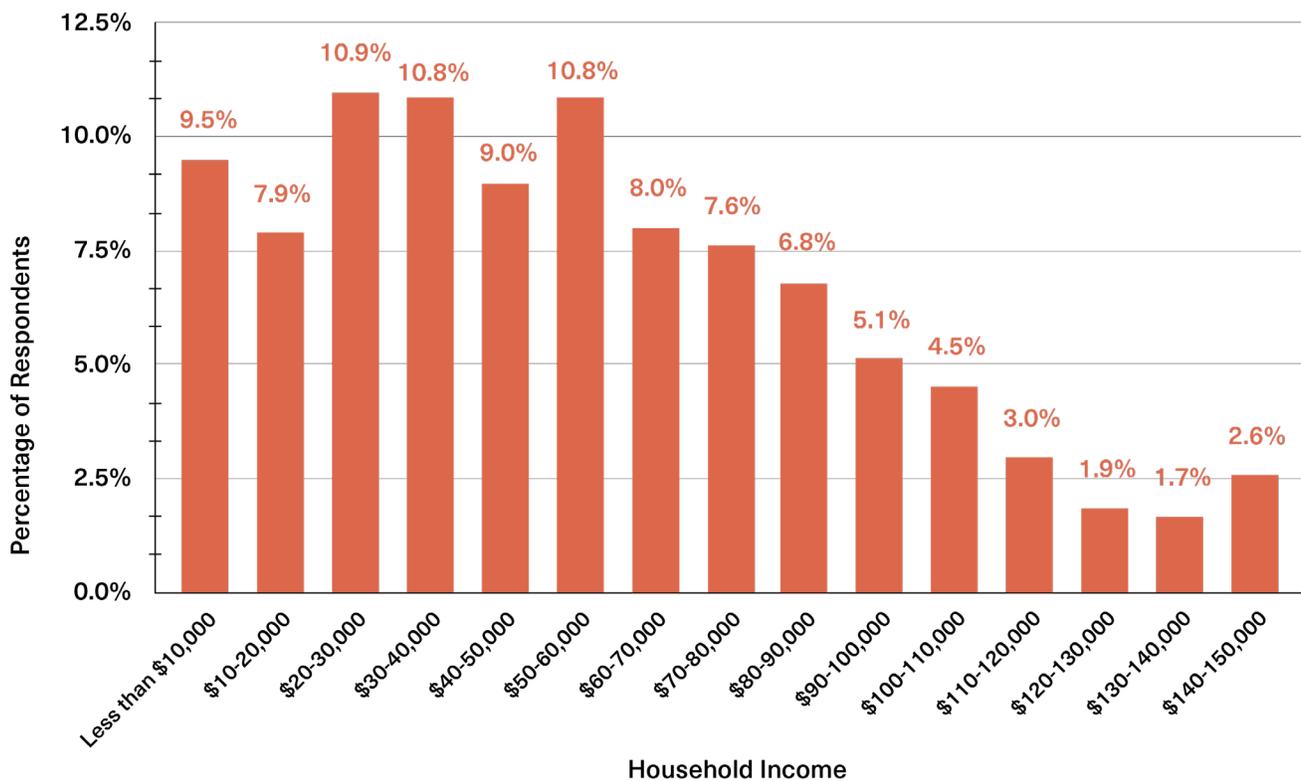
Black and African American respondents comprise 24 percent of survey respondents, greater than their 15 percent share of the Illinois population ([ACS, 2019](#)). Black and African American working mothers are likely overrepresented because residents from the City of Chicago were more likely to respond to the survey and because Black and African American women tend to earn less, on average, than their White counterparts. Put differently, Black and African American working mothers are disproportionately more likely to live in households with incomes below \$150,000, which was the threshold for participation in the survey.

"I'm not able to take on extra projects, join committees, do the extras that put you in a promotable position."

"We are barely surviving."

Two-thirds of surveyed mothers live with a domestic partner and, of those, 21 percent reside with a female or gender non-specific or non-binary partner. Surveyed workers living with no spouse or domestic partner had lower household incomes and comprised roughly 50 percent of the sample of surveyed mothers with household incomes of less than \$40,000 annually (Figure 14).

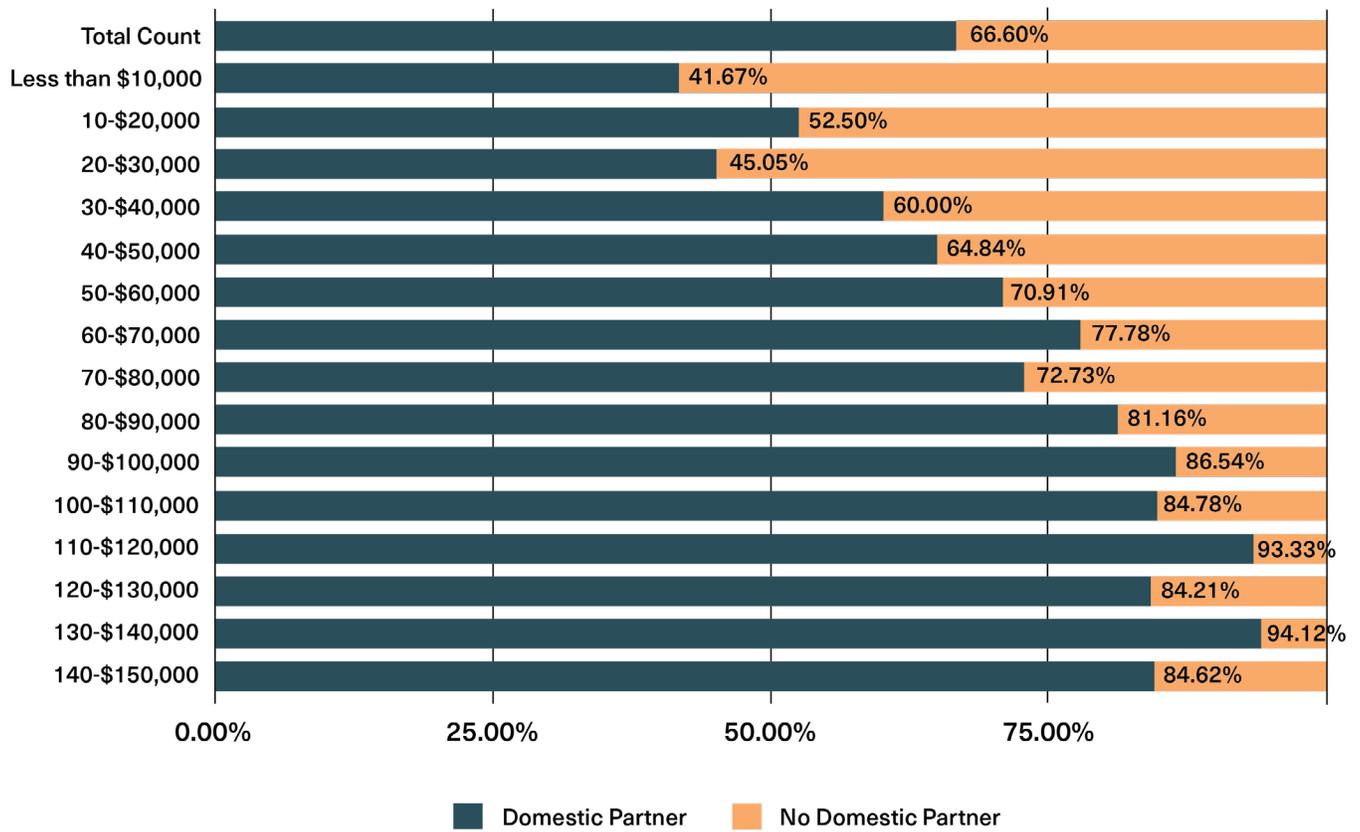
Figure 13. Distribution of Household Income (2019) of Working Mothers in the Survey, Fall 2020



Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Minimum and maximum “quotas” were set in order to collect a sample representative by job and industry characteristics. Because the distribution of industries in Illinois is remarkably similar to the industry composition of jobs in the United States, the survey results may be reliable for inferring implications for the entire country. About 75 percent of the respondents were full-time workers, near the national average, while 22 percent were part-time and 3 percent held seasonal or some other type of employment.

Figure 14. Distribution of Household Income, By Residence with Spouse or Domestic Partner, Fall 2020



Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Current Employment Status and Worksite Location of Respondents

At the time of their participation in the survey, 19 percent of respondents had been laid off or left their employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 14). When combined with those whose hours were cut between March 2020 and August 2020 and those who had been furloughed, just shy of 40 percent of surveyed workers experienced substantial changes in their employment and incomes as a direct result of the health pandemic. When compared to the working mothers participating in this study, domestic partners of respondents fared relatively better in terms of maintaining employment and work hours during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 15). Surveyed workers residing in the City of Chicago experienced higher rates of COVID-19-induced unemployment (22 percent) than respondents living in the rest of Illinois (between 16 percent and 17 percent) (Figure 16).

"I lost my job. It sort of works out because we could never afford to pay for child care while the kids have to do remote learning. I'm only working part-time because the company cannot pay me full-time. The plan is to go full-time, but with the way things are going, I may have to look for a new job. No one else from my old job—which was in the hospitality industry—has found new employment yet. It's all a nightmare."

Findings from this survey reflect nascent national figures on the disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working women ([Igielnik, 2021](#); [Heggeness, 2020](#); [Bateman & Ross, 2020](#)). Consideration of the long-term economic impacts for working mothers is needed in future research, especially given the considerable literature documenting that loss of earnings due to job losses are both enduring and more relentless when they occur during recessions ([Stevens, 1997](#); [Davis & von Wachter, 2011](#)). Jobs lost and foregone employment-related experiences also likely lead to less secure future employment ([Jarosch, 2015](#)).

Just over one-third (35 percent) of the 820 respondents still working in some capacity at the time of survey participation were able to perform their job duties from home (Figure 17). Another 13 percent divided their work time between home and the job site, while 52 percent of surveyed workers could be classified as frontline workers due to an employment location outside of the home.

"I have worked remotely since the pandemic began. Prior to that I was able to work overtime. Since the pandemic began, I haven't done any overtime and therefore less money is coming in."

Figure 15. Employment Status of Working Mothers and Their Domestic Partners, Fall 2020

Employment Status: "Are you currently still working at this same company?"	Survey Respondent	Domestic Partner
Yes	57.4%	66.4%
Yes, but hours have been cut	15.4%	12.2%
Yes, but have been furloughed and am receiving less or no pay	5.1%	3.0%
No, have been let go because of COVID-19 related reasons and don't know if or when I'll return	9.7%	6.8%
No, but have been directed by my employer to report back to work and have a return date	0.7%	0.7%
No, but expect to go back soon	1.2%	1.2%
No, voluntarily left to take care of children or family members during this time	4.6%	1.1%
No, quit because was concerned about COVID-19 and safety at work	2.5%	1.3%
Unemployed due to COVID-19	18.7%	11.0%
Unemployed and furloughed workers	23.8%	14.1%
Unemployed, furloughed, and reduced hours	39.1%	26.2%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Figure 16. COVID-19-Related Unemployment Rate of Working Mothers by Location, Fall 2020

Geographic Location in Illinois	COVID-19-Related Unemployment
State of Illinois (Total)	18.7%
City of Chicago	22.1%
Outside of Chicago but in Cook County	16.1%
Outside of Cook County but in Illinois	17.1%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Frontline workers are employees within “**essential industries**” who are required to physically show up to their jobs, meaning that they represent specific subsets of workers in public-facing occupations within essential industries. While health risks vary between frontline worksites, these workers all face a variety of occupational hazards, including physical proximity to customers and co-workers.

Figure 17. Worksite Location of Working Mothers and Their Domestic Partners, Fall 2020

Worksite Location At Time of Survey	Survey Respondent	Domestic Partner
Home	34.8%	31.3%
Jobsite	51.9%	58.4%
Combination of work at jobsite(s) and home	13.3%	10.3%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Figure 18. Worksite Location of Single Mothers in the Survey, Fall 2020

Worksite Location At Time of Survey	Respondent Living with a Partner	Respondent Not Living with a Partner
Working from home	38.0%	28.1%
Not working from home	48.3%	59.6%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Results from the survey highlight a number of similar as well as distinct challenges faced by both frontline workers and those working from home during these times. Figure 17 shows the breakdown between both work in and outside the home for all survey respondents compared with the experiences of their domestic partners. When comparing the experiences of the sample to those of domestic partners, it is evident that surveyed mothers were more likely to work from home than their domestic partners. However, while 38 percent of mothers who reside with a domestic partner have been able to work from home during the pandemic, only 28 percent of surveyed single mothers have been able to work from home (Figure 18).

School and Child Care Closures, Remote Learning, and the Usage of Child Care Supports

Fully 83 percent of all surveyed workers, regardless of their employment status, experienced child care, school, or summer camp closures as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women who had access to schools and child care that remained open during this time period were more likely to work outside of the home or split their work hours between their home and their jobsite (Figure 19).

"I have to be there for my child, during and after school hours. I can't even work from home because I have to constantly be paying attention to her needs."

Figure 19. Schools or Child Care Facility Closures, By Worksite Location of Working Mothers, Fall 2020

Worksite Location At Time of Survey	Schools or Day Care Centers Open	Schools or Day Care Centers Closed
All Working Mothers	16.8%	83.2%
Home	12.7%	87.3%
Jobsite	19.9%	80.1%
Combination	16.1%	83.9%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

As can be seen in Figure 20, about four out of every 10 surveyed women (37 percent) spent at least 11 hours per week between March 2020 and June 2020 assisting or facilitating their children's education. This includes one out of every 10 respondents (11 percent) who spent at least 30 hours per week aiding in remote learning during this time period. The difference in the number of hours spent assisting children with their schooling between respondents whose work was at home compared to those working outside home was minimal (Figure 21). Between 35 percent and 40 percent of respondents in both groups engaged in 11 or more hours aiding in schoolwork and remote learning per week during the Spring 2020, suggesting that remote learning burdens have fallen to mothers in Illinois regardless of whether or not their work could be performed at home. On average, survey respondents predicted they would be personally responsible for two-thirds of total remote schooling assistance for their children during the 2020-2021 academic year, when compared to others living in their homes. Disproportionate division of labor is also experienced by surveyed women in terms of other household duties. Respondents predicted a singular assumption of nearly three-quarters of typical domestic activities such as grocery shopping and housekeeping.

Figure 20. Weekly Hours Spent Helping Children with Schoolwork or Early Education, March-June 2020

Hours Spent on Schoolwork Per Week	Percentage of All Respondent Working Mothers
0	11.0%
1 to 5	28.6%
6 to 10	23.0%
11 to 15	12.2%
16 to 29	10.0%
21 to 29	4.4%
30 or more	10.8%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Figure 21. Weekly Hours Spent Helping Children with Schoolwork or Early Education, By Worksite Location, March-June 2020

Hours Spent on Schoolwork Per Week	All Working Mothers	Mothers Working From Home	Mothers Working at Jobsites	Mothers Working Both From Home and At Jobsites
0	10.8%	5.2%	14.5%	10.8%
1-10	52.3%	60.0%	47.5%	51.3%
11-20	23.2%	20.7%	23.5%	28.8%
2 or more	13.7%	14.1%	14.5%	9.01%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

In addition to school closures, traditional forms of child care available to parents for off-school hours were impacted by closures during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. In at least 63 percent of Illinois public school districts, school hours are coupled with before and after-school programs to provide child care for parents between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on school days (Ruiz & Dunn, 2004). These programs are typically located on school grounds or at nearby community centers, such as local YMCAs, local YWCAs, and local park districts (Ruiz & Dunn, 2004). Coupled with full and partial-day summer camp and child-care services, these programs provide essential support for working parents during off-school hours. During the Summer 2020, roughly 15 percent of surveyed mothers made use of partial or full-day summer camp and child care programs, while over 54 percent relied on child care support from family members and friends living in and outside of their households (Figure 22).

“I am waking up at 3 a.m. to get work done before she wakes so that I can be available before and after school.”

The share of working mothers who relied on family members and friends for child care needs increased by 5 percent due to COVID-19, from 40 percent pre-pandemic to 45 percent in Fall 2020 (Figure 22). This corresponds with a 6 percent drop in surveyed working mothers planning on relying on before-school and after-school programs in Fall 2020, from 18 percent pre-pandemic to 12 percent during the pandemic. A similar decline was anticipated by survey respondents when asked about after-school enrichment activities, from 17 percent before the pandemic to 12 percent during. Perhaps most importantly, while just 9 percent of working mothers did not use any child care supports before COVID-19, the share increased 7 percent to 16 percent in Fall 2020 (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Usage of Child Care Supports During Summer 2020 and Pre-COVID-19 vs. Fall 2020

Child Care Support Used by Respondents	Summer 2020	Before and After School Pre-COVID-19	Before and After School in Fall 2020
Full-day summer camp/child care	7.6%	--	--
Partial-day summer camp/child care	7.5%	--	--
A family member living in your household (including spouse/partner)	28.5%	20.7%	23.6%
Extended family and/or friends not living in your household	25.6%	19.4%	21.7%
Babysitters/nannies	12.6%	15.0%	13.5%
After school activities related to sports, arts, games, or other enrichment	--	16.9%	12.3%
A before and/or after school child care program	--	18.4%	12.0%
Other	1.4%	0.6%	1.3%
None of the above	16.8%	9.0%	15.6%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Personal Economic and Financial Impacts on Working Mothers

While this analysis does not seek to quantify the long-term career and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on working mothers of school-aged children, survey respondents were asked to assess whether they had worked fewer hours, earned less income, passed up work-related opportunities, and felt their job performance had suffered due to school and child care closures (Figure 23). The responses are striking. In total, 55 percent of the women who remained employed during the pandemic reported that they worked fewer hours, 53 percent reported that they earned less income, 45 percent reported that they passed up work-related opportunities, and 60 percent reported that their job performance had suffered. In an open-ended query on other negative employment-related impacts, an additional 6 percent of the sample self-reported that they had delayed their own schooling or professional development during this time. Another 6 percent of surveyed mothers self-reported suffering from adverse mental health effects.

“I was up for a promotion but since I have to watch the kids more, I can't accept it.”

“I have had to drop out of my college courses and work from home to take care of my child's needs.”

Across the board, negative consequences were most severe for working women whose children’s schools and child care facilities had closed (Figure 23). Among the 82 percent of respondents whose children were subject to pandemic-related schooling or care closures, 61 percent worked fewer hours, 58 percent earned less income, 49 percent passed up opportunities, and 66 percent said their job performance suffered. Nevertheless, even amongst the 18 percent of respondents whose children were not subject to pandemic-related closures, negative career shocks have been considerable. For example, about three out of every 10 of surveyed mothers who did not experience school closures still reported that they worked fewer hours, earned less income, and that their job performance suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 23. Personal Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and School or Child Care Closures on Working Mothers, Fall 2020

Personal Economic Impacts	Worked Fewer Hours	Earned Less Income	Passed Up Opportunities	Job Performance Suffered
All Respondents	54.9%	53.2%	45.3%	60.2%
Schooling/child care closed (81.9%)	60.5%	58.1%	49.5%	65.8%
Schooling/child care open (18.1%)	29.9%	30.4%	26.3%	34.9%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

"I'm not able to start on a new career or go to school because I have to be home for my children. They are both using the computers we have here so there is not one for me."

"I was in the process of building my business from my savings and needed to draw from that money to cover home necessities and everyday items."

Regardless of whether they were able to work from home, a majority of women surveyed believed their job performance had suffered in some way as a result of school and child care closures. For mothers working at home during the pandemic, over two-thirds believed their work product was negatively impacted (Figure 23). Even amongst *frontline* workers, however, 58 percent felt their job performance suffered due to their children being home.

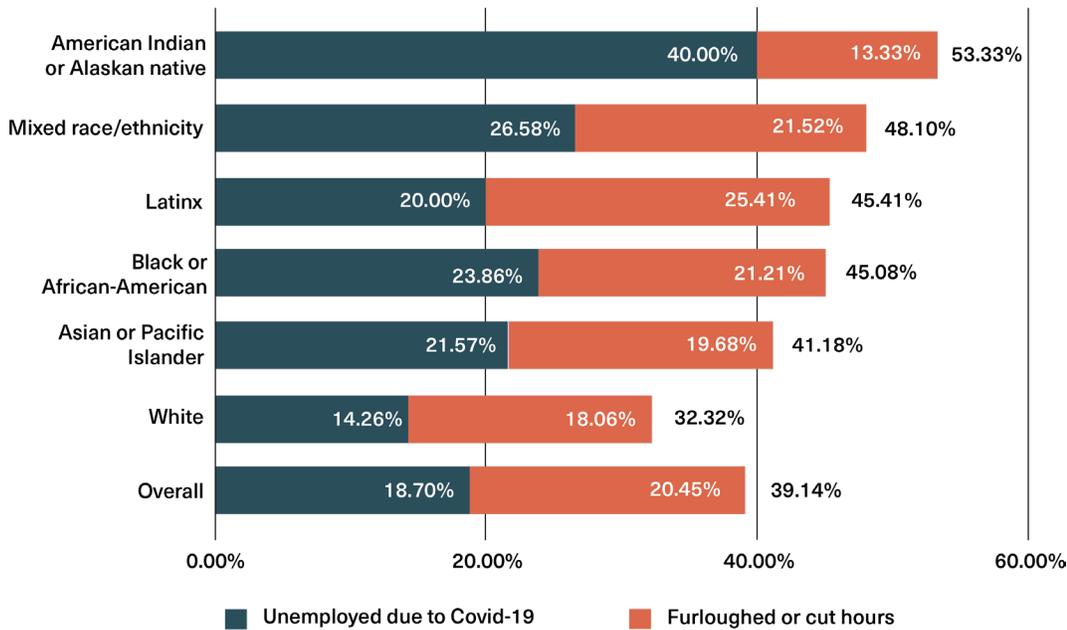
Figure 24. Share of Working Mothers Reporting Negative Impacts on Their Job Performance, By Worksite Location, Fall 2020

Worksite Location	Job Performance Suffered
All Respondents	60.2%
Home (34.8%)	66.8%
Jobsite (51.9%)	58.4%
Combination (13.3%)	65.2%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Negative career impacts were acutely experienced by women of color who participated in this study. Nearly half of surveyed mothers self-identifying as Black or African-American (45 percent), Latina or Hispanic (45 percent), and mixed race or ethnicity (48 percent) suffered unemployment, furloughs, or reductions in their work hours as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 25). In addition, more than half of American Indian or Alaskan native respondents (53 percent) experienced unemployment, furloughs, or reduced hours, though these workers comprised less than 2 percent of the total sample. Taken together, two out of every five (39 percent) of all surveyed women experienced loss of employment and income due to the pandemic-related economic shock as well as the lack of available and affordable childcare.

Figure 25. Unemployment, furlough, and reduced hours for working mothers by racial or ethnic background, Fall 2020



Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Among surveyed workers still employed, more than half of Black or African American (54 percent), Latina or Hispanic (54 percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (54 percent), or mixed-race respondents (68 percent) passed up work-related opportunities due to pandemic-related school and child care closures compared with 39 percent of White respondents (Figure 26). In addition, more than half of Black or African American (64 percent), Latina or Hispanic (60 percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (51 percent), or mixed-race respondents (63 percent) reported that they earned less income compared with less than half of White respondents (47 percent). Black, Latina, and Asian respondents also felt their job performance suffered at higher rates than White respondents.

Figure 26. Personal Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and School or Child Care Closures on Working Mothers, By Racial or Ethnic Background, Fall 2020

Personal Economic Impacts	Passed Up Opportunities	Earned Less Income	Job Performance Suffered
All respondents	45.3%	53.2%	60.2%
Black or African American	54.0%	63.8%	61.5%
Latina or Hispanic	54.3%	60.2%	68.3%
White	38.6%	47.2%	58.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	54.0%	51.0%	64.0%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	46.7%	66.7%	53.3%
Mixed Race	67.7%	62.9%	69.4%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

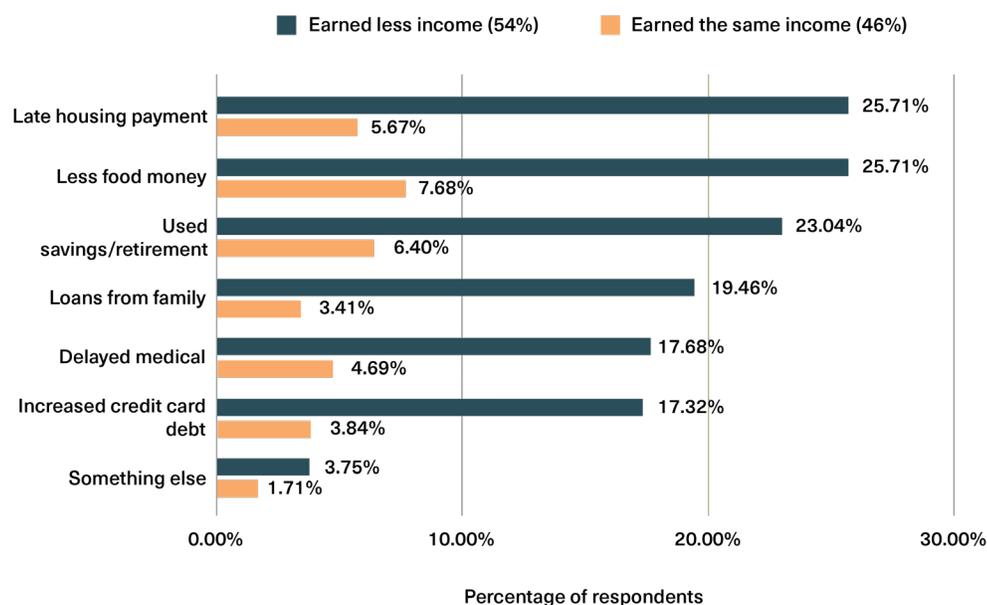
“Our savings is gone and I’ve had to greatly reduce my hours because of [the] lack of child care.”

COVID-19 and school and child care closures have led to loss of earnings and work hours for a large portion of working mothers in Illinois. As shown previously, 53 percent of all surveyed women reported that they earned less income in the months between the COVID-19-related economic shutdown in March 2020 and their survey participation in Fall 2020. This is likely driven by a drop in work hours, with 55 percent of respondents saying that they worked fewer hours overall due to school and child care closures (Figure 23).

Working mothers have compensated for their loss of income with a number of different strategies (Figure 27). Over one-quarter of surveyed women who lost wages due to COVID-19-related school and child care closures delayed their rent or mortgage payments (26 percent). Another one-quarter (26 percent) spent less money on food for their family between March and August 2020. Other impacts on household budgets included pulling from savings and retirement funds (23 percent), taking on loans from friends and family (19 percent), delaying needed medical treatments (18 percent), and increasing credit card debt (17 percent).

Financial hardships have also been experienced by the 46 percent of respondents who did not earn less income as a direct result of school and child care closures (Figure 27). Among these working women, 6 percent paid their rent or mortgage late, 8 percent spent less money on food, and 6 percent dipped into savings or retirement accounts.

Figure 27. Changes in Personal Finances Due to COVID-19 and School or Child Care Closures, Fall 2020



Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

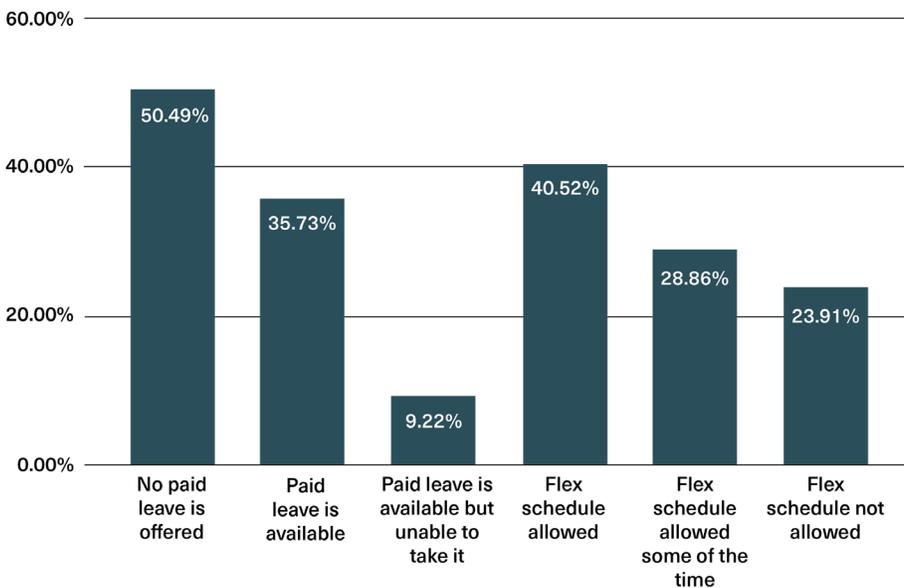
Employer Supports for Working Mothers

In March 2020, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) to expand paid sick leave and family and medical leave to eligible employees for COVID-19-related reasons. The Act required certain employers to provide employees with 80 hours of paid sick leave at two-thirds the employee's regular pay to take care of an individual who is sick or a child whose school or child care provider is closed. It also granted up to 10 weeks of paid family and medical leave at two-thirds regular pay for eligible employees who are unable to work because a child is unable to attend child care for reasons related to COVID-19 (DOL, 2020). However, the FFCRA only applied to workers at private companies with fewer than 500 employees and certain public sector employers, representing just 27 percent of the U.S. workforce (BLS, 2019b).

"I feel like I have taken too much time off of work, affecting how my bosses see me as a reliable employee."

At the time this survey was conducted in Fall 2020, half of surveyed mothers (50 percent) reported that they had no access to paid leave from their employers to use to take care of their children (Figure 28). An additional 9 percent had access to paid leave but were unable to take it due to their workloads or for another work-related reason. Among the working mothers who did have access to paid leave through their employers, more than half (55 percent) had just two weeks or less of annual paid leave (Figure 29). Inability to take paid leave has forced many working mothers to make use of flexible scheduling policies at work. Close to 70 percent of survey respondents had access to flexible scheduling policies at their job at least some of the time to attend to child care responsibilities.

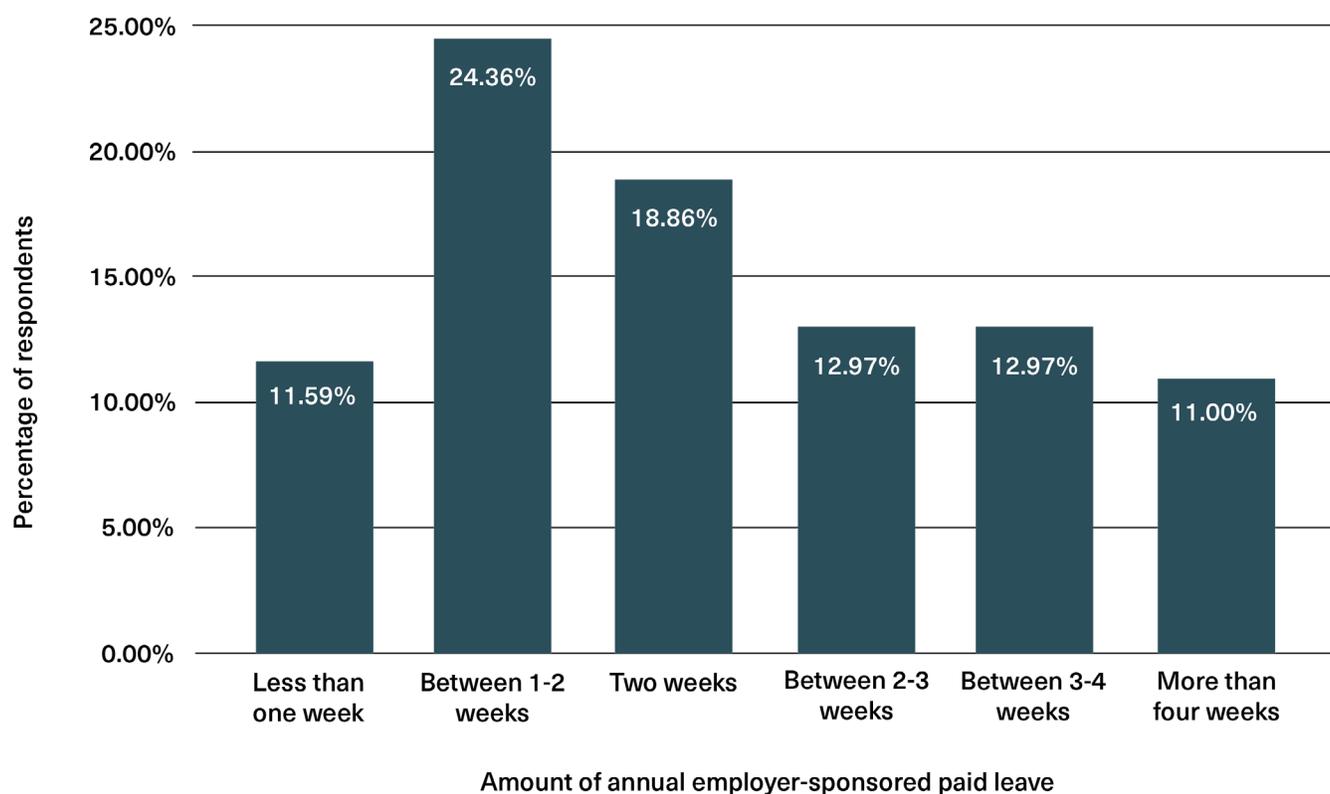
Figure 28. Access to Paid Leave and Flexible Scheduling Policies Among Working Mothers, Fall 2020



Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

“It makes it difficult to know if I will still have a job after the fall or spring. We can't afford child care but we also can't afford for me not to work at this current moment. It's a struggle to consider looking for other jobs because you don't know what the market is like and if they will pay what we need. I also work for a company that did not offer maternity leave, I had to use my sick, vacation, and personal pay and take 3 weeks unpaid, plus my hours get reduced in the summers. That was before COVID-19.”

Figure 29. Employer-Sponsored Paid Leave Among Working Mothers, By Annual Paid Time, Fall 2020



Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000.

Statistical Analyses: The Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Working Mothers

This analysis also utilizes a common but advanced statistical technique called regressions to understand the unique and independent impact of specific characteristics or phenomena on working mothers in Illinois. Regressions describe “how much” a variable is responsible for a particular outcome. For example, probabilistic probit regressions, with average marginal effects, can evaluate how much school or child care closures contributed to the increase in joblessness or to the loss of earnings among working women.



After accounting for other important factors, pandemic-related school or child care closures were not directly responsible for *loss of jobs* among working mothers in Illinois. In other words, the pandemic itself was the biggest factor in whether a working mother in Illinois was still employed in Fall 2020, not the closure of schools and child care facilities. However, pandemic-related school or child care closures did result in a *loss of hours* worked among mothers who were still employed. Furthermore, high child care costs were associated with a drop in employment amongst working mothers. Paying more than \$500 per month in child care costs decreased the chances that a working mother kept her job by 10 percent, while there was no discernible effect for those who pay less than \$500 per month.¹⁰

Figure 30. Regression Results on the Employment Impacts of COVID-19 and School or Child Care Closures on Working Mothers, Fall 2020

Impact of Key Variable on Employment Impacts: Probit Regression Analyses	Still Employed (In Any Capacity)		Not Working due to Child or Family Care		Very Worried About Job Loss	
	Percentage	Significance	Percentage	Significance	Percentage	Significance
School or Child Care Closure	3.9%		-2.4%		10.1%	**
Low Child Care: ≤\$500 Per Month (vs. No Costs)	-1.1%		0.1%		3.5%	
High Child Care: ≥\$501 Per Month (vs. No Costs)	-9.5%	**	2.7%		11.1%	**
Flexible Schedule: Yes or Sometimes	9.4%	***	-3.9%	***	-8.8%	**
Paid Leave Available: Yes	10.3%	***	-3.9%	**	-1.1%	
Union Member	4.9%		-2.1%		1.8%	
Living with a Spouse or Domestic Partner	-3.3%		5.0%	**	3.2%	
Spouse or Domestic Partner Is Employed	2.6%		-1.3%		7.3%	
Chicago (vs. Outside of Cook County)	0.7%		-2.6%		11.7%	**
Black or African American Woman (vs. White)	-9.0%	***	0.1%		-2.5%	
Latina or Latinx Woman (vs. White)	-6.9%	*	-3.3%		6.3%	
Bachelor's Degree or More (vs. High School Only)	11.5%	***	-3.7%	**	-14.6%	***
Constant (i.e., Baseline Probability)	80.1%	***	4.5%	***	27.6%	***

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000. *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$. For full regression results, see Table B in the Appendix.

This indicates that mothers may have decided to exit the workforce to care for their children instead of continuing paying for the high child care costs during the pandemic. Additionally, access to paid leave increased the probability that a working mother kept her job by 10 percent and access to flexible scheduling increased the probability by 9 percent. By allowing paid time off and flexible work hours to care for children during the COVID-19 pandemic, paid leave and flexible scheduling significantly improved workforce retention and labor force attachment among working mothers (Figure 30).

It is also worth noting that racial background and educational attainment were strongly associated with whether or not a woman was still employed during the pandemic. Black women were 9 percent less likely than their White counterparts to remain employed, a finding that persists even after accounting for the fact that women of color are more likely to be employed in face-to-face and essential industries (Manzo & Bruno, 2020). This suggests that decisions about which employees were laid off due to the pandemic may have been influenced by the forces of structural racism. Moreover, working mothers with bachelor's degrees or higher were 12 percent more likely to remain employed as compared with those who did not hold four-year college degrees (Figure 30).

Nearly 5 percent of Illinois women surveyed reported that they were not working because they “voluntarily left to take care of children or family members during this time.” Once again, the closure of schools and child care facilities had no direct impact on a working mother voluntarily quitting to care for her family, but did result in mothers working fewer hours. However, access to paid family leave and access to flexible scheduling both effectively eliminated the odds that a working mother voluntarily left the labor force to care for her family, each respectively reducing the chances by 4 percent. On the other hand, mothers who lived with a spouse or a domestic partner were 5 percent more likely to report that they left their jobs to care for their children and families—further revealing that mothers have shouldered more of the child care burden than fathers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 30).



Respondents who remained employed were asked how worried they were about losing their job on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all concerned and 10 being extremely concerned. About one-fourth responded with a concern level of 8, 9, or 10, which is classified in this analysis as “very worried.” The chances that a working mother said she was “very worried” statistically increased by 10 percent if her child’s (or children’s) school or child care facility closed and by 11 percent if she had high child care costs exceeding \$500 per month. The link between high child care costs and increased worry about job loss is an indication that working mothers feel they would not be able to afford to continue paying for child care if they were to lose their jobs. While access to paid sick leave did not decrease the probability that a working woman said she was “very worried” about losing her job, access to flexible scheduling was associated with a 9 percent decrease (Figure 30).

A significant share of working-class and middle-class mothers in Illinois reported that they had suffered earnings losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The baseline probability, independent of all other factors, that a working mother earned less income was 55 percent. However, the chances that a working mother earned less income increased by 21 percent if her child's (or children's) school or child care facility closed between March 2020 and Fall 2020 (Figure 31). This is directly linked with the 61 percent of working mothers whose children's schools or child care facilities closed reporting that they worked fewer hours to take care of their children compared with just 30 percent of working mothers who were not subject to these closures.

Figure 31. Regression Results on the Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and School or Child Care Closures on Working Mothers, Fall 2020

Impact of Key Variable on Economic Impacts: Probit Regression Analyses	Job Performance Suffered		Earned Less Income Due to Closures		Onsite Child Care Available at Work	
	Percentage	Significance	Percentage	Significance	Percentage	Significance
School or Child Care Closure	23.3%	***	21.3%	***		
Low Child Care: ≤\$500 Per Month (vs. No Costs)	21.9%	***	24.2%	***	1.3%	
High Child Care: ≥\$501 Per Month (vs. No Costs)	15.3%	***	24.0%	***	2.5%	
Flexible Schedule: Yes or Sometimes	-1.0%		-1.6%		7.1%	**
Paid Leave Available: Yes	-4.2%		-13.6%	***	3.1%	
Union Member	7.5%	*	2.1%		7.1%	***
Living with a Spouse or Domestic Partner	-1.8%		0.4%			
Spouse or Domestic Partner Is Employed	9.9%	*	4.9%			
Chicago (vs. Outside of Cook County)	5.7%		6.8%	*	5.3%	**
Black Woman (vs. White)	-5.4%		7.9%	*	-2.2%	
Latinx Woman (vs. White)	3.2%		3.6%		-2.5%	
Bachelor's Degree or More (vs. High School Only)	-6.5%		-5.5%		2.4%	
Constant (i.e., Baseline Probability)	64.4%	***	54.9%	***	7.8%	***

Source(s): Authors' analysis of an August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes under \$150,000. *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$. For full regression results, see Table C in the Appendix.

Working mothers who had child care expenses also were 24 percent more likely to report that they lost income than their counterparts without any child care costs. These results indicate that the pandemic itself was the primary reason why working mothers suffered earnings losses, but that both the closure of schools and day care centers and the costs of child care fostered a child care crisis that noticeably contributed to negative personal economic outcomes. Conversely, while flexible scheduling was not statistically associated with a decrease in the share of working women who reported that they earned less income, access to paid leave did have an effect. Working mothers in Illinois that had paid leave policies available through their workplace were 14 percent less likely to report that they had earned less income (Figure 31).



Similar results are discovered in an examination of the causes of a large percentage of working mothers testifying that their job performance suffered during the pandemic. The chances that a working mother reported that her job performance had suffered were a high 64 percent, independent of all other factors. The chances that a working mother said her job performance had suffered increased by 23 percent if her child's (or children's) school or child care facility closed and by another 15 to 22 percent if she had any child care costs. These findings again demonstrate that the pandemic itself is the main cause of the negative work-related outcome, but that the child care crisis engendered by the closure of schools and day care centers and the costs of child care were also significant factors. However, there was no evidence that flexible work hours or paid leave policies led to fewer working mothers saying that their job performance had suffered (Figure 31).

Given that child care facilities and child care costs have critical impacts on the labor market outcomes of working mothers, it is important to understand how many working mothers have an employer-provider or employer-subsidized child care option available onsite at their workplace. On average, the probability that a working mother reported that she had onsite child care available at her workplace was 8 percent, independent of other factors. The probability increased by an additional 5 percent if the working mother lived in the City of Chicago. Union membership is also associated with a 7 percent increase in the chances that a working mother has onsite child care at her workplace, nearly doubling her chances of having an employer-provided or employer-subsidized child care option onsite.

Potential Policy Options: Five Approaches for Firms and Elected Officials

While COVID-19 exposed the fragility of Illinois' child care system and exacerbated child care challenges faced by working parents, the child care crisis will continue well after the pandemic has ended. This data-driven and evidence-based analysis reveals five key potential policy options that both businesses and elected officials could consider to improve labor force participation, boost earnings, and help close gender pay gaps for working mothers in Illinois. These potential courses of action include both short-term and long-term policy options.

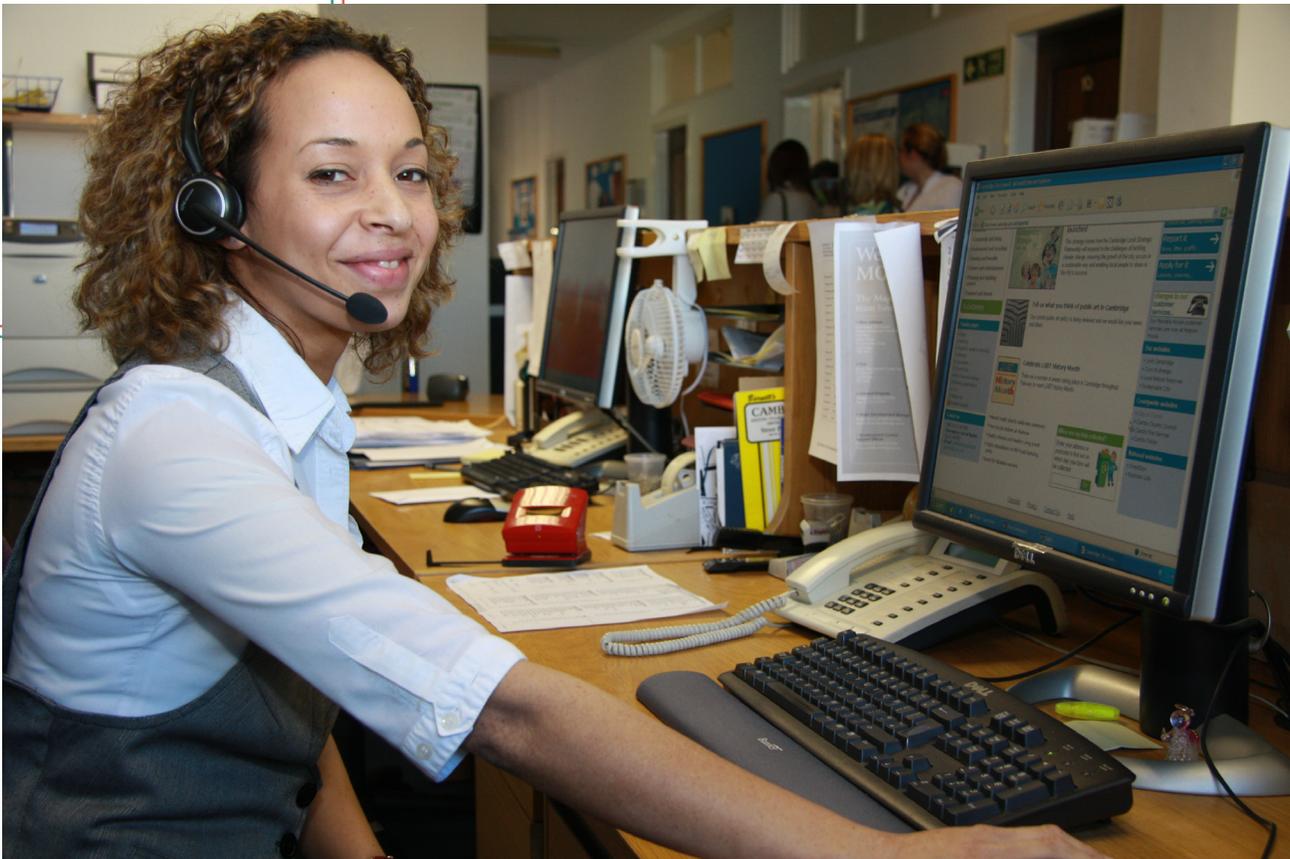
First, schools and child care facilities matter.

The closures of schools and day care centers during the pandemic were directly linked with a decrease in perceived job performance and an increase in worry about being laid off among working mothers. Most importantly, the closures of schools and day care centers were associated with income losses for working mothers in Illinois. These findings imply that, in “normal” times, schools effectively function as child care services for working mothers, allowing them to earn a living while maintaining high levels of productivity in the workforce. With most teachers now fully vaccinated in Illinois, elected officials should provide school districts with the necessary resources to ensure schools are fully reopened and remain safe for both staff and students.



The most important safety mitigations, including mask wearing and testing protocols, along with supplies of personal protective equipment, upgrading ventilation systems, modifying layouts to ensure social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces should be subsidized by the state ([CDC, 2021](#)). Additionally, elected officials should consider grants that would allow school districts to expand before-school and after-school programs to provide child care for more parents on school days. For example, state lawmakers could significantly expand the After School Programs Grant, which currently provides \$20 million to school districts and non-school district applicants to improve academic outcomes and provide enrichment activities for students ([ISBE, 2021](#)). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 18 percent of working mothers reported that they were using these services. Enrolling more children in before-school and after-school programs would improve the productivity and earnings of working mothers in Illinois.

Second, businesses should consider implementing flexible work schedules and other workplace arrangements that promote work-life balance for their employees. Flexible work scheduling kept more working mothers employed during the pandemic and reduced their worries about potential job loss. Previous economic research has established a strong relationship between flexibility and productivity, with higher employee morale, reduced absenteeism, and less turnover contributing to increased productivity (CEA, 2014; Bloom et al., 2009). However, research has also found that many workers experience a tradeoff, working longer hours and giving up more leisure time—adding to stresses and decreased health outcomes that are associated with irregular work (Golden, 2001; Golden & Dickson, 2020). Consequently, while employers should consider implementing flexible work schedules, the practice must be balanced out with predictable scheduling that provides advance notice of work schedules, the right to decline previously unscheduled hours, and compensation through “predictability pay” for any shift changes (e.g., see BACP, 2021). Elected officials in Illinois could consider adopting a statewide predictive scheduling law that would improve worker health, productivity, and overall happiness and life satisfaction (Golden & Dickson, 2020). Flexibility and predictability are not mutually exclusive; the State of Illinois could promote predictable schedules as a labor standard while encouraging businesses to implement flexible hours and the ability to telecommute within that framework.



Third, paid family and medical leave was strongly associated with keeping Illinois' working mothers employed during the pandemic and preventing them from suffering income losses.

Access to paid leave increased the probability that a working mother remained employed by 10 percent, reduced the chances that she exited the labor force specifically to care for family members by 4 percentage points, and reduced the likelihood that experienced a loss of income by 14 percent. This corroborates previous economic research which finds that paid leave policies boost labor force participation among women. Studies have found that paid parental leave increases weekly hours worked for mothers by up to 17 percent in the years after birth, lifts the salary potential of women, improves worker productivity, and reduces employee turnover ([Sakaria & Tosto, 2018](#); [Jones, 2020](#); [Berger et al., 2005](#); [Petts et al., 2018](#); [Rossin-Slater et al., 2013](#); [Cornfield, 2018](#)).



Similarly, paid sick leave has been found to produce positive economic effects and reduce workplace infections during epidemics ([Appelbaum et al., 2014](#); [Kumar et al., 2013](#)). Elected officials in Illinois could follow the leads of 8 states in enacting paid family leave for workers to care for a newborn or adopted child or a seriously ill family member, and of 13 states providing 5 days of paid sick leave ([NCSL, 2020](#); [Manzo et al., 2020](#)). Implementing 12 weeks of paid family leave and 5 days of paid sick leave would boost worker earnings by a combined \$3 billion in Illinois ([Gigstad et al., 2020](#); [Manzo et al., 2020](#)). While lawmakers could create new social insurance programs funded through payroll deductions to pay for the programs, most Americans think employers should be responsible for providing paid leave ([Horowitz et al., 2017](#)). Instead of creating a publicly funded program, Illinois' lawmakers could consider legislation that simply requires both private and public sector businesses to provide 12 weeks of paid family leave at two-thirds of their income up to a maximum of \$1,000 per week and 5 days of paid sick leave. These labor standards would have marginal impacts on Illinois businesses by raising labor force participation rates, reducing employee turnover, improving worker health, and boosting consumer spending—resulting in no net-negative effect on the broader Illinois economy ([Gigstad et al., 2020](#); [Manzo et al., 2020](#)).

Fourth, businesses and elected officials in Illinois could consider expanding access to quality, safe, and affordable child care. Compared with their counterparts without any child care costs, working mothers who had monthly child care costs were more likely to report that their job performance suffered during the pandemic and that they have experienced income losses. Furthermore, lack of affordability resulted in additional negative outcomes. For example, working mothers with high child care costs exceeding \$500 per month (or \$6,000 per year) were statistically 10 percent less likely to still be working by Fall 2020 but 11 percent more concerned about losing their jobs. Overall, costly child care meant that more women stayed home and, among working mothers who kept their jobs, put pressure on them to maintain high productivity in order to keep their jobs and pay for the care—all while their job performance nevertheless suffered.



Expanding access to quality, safe, and affordable child care is necessary because the cost of child care in Illinois rivals other family expenses ([EPI, 2019](#)). The average annual cost of infant care is \$13,800 and the average annual cost of care for a 4-year-old is \$10,400, making Illinois the 10th most expensive state for care and unaffordable for many low-income and middle-class families. Child care costs about as much as the average cost of rent (about \$11,700 per year) and the average cost of college tuition and fees at four-year public colleges (\$14,000 per year) in Illinois.

To combat the high cost of child care and make it affordable for low-income families, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) administers the \$1.34 billion Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which serves 128,000 children from 72,000 families every month ([OMB, 2020](#); [IDHS, 2019](#)). This state-run program, which cares for approximately 6 percent of all child care-aged children in Illinois, ensures that no family pays more than 7 percent of their gross income on child care. For example, a single mother with a child enrolled in CCAP earning \$2,500 per month (or \$30,000 annually) is charged a monthly co-pay of \$176, or \$2,112, which equals 7 percent of her gross income ([IDHS, 2020b](#)).

Elected officials in Illinois could consider doubling the investment in the Child Care Assistance Program. At a cost of \$1.34 billion, expanding eligibility to cover more families with middle-class incomes and doubling funding for CCAP would ensure that over 10 percent of Illinois families have affordable child care at no more than 7 percent of their income. Additionally, elected officials could pair the expansion of CCAP with a refundable child care tax credit to provide relief for working families. Assuming 60 percent utilization, which is the share of children in some child care arrangement, and a typical cost of \$10,400 per child, the child care tax credit would lower individual income taxes by an average of \$1,042 annually for more than 700,000 Illinois families, costing the State \$735 million in lost income tax revenues (Redford et al., 2017). Together, the targeted aid to low-income families and universal child care tax credit would address the child care crisis, boost labor force participation among women, and grow the economy in Illinois. These child care policy changes could be paid for using a number of revenue options. For example, the programs could be fully paid for by expanding the state’s sales tax to cover the services that are taxed in Iowa, which would generate an additional \$1.2 billion, and increasing the tax on the gross premiums of insurance companies to the 2.0 percent rate levied in Wisconsin and Missouri, which would generate an additional \$1.1 billion (COGFA, 2017; Gentry, 2019; Illinois OMB, 2020). Even after accounting for the broadening of the sales tax base and the increase in taxes on insurance companies, these policy changes would create 28,600 jobs, boost worker income by \$563 million per year, and grow the economy by \$121 million annually (Figure 32).

Figure 32. Economic Impacts of Doubling CCAP Investment and Enacting a Child Care Tax Credit in Illinois, 2021

Effect of Doubling CCAP Investment and Enacting Child Care Tax Credit	Jobs Created or Saved	Total Worker Income, In Millions	GDP (Value Added), In Millions
Direct Impact	29,600	\$685.8	\$354.5
Indirect and Induced Impacts	-1,000	-\$122.9	-\$233.1
Total Impact	28,600	\$562.9	\$121.4

Source(s): Authors’ analysis using 2020 data from IMPLAN economic impact analysis software (IMPLAN, 2020). Estimates for jobs created or saved and for average income per job are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Lastly, elected officials should explore policy tools for strengthening worker rights and increasing union membership. An expansion of onsite child care into workplaces is a possible long-term solution, and the most effective institutions at expanding onsite child care are labor unions. Improving the rights of workers and promoting collective bargaining would boost worker wages, expand health insurance coverage, help address the child care crisis, and support women in Illinois. Importantly, these tools must be pursued in tandem with policies that seek to curb employee misclassification as well as expand employment-associated benefits to all workers.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted economic and educational systems. The economic downturn caused by the pandemic has had substantial and potentially long-term implications for gender equality, with the labor force participation rate among women falling to its lowest level in three decades. Meanwhile, the closure of schools and child care facilities due to the pandemic exacerbated a child care crisis that had already existed. While COVID-19 exposed the fragility of Illinois' child care system and nearly universal absence of employer provided child care benefits, this child care crisis will continue well after the pandemic has ended. Businesses and elected officials in Illinois could consider increasing access to affordable child care programs, funding more before-school and after-school programs, and expanding flexible scheduling, paid leave, and collective bargaining rights to address the child care crisis and support working parents across the state.

Footnotes

¹ In the *American Community Survey*, the U.S. Census Bureau publishes data by sex, not by gender. This is reported by the survey-taker, who is typically a parent, guardian, or other head of the household.

² The higher number of women (23.4 percent more) is due to the higher share of single-mother households in comparison with single-father households in Illinois.

³ For full regression results, see Table A and Table B in the Appendix.

⁴ The results for mothers and fathers with children ages 0 to 5 years old and ages 6 to 13 years old are not statistically significant.

⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic is also inflicting financial uncertainty on 63,000 Illinois workers in the child care industry—95 percent of whom are women ([Ruggles et al., 2020](#)). Illinois closed all licensed child care centers and all child care homes serving more than 6 children in the initial statewide stay-at-home order to promote public health ([Office of the Governor, 2020](#)). Of the day care centers that stayed open, 85 percent operated with less than half of their usual enrollment ([Travers & Weinstein, 2020](#)). As day care centers—which have historically operated on slim profit margins—have reopened, they have had to invest in personal protective equipment (PPE) and extra cleaning supplies to limit the spread of the virus. However, on June 24, 2020, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) announced \$270 million in assistance for child care providers to offset reopening costs. Illinois was the first state to dedicate this level of federal aid for child care programs during the pandemic ([INCCRRA, 2020](#)).

⁶ Respondents from the City of Chicago were oversampled in this study, as they only represent roughly 21 percent of the total state population ([ACS, 2019](#)).

⁷ The worker quotes included in this section represent responses to an open-ended question on the survey asking if there were additional ways in which Covid-19-related school and day care closures were impacting their careers.

⁸ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 17 percent of *households* in Illinois earn more than \$150,000 per year and approximately 23 percent of *families* in Illinois earn more than \$150,000 per year ([ACS, 2019](#)).

⁹ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average household earns \$95,725. Among *families* in Illinois, the median family earns \$87,771 and the average family earns \$115,529 ([ACS, 2019](#)).

¹⁰ The median respondent resided in a household with total household income between \$50,000 and \$60,000 per year (see Figure 13). Child care costs exceeding \$500 per month equate to annual expenses of more than \$6,000 per year. This threshold thus represents *at least* 10 percent of household income for the median respondent.

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Appendix

Table A. Regression of Labor Market Outcomes in Illinois, Effect of Having Children, 2014-2018

Probit and Robust OLS Regressions	Prob(Being Employed)		Ln(Real Wage)	
	margins, dydx	SE	Coefficient	SE
Woman with Child 0-5	-0.1648***	0.016	+0.0389*	0.021
Woman with Child 6-13	-0.0810***	0.014	+0.0034	0.019
Woman with Child 14-17	-0.0794***	0.016	-0.0613***	0.022
Woman	-0.1000***	0.007	-0.2013***	0.013
Has Child 0-5	+0.0708***	0.014	+0.0242	0.015
Has Child 6-13	+0.0328***	0.012	+0.0129	0.014
Has Child 14-17	+0.0617***	0.014	+0.0300*	0.016
Age	+0.0285***	0.002	+0.0419***	0.004
Age ²	-0.0004***	0.000	-0.0004***	0.000
White	+0.0624	0.047	+0.1347*	0.075
Black or African American	-0.0000	0.048	-0.0333	0.076
Latinx or Hispanic	+0.0535	0.048	+0.0326	0.076
Asian	-0.0301	0.048	+0.1055	0.077
Urban Status: Central City	+0.0005	0.009	+0.0840***	0.014
Urban Status: Suburb	+0.0201***	0.007	+0.1002***	0.012
Less than High School Degree	-0.1161***	0.011	-0.2229***	0.020
Associate's Degree	+0.0689***	0.010	+0.0640***	0.015
Bachelor's Degree	+0.0874***	0.007	+0.2774***	0.013
Advanced Degree	+0.1281***	0.009	+0.4359***	0.015
Union Member			+0.0998***	0.014
Works for Federal Government			+0.0318	0.036
Works for State Government			-0.1316***	0.026
Works for Local Government			-0.1227***	0.020
Usual Hours Worked Per Week			+0.0053***	0.000
Major Occupation Dummies			Y	Y
Major Industry Dummies			Y	Y
Constant Term (Baseline)	+0.7653***	0.003	+1.3896***	0.131
R ²	0.099		0.410	
Observations	21,513		12,741	
Weighted	Y		Y	

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2014-2018 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS-ORG) data (CEPR, 2019). *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$. "SE" denotes the standard error. The models are for all working-age adults between the ages of 20 and 64 years old. The probabilistic models require two steps– the probit regression and average marginal effects (margins, dy/dx). Y indicates that the variables are included in the regression.

Table B. Regressions of Employment Outcomes, Impact of COVID-19 and School Closures, Fall 2020

Probit Regressions	Prob(Still Working in Any Capacity)		Prob(Not Working Due to Child Care)		Prob(8-10 Worry About Job Loss)	
	margins, dydx	SE	margins, dydx	SE	margins, dydx	SE
School or Child Care Closure	+0.0394	0.035	-0.0243	0.017	+0.1007**	0.051
Low Child Care: ≤\$500 Per Month	-0.0114	0.034	+0.0007	0.018	+0.0346	0.044
High Child Care: ≥\$501 Per	-0.0095**	0.041	+0.0269	0.021	+0.1110**	0.054
Flexible Schedule: Yes or Sometimes	+0.0943***	0.027	-0.0391***	0.014	-0.0879**	0.038
Paid Leave Available: Yes	+0.1029***	0.027	-0.0386**	0.017	-0.0115	0.034
Union Member	+0.0490	0.034	-0.0214	0.020	+0.0175	0.039
Living with a Spouse or Partner	-0.0330	0.041	+0.0502**	0.022	+0.0324	0.060
Spouse or Partner Works	+0.0264	0.039	-0.0127	0.019	+0.0734	0.056
Location: Chicago	+0.0066	0.031	-0.0262	0.018	+0.1166***	0.040
Location: Cook County	-0.0185	0.034	-0.0062	0.019	+0.1182***	0.044
Start Year at Job	-0.0023	0.002	+0.0005	0.001	-0.0029	0.002
Children Ages 0-5	+0.0032	0.012	+0.0115*	0.006	-0.0090	0.015
Responsibility: % of Child's Learning Needs	-0.0005	0.000	+0.0006**	0.000	+0.0023***	0.001
Black or African American	-0.0900***	0.034	+0.0010	0.019	-0.0252	0.045
Latina or Hispanic	-0.0694*	0.036	-0.0334	0.024	+0.0626	0.045
Asian	-0.0726	0.064	+0.0147	0.033	+0.1370*	0.076
All Other Races (Non-White)	-0.1575***	0.047	+0.0278	0.023	+0.1188	0.073
Less than High School Degree	-0.0331	0.061	+0.0253	0.029	-0.0809	0.096
Associate's Degree	+0.1228***	0.040	-0.0439*	0.024	-0.0528	0.049
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	+0.1151***	0.031	-0.0370**	0.018	-0.1455***	0.038
Works in an Essential Industry	+0.0398	0.034	+0.0086	0.019	-0.0412	0.040
Works in a "Face-to-Face" Industry	-0.0269	0.034	+0.0001	0.020	+0.0340	0.042
Works in a Goods-Producing Occupation	-0.0618	0.060			-0.0324	0.088
Works Full-Time					-0.0192	0.039
Constant Term (Baseline)	+0.8014***	0.012	0.0455***	0.007	0.2765***	0.016
R ²	0.134		0.193		0.178	
Observations	894		860		690	
Group Analyzed	Full Sample		Full Sample		Still Employed	

Source(s): Authors' analysis of August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes less than \$150,000 per year. ***p≤|0.01|; **p≤|0.05|; *p≤|0.10|. "SE" denotes the standard error. The models all require two steps– the probit regression and average marginal effects (margins, dy/dx).

Table C. Regressions of Economic Outcomes, Impact of COVID-19 and School Closures, Fall 2020

Probit Regressions	Prob(Job Performance Suffered)		Prob(Earned Less Income)		Prob(Onsite Child Care Available at Work)	
	margins, dydx	SE	margins, dydx	SE	margins, dydx	SE
School or Child Care Closure	+0.0233***	0.047	+0.2127***	0.042		
Low Child Care: ≤\$500 Per Month	+0.0219***	0.041	+0.2422***	0.039	+0.0132	0.031
High Child Care: ≥\$501 Per	+0.0153***	0.054	+0.2399***	0.049	+0.0250	0.035
Flexible Schedule: Yes or Sometimes	-0.0098	0.042	-0.00157***	0.035	+0.0709**	0.031
Paid Leave Available: Yes	-0.0424	0.036	-0.1356***	0.031	+0.0307	0.022
Union Member	+0.0753*	0.042	+0.0206	0.038	+0.0705***	0.020
Still Working			-0.1277***	0.040		
Onsite Child Care Available: Yes			+0.1433**	0.059		
Living with a Spouse or Partner	-0.0183	0.061	+0.0042	0.052	-0.1166*	0.067
Spouse or Partner Works	+0.0992*	0.058	+0.0491	0.050	+0.1310**	0.064
Location: Chicago	+0.0573	0.042	+0.0675*	0.037	+0.0533**	0.023
Location: Cook County	-0.0110	0.047	-0.0040	0.041	+0.0261	0.029
Start Year at Job	-0.0011	0.003	-0.0015	0.002	-0.0018	0.001
Children Ages 0-5	+0.0646***	0.017	+0.0280**	0.014	+0.0203**	0.008
Responsibility: % of Child's Learning Needs	+0.0016***	0.001	+0.0018***	0.000	-0.0003	0.000
Black or African American	-0.0541	0.047	+0.0788*	0.041	-0.0218	0.025
Latina or Hispanic	+0.0316	0.050	+0.0360	0.042	-0.0250	0.028
Asian	-0.0151	0.083	+0.0253	0.074	-0.0112	0.043
All Other Races (Non-White)	+0.0481	0.084	+0.0324	0.063	-0.0691	0.067
Less than High School Degree	+0.0878	0.108	+0.1935**	0.090	+0.0723	0.048
Associate's Degree	-0.1200**	0.051	-0.0577	0.046	+0.0050	0.034
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	-0.0649	0.042	-0.0552	0.036	+0.0242	0.024
Works in an Essential Industry	-0.0060	0.041	+0.0692*	0.037	-0.0167	0.023
Works in a "Face-to-Face" Industry	+0.0326	0.045	+0.1782***	0.038	-0.0068	0.024
Works in a Goods-Producing Occupation	-0.1300	0.041	+0.0209	0.075	-0.0441	0.057
Works Full-Time	-0.0145	0.042	-0.2059***	0.035	+0.0140	0.025
Constant Term (Baseline)	+0.6435***	0.017	+0.5487***	0.015	+0.0785***	0.009
R ²	0.120		0.200		0.219	
Observations	713		889		714	
Group Analyzed	Still Employed		Full Sample		Still Employed	

Source(s): Authors' analysis of August 20, 2020 through October 27, 2020 survey of 1,030 working mothers in Illinois with household incomes less than \$150,000 per year. ***p≤|0.01|; **p≤|0.05|; *p≤|0.10|. "SE" denotes the standard error. The models all require two steps- the probit regression and average marginal effects (margins, dy/dx).