

Center- and program-level factors associated with turnover in the early childhood education workforce ^[1]

Author: Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands

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EXCERPTS

Why this study?

Turnover rates are as high as 25–30 percent in some early childhood education settings (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2012). Turnover in the early childhood educator workforce is a critical issue because it affects the quality of children's early childhood education environment and has been linked to weakened language and social development (Cassidy et al., 2011; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Hatfield et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 1990). Turnover among early childhood educators also influences school effectiveness, because of the considerable academic and financial costs of teacher turnover for student learning and school budgets (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Despite the importance of workforce stability, there has been little research on the correlates of turnover among early childhood educators, in particular on the link between working conditions and turnover in early childhood education centers (Cumming, 2017; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014; Totenhagen et al., 2016; Wells, 2015).

This study used national-level data from the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) to explore turnover rates in the early childhood educator workforce across different types of early childhood education centers and to identify predictors of higher and lower turnover rates. Data from the 2012 NSECE are nearly a decade old, and many policy and program changes have occurred in the intervening years that may have altered the landscape of educator turnover. Nevertheless, this study addressed previously unanswered questions using the NSECE nationally representative sample. When data from the NSECE's 2019 administration become available, it will be important to replicate these analyses to understand whether changes in the policy and program context are associated with changes in turnover patterns across early childhood education centers. (For an overview of center-level characteristics and key terms used in this study, see box 1.)

To inform policy and program guidance for early childhood education centers, members of the Early Childhood Workforce Development Research Alliance of the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands want to better understand the factors that can contribute to or reduce turnover rates in the early childhood educator workforce. The relationship between wages and turnover has been well documented in previous research about the early childhood educator workforce. Less well understood is how educator turnover rates vary across center and program types and working conditions. A better understanding of the relationships between educator turnover and center characteristics, including the nonwage benefits offered, age group served, funding structure, and staff and student composition, could help members of the alliance direct resources and interventions to the settings where they are most in demand or might be most effective.

Alliance members are well positioned to influence the early childhood educator workforce through formal regulations, nonregulatory guidance, and program funding. For example, Connecticut, among other states in the alliance, has prioritized reducing turnover rates for early childhood educators in state-funded early childhood education centers through initiatives such as the Quality Recognition and Improvement System Connecticut Office of Early Childhood General Policy, 2015). The system encourages the retention of early childhood education staff by awarding higher ratings to centers that offer reflective supervision, ample professional development, and opportunities for educational and professional advancement.

Research questions

This study addressed two research questions related to turnover in the early childhood education workforce:

1. What was the turnover rate across early childhood education centers in the United States in 2012?
2. What center characteristics (such as nonwage benefits and supports, age group served, funding structure, center size, and staff composition) were associated with center turnover rates?

Region: United States ^[6]

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