

Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017

Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Executive Summary

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Several decades of research have established the importance of high-quality early care and education (ECE) for children's short and long-term social-emotional and academic outcomes and point to the critical role ECE can play in narrowing the achievement gap¹. As a result, high-quality ECE is increasingly recognized among policymakers as a sound economic investment. Knowledgeable and skilled early educators are the "*single most important factor*" in high-quality ECE². Yet many communities throughout Colorado are struggling to attract and retain a well-qualified early educator workforce.

Consequently, Early Milestones Colorado, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Health and Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education has spearheaded the *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado* project. The goal of this project is to develop strategies to support and retain a well-qualified early educator workforce, and to assure that they are appropriately compensated to attract talented new professionals into the field. As part of the *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado* project, this study was designed to identify the strengths, gaps, and unmet needs in the workforce to help inform workforce recruitment, retention, and professional development efforts.

This study surveyed 4,223 directors, assistant directors, teachers, and assistant teachers who worked in community-based ECE centers, Head Start centers, and public school-based ECE classrooms throughout Colorado serving children birth through five, and surveyed 496 family child care providers who provided home-based ECE services. This study sought to describe their basic demographic, educational, and workplace characteristics, to identify the barriers they experienced in accessing professional development and higher education, and to understand the personal, workplace, and policy factors associated with job turnover and early educator well-being.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the sample of early educators drawn for this study are described below. Additional findings and their implications for policy are discussed in each of the research briefs comprising the full report of this study.

There is a need to recruit and develop Latina and Spanish-speaking early educators and to ensure that all early educators have professional preparation in supporting the care and learning needs of dual-language learners.

- ▷ Fifty-one percent of teachers reported that they worked in classrooms in which they did not speak the primary languages of each of the children in their classrooms. Sixty-two percent of these language mismatches occurred when there were children in the classroom that spoke Spanish, but the responding teacher did not (Brief #1).
- ▷ Latina teachers were less likely to be in lead teaching roles and more likely to be in assistant teaching roles than were White, non-Latina teachers (Brief #1).
- ▷ Early educators across job roles reported feeling underprepared to support the care and education needs of English language learners (Brief #2).

There is a need for greater investment in scholarship and loan forgiveness programs for early educators, to create more diversified educational pathways for early educators, and to ensure that higher education programs in Colorado enable seamless transfer between two and four-year programs and offer accessible programming for working adults.

- ▷ Sixty-two percent of directors, 54% percent of lead teachers, and 26% of family child care providers have at least a bachelor's degree (Brief #1).
- ▷ Of early educators with an associate's degree or higher, most do not hold a degree focused on the care and education of young children. Forty-eight percent of directors, 72% of teachers, and 82% of family child care providers with a degree do not hold at least one degree focused on young children (Brief #1).
- ▷ Eighty-seven percent of teachers and 73% of family child care providers not currently enrolled in college, expressed interest in pursuing higher education. Yet the cost of tuition served as one of the most significant barriers to advancing their education (Brief #2).
- ▷ To pursue educational advancement, many early educators expressed that they would need more convenient class times (e.g., nights and weekends), more on-line course options, and more convenient course locations (Brief #2).

There is a need to develop both short and longer-term strategies for improving compensation, including wages and workplace benefits, and for more appropriately rewarding highly qualified early educators. Compensation for early educators in Colorado remains low and serves as a significant source of job dissatisfaction among early educators and a factor that predicts turnover, retention, and occupational burnout among teachers in ECE centers.

- ▷ The median hourly wages for lead teachers across ECE service sectors ranged from \$14.00 to \$16.50 an hour, with assistant teachers earning a median of \$12.00 per hour and family child care providers earning a median of \$12.63 an hour. Public school-based ECE teachers earned more than Head Start teachers, who earned more than community-based teachers (Brief #3).
- ▷ Lead teachers with a bachelor's degree earned only \$3.07 more an hour, on average, than lead teachers with a high school degree and only \$0.55 more an hour than teachers with an associate's degree (Brief #3). Teachers with a bachelor's degree were more likely to express intentions to leave their jobs than teachers with a high school degree as their highest level of education (Brief #7).
- ▷ Almost a third of teachers and family child care providers made low enough wages that they received public assistance benefits restricted to very low-income families. An additional 45% reported that they were struggling to pay their bills and make ends meet (Brief #3).
- ▷ Teachers identified low pay as their greatest job frustration, while family child care providers expressed more frustration over their lack of benefits (Brief #5).
- ▷ Having more workplace benefits was associated with less occupational burnout among teachers and with greater retention of highly-qualified teachers (Brief #7).
- ▷ Higher teacher wages predicted less teacher turnover and less depersonalization (e.g., psychological withdrawal) of children (Brief #7).

Substantial investments in workforce development efforts are needed to grow a pipeline of new early educators entering the field. While there was an unexpected degree of occupational stability observed in the sample, less stability was found within jobs. Teacher turnover and finding qualified early educators remain significant issues in the field.

- ▷ Directors averaged approximately 18 years in the field, lead teachers averaged 13 years in the field, assistant teachers averaged eight years in the field, and family child care providers averaged 18 years in the field. (Brief #1)
- ▷ Twenty percent of directors, 20% of lead teachers, 38% of assistant teachers, and 10% of family child care providers reported being in their jobs for less than two years (Brief #1).
- ▷ Ten percent of directors, 26% of lead teachers, 24% of assistant teachers, and 13% of family child care providers intend to leave their jobs soon (Brief # 4).
- ▷ Across ECE service sectors, directors reported an average annual turnover rate of 17% for program leaders, 16% for lead teachers, 22% for assistant teachers, and 40% for floater teachers. Turnover rates were higher in community-based ECE and Head Start programs compared to public school-based ECE programs (Brief #4).
- ▷ Thirteen percent of centers experienced at least a third of their lead teachers turning over in the previous year, and 35% of centers experienced at least a third of their assistant teachers turning over in the previous year (Brief #4).
- ▷ Seventy percent of directors reported difficulty in finding teachers to fill open positions, and on average, position openings took about two and a half months to fill (Brief #4).

- ▷ Forty-six percent of directors reported that they have had to fill open positions with under-qualified teachers (Brief #4).

There is a need for greater state-level coordination and alignment among programs and initiatives and for more tailoring of these initiatives to family child care homes. State-level policies and programs served as a source of job frustration for many early educators, and for some, this frustration influenced their well-being.

- ▷ Twenty-nine percent of teachers were frustrated with the amount of paperwork required in their jobs, and 13% were frustrated with having multiple rules, standards, and reporting requirements stemming from multiple child tuition funding sources and quality improvement initiatives in their classrooms (Brief #5).
- ▷ Thirty-five percent of family child care providers expressed job frustration over state child care rules and regulations, and 27% expressed frustration over programs, policies, and professional development that they perceived were pushing them to look more like centers (Brief #6).
- ▷ Twenty-three percent of family child care providers felt that most professional development opportunities were geared toward teachers in centers, which prompted them not to participate in professional development programs (Brief #2).
- ▷ For teachers, participation in Colorado Shines, excessive paperwork, and having multiple rules, standards, and reporting requirements stemming from multiple child tuition funding sources and quality improvement initiatives was associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Brief #7).
- ▷ For family child care providers, frustration with state licensing rules and regulations was associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Brief #6).

There is a need to develop a pipeline of well-qualified and effective program leaders. Positive working conditions and climates were associated with greater feelings of effectiveness and accomplishment in their work among teachers, while negative work conditions and climates were associated with teachers' occupational burnout and depression. The educational background and skills of program leaders appear to play an important role in cultivating work environments that foster teacher well-being.

- ▷ Staffing issues, including high teacher-child ratios, teachers moving in and out of different classrooms throughout the day, being sent home without pay if child attendance was low, and short-staffed classrooms emerged as significant sources of job frustration among teachers (Brief #5).
- ▷ Negative work climates stemming from high teacher-child ratios, multiple paperwork requirements and standards, and conflictual relationships with directors were associated with greater feelings of emotional exhaustion, occupational burnout, depersonalization (e.g., psychological withdrawal from children), and depression among teachers (Brief #7).

- ▷ Greater feelings of collegial support and having a director with at least a bachelor's degree was associated with less depression among teachers. Teachers whose directors employed a more collaborative leadership style and fostered a shared vision among staff reported lower levels of occupational burnout and greater feelings of personal accomplishment in their work (Brief #7).

There is a need for greater investment in evidence-based programs to support early educators who care for children with challenging behaviors. Children's behavioral issues are a significant source of job frustration for many early educators. For family child care providers, children's behavioral issues were related to their engagement with children and to their own personal well-being.

- ▷ Teachers and family child care providers reported feeling underprepared to meet the care and learning needs of children with challenging behaviors as well as children with special health and learning needs (Brief #2).
- ▷ Thirty-one percent of directors noted an increase in children's challenging behaviors as a result of teacher turnover (Brief #3).
- ▷ Twenty-eight percent of teachers and 13% of family child care providers reported that children's challenging behaviors was a significant source of frustration in their jobs (Brief #5 & #6).
- ▷ Among family child care providers, caring for more children with challenging behaviors was associated with greater depersonalization (e.g., psychological withdrawal) of children and families and stronger feelings of depression (Brief #6).

REFERENCES

¹Duncan, G., Magnuson, K., Kalil, A., & Ziol-Guest, A. (2012). The Importance of Early Childhood Poverty. *Social Indicators Research* 108, 87–98.

¹¹United States Department of Health and Human Services and United States Department of Education (2016). *High quality early learning settings depend on a high-quality workforce: Low compensation undermines quality*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

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