



EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE RETENTION RATES: What factors impact the statistics?

“Research...indicates that child care teaching staff earned less than half as much as comparably educated women in the civilian work force.”¹

Background

In 2001, university researchers and state program partners in four states (Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska) initiated the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC). The focus of the Consortium’s work is to conduct a longitudinal study on a range of issues associated with early childhood program quality and workforce conditions. Across the four states, a random sample of 2,022 child care providers participated in the study representing licensed infant, toddler, and preschool centers including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, license-exempt centers, and licensed and unlicensed family child care homes. In Missouri, 517 providers participated in telephone interviews and 110 of those programs were randomly selected for a quality assessment.²

National and State Workforce Statistics

When studying early childhood programs, it is important to look at two areas of workforce statistics: job retention rates and compensation data (salary and benefits). Across the nation, the early childhood field experiences an annual turnover rate of 30%, which is quite high when compared to the 6.6% annual turnover rate among public school teachers.³ In Missouri, the MCCRC data indicate approximately 33% of the early childhood educators anticipate leaving the field within the next five years.

Compensation data are also a concern at the national and state levels. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates the compensation rate for the early childhood workforce has changed very little over the past several years. Although occupational titles vary from “child care worker” to “preschool teacher,” the 1997 per hour salaries for center-based teachers were nearly the same at approximately \$8 per hour (\$7.03 and \$9.09 respectively).⁴ More recent data (2000) indicate the salaries are quite similar to the 1997 rates (\$7.84 and \$9.08 per hour).⁵ In Missouri, the mean salary for full-time early childhood educators working in center-based programs is \$15,561 (\$8.10 per hour). Family child care educators earn slightly more at \$17,000 (\$8.85 per hour).

The types of benefits offered to Missouri early childhood educators, among center-based programs, varies by licensing status. The comparative percentage of educators receiving each type of benefit is noted below (licensed centers : license-exempt centers).

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| (1) Paid vacation (90% : 88%) | (5) Health insurance for self (62% : 33%) |
| (2) Paid sick leave (78% : 75%) | (6) Health insurance for family (48% : 25%) |
| (3) Paid days to attend professional meetings (76% : 67%) | (7) Retirement benefits (45% : 29%) |
| (4) Reduced tuition (63% : 69%) | |

Why Do Some Educators Continue in the Field While Others Leave?

Data from the Missouri sample provides insight on state retention rates. To better understand the retention rates, the teachers in the study sample were divided into two groups: teachers who reported that they planned to stay in the field for more than five years (“Long-Term Teachers”) and those who reported that they would leave the field within the next five-years (“Short-Term Teachers”). Upon closer examination, teacher and workplace characteristics indicated a clear distinction between the two teacher groups. These characteristics can be analyzed as “Engagement in Professional Development Opportunities” and “Compensation.”

policy brief

Engagement in Professional Development Opportunities

Long-Term Teachers were more likely to be involved in professional development activities than Short-Term Teachers. The most significant form of professional development across all types of program settings was whether or not the teacher held an education credential with an emphasis in child development (Child Development Associate, one- or two year degree, or bachelor's degree). Long-Term Teachers were more likely to report having this type of education than Short-Term Teachers. Training in a curriculum (e.g., Project Construct, High Scope, or Creative Curriculum) was statistically significant among Long-Term Teachers who worked in preschool programs and family child care homes. Additional professional development activities reported among the Long-Term Teachers included: belonging to a professional organization and working in a licensed program. Long-Term Teachers also reported feeling supported in the workplace and they viewed their work in the early childhood field as a career.

Compensation

Long-Term Teachers were more likely to receive a higher salary and more benefits than Short-Term Teachers. Specifically, Long-Term Teachers were more likely to receive benefits such as health insurance, sick leave, retirement, and paid time off to attend professional meetings than Short-Term Teachers.

What Does this Mean for Quality Programs in Missouri?

These findings indicate that teachers who participate in professional development opportunities and are better compensated are more likely to continue in the field. This reduces turnover while also increasing the knowledge and experience base of the staff. Upon further analysis of all teachers, a smaller proportion of Long-Term Teachers work in infant-toddler programs as compared to preschool programs.

When specifically looking at quality within infant-toddler programs, a clear distinction was observed when comparing programs with Long-Term Teachers versus Short-Term Teachers. Among infant-toddler programs with Long-Term Teachers, overall quality was assessed at 4.7 (a score of 5.0 indicates "good" quality). This is statistically significant when compared to the quality of infant-toddler programs with Short-Term Teachers. These programs were assessed at 3.8 (a score of 3.0 indicates "minimal" quality).

A similar type of analysis for preschool programs and family child care homes was not possible due to the small sample size. However, as additional data is collected during the third year of the MCCRC study, researchers will continue to examine the relation between retention rates and program quality.

Policy Recommendations

The State of Missouri should fund efforts to improve the professional development and compensation of early childhood educators to keep qualified teachers in the profession. For example, fund WIN (Workforce Incentive Program) to compensate educators based on their education level.

¹ Early, M. D., & Winton, P.J. (2001). Preparing the workforce: Early childhood teacher preparation at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16, 285-306.

² Each child care program was observed for two- to three-hours using one of the following instruments: Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised, Family Day Care Rating Scale, or Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale.

³ Whitebook, M., & Bellm, D. (1999). *Taking on turnover: An action guide for child care center teachers and directors*. Washington, DC: Center for the Childcare Workforce.

⁴ U.S. House Ways and Means Committee. (2000). *Green book*. Retrieved September 17, 2002, from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/2000gb/sec9.txt>

⁵ Buckley, J. E. (March, 2002). Rankings of full-time occupations, by earnings, 2000. *Monthly Labor Review*, pg. 46-57.

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