

Early childhood workforce index 2024 ^[1]

Providing guidance to advocates and legislators on ECE workforce policies that require action

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AVAILABILITY

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Key Findings

Early Educators Are Highly Skilled, Diverse

Early educators are skilled, experienced professionals, many of whom have 16 or more years of experience and hold college degrees. Early educators are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, like the children they care for and educate. Depending on the setting, 40 to 56 percent of early educators are women of color.

Economic Insecurity Remains Rampant

The work of teaching and caring for young children is highly skilled and complex, yet early educators are paid some of the lowest wages in the United States.

- Nationally, early educators are paid a median wage of \$13.07 per hour, much less than hourly earnings for elementary and middle school teachers (\$31.80) or the U.S. workforce across occupations (\$22.92).
- 97 percent of other occupations are paid more than early educators.
- Wages vary somewhat by location, ranging from \$10.60 in Louisiana to \$18.23 in the District of Columbia. Yet early educator wages do not meet a living wage for a single adult with no children in any state, even though many early educators are themselves also parents, with children at home.
- 43 percent of early educator families must rely on public safety net programs like Medicaid and food stamps in order to get by and still struggle with financial insecurity and economic stress.

Pay Inequity Is Entrenched in the System

As difficult as it is for anyone to be an early educator in America, conditions are even more harmful for Black and Latina women, who are paid thousands of dollars less than their peers each year, even when holding equivalent educational degrees.

There are also pay disparities linked to program funding source and the ages of children in their care: an early educator working in a child care program, a Head Start-funded program, or a public pre-K program is likely to earn different amounts for doing the same work.

New Policies Support Early Educators, But Lack of Sustained Public Funding Hinders Progress

Federal ARPA and other COVID-19 relief funding provided a lifeline to state and program leaders in the context of the pandemic. The majority of states used pandemic relief funds to fund workforce initiatives that increased wages, provided wage supplements, expanded scholarships, and provided personal protective equipment and mental health supports, among other uses.

COVID-19 relief funding was never sufficient nor intended to sustain the ECE system or the workforce over the long term. State and local leaders have the power and authority to advance policies to support the ECE workforce, with and without federal funding.

- Some states are pointing the way toward a public system of early care and education for all children from birth to age five with substantial new state investments, such as Vermont's payroll tax or New Mexico's Early Childhood Education and Care Fund.
- The District of Columbia is using a local wealth tax to fund grants to ECE programs to meet minimum salaries aligned with the District's public school salary scale.

For a more detailed summary of findings, see the Executive Summary.

Related link: 2020 Early Childhood Workforce Index ^[3]

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