

# Some dog walkers earn more than caregivers for babies. Educators want to change that. <sup>[1]</sup>

A new Bank Street College report calls for more public and private investment in training and pay for teachers serving children from birth to age 3

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## EXCERPTS

A 2-year-old named Miles was helping move chairs for snack time at a Manhattan child-care center when he put them in a row, sat in one and announced he was on a train.

"Come on!" he said, but nobody joined in. His teacher suggested inviting peers by name: "You can say, 'Elsie, do you want to come on the train?'" Several got on board.

That might seem like a simple cue. But to his teacher, Alexandra Martinez, it illuminates something more complex: Letting a toddler create a game rather than follow an adult's agenda, encouraging relationships and helping him find the language to do so. "It was his idea but he needed support," she said.

This scene at Bank Street College of Education's Family Center on a recent morning reflects the nurturing practices its leaders want to see nationwide. They cite research finding that most of the littlest learners receive low-quality or mediocre child care, leaving many children, especially those in poverty, with cognitive and behavioral delays.

A new report from Bank Street calls for more public and private investment in training and pay for teachers serving children from birth to age 3, a time of rapid brain growth and language acquisition. On Monday, about 100 experts in early education, advocates and policy makers are meeting to discuss that goal at a conference at the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

"You can make more as a dog walker in New York City than as an infant-toddler caregiver," said Shael Polakow-Suransky, president of Bank Street. "It's scary."

Some child-care centers advertising online for teachers Friday offered \$11 to \$14 an hour in the city area. Early Head Start, a government-subsidized program for low-income infants and toddlers, for example, pays about \$31,000 a year for an assistant teacher with a bachelor's degree.

A former chief academic officer for the city's public schools, Mr. Polakow-Suransky became convinced they won't make much headway in closing stubborn achievement gaps until children in poverty get better child care early on. "Most of what we're doing in the K-12 system to remediate some of the challenges from insufficient support when kids are younger is wasted money," he said.

The report advocates for a training system for home and center-based teachers modeled loosely on medical residencies for doctors. Funded by scholarships, caregivers would be coached by experienced mentors in quality centers, and tackle a year of relevant coursework while working toward professional credentials, such as an associate or bachelor's degree.

The Family Center reflects the residency idea. Some staffers are pursuing degrees in child development and get coaching while practicing the theories they study. On a recent morning, several sat on the floor to avoid intimidating children, rubbed their backs at times and looked squarely in their eyes to build trust.

"Two more minutes left to play," they sang, "and then we'll put our toys away!"

The Bank Street report urges public-private partnerships in cities and states to develop pilot projects for strengthening the caregiver workforce. It estimates that at scale, a residency program would cost \$2.2 billion a year nationwide and comprehensive compensation reform would cost more than \$40 billion a year.

Andrew Rein, president of the Citizens Budget Commission, a nonpartisan New York civic group, cautioned the public sector can't afford to fund every good idea: Government coffers are under stress, with competing demands for improving health care, infrastructure and safety.

"The question is what is the highest value use of the public dollar, and is that public dollar available?" Mr. Rein said. "If you want to fund one priority, most likely something else has to give."

But advocates for more training for child-care workers say it would cut some of the expensive bills for special education and help narrow achievement gaps. In New York City public schools, about 43% of black and Hispanic third-graders passed state tests in reading last year, compared with more than 70% of white and Asian students, by city data.

Nearly half the nation's early childhood workforce relies on public assistance, according to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley. Director emerita Marcy Whitebook says that the younger the child, the lower the caregiver's pay. "It's really misaligned with scientific data about the importance of the first three years," she said.

"These are the people you want to be able to sensitively interact with children, to be present all the time and responsive," she said. "That's really hard to do when you're worried about feeding your own family."

Some teachers in New York City's publicly funded, community-based preschools won promises of raises only after threatening to strike last year, and they won't all earn as much as district teachers even after raises are phased in.

At the city Department of Education, Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack said the agency's success in expanding public prekindergarten has generated support for deeper investments in early childhood programs, and some new initiatives are under way. The Bank Street report "outlines a really ambitious but important way forward and has lots of clues for us," he said.

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