

Recruiting and Retaining Staff in the Early Childhood Workforce

A Summary of Minnesota and National Literature

“There is broad consensus that high-quality environments for young children depend on teachers who are skilled at nurturing their development and learning, yet low pay and inadequate working conditions routinely hamper teachers in their efforts to apply their skills and knowledge. This condition exists among teachers in early education as well as K-12 classrooms, fueling the ubiquitous challenge of recruiting and retaining a skilled teaching workforce across the age spectrum” (Whitebook et al., 2018).

Much of the literature on the early childhood education (ECE¹) workforce discusses the crisis of recruiting and retaining quality educators to a sector that is essential to American life, but that has unsustainable wage levels and high rates of burnout (Swigonski et al., 2021). While issues of low wages and stress are not new, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly exacerbated existing instabilities. Given the size of the workforce—Wilder estimates over 40,000 early childhood educators in Minnesota (Valorose et al., 2023)—and its profound impact on Minnesotans of all ages, it is critical to address recruitment and retention challenges.

Like many ECE centers, Wilder’s Child Development Center has experienced challenges with recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff over the years, and especially in the wake of the pandemic. To understand the most recent challenges and opportunities for the workforce, Child Development Center staff asked Wilder Research to conduct an evaluation including: 1) a review and summary of existing literature, and 2) key informant interviews with child care centers and training programs. Wilder Research and Child Development Center staff identified the following questions to guide the evaluation.

- What kinds of staffing challenges are ECE centers dealing with, particularly in the Twin Cities metro area? How prevalent are these challenges? Are they more prevalent in certain areas or types of centers?
- What are the key factors contributing to staffing challenges? What barriers exist at the individual, center, regional, and societal/economic levels? (e.g., are centers not getting applicants in general? Or are they not getting qualified applicants?)
- What strategies or approaches seem to be effective at recruiting and retaining ECE staff in this current climate?
- What does the landscape in the Twin Cities metro look like in terms of who is being prepared for early childhood positions? How many people are graduating from ECE programs? What are graduates looking for?

Answers to these questions will come from both the literature review and the key informant interviews. The following report is a summary of key themes from the literature, organized roughly by research question. Wilder focused in particular on projects, evaluations, and data that are specific to Minnesota. Key informant interviews will take place in spring/summer 2024.

¹ Throughout this summary, ECE is used to abbreviate “early childhood education,” though many sources also use ECE to mean “early care and education.”

Individual-level stressors on recruiting and retaining ECE workers

“Early educators are engaged in incredibly difficult and complex work that has been recognized as essential to children’s learning and development, supportive for families, and foundational to the economy. In the best of times, educators do this work in conditions that undermine their well-being, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened the harm caused to this workforce, nearly all of whom are women. Adequate public investment and state policies that appropriately prepare, support, and compensate the early education workforce can remedy these dire conditions by establishing systems that benefit early educators and the children they care for and teach” (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2021).

Extensive literature on the early childhood education workforce describes stressors that affect an individual’s ability and desire to become and remain employed in that sector. Predominantly, these factors are low pay, the high cost of earning a degree or certificate (and the inherent tension between those two factors), and high-stress work environments.

Inadequate pay for the job

“I am in this field because I am passionate about children. However, I feel like I am making financial sacrifices in order to remain in this field. I have a Masters of Education with a teaching license, but I am not adequately compensated nor are my co-workers. We are working for minimum wage [...] with degrees, while being responsible for up to 16 preschoolers. I feel supported when it comes to my socioemotional well-being through my co-workers, and I enjoy my work every day, but in the long term, this salary is not sustainable” –Minnesota educator in a center-based program (Whitebook et al., 2018, p. 7).

Pre-pandemic data show that median wages for early childhood educators in Minnesota had increased between 2017 and 2019 (Figure 1). While wages only increased by 2% for child care workers, the increase for preschool teachers was 12%, the largest percent increase across all 50 states (McLean et al., 2021).

1. MEDIAN HOURLY WAGE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN MINNESOTA, 2017 TO 2019

	2017	2019	Percent change
Child care workers	\$11.79	\$12.06	+2%
Preschool teachers	\$15.62	\$17.46	+12%
Preschool/Child care directors	\$25.48	\$28.40	+11%
Kindergarten teachers	\$33.88	\$35.01	+3%

Source. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/interactive-map/>

Despite these wage increases, early educators tend to earn a lot less than their K-8 educator peers. “Early educators with a bachelor’s degree are paid 27.6% less than their colleagues in the K-8 system” and the poverty rate for early educators is 18.8%, compared to 8.3% for Minnesota workers in general and 2.1% for K-8 teachers (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2021). A recent Wilder Research survey of early childhood educators found that over half of respondents (54%) made less than \$44,000 per year, and “despite being employed, 16% of the workforce is living below 200% of the federal poverty level” (Valorose

et al., 2023, pg. 3). At the time that report was written median household income² in Minnesota was reported as \$77,700 (Valorose et al., 2023).

Low wages have been a persistent issue for early educators, especially women and people of color:

- In general, child care workers “are almost twice as likely as the average American worker to rely on public support” (46% versus 25%; Phillips et al., 2016, p. 146).
- In 2015, 18% of female child care workers lived below the poverty line, compared to 9% of all female workers in the United States (Vogtman, 2017). Black (23%) and Latina (22%) women who work in child care experience higher poverty rates than their White counterparts (15%; Vogtman, 2017). Poverty rates were highest for single mothers who are child care workers (44%, compared to 24% of single mothers in any other type of work), especially Latina single mothers working in child care (54%; Vogtman, 2017).
- “Black early educators earn an average of 78 cents less per hour than their White counterparts, even when controlling for education level” (Gillispie et al., 2021, p. 8).
- Across the country, full-time child care teachers are paid an average \$14.01 per hour, which is “less than half the wage of kindergarten teachers. And Black and Hispanic women are paid even less, at \$11.27 and \$12.59 per hour, respectively” (Coffey & Khattar, 2022).

Low wages have direct implications for the economic well-being of those who work in early childhood education. In a 2018 survey of Minnesota ECE teachers (discussed further in the section below), over half of respondents worried about paying for routine health care costs (56%) or having enough to pay their families’ monthly bills (55%). Another 39% worried about paying housing costs, and a quarter of respondents worried about being sent home without pay if child attendance was low or if their program had an unexpected closure (27%), or worried about having enough food to feed their families (24%; Whitebook et al., 2018).

Lack of incentive to earn degrees, certificates, or build professional development

Much of the literature discusses the absolute lack of incentive for joining the ECE workforce. Low wages, often without benefits, do not incentivize workers to “obtain credentials and move up career ladders that offer little or no pay increase. As a result, programs struggle to find and keep qualified staff to meet basic licensing requirements” (Casale et al., 2020). Because of the lack of payoff in the ECE workforce for earning a degree, there appears to be a decrease in the proportion of ECE workers with degrees and credentials.

- In Minnesota, students who received their associate’s or bachelor’s degrees in early learning or child development earned a much lower median wage in the two years after graduation (\$15.37 and \$17.48, respectively) than those who worked in elementary or secondary schools (\$25.37; Casale et al., 2020).
- Another study shows that fewer lead teachers³ in Minnesota had a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2019 (37%) than in 2012 (65%; NORC, 2022). In addition, fewer lead teachers had a certificate or endorsement for early care and education in 2019 (36%), compared to 2012 (65%).
- As of 2020, neither center- nor home-based child care programs in Minnesota were required to pay for professional development time or for planning and preparation time. This is different from the K-12 education system, which has more mechanisms in place to protect teacher time. For example, Minnesota

² Because median income shows the “middle” value of household income across the state, it is important to note that the median varies widely by factors such as geography, family type (single vs. married), age, race, ethnicity and gender. For example, the median income for a married couple with children in Minnesota is \$130,650, whereas the median income for a single woman with children is \$39,780.

³ Excludes assistant teachers and aides

Statutes § 122A.60 (Staff Development Program) and 122A.61 (Reserved Revenue for Staff Development) require school districts to set aside revenue for educators' professional development.

- In a 2021 report, the Center for the Study of Child Care and Employment assigned categories—making headway, edging forward, stalled—to several policy areas. For Minnesota, the policy area “work environment,” which includes sufficient staffing, paid professional development time, and opportunities to provide input on programming, was marked as “stalled.”
- Across the country, “child care workers have much lower access to important employer-provided benefits such as health care and retirement than do employees in other sectors. In fact, child care workers in center-based care are twice as likely as the general workforce to have no form of health insurance, and only 1 in 10 child care workers have retirement benefits” (Coffey & Khattar, 2022).

While there are challenges to building professional development within the ECE workforce (e.g., lack of paid time), a recent survey of ECE educators (N=1,050) shows that 44 percent of early childhood educators had a professional mentor, coach, or consultant in the past year (Valorose et al., 2023). When asked what professional development topics they would want or need from a training, the most common answer was behavior management (48%), followed by developmentally appropriate learning (33%), trauma-informed care and practice (33%), child development and learning (32%), relationships with families (29%), and working with children who have special health care needs (29%).

High-stress work environments, especially post-pandemic

Within ECE work places, there are multiple demands on staff, from the system level (e.g., keeping in compliance with state and federal laws, such as student-teacher ratios) to the individual level (e.g., ensuring that the needs of children are met on a daily basis). As with other workforce challenges discussed in this summary, stress is not new to early childhood educators and is not simply the result of the pandemic. However, of all the challenges discussed, work stress may have been most exacerbated by the pandemic. ECE workers play a crucial role in starting children on a positive educational path. The “teacher-child relationship in pre-school was found to be associated with skills in first grade even after controlling for [an] individual child’s sociodemographic variables (Hamre & Pianta, 2004)” (Swigonski et al., 2021).

- The health of teachers has also been shown to affect the socio-emotional well-being of students. In essence, “young children flourish in early learning settings where there are secure and positive relationships with early childhood educators who are capable of responding to a child’s individual needs” (Swigonski et al., 2021). Given the myriad stressors that adults face on any given day—let alone in a critical, high-needs sector like child care or in a post-pandemic world with growing socio-political stressors—being “capable of responding to a child’s individual needs” can feel more and more difficult for caregivers.
- In a pre-pandemic study of licensed center-based programs⁴ in Minnesota, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) developed a survey tool⁵ to hear from teachers on key aspects of their work environments. In particular, three areas showed a need for improvement: adult well-being, staffing and teaching supports, and professional learning and guidance (Whitebook et al, 2018). Under adult well-being, “teaching staff reported experiencing stressful workplace dynamics like intimidation, unequal distribution of workload, favoritism, or a lack of opportunities for input in their program” (p. 7).
- A recent study of the stress impacts of COVID-19 on Indiana educators found that, even before the pandemic, a third (33%) of “early childhood educators reported feeling moderate personal stress and 4%

⁴ This study looked specifically at licensed child care centers who participate in Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, or QRIS, known as Parent Aware. Parent Aware is a voluntary program for child care centers across the state.

⁵ The Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL)

had severe stress” (Swigonski et al., 2021, p. 801). These proportions increased significantly after the pandemic, with 46% reporting moderate stress and 18% reporting severe stress.

- After the beginning of the pandemic, early childhood educators in Indiana experienced “statistically significant increases in sadness, being restless or fidgety, feelings of worthlessness, nervousness, feeling everything was an effort, and hopelessness⁶” (Swigonski et al., 2021, p. 801). The Indiana study also showed that, since COVID-19, there were significant increases in many stress-related symptoms, including poor sleep, poor appetite or overeating, headaches or stomachaches, increased alcohol or drug use, and difficulty controlling temper.
- A survey of Minnesota child care providers⁷ in summer 2020 showed that 17% of respondents had moderate or severe anxiety, as measured by the GAD-7⁸ (Warner et al., 2021). Center-based respondents (27%) were significantly more likely than family child care providers (15%) to be “clinically anxious.”
- During the early days of the pandemic, new practices created additional stress for providers. Minnesota providers who were “not confident in implementing new health and safety practices were 2.15 times more likely to be clinically anxious compared to providers who were confident in those practices” (Warner et al., 2021, p. 11).

System-level stressors on recruiting and retaining ECE workers

“The ECE system in the United States reflects and reinforces gender, class, and racial inequities that are woven throughout U.S. institutions and culture. About 40 percent of early educators are women of color, and they occupy a disproportionate share of the lowest-paying jobs in the field. Beyond low pay and inadequate benefits, many of these early educators experience historical and systemic barriers to accessing and successfully participating in education and professional development” (McLean et al., 2021, p. 70).

Multiple, interconnected system-level stressors— child care shortages, enrollment disruptions, financial instability, and the exorbitantly high cost of child care—also have an effect on recruitment and retention in the ECE workforce.

Child care shortages

Nearly all Minnesota-focused literature on the ECE workforce discusses severe child care shortages (frequently using the word “crisis”), particularly in Greater Minnesota and for in-home care.

- According to the Department of Employment and Economic Development, “Minnesota was short nearly 80,000 child care slots” prior to the pandemic (Casale et al., 2020).
- A 2016 report from the Center for Rural Policy and Development illustrates a trend away from in-home family care “at a disturbing rate” toward center-based care (Werner, 2016). Between 2006 and 2015, licensed in-home family providers decreased by 27% across the state (a loss of approximately 36,500 spaces). While there was also an increase in center-based facilities (enough to cover about two-thirds of the gap), “most of the growth in center-based care...occurred in the Twin Cities seven-county area” (Werner, 2016).

⁶ This study used the Kessler 6 Scale of Mental Health and a set of yes/no survey questions, to measure emotional stress.

⁷ The pool of survey respondents included center-based and home-based child care providers who applied to the Peacetime Emergency Child Care (PECC) Grant program.

⁸ The GAD-7 is a self-report questionnaire used for screening General Anxiety Disorder.

- In 2023, Wilder Research found that the number of licensed family child care providers has decreased from 10,778 in 2011 to 6,291 in 2023 (a decrease of 58%; Valorose et al., 2023). Because the average age of licensed family child care providers has increased during that same time (from 44 to 49 years), the decrease in providers will likely continue as the current workforce begins to retire (Valorose et al., 2023).
- A recent article in the Minnesota Reformer states that “staffing rates still have not returned to pre-pandemic levels...as of June 2022, there were 3% fewer people working in child care in Minnesota compared to February 2020” (McVan, 2023). The article also summarizes the reasons for child care shortages, especially in rural areas:

“Child care providers, parents and policymakers say they’re dealing with a complex set of overlapping problems. In-home child care providers skew older than the general population and aren’t being replaced as they retire. Child care centers are sparse in rural Minnesota, and across the state they are understaffed, largely because of low wages. At the same time, child care is so expensive that the cost of care, especially for multiple children, can quickly consume one parent’s salary” (McVan, 2023).

Staff turnover is often an issue among providers and the sector as a whole is losing experienced workers.

- According to NORC, the percentage of experienced child care workers in Minnesota (those who had done paid work caring for children for 10-20 years) dropped from 61% in 2012 to 34% in 2019 (NORC, 2022).
- In a 2023 workforce survey, Wilder Research found that staff turnover among early childhood providers was 30% every year (Valorose et al., 2023).

Enrollment disruptions and financial instability

Policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including child care center closures, understandably caused significant drops in attendance, ultimately impacting enrollment and the financial stability. When looking at these impacts by provider type, there is some tension in the literature around whether center- or home-based providers were harder hit financially. Several articles illustrated that BIPOC providers experienced greater financial loss than White providers on the whole.

- In a recent survey of Minnesota ECE providers,⁹ roughly half of licensed centers (51%) and family child care providers (49%) reported closing temporarily or permanently since March 2020; 30% of respondents from certified centers¹⁰ reported the same (Ulmen et al., 2023). Compared to family child care providers, licensed centers were significantly more likely to report “much less” revenue between 2019 and 2020, and “to report that the costs of doing business had increased” (Ulmen et al., 2023, p. 1).
- According to a report about post-pandemic child care finances, “the hardest hit financially were family child care providers—small providers usually based out of their own homes—a majority of whom have seen their household income affected by losses from their business” (Tran, 2021).
- “Black providers (80%) were significantly more likely to report experiencing, or expecting to experience, financial loss not covered by federal or state grants compared to White providers (37%)” (Ulmen et al., 2023, p. 12).

⁹ This includes licensed center and family child care providers and certified centers.

¹⁰ The Minnesota Department of Human Services “oversees licensure of family child care and center-based programs. However, DHS has the authority to certify license-exempt programs (e.g., programs operated by a school or other organizations whose purpose is to provide child care services; Head Start; camps) that wish to accept child care subsidies” (Ulmen et al, 2023, p. 1).

- Financial loss and enrollment disruptions, as well as embedded and systemic racial disparities, are not unique to Minnesota. At the onset of the pandemic, emergency state and federal funding was deployed, including through Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. “Unfortunately, research shows that these relief programs failed to reach a lot of providers” (Gillispie et al., 2021, p. 13) and early pandemic data show that, generally, “White business owners [had] been approved for Paycheck Protection Program funds at almost twice the rate of Latino business owners” (Gillispie et al., 2021, p. 9). These data were not specific to early childhood education businesses.

Some providers “had trouble retaining enough workers to maintain the staff-to-child ratios required by the state,” which they indicated was also an issue prior to the pandemic (Tran, 2021). Because of financial instability, many providers were forced to pay for supplies out of their own pockets; again, this is a common theme among educators even prior to the pandemic. One provider said:

“I look back on a year ago when COVID hit and all the changes we all had thrown at us, and I thought, ‘How are we going to make it?’ And now, a year later, we still struggle, but we are here. We make it with just the basics, no extras. Child care needs come first before our personal needs now”
—Family-based provider in central Minnesota
(Tran, 2021).

Despite declining enrollment and financial instability, providers may be reluctant to raise tuition, fearing it may further “erode their enrollment” (Tran, 2021). The high cost of child care is already a barrier for many families, especially those with lower incomes. The balance of charging enough tuition to cover costs, including employee wages, and maintaining or increasing enrollment is a major stress point for many child care providers. One family provider stated:

“We are still struggling to stay afloat during these times. I understand families need me, and I’m so crucial to them to be able to go to work. But at times I wonder if it’s even worth it to stay in business during these times or to quit and find a job with guaranteed steady income” —Family-based provider in northeastern Minnesota
(Tran, 2021).

Prohibitive costs for parents and caregivers

The cost of child care is a huge burden for parents and caregivers, accounting for a substantial portion of household income. A report by Child Care Aware illustrates the affordability of child care by state and in Minnesota the picture is nuanced:

“Minnesota, for example, ranks among the 10 least-affordable states when considering the price of center-based infant care for a married couple with one child. However, this is a state where center care is rare, and family child care predominates in the child care landscape. Using family child care as the price factor in the equation, Minnesota is among the 15 most-affordable states”
(Child Care Aware of America, 2022a, p. 35).

Table 2 further illustrates the high cost of center-based care in Minnesota, especially for infants, as well as the difference in ranking for family child care. In particular, single-parent households struggle to afford child care, as it can account for between one quarter (for family child care) to half (for center-based care) of their median income.

2. COST OF CHILD CARE IN MINNESOTA IN 2020

Type of child care	Annual cost	Rank by <i>least</i> affordable (out of 52)	% of median income for a single parent	% of median income for a married couple
Infants, center-based	\$16,973	7	50.7%	14.8%
Toddlers, center-based	\$14,917	6	44.6%	13.0%
4 year olds, center-based	\$12,954	9	38.7%	11.3%
Infants, family child care	\$8,898	41	26.6%	7.8%
Toddlers, family child care	\$8,502	38	25.4%	7.4%
4 year olds, family child care	\$8,103	39	24.2%	7.1%

Source: Child Care Aware (2022b).

Effective strategies for recruiting and retaining ECE workers

Extensive literature is clear about the pressing need to transform the early childhood education and care sector. Interconnected individual- and system-level factors (e.g., education, pay, health, gender, and racial disparities), which have only become more complex since the COVID-19 pandemic, have a huge impact on workforce recruitment and retention. In the most basic, individual-level terms, low wages and stressful working environments increase staff turnover, which reduces program quality and has negative impacts on child development. System-wide, programs have recently experienced drops in enrollment, which also creates further financial stress for providers who are forced to make difficult decisions about resources, including wages.

The ultimate question, then, is what works? The ECE workforce has such complex, long-embedded challenges that Minnesota needs multiple innovative solutions to build and maintain a high-quality workforce. Partly because of the pandemic, many states (including Minnesota) have amplified efforts for improving the early childhood workforce. A new Minnesota Department of Education report, called Minnesota early childhood strategic refresh: An updated cross-system plan for 2023 and beyond, briefly outlines a few existing initiatives in Minnesota:

- “Grow Your Own initiatives¹¹ and housing child development associate’s degree programs in high schools”
- “Job-embedded training and supports and within teacher preparation programs to include supporting multilingual learners, cultural responsibility, and trauma-informed work”
- “A review of early childhood licensure requirements and career pathways”
- “It is also of note that in recognition of workforce compensation issues as inextricably linked with program quality and effectiveness, new federal Head Start guidance will allow programs to reduce enrollment in favor of increasing staff compensation, creating an opportunity to move toward compensation parity between early childhood and elementary school teachers” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2023).

In addition, Valorose et al. report that “Minnesota has recently launched the Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program to provide direct payments to child care providers to improve compensation, and

¹¹ “Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are partnerships between educator preparation programs, school districts or charter schools, and community organizations that recruit and prepare local community members (e.g., parents, para-educators, non-certified school staff, high school students) to enter the teaching profession and teach in their communities” (from MDE’s website: <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/equitdiv/grow/>)

work is underway to develop an early care and education wage scale that will outline compensation expectations across all settings in the early care and education field” (Valorose et al., 2023, pg. 38).

Ultimately, recruitment and retention in this sector hinges on monetary investment. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment has created an infographic that clearly illustrates this point:

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/infographic/why-do-parents-pay-so-much-for-child-care-when-early-educators-earn-so-little/>.

1) Convince state and federal policymakers to invest more money in early childhood education

Literature is very consistent in describing the need for more money in early childhood education, particularly around building a healthy workforce. At present, parents and caregivers are seeing huge proportions of their paychecks go toward child care. Even with these high costs, child care providers are operating on thin profit margins, meaning the price that parents and caregivers are paying is still not enough to keep providers open. Despite the many problems the pandemic caused, one positive impact was significant government financial intervention, particularly through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Child Care Stabilization funding. Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that national “child care employment has reached and slightly exceeded February 2020 numbers,” suggesting that ARPA funding “may have helped the [child care] sector from falling into further crisis” (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2021, p. 70).

According to the *Minnesota Reformer*, “the Minnesota Legislature made substantial investments in child care in the [2023] legislative session, but the \$1 billion in funding over the next two years won’t come close to bridging the gap between the supply and demand for child care slots” (McVan, 2023).

A recommendation from another Wilder Research report on ECE workforce talks about the pressing need to grow and support early childhood education, specifically in the context of two new DHS-funded programs—Child Care Wayfinder and Empower to Educate. Both of these programs “seek to grow the number of early childhood educators.” The recommendation goes on to say that “Given the declining number of licensed family child care providers, and the lack of sufficient child care programs statewide, growing the number of all types of early childhood educators is critically important...especially in greater Minnesota, which lacks the density to sustain larger programs and where licensed family child care providers make up the bulk of the child care industry” Valorose et al., 2023, pg. 38).

2) Provide better pay and benefits to early childhood education workers

The disparity in pay between ECE and K-12 workers (and between educators and any other sector) is significant. Policies aimed at achieving pay parity are still rare and considered very ambitious. Given that ECE pay has been an issue for so long, Minnesota needs to re-envision what and how workers are paid. As shown in the literature, low pay for ECE workers has ripple effects in workers’ lives (e.g., health, basic needs), as well as at a societal level, as many adults depend on child care. Because there are deeply entrenched socio-economic and racial disparities at play, any efforts to reform pay structures for ECE workers should give special focus to centers that serve lower income families, as well as providers of color. The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, in a recent article stated:

“Across-the-board compensation increases for child care centers would likely lower turnover, but targeted increases in compensation at the lowest-paid centers could be expected to have a larger effect (per dollar spent) on the turnover disparities across centers” (Grunewald et al., 2022).

In addition to better pay, ECE workers need better benefits, including paid time for professional development. The literature shows that several states have piloted programs that offer bonuses for workers

who stay in their early childhood education job, which, according to evaluations, has shown to increase retention of ECE workers. Two of these programs are outlined below:

- **Teacher Recognition Program (Virginia):** In 2019, the state of Virginia used federal funding to pilot the Teacher Recognition Program, “which offered early educators up to \$1,500 if they remained teaching at their sites over an 8-month period” (Bassok et al., 2021). A randomized controlled trial of the program found that staff turnover was less among participants in the Teacher Recognition Program (14% of program participants left their position after 8 months, compared to 25% of those the control group). This difference was even more pronounced among workers at child care centers, versus school-based programs (15% of *child care center* program participants left their position after 8 months, compared to 30% of those the control group.)
- **Retaining Early Educators through Attaining Incentives Now (REETAIN; Minnesota):** In 2003, Child Care Aware Minnesota launched REETAIN (with a complementary national scholarship program called TEACH) to improve workforce retention among highly trained child care professionals (Shaw et al., 2019). The program offers financial incentives “to providers with degrees who stay in the field and continually participate in professional development on their own time. In return, bonus recipients agree to remain in their current positions for at least one year after receiving the incentive” (p. 6). Though it originally started in specific Minnesota counties, REETAIN spread statewide within five years of its launch and the number of applicants has doubled since 2013. As of 2018, 99 early childhood educators had received bonuses at an average of \$2,323 per recipient (Shaw et al., 2019). The two major successes reported of this program are the increased level of interest in the REETAIN program (i.e., more applicants) and positive feedback from grant recipients (Franchett et al., 2019). Eligible early childhood educators can apply for a REETAIN bonus through Child Care Aware Minnesota’s [website](#).

Ultimately, if the higher wages found in other sectors are not matched by the child care sector, staff turnover and worker shortages will persist. The pandemic created opportunities for government financial intervention to be implemented significantly, widely, and innovatively. These efforts must be sustained in order for them to have the needed transformative effect on this sector.

Experts and resources for continuously improving the ECE workforce

In addition to evaluation and research findings, the literature provided an excellent source of experts (and potential partners for Wilder’s Child Development Center) on the work of improving the early childhood education workforce. To supplement the next phase of the evaluation which includes interviews with ECE providers and training programs, Wilder has compiled a list of organizations and resources that could potentially be included or consulted in future evaluation activities (e.g., key informant interviews, staying abreast of current research projects).

Experts and potential partners

Minnesota has a passionate, robust network of early childhood education advocates; a small sample of organizations is listed below.

- [Child Trends](#); in partnership with Minnesota’s Department of Human Services and the University of Minnesota, Child Trends leads the [Minnesota Child Care Policy Research Partnership](#), which “aims to support children and families by addressing pressing questions that policymakers and researchers have about the effectiveness of policies and practices to support ECE access.”
- [Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota](#)

- [Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis](#)
- [First Children's Finance](#); FCF recently released a report related to their work with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to create a [cost model](#) that estimates the cost of providing child care in Minnesota.
- [Minnesota Children's Cabinet](#)
- [Minnesota's Early Childhood Workforce](#) (formerly the B8 Workforce Core Team)
- [National Governor's Association advisory group](#)
- [Think Small](#)

Studies or measures that may be helpful to future work

- **Building and Sustaining the Early Care and Education Workforce (BASE) project:** This national, multi-year project (2020-2025) aims to “identify effective approaches to recruiting, supporting, and retaining a qualified ECE workforce.” <https://www.mdrc.org/work/projects/building-and-sustaining-early-care-and-education-workforce-base#overview>
- **Supportive Environment Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL) tool:** Developed by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, or CSCCE, this validated tool addresses five areas of teachers' work environments: teaching supports, learning community, job crafting, adult well-being, and program leadership.
- **Urban Institute database:** The Urban Institute has a list (which lives in Smartsheet) compiling child care surveys and data analysis related to COVID-19: <https://www.urban.org/projects/list-covid-19-child-care-surveys-and-data-analyses>

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