

pathways... TO EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION:

Attracting, Supporting and Retaining a Qualified Workforce



A growing body of scientific evidence indicates that investments in quality child care and early learning programs result in large, positive economic returns to society. Investing in the education of Wisconsin’s youngest children may also be one of the most promising ways to ensure that children are ready to enter Kindergarten and succeed in school and life. Children—especially those from low-income families—who attend high-quality programs are less likely to require special education services, drop out of school, and utilize social welfare programs than their peers.ⁱ

Research studies have found that the quality of care a child receives in a program is strongly linked with the quality and continuity of the program’s staff. High quality programs are often associated with well-educated, well-compensated, and well-supported providers who remain in the field. Although many programs struggle to attract and retain providers of this caliber, they are even less likely to be found in programs that serve higher percentages of children from families that utilize child care subsidies.ⁱⁱ A 2002 study by the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership found that programs serving a high percentage (50% or higher) of children subsidized through the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program had staff who received lower wages, were less likely to have a degree, and more likely to turnover than the Wisconsin average.ⁱⁱⁱ

Current Challenges in Maintaining a Qualified Workforce

Highly-qualified providers, although immensely beneficial to young children and their families, are increasingly difficult to attract, support, and retain within the child care field. Many challenges contribute to this reality.

Low Compensation: Practitioners in the child care workforce- in child care centers and family child care programs- generally earn low wages, and often receive no benefits. In comparison to other early education sectors, like Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, Head Start, and birth to five special education, the Wisconsin child care field lags far behind in terms of compensation. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2009 Wisconsin child care professionals (in center and home-based settings) earned an average of \$23,080 per year, in comparison to \$29,476 for Head Start teachers, \$50,460 for early special education teachers, and \$45,590 for Kindergarten teachers (see figure 1). With such disparities in compensation, it is not surprising that the child care field lags behind other early education sectors in terms of educational qualifications as well. Because 61% of all Wisconsin children in early education settings are in regulated child care settings (group and family child care programs),^{iv} this inequality in compensation and qualifications impacts the majority of our state’s young children.

Early Education Sector Annual Salaries

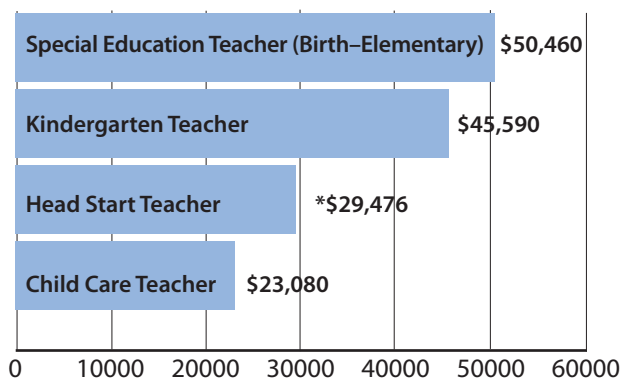


Figure 1 US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Wisconsin wage data, May 2009
*National Institute for Early Education Research 2009 State of Preschool Yearbook

Moreover, the child care field rarely offers formal pay scales that reward providers for increased education and ongoing professional development.^v With meager wages and little incentive for educational improvement, it is difficult to attract high-quality teachers to enter and remain in the field. It is also difficult to support and retain child care providers who wish to advance their skills through higher education and other professional development opportunities.

Lack of professional development support: Despite low compensation, many child care providers do stay in the field because they value and enjoy the important work they do. These providers often have difficulty accessing career counseling, training, or higher education to enhance their work. The increasing costs of higher education and training opportunities, along with the lack of a formal child care professional development system, contribute to this workforce challenge.

Additionally, child care centers are seldom able to offer significant career development support to the teachers they employ, and family child care providers often have minimal or no support to improve their qualifications. Often child care programs are struggling to sustain themselves financially and may not have additional resources to pay for ongoing staff development opportunities. A 2010 study by the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leader-

ship found that 93% of the child care programs it evaluated provided some type of staff development such as in-service training. However, only a few of these programs provided systemic support for career development, e.g. providing salary increases for credit-based professional development.^{vi}

High Turnover: Child care providers leave the field at an alarming rate, often because of the profession's low compensation and inadequate support for professional development. The annual rate of teacher turnover in Wisconsin was last estimated at 39%ⁱⁱ which is higher than the national average. Centers that served a higher percentage of children from families receiving Wisconsin Shares subsidies had higher rates of turnover than those programs who served a smaller percentage of children from families using subsidies (see Figure 2). Non-accredited programs, programs with lower staff qualifications, and programs with lower staff wages also experienced higher rates of turnover.^{vii} Although data on turnover rates for family child care in Wisconsin are not readily available, a 2003 study found that about two-thirds of family providers had at least 3 years of experience in their business. Family child care providers who stayed in the field longer had stronger educational credentials and more links with systems that provide support specific to family child care business needs.^{viii}

Studies have found that inadequate compensation is the strongest predictor of turnover.^{ix} Many providers who earn a degree are unable to receive higher wages in the child care field, and therefore leave to work in sectors offering better compensation.

Child care centers must invest significant time and money each year to combat high rates of turnover. Programs must hire, train, and recruit new providers constantly, leaving them with less funding and time to make quality improvements. When family child providers leave the field, often after only a few years, they are typically replaced by new inexperienced providers.

The loss of experienced providers is troublesome, but more devastating is the negative effect turnover has on young children. An important part of an infant or toddler's social emotional development is forming secure attachments with caregivers. This type of attachment is created when a caregiver remains stable over time. Too many changes in caregivers can result in a child being hesitant to form attachments in other relationships in the future.^{xii} Additionally, if a child loses a caregiver with whom he or she has already formed a trusting relationship, the child may feel less secure and the loss may negatively impact the child's social and cognitive skill development.^{xii}

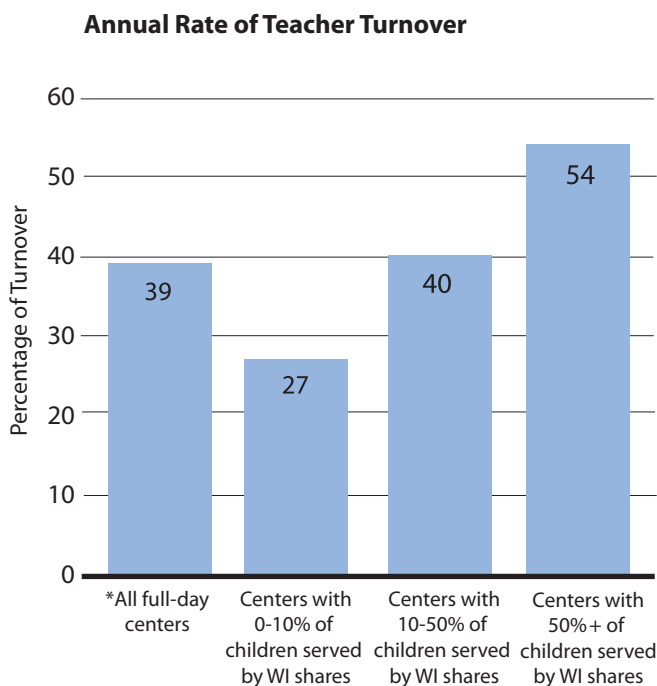


Figure 2 Source: Roach, et. al (2002), *(2005)

“Once a degree is earned, many early educators seek higher compensation by moving to a different setting or auspice within the field.”^x – Valora Washington, Wheelock College, 2008

Strategies to Attract and Retain Well-Qualified Early Childhood Teachers

Critical pathways that can be used to increase the number of high-quality providers that remain in the child care field include:

- Supporting current child care staff to achieve higher education qualifications and enhance their professional development.
- Retaining new or current high-quality child care staff by rewarding skill level and dedication to young children.
- Recruiting new staff with higher education qualifications to enter the child care field.

Although all three of these strategies can be successful, this brief will focus on the importance of the first two pathways: supporting staff to increase their education and retaining highly-qualified staff. Child care providers who feel supported by their employers and/or by the early education system are more likely to remain in the field in spite of lower compensation. One such system that would support current child care providers to achieve higher education is **credit for prior learning**. At present, many Wisconsin child care providers lack formal credit-based education; however these same providers have accumulated several years of relevant experience and many hours of non credit-based training. This experiential learning often addresses many components found in credit-based educational courses. One critical pathway that can be used to increase

the number and percentage of child care teachers with a two- or four-year degree in the field is to offer credit for prior learning. Institutes that offer credit for prior learning award degree credit(s) to individuals who can demonstrate relevant skills and knowledge previously acquired through non-traditional schooling, non credit-based training, work or other life experiences .

To retain staff members who have achieved higher education qualifications, it is important to acknowledge and reward

them in meaningful ways. Linking education with compensation is one essential way to do so. Well-educated individuals who are offered higher-paying child care positions, and positions that offer more benefits, are far less likely to leave the field.^{xiv} Programs like the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Wisconsin scholarship program and the R.E.W.A.R.D.™ Wisconsin stipend program make the link between education and compensation, and as a result have significantly decreased turnover in the field. Whereas the overall turnover rate in Wisconsin is 39%, for those providers who have received a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship it is 11%, and for those providers who are in active agreements with R.E.W.A.R.D. it is under 5%.

Policy Implications and Possibilities for Wisconsin

If the educational level and retention rate of early childhood teachers is critical to quality, Wisconsin officials and advocates should consider supporting several existing and new efforts that work to attract, support, and retain well-educated providers in the state.

- 1. Support a credit for prior learning pathway to higher education.** Institutes of higher education that offer credit for prior learning award degree credit(s) to individuals who can demonstrate relevant skills and knowledge previously acquired through non-traditional schooling, non credit-based training, work, or other life experiences. Credit for prior learning can help child care teachers and providers ease into the sometimes confusing higher education system. Wisconsin should support and implement a standardized statewide system for credit for prior learning in the early education field. A system of credit for prior learning is an opportunity to recognize the current skill and knowledge level of Wisconsin's early childhood teachers while building a pathway for these teachers to obtain more credit-based education.
- 2. Build on the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Wisconsin scholarship program.** The T.E.A.C.H. program provides credit-based educational scholarships to early childhood professionals who work in regulated settings. The T.E.A.C.H. program links education, compensation, and retention in the field. T.E.A.C.H. counselors offer individualized professional development opportunities and career counseling to recipients. With increased funding, these supports could evolve to include professional portfolio development, on-site center training, web-based opportunities, credit for prior learning, and more.

Words from the Wisconsin Workforce

A Madison child care director shares 4 ways that she supports and retains her well-qualified workforce:

- Staff participates in “management” duties (roles in hiring, budget, etc.)
- Management promotes staff autonomy, flexibility and individuality
- Staff receives great benefits such as annual wage increases, sick/vacation days, a qualified substitute pool, and health and dental insurance
- Staff can engage in on-going quality professional development opportunities

3. **Build on the R.E.W.A.R.D.™ Wisconsin Stipend Program.** Since its inception, the R.E.W.A.R.D. program has been awarding incremental yearly salary supplements to early childhood professionals based on educational attainment and longevity in the field. Due to budgetary constraints in recent years, the R.E.W.A.R.D. program is awarding stipends to fewer educational levels, is awarding smaller stipends amounts, and has implemented a wage cap for participation. As the program moves forward, it needs more funding to be able to reward all well-educated providers who remain in the field. Increased funding could also be used to increase the dollar amount of stipends providers receive to make them even more meaningful.
4. **Include a link between education and compensation within the Wisconsin QRIS, YoungStar.** A quality rating and improvement system proposal can reward programs that have low turnover, well-compensated staff, and links between education and compensation for child care personnel. The YoungStar program that was launched in June 2010 has great potential to reward those who meet these components and utilize programs designed to improve education and compensation in the field- like the T.E.A.C.H. and R.E.W.A.R.D. programs.
5. **Encourage child care programs to utilize Model Work Standards.** Developed by the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW), the Model Work Standards guide is an educational self-assessment and planning tool designed to improve adult working conditions. The standards promote the concept of shared decision-making (or participative management) as a method of creating meaningful change at the program level. The guide assists child care programs as they enhance their own business practices and personnel policies. The guide addresses compensation, turnover, and professional development supports.
6. **Develop and implement comprehensive early childhood professional development policies across all sectors.** Wisconsin should build a comprehensive, long-term system for providing workforce development supports to the early care and education workforce. This pathway will result in lower turnover and higher teacher

quality in child care programs across the state. The system may include components like: job placement services, career counseling, business trainings for center directors (ex. hiring and HR practices), credit for prior learning support, and more. The system would coordinate the current fragmented early education professional development system.

ⁱ Rolnick, A.J., & Grunewald, R. (2007, January 4). *Early intervention on a large scale*. Education Weekly, 26(17), 32, 34-36.

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Partnership for America's Economic Success. Long-Term economic benefits of investing in early childhood programs: Proven programs boost economic development and benefit the nation's fiscal health. www.partnershipforsuccess.org

ⁱⁱ Roach, M.A., Adams, D.B., Riley, D.A., Edie, D., and Kim, Y. (2005). *Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership Issue Brief #16: What do we know about the workforce in child care centers?* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Extension.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adams, D., Roach, M., Riley, D., and Edie, D. (2002). *Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership Brief #3: Are program characteristics linked to child care quality?* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Extension.

^{iv} Edie, D. (November 2009). *Wisconsin's Early Care and Education Landscape: Preparing for a Coherent System*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

^v T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Technical Assistance and Quality Assurance Center. (2009). *A Focus on Compensation*. Chapel Hill, NC: Child Care Services Association.

^{vi} McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. (Spring 2010). *A Window on Early Childhood Administrative Practices*. Wheeling, IL: National-Lewis University.

^{vii} Roach, M.A., Adams, D.B., Riley, D.A., Edie, D., and Kim, Y. (2005). *Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership Issue Brief #16: What do we know about the workforce in child care centers?* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Extension.

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^{viii} Phillips, D., Mekos, D., Scarr, S., McCartney, K., & Abbott-Shim, M. (2000). Within and beyond the classroom door: Assessing quality in child care centers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(4), 475-496.

^{ix} Whitebook & Bellm. (1999). Taking on turnover: An action guide for child care center teachers and directors. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 425833).

^x Washington, V. (2008). Role, relevance, reinvention: Higher education in the field of early care and education. Boston: Wheelock College.

^{xi} Cohen, J., & Lurie-Hurvitz, E. (2009). *Seizing the Potential: Quality infant-toddler child care*. Zero to Three Policy Center. Washington, DC.

^{xii} Howes, C., Hamilton, C. E., & Phillipsen, L. C. (1998). Stability and continuity of child-caregiver and child-peer relationships. *Child Development*, 69(2), 418-426.

^{xiii} Gernetzke, E., Wolfe, D., Edie, D., & Paulson, J. (2010). Pathways to higher education: Credit for prior learning. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Early Childhood Association and Wisconsin Council on Children & Families.

^{xiv} T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Technical Assistance and Quality Assurance Center. (2009). *A Focus on Compensation*. Chapel Hill, NC: Child Care Services Association.

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