

W I L D E R **RESEARCH** C E N T E R

**Staff recruiting and
retention in early childhood
care and education and
school-age care**

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF

*Children,
Families &
Learning*

APRIL 2001

Concerns about a staffing crisis in the child care field and its effect on quality child care prompted the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning to commission this statewide study.

National research, best summarized in the 1995 study Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes, links low wages with high turnover and poorer quality of care. This study describes wages and benefits in the child care field, explores turnover rates and the reasons that child care providers leave their jobs, and identifies strategies to increase retention.

Wilder Research Center conducted a study of staffing and turnover among early childhood and school-age care programs, surveying all Head Start programs in Minnesota and randomly selected samples of current and former family child care providers, child care centers, school-age care sites, and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) sites. The study used a mail survey with telephone follow-up from March through June 2000.

Altogether, 904 providers and programs completed surveys. In addition, 20 sites identified by state and regional professionals as model sites with regard to successful retention of staff were interviewed to better understand financial and non-financial retention strategies.

Turnover rates

Teacher turnover is inversely related to wages. The average teacher turnover rate goes up when the average hourly wage goes down. Among aides, the average turnover rate goes up as the average wage goes down and when the employer does not offer health insurance. Teacher turnover also appears related to program accreditation. In centers and preschools, teacher turnover is 16 percent among facilities with NAEYC accreditation and 24 percent among those without it.

The mean turnover rates for teachers overall are 23 percent in child care centers and preschools, 20 percent in school-age sites, 13 percent in Head Start, and 17 percent in ECFE. For comparison, the reported turnover rate for public school teachers is 9 percent.

The highest average (mean) turnover rates occur among:

- Aides in child care centers and preschools (33%) and school-age sites (32%)
- Assistant teachers in centers (32%) and school-age care sites (31%)
- Toddler teachers (30%) and infant teachers (28%) in child care centers

Other groups with turnover rates at or above 20 percent per year include:

- Head Start aides (24%)
- Preschool teachers (23%) and school-age teachers (22%) in child care centers
- ECFE preschool teachers (21%) and assistant teachers (20%)
- Teachers in school-age sites (19%)

The lowest mean turnover rates are among program directors (14% in centers, 10% in school-age sites, 12% in Head Start, and 6% in ECFE) and among ECFE toddler teachers (13%) and ECFE infant teachers (10%).

The turnover rate for family child care providers is 15 percent for the year beginning October 1999, according to administrative records at the Department of Human Services.

Reasons reported for turnover

Dissatisfaction with pay is the top reason for staff leaving child care centers and preschools (67%), Head Start (63%), school-age care (56%), and ECFE (48%). (The category “dissatisfaction with pay” was selected from a list of reasons arranged in random order. Programs selected the three reasons most frequently mentioned by staff who are leaving.)

In child care centers and preschools, other common reasons include dissatisfaction with benefits (37%), job stress (24%), leaving to go to school or training (22%), and family mobility (22%).

In school-age sites, other common reasons include going to school or training (42%), dissatisfaction with benefits (33%), challenges of caring for children with behavior problems (19%), and job stress (18%).

In Head Start, other common reasons include job stress (33%), problems with the staff member’s own child care arrangements (21%), going to school or training (17%), dissatisfaction with benefits (17%), dissatisfaction with program policies and procedures (17%), and conflict with coworkers or supervisors (17%).

In ECFE, other common reasons include dissatisfaction with benefits (43%), going to school or training (25%), family mobility (22%), and problems with the staff member’s own child care arrangements (17%).

For family child care providers, burnout (42%) is the most frequently reported reason for leaving the business, followed by the need for adult socializing (33%), the need for more money (32%), their own children growing up (31%), the desire to work shorter hours (28%), and reductions in food program reimbursement (25%).

Wages and benefits in child care programs

Overall, ECFE and Head Start offer the best wages and Head Start offers the best benefits. Child care centers offer the lowest wages and the poorest benefits. The average starting hourly wage for a child care teacher is \$9.39; for an ECFE teacher it is \$15.89. Wages and benefits are better in the metro area than in greater Minnesota. Also, teachers in accredited child care centers, on average, make \$1.44 per hour more than teachers in centers without accreditation.

Benefits for full-time and part-time staff

Teachers in child care centers (70%) and Head Start (94%) are mostly full-time staff (35 or more hours per week). Fewer teachers in school-age programs (35%) and ECFE (23%) are full-time staff. Aides mostly work part time (34 or fewer hours per week) in centers (70%), school-age programs (96%), and ECFE (95%). Among aides in Head Start, half are full time and half part time.

In 19 percent of child care centers and preschools, full-time teaching staff receive fully paid health insurance for themselves, while in 26 percent of the sites they receive no health insurance benefit at all.

The comparable percentages for part-time teachers in centers are 4 percent and 61 percent.

In 16 percent of school-age sites, full-time teaching staff receive fully paid health insurance for themselves, and in 32 percent of school-age sites they get no health insurance benefit at all. The comparable percentages for part-time teachers are 2 percent and 54 percent.

In 38 percent of Head Start programs, full-time teaching staff receive fully paid health insurance for themselves, and in 5 percent of Head Start programs they get no health insurance benefit at all. The comparable percentages for part-time Head Start teachers are 33 percent and 11 percent.

In 25 percent of ECFE sites, full-time teaching staff receive fully paid health insurance for themselves, and in 30 percent of the ECFE sites, they get no health insurance benefit at all. The comparable percentages for part-time ECFE teachers are 5 percent and 52 percent.

Among full-time aides, health insurance is not available in 31 percent of the centers, 51 percent of the school-age programs, and in 50 percent of ECFE programs. Health insurance is available in all Head Start programs for full-time aides, including 36 percent that fully pay for the staff insurance coverage.

AVERAGE STARTING HOURLY WAGES

	Directors	Teachers	Assistant teachers	Aides
Centers and preschools	\$11.60 (N=127)	\$9.39 (N=172)	\$7.70 (N=140)	\$6.58 (N=154)
School-age care	\$12.28 (N=69)	\$9.24 (N=76)	\$7.75 (N=66)	\$6.56 (N=61)
Head Start	\$15.72 (N=20)	\$10.14 (N=25)	\$8.00 (N=17)	\$6.95 (N=21)
ECFE	\$17.73 (N=98)	\$15.89 (N=129)	\$8.36 (N=57)	\$7.69 (N=94)

RELIANCE ON PARENT FEES (as a percentage of total revenue)

School-age care



Child care centers and pre-schools



ECFE



Head Start



Among part-time aides, health insurance is not available in 66 percent of centers and preschools, 68 percent of school-age programs, and in 64 percent of ECFE sites. Health insurance is available for part-time aides in 75 percent of Head Start programs.

Head Start programs have the highest proportion of sites providing full-time teachers with paid leave (84%), vacation (84%), and holidays (96%). About half of child care centers provide full-time teachers these paid leave days, about 10 percent higher than school-age sites. ECFE reports that, in 40 percent of the sites, full-time teachers get paid sick days, but only 9 percent of the sites provide paid vacation and 14 percent provide paid holidays. It is important to note, however, that neither Head Start nor ECFE operates 12 months per year.

Pay and benefits for family providers

Eighty-five percent of licensed family child care providers report an annual net profit from their business, with a mean net profit of \$11,293. Ninety-three percent of family child care providers say they are covered by health insurance or a medical plan. Most frequently, this insurance was provided through a spouse's or partner's employer.

Maintaining capacity in child care programs

When a classroom staff position is vacant, the most common temporary measure is for the director to fill in at child care centers and preschools (63%), school-age programs (73%), and ECFE (62%). In Head Start programs, other non-teaching staff (72%) and parents (60%) fill in temporarily.

One-third of centers and preschools and 15 percent of ECFE sites applied for staffing waivers, variances, or exceptions. (Variances, waivers, or exceptions may be

temporarily granted to staff members who do not yet fully meet licensing regulations for professional development.) Few report that their applications were denied.

On average, centers and preschools report about six empty slots due to the difficulty of retaining qualified staff and 11 slots lost due to staffing shortages; school-age sites report about six slots empty due to the inability to retain qualified staff and 14 school-age slots lost due to staffing shortages. About 8 percent of centers and school-age sites, one Head Start program, and 3 percent of ECFE sites report closing entire classrooms in the past 12 months because of staffing shortages. These numbers do not clarify whether a waiting list existed as a result of the closings.

Respondents were asked to estimate, from their experience with staff turnover in the past few years, what percentage of teachers leaving their programs are leaving the child care and early childhood field altogether and what percent are leaving to take a similar job in another child care or early childhood program.

Child care centers, preschools, and school-age care sites, on average, say that more staff leave the field altogether (50% and 55%) than change jobs in the field (37% and 34%); while Head Start estimates are about evenly split, and ECFE estimates that more staff change jobs in the field (48%) than leaving the field (33%).

Staffing and professional development problems

Finding substitutes is the most common problem reported by child care centers (41% said it was a "major" problem and 45% "somewhat"), school-age programs (46% major and 36% somewhat), Head Start (67% major and 21% somewhat), and ECFE (45% major and 43% somewhat). Finding trained staff is the next most commonly reported problem.

Finding substitutes, filling teacher vacancies, and finding trained staff are reported as equally serious problems in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metro area and greater Minnesota.

Among current licensed family providers in the metro area and in greater Minnesota, finding substitutes is the biggest problem, selected from a checklist by 51 percent as a major problem (21%) or somewhat a problem (29%), followed by finding affordable and high-quality professional development.

Strategies to address staffing and turnover problems

From a list of possible strategies to address staffing shortages, early childhood and school-age care programs checked the ones they currently use and rated the usefulness of each one they have tried.

The strategies most commonly used are low adult-to-child ratios, free training and tuition reimbursement, wage supplement based on training and experience, competitive compensation, training of paraprofessionals to meet needs, and retraining current staff for high-need areas.

Overall, the various strategies are reported to be “moderately useful”. The strategies most often reported to be “very useful” are staffing variances (49%); low adult-to-child ratios (46%); competitively set compensation (43%); free training and tuition reimbursement (37%); recruiting above licensing, training and experience requirements (35%); formal mentoring (34%); training of paraprofessionals to meet needs (32%), and retraining current staff for high-need areas (31%). Three of these strategies found to be useful — staffing variances; recruiting above licensing, training and experience requirements; and formal mentoring — are not at present widely used.

Some successful financial strategies identified across the different types of model early childhood and school-age care programs include offering staff competitive wages and providing benefits, including health coverage and retirement plans; paying staff for preparation, meetings, and training; and offering full-time employment. Being part of the school system with teacher pay scales and union contracts is a key part of staff retention in the school-age and ECFE model sites.

When asked to check off any services that the state could have provided to keep them in the child care business, former licensed family providers most often selected wage supplements (46%).

Family child care providers recognized as leaders in their field identified that belonging to different child care organizations is a good way to get information and support and to overcome isolation.

Some successful non-financial strategies identified across the different types of early childhood and school-age care programs include flexible (family-friendly) scheduling to meet the needs of staff; team-building, good communication, and a supportive work environment so that teachers and aides may work as a team; good in-house training and a commitment to staff training; staff recognition, incentives, and rewards such as gifts, food, and free days off; and hiring out of the pool of parents who share a commitment to the program and its mission.

Recommendations

According to study results, the majority of early childhood and school-age care sites in Minnesota report staff turnover (71 percent of child care centers, 77 percent of school-age programs, 96 percent of Head Start programs, and 62 percent of ECFE sites), bolstering concerns about a staffing crisis and its effect on the quality of care.

The turnover rate is clearly high for aides in child care centers statewide (33%) and for teachers in Twin Cities-area child care centers (28%). On the other hand, the good news in this study is that staff turnover does not appear to be a universal problem. For example, more than one-third of child care centers and preschools, ECFE sites, and school-age care sites reported “no impact” on their programs due to staff turnover.

Based on the results of this study, Wilder Research Center recommends the following strategies for supporting staff retention in early childhood care and education and school-age care:

- Competitive wages, health coverage, and retirement plans for all staff, both full-time and part-time
- Paid time for preparation, meetings, and training
- Full-time employment opportunities for teachers and aides
- Incentives for programs to become accredited
- Scholarships for students willing to enter high-need jobs (positions that are difficult to fill)
- Flexible scheduling to accommodate family responsibilities
- Team-building, good communication, and a supportive work environment that encourages teachers and aides to work as a team
- Good in-house training and a commitment to staff training
- Staff recognition, incentives, and rewards such as gifts, food, and days off
- Recruiting staff from among the parents who share a commitment to the program and its mission

For licensed family child care providers, highly rated strategies include compensation and professional development opportunities that are affordable and of high quality. Membership in child care associations and networks also appears to be an important strategy. At present, membership rates are fairly low, but model family child care providers reported that belonging to child care organizations is a good way to get information and support and to overcome isolation.

One finding that deserves further study is the use of staffing variances as a strategy for dealing with teacher turnover. Centers are allowed to give staff who do not yet meet licensing requirements for training and education a period of time to come into compliance. The effect that these staffing variances may have on the quality of care, however, is not currently known.

Finally, the relationship between type of funding and level of turnover deserves further attention. We know that turnover rates are lower in publicly funded, school-based programs than in child care settings primarily funded through parent fees.

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