

Child care workers earn poverty-level pay [US] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child care workers have a higher concentration of poverty-level jobs than almost any other occupation in the United States, according to a new report by the American Federation of Teachers Educational Foundation's Center for the Child Care Workforce.

"While there is more attention than ever focused on the importance of early childhood education, those who care for and who educate our young children continue to be among the lowest-paid professionals," said Marci Young, director of CCW/AFTEF. "We are never going to achieve the high-quality early childhood education system that we know all children deserve if we do not invest in the workforce itself."

The AFT reports that only 18 occupations out of 770 surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported having lower mean wages than child care workers in 1993.

People made more repairing bicycles, attending locker rooms and pumping gas.

Preschool teachers don't do much better.

Nationally, child care workers' mean hourly wage is \$8.32 and preschool teachers' is \$10.67, compared to kindergarten teachers, who earn \$20.38.

Last year, Georgia child care workers earned a mean hourly wage of \$7.33, about \$15,240 annually. In 2002, the most recently reported mean wage for preschool teachers in Georgia was \$9.46 per hour.

"It's appalling how little (child care workers) are paid," said Terrie Oliver, Early Childhood Care and Education Department Head at Savannah Technical College.

"We tell students if you're here for the money, you came to the wrong place," said Oliver.

Quality child care is essential because of the tremendous amount of brain development that occurs between birth and age 3, said Janna Taulbee who teaches child and infant prenatal development at Georgia Southern University.

"It's like trying to build a house without a firm foundation," she said.

But there is a common misconception that anyone can raise a child and it has led to low standards and pay for early childhood education workers, Taulbee said.

"The low pay and lack of benefits give very little incentive for people to enter the early care and education profession," said Edward J. McElroy, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

AFT reports that, nationally, wages for early care and education teaching staff rose just 0.6 percent in 2003 and wages for early care and education staff have decreased in 12 states and the District of Columbia since 2002. Georgia and South Carolina were among them.

"Child care jobs have 40 to 60 percent turnover primarily because of the pay," Taulbee said. "Generally they pay minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour) and provide no benefits."

If early care and education teachers aren't discouraged by the pay, the government standards usually send them packing.

"They push the limits on the number of children per teacher," said Taulbee.

"If we are to attract and retain well-educated and better-trained early childhood education teachers, said Young, "Our nation must invest adequate resources to support this important workforce."

- reprinted from the Savannah Morning News

Region: United States ^[2]

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