



PAACT
PROMISE ALL ATLANTA CHILDREN THRIVE

CONVERSATION REPORT
February 2021

24 CIVIC DINNERS 130 PARTICIPANTS 33 SURVEYS 222 SURVEY INSIGHTS



CIVIC DINNERS®

The platform that brings people together
for conversations that matter

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OVERVIEW

How do you parent in a pandemic? In the fall of 2020 we partnered with Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive (PAACT) to launch a community conversation for parents and caregivers in Atlanta about the realities of raising young children in 2020, and what we need to ensure our children are getting the best possible start.

Atlanta parents were invited to join the conversation by signing up to either host or attend a virtual dinner on the Civic Dinners platform during the months of August to December 2020.

This report summarizes some of the themes and special moments from those dinners, including some of the fears and frustrations of Atlanta parents, their tips for getting through, their support needs and their hopes for the future.

What is PAACT?

PAACT: Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive is a citywide alliance working to support high-quality early learning, education and healthy development of Atlanta's youngest citizens. See gears.org/initiatives/paact/ to learn more.

What is Civic Dinners?

Civic Dinners is an award-winning organization and civic engagement platform that partners with cities, regions, nonprofits, NGOs and companies to bring people together for conversations that matter. To learn more about our work, visit civicedinners.com.



THE CONVERSATION

Our Collaboration

By inviting residents of Atlanta to a conversation about parenting in the midst of COVID-19, PAACT gave parents the opportunity to connect with each other and share the joys, frustrations and challenges of parenting during a global pandemic.

The conversation enabled parents to come together to empathize and support one other during a truly challenging time. This conversation was an opportunity to honor and recognize the work amazing parents and caregivers do, while opening an important discussion on how our Atlanta communities can best help families provide our children with the strongest possible start.

Key themes that emerged in the conversation:

Children: Children need a sense of love, care and belonging in order to thrive. This can be nurtured in the context of a strong community.

Community: Many parents are grateful for the support they've received from other families and neighbors during the pandemic.

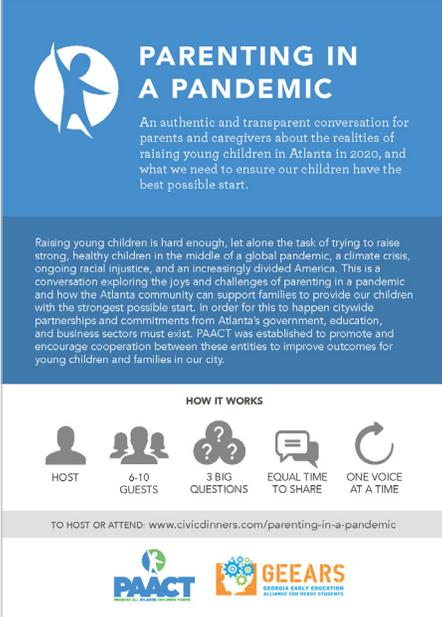
Government: There is a general frustration with the government's response to the pandemic, highlighting the need for greater institutional support, communication and transparency.

School: The rise in working from home and virtual learning has made it exceptionally difficult for parents to balance work and childcare responsibilities.

Work: Flexibility in the workplace has become increasingly crucial for parents and caregivers, especially during the pandemic.

PAACT: PAACT can focus on providing an affordable, high-quality educational experience and equipping parents to best support their child's education.

Each of these themes is addressed in turn in the following pages.



PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC

An authentic and transparent conversation for parents and caregivers about the realities of raising young children in Atlanta in 2020, and what we need to ensure our children have the best possible start.

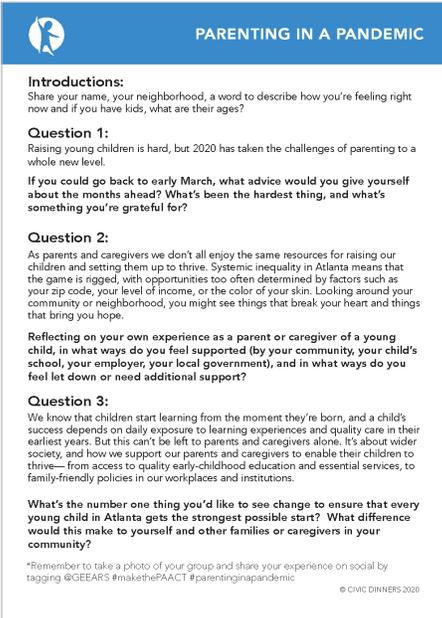
Raising young children is hard enough. Let alone the task of trying to raise strong, healthy children in the middle of a global pandemic, a climate crisis, ongoing racial injustice, and an increasingly divided America. This is a conversation exploring the joys and challenges of parenting in a pandemic and how the Atlanta community can support families to provide our children with the strongest possible start. In order for this to happen citywide partnerships and commitments from Atlanta's government, education, and business sectors must exist. PAACT was established to promote and encourage cooperation between these entities to improve outcomes for young children and families in our city.

HOW IT WORKS

- HOST
- 6-10 GUESTS
- 3 BIG QUESTIONS
- EQUAL TIME TO SHARE
- ONE VOICE AT A TIME

TO HOST OR ATTEND: www.civicedinners.com/parenting-in-a-pandemic

PAACT | GEARs



PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC

Introductions:
Share your name, your neighborhood, a word to describe how you're feeling right now and if you have kids, what are their ages?

Question 1:
Raising young children is hard, but 2020 has taken the challenges of parenting to a whole new level.
If you could go back to early March, what advice would you give yourself about the months ahead? What's been the hardest thing, and what's something you're grateful for?

Question 2:
As parents and caregivers we don't all enjoy the same resources for raising our children and setting them up to thrive. Systemic inequality in Atlanta means that the game is rigged, with opportunities too often determined by factors such as your zip code, your level of income, or the color of your skin. Looking around your community or neighborhood, you might see things that break your heart and things that bring you hope.
Reflecting on your own experience as a parent or caregiver of a young child, in what ways do you feel supported (by your community, your child's school, your employer, your local government), and in what ways do you feel let down or need additional support?

Question 3:
We know that children start learning from the moment they're born, and a child's success depends on daily exposure to learning experiences and quality care in their earliest years. But this can't be left to parents and caregivers alone. It's about wider society, and how we support our parents and caregivers to enable their children to thrive—from access to quality early-childhood education and essential services, to family-friendly policies in our workplaces and institutions.
What's the number one thing you'd like to see change to ensure that every young child in Atlanta gets the strongest possible start? What difference would this make to yourself and other families or caregivers in your community?

*Remember to take a photo of your group and share your experience on social by tagging @GEARS #makethePAACT #parentinginapandemic © CIVIC DINNERS 2020

KEY THEMES

Children: What does a child need?

When asked what a child needs to in order to thrive, many parents responded that love, support and emotional safety are essential ingredients to a child's well-being. Children need a nurturing environment in which to grow. However, this isn't down to just parents and caregivers alone. A nurturing environment is often created in the context of community and role models can be essential in providing the valuable mentorship a child needs to succeed. This, alongside affordable, quality early-childhood education, can help equip a child with the tools they need to ensure a bright future.

"[Children need] early access to high quality and affordable educational programming."

Community: It takes a village to raise a child

As the famous proverb goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." Community plays an integral role in childhood development (perhaps never more important than in the midst of a global pandemic). Many attendees expressed their deep gratitude for their surrounding community, their neighbors and their extended family, especially when it came to childcare.

"I am grateful for all the support I receive from my community."

"[Participants in our conversation] felt supported by the community and circles of family and friends that they created."

Government: Let's get to work

Many participants voiced their general frustration concerning a lack of governmental support. Parents felt especially let down by the lack of clarity and transparency among government responses and wished that they had been provided with more information and guidance. It was expressed that the government could better support parents by providing greater financial assistance and child care resources.

"Parents feel supported by their government when they have access to resources, information, and services which promote their well-being and the well-being of their children."

School: Since when did I have two jobs?!

With the lines between work and home becoming blurred, many parents spoke to the impossible challenge of trying to juggle work and childcare at the same time and in the same space. There were also many parents for whom the lack of childcare made it impossible for them to work, and they spoke to the financial impact this had had on their family.



Many working parents spoke passionately about wanting to support their child's education and help them learn but that a lack of guidance from the school was adding an additional burden which left some parents feeling like they were trying to balance two jobs at once. One respondent explained how it would be beneficial to have a "system that supports and educates the entire family as the learning process proceeds." The view from a number of parents was that better resources for parents would be invaluable to help them best support their children in navigating this new learning environment.

"Parents are struggling with navigating and balancing the demands of working, parenting, and supporting the educational goals they hold for their young people."

"One main issue that came up in discussion was parents realizing how hard it was for teachers to teach their children, and families being unable to work due to lack of childcare."

Work: A toast to nurturing workplaces

Flexibility in the workplace has become increasingly important for parents over the last 10 years, but this flexibility, once a nice-to-have, became imperative during Covid-19. Participants shared how work accommodations such as flexible working hours and flexible paid-time-off policies enabled them to more fully support their children. Parents were grateful for the ways their employers demonstrated empathy through their compassionate communication and the flexibility that was provided for caregiving.

"Participants felt supported, overall by their work, especially when it came to their employers. Employers communicated to stay home to be safe, adjusted hours to accommodate children's schedules, and kept the team updated."

PPACT: What role can PPACT play?

When asked what PPACT can do to best support children and families during this time, many participants answered that the organization can focus on providing affordable, high-quality educational experiences and equipping parents with the resources they need to support their child's education. While parents and educators are instrumental in guiding children's development, they often require additional support and guidance.

"I think PPACT could focus on how to support childcare providers and public schools in trauma-informed approaches -- educators will continue to need a lot of support as children re-enter classrooms."

"There is a need for early access to high quality and affordable educational programming and increased access and awareness to early intervention programs."

"The group stressed the need for two-generational support -- parents are a child's first teacher so they have to be supported too."



TESTIMONIALS



“The purpose of these virtual conversations is important and worth having. These meaningful conversations can lead to structured change for the better.”

“Enlightening to hear parents’ perspectives and know I’m not alone with mixed feelings of anxiety, guilt, frustration, happiness, and hope.”

“It was cathartic for parents to talk about their experience with the pandemic.”

“This conversation was informative and enlightening. The ideas shared were very eye-opening and refreshing. More conversations like this should be held on a regular basis to share information and concerns.”

FINAL REMARKS

Parenting in a Pandemic was a conversation designed for parents and caregivers in Atlanta to come together as a community of mutual support to discuss both the challenges and joys of parenting during this unprecedented time. It was an opportunity for parents to share ways in which they felt well-supported and areas where they could use a little more support. Through these conversations, several themes emerged concerning the role of community, school, the workplace and government in helping families succeed.

Parents shared how children need a sense of love, care and belonging which can be nurtured through mentors and a strong community. Community support is integral, and many parents expressed gratitude for how other families and neighbors have shown up for them. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, parenting has been especially difficult. Working from home and virtual learning have forced parents to balance their responsibilities as both an employee and a caregiver. Many parents have also felt let down by the government's response to date. Moving forward, they hope that the government will provide greater support, clearer communication and greater transparency.

In the workplace, flexibility and empathy have become more important than ever. Increased work accommodations have allowed parents some essential time for caregiving. So what role can PAACT play in this? Many respondents suggested that PAACT can focus on ensuring an affordable, high-quality educational experience for children and guiding parents on how to best support their child's education.

Overall, these discussions were key in providing a space for parents to connect and identify how Atlanta communities can best support our city's children and families through the pandemic and beyond.

