

# EC3 Family & Staff Survey

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## **Background and Purpose**

A few weeks ago, we surveyed EC3 families to gather input on some key points affecting the re-opening of the center. The most critical concerns are the health and safety of children, staff, and families; and the financial viability of opening the center without full enrollment.

EC3's management team and staff have spent countless hours working on scenarios based upon feedback gathered from parents as well as recommendations from the CDC, OSHA, and the State of Michigan health officials. We have explored options, listened to webinars, and hoped to find a landing spot that would ensure success of providing a program meeting high-quality early learning standards while maintaining confidence that children, staff, and families are protected from coronavirus infection or transmission.

At this time, EC3's management team is recommending to the Board of Directors that we suspend all programming and operations until after Labor Day. We are facing uncharted waters, and with the new restricted guidelines placed upon all organizations, we are not convinced that it is possible for us to meet our budgetary requirements while providing the programming that we know to be best, and that the children, parents, and staff deserve.

With this survey, we are calling upon all staff and families to participate in a process of deliberations with the center's management team and Board of Directors. This process is intended to create an architecture for decision-making; at the end of the process, we will come to a decision about whether or not to delay opening the center until Labor Day. We need to come to a decision no later than June 15, 2020, to allow time for preparation, and also to manage the expectations of staff and families for the near future. Ideally, the decision will be a reflection of the general consensus among all stakeholders—families, staff, management, and Board—or, and ultimately, the best judgment and determination made by the Board of Directors.

EC3's sister school, Early LCC, is also calling upon its staff and families to participate in an important decision-making process of a different nature, using a similar framework.

The framework we are using will help us collectively define the following:

- **What we know for sure.** The very grounding and integrity of the center is based on a set of core values and expectations for the kind of center we want to operate, and the best information we have about finances, enrollments, COVID-19 requirements, etc., establishing the boundaries of everything we do.
- **What we don't know.** The situation before us—global pandemic, financial and enrollment uncertainties, and decision deadlines—is complicated and fast-changing. We must acknowledge and accept the tradeoffs brought by incomplete information.
- **Scenarios derived from our knowledge to-date, core values, and different assumptions about the future.** Examining some possible outcomes resulting from several possible scenarios in this matter may guide us toward consensus and enable us to move forward.

Establishing these topics in full, and then testing our assumptions about each one, will improve our collective understanding of who we are, what our mission is, and how we should respond in the current situation.

### ***What We Know For Sure***

The following statements are intended to be thought-provoking and reflective of what we know about the center and the situation at hand, as well as what we collectively value that may guide our decision-making. It is not an exhaustive list; there are many more values we uphold and want EC3 to maintain.

- EC3 is a high-quality center, maintaining standards established by NAEYC and the Great Start Initiative.
- EC3 values its staff highly, hiring qualified and loving individuals and providing them with good wages, continuing education, and a pleasant working environment.
- EC3 maintains a physical environment that is tidy and sanitized, designed to minimize hazards and health risks for children, staff, and families.
- EC3 is a high-priced center (for those with the ability to pay), but one that seeks minimal tuition increases each year.
- EC3 staffers develop close bonds with the children in their care, and caring for/protecting them is one of the most important and satisfying parts of their job.
- EC3 is a nonprofit center and adheres to a balanced budget.
- EC3's families are devoted to the center and its staff, preferring it over other centers offering similar services.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Do the statements above generally reflect your sentiments about the center? What stands out as particularly true or false? What other core values and expectations should guide our decision-making? [Comment box]
2. If any of these statements was not true ("EC3 is **not** a ..."), would you feel differently about sending your children there? Which of these statements, if any, could you tolerate modifying or eliminating? [Comment box]

### ***What We Don't Know***

The following statements are the "known unknowns" for EC3 right now, given the uncertainties brought about by COVID-19.

- Whether there are health risks (short-term, long-term) to young children of coronavirus infection.
- Whether/how many staff members would feel safe returning to work in June or July.
- Whether/how many parents feel safe bringing their children to group care in June or July.
- Whether/how many current families are willing and able to pay tuition (or make donations) to EC3 prior to their children returning to group care.
- Whether/how many new families are willing and able to place their children in group care (market demand).
- Whether licensing requirements will change/increase as a result of COVID-19.
- How much the center's budget is impacted, having foregone the annual auction.
- What risk there is of a second wave of coronavirus outbreak and subsequent shut-downs.

- Whether/how many families are willing and able to pay increased tuition rates.
- Whether there may be new, unanticipated dynamics that could dramatically alter our current expectations about EC3's enrollments and finances (i.e., lots of other providers don't open, increasing demand at EC3; state or federal governments pour more money into early learning, etc.)

## QUESTIONS

1. Can you provide any additional information about your own interests, intentions, or attitudes that can help us learn more about these "unknowns" (e.g., "I won't be comfortable re-enrolling until next winter," "I am comfortable and able to pay tuition, even if not re-enrolling," or "We can't afford any tuition increase, and I don't think EC3 should operate by raising tuition.")? [Comment box]
2. Are there other "known unknowns" you can identify? [Comment box]

## **Scenarios**

Given the values, assumptions, and facts that are known to-date, as well as in light of all the uncertainties, these are potential scenarios for EC3's near-future. Again, these are meant to promote discussion and reaction from you, and to help us reach consensus about what is best for the center, stakeholders, and families. No decision or direction has been "pre-determined."

- A. EC3 re-opens in the fall with staff fully trained and new procedures in place, to allow for greater social distancing, frequent screening/testing, and increased cleaning requirements. Families will pay tuition as soon as EC3 opens, regardless of when they return to group care, or else their spot will be available to new families. Tuition rates will be increased approximately 10% to make up for the loss of auction revenue and to address the many changes in operations that are necessary in the post-COVID environment. Currently-enrolled families will be supported with child care by members of the teaching team (as they are willing and able) throughout the remainder of the summer.
- B. EC3 re-opens as soon as possible (likely July, if the stay-home order is lifted after June 12<sup>th</sup>). Families will pay tuition starting when EC3 opens, regardless of when they return to group care, or else their spot will be available to new families. Tuition rates will be increased approximately 20% to make up for the loss of auction revenue and to compensate for expected reduced enrollment from families leaving, as well as to address the many changes in operations that are necessary in the post-COVID environment.

## QUESTIONS

1. Which of these scenarios seems to be the most reasonable, appropriate, and consistent with the values and nature of EC3 in your view? Which scenario troubles you the most? Why? [Comment box]
2. What is your preferred scenario? Do you see or want to advocate for any scenario that differs greatly from these? [Comment box]

3. If you have additional comments or questions, feel free to enter them here. [comment box]

Thank you for participating in this important process. All your responses will be compiled (anonymously, not indicated by names or other identifiers) and shared with all stakeholders by June 4<sup>th</sup>. A virtual town-hall meeting will be held on June 11<sup>th</sup>, and will include all staff and families. At that time we will collectively determine if something close to consensus exists; if one does, it will be adopted. If a consensus is not identified, the Board of Directors will make a final determination by June 15<sup>th</sup>.