



2022 Arkansas Workforce Study: Instructional Staff in Early Childhood Care & Education

Lorraine McKelvey, Ph.D.
Lauren Fox, M.P.S.
Melanie Chapin-Critz

UAMS[®]



COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
DEPARTMENT OF
FAMILY AND PREVENTIVE MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES



Executive Summary



Purpose

The most critical period of human brain development occurs in the first 5 years of life. Having high-quality care and stimulating environments in that first 5 years can influence how well children will learn in school, how well they will be able to find employment and support their own families, and how much they will give back to their communities.¹

While parents are their children’s first and most important teachers, they are often not their children’s only teachers. Half of Arkansas’s children under age 5 are in non-parental care for at least 10 hours per week.

To optimally support a child’s development, teachers in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) require specialized education and training as well as structural supports to implement what they have learned.

The last statewide workforce study took place in 2017.² Results highlighted low wages, minimal benefits, and a small proportion of the field having specialized education and training. Nearly 60% of ECCE teachers had trouble meeting basic economic needs, and 40% were food insecure.

HALF of
Arkansas’s
children are in
non-parental
care at least
10 hours per
week.



Since 2017, the ECCE sector has been impacted by several waves of economic change.

Minimum Wage Increases

On November 6, 2018, Arkansas voters passed Issue 5 to increase the state minimum wage. Over the last few years, the minimum wage has increased from \$8.50 to \$11 per hour.

Establishment of an Educator Scholarship Program

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Arkansas Scholarship Program, funded by the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE), was launched by the Arkansas Early Childhood Association (AECA) in 2019. It provides scholarships and support to early educators to help them earn Child Development Associate® Credentials or ECCE-related associate's or bachelor's degrees.

Pandemic-Related Changes

Programs experienced financial distress related to disruptions in enrollment and staff attendance during the COVID pandemic.³ Several waves of financial relief have been issued to providers throughout the state, including support through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), reimbursement for cleaning expenses, essential worker child care assistance, and quality improvement grants.

Through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), Arkansas has committed funds to support stability of the ECCE sector in this precarious time. DCCECE is issuing program grants to expand services to more children and to raise the quality of care and education. ARPA funds will also be used to expand the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program.

In a national survey, providers reported that these relief funds prevented program closures,⁴ but we do not know to what extent they protected teachers from economic distress.



In light of these changes and the positive influence early educators can have on children's future growth, **this study was designed to learn about compensation and benefits, education and professional development, and common barriers and supports present in the field of early childhood care and education (ECCE).**

Methodology

Teachers in the state's ECCE Professional Development Registry who had participated in training within the prior 6 months were invited to participate in an online survey. Nearly 1,300 professionals responded.

Participants included 1,151 current and 141 former educators from center-based and family child care programs. Job roles for current staff were split between 55% lead teachers in centers and 45% assistant teachers in centers and family child care (47%/54% for past staff). Respondents were representative of the invited sample with regards to race and ethnicity and geographic location. The responding sample was slightly better educated and more experienced than what would be expected from the proportion of those invited to participate.

40%
of current
teachers had
4 or fewer
years of
experience.



40%
of current
teachers
had higher
education
related to the
field.



Results

Results of the study highlight characteristics and experiences of teachers in the Arkansas ECCE workforce that make it difficult to maximize children's growth and development during that critical first 5 years of life. The workforce is reporting a high level of turnover, as many teachers are both new to the field and at-risk to leave.

High turnover means children often have less stability in their caregiving relationships. Also, caregivers who are less experienced and less educated may be less equipped to care for children.

This high turnover risk is driven by teachers having:

- Lower pay and fewer benefits than other educators.
- Difficulty paying for typical household expenses, such as food and rent.
- High risk for depression.
- Limited organizational support for professional development.

Demographics

Many teachers in this survey were new to the ECCE field. Fourteen percent (14%) had less than 1 year of experience, and 26% had between 1 and 4 years. Only 40% of teachers have college education related to young children's learning.

Compensation & Economic Security

Although 77% of Arkansas ECCE teachers work full time, many still do not earn enough to pay for basic necessities. Annual salaries range from \$24,000 - \$45,000 depending on education, years of experience, race, and the age of children in their classrooms.

Despite the complex needs of children younger than age 3, **teachers of infants and toddlers make about \$3,500 less per year** than colleagues in older classrooms.

An ECCE-related education (bachelor's degree or higher in an ECCE-related field or any education level with a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) increases annual pay by \$5,297 or more per year. However, there are racial inequities. We found statistically significant evidence that **teachers of color experience less return on investments of time and money spent on college education.**

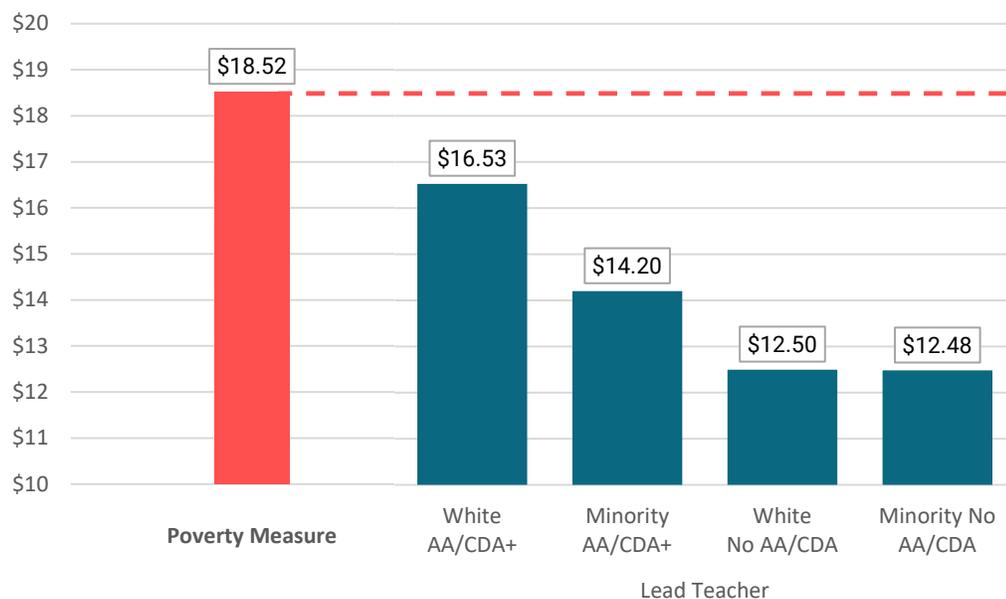
There are **INEQUITIES** for **teachers of color** and for **infant/toddler teachers.**



Many teachers do not have access to common job benefits, such as paid time off or medical insurance. More than half (52%) of teachers said they are not offered health insurance, and 68% are not offered retirement plans. Paid time off was more commonly available. About 80% said their job paid them for holidays or sick days.

Only 22% of the sample reported receiving cost-of-living adjustments or raises based on performance. In fact, 50% of ECCE teachers reported having trouble paying for their basic household expenses, such as rent, utilities, and transportation.

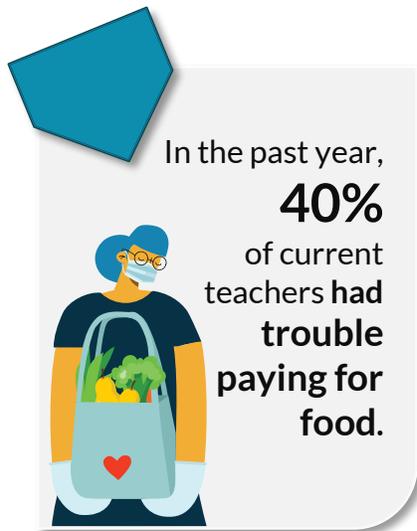
Lead Teacher Hourly Pay by Education & Race



Based on the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed measure (ALICE), even lead ECCE teachers do not make enough to pay for basic household necessities. To use the ALICE calculator, visit unitedforalice.org/wage-tool.

Nutrition is also a common concern. **Nearly 4 in 10 teachers reported having run out of food, cutting meal sizes, or skipping meals due to financial instability within the past year.**

Although most teachers work full time, many still need financial assistance to make ends meet. Just under half of teachers (46%) said they use some form of financial support, such as SNAP/WIC nutrition support or Medicaid/AR Kids First insurance.



Wage Compression

Minimum wage increases likely lifted some teachers out of poverty. However, most child care programs have little to no room in their operating budgets for rising personnel costs.

By federal standards, only 18% of families in Arkansas can afford child care at current costs.⁵ Private-pay programs risk losing customers and jeopardizing their businesses if they increase tuition. We were concerned that more senior personnel might be forfeiting income to compensate for higher entry-level wages.

Thus, in addition to conducting the teacher survey, we examined state occupational employment and wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics^a and compared inflation-adjusted salaries reported in this study and in our 2017

workforce study.⁶ In both, we see evidence that minimum wage increases were paid for, at least in part, with cuts in pay for staff with higher qualifications.

Wage compression of this nature disincentivizes ECCE workforce retention and professional development.

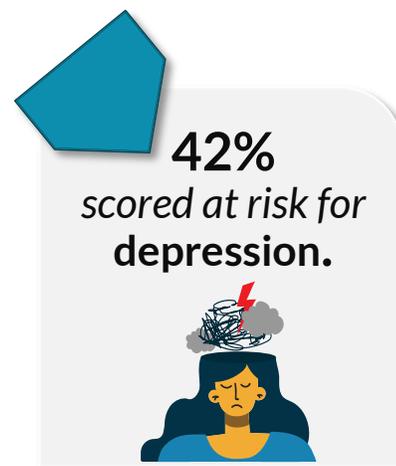
Mental Health & Professional Well-Being

There were risks and protective factors present in the sample's responses to questions about mental health and sense of professional purpose.

On one hand, a high percentage of teachers (81%) reported finding their work to be meaningful. This outlook is associated with workforce retention.⁷

Those who did not find their work to be as meaningful or who reported more disengagement from children were more likely to also report economic insecurity, food insecurity, and symptoms of depression. In this sample, symptoms of depression were common, with 42% of ECCE staff reporting risks.

High levels of teacher stress have been associated with workplace turnover and lower engagement in classroom learning activities.⁸



^a We compared salaries for Child Care Workers (SOC 39-9011); Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education (SOC 25-2011); Education Administrators, and Preschool and Child Care Center/Program (SOC 11-9031).

Behavior Regulation Concerns

Thirty-six percent (36%) of teachers reported that they are not well prepared to work with children who display challenging behaviors. Twenty-seven percent (27%) reported at least one child being suspended or expelled from the program in the past year. These forms of discipline have been associated with long-term harm to children's learning and development.⁹



Professional Development & Support for Continuing Education

Half (50%) of current teachers reported receiving no professional development support, including mentoring, coaching, individualized professional growth plans, or substitutes and compensation to cover training and planning outside of the classroom.

Most former teachers (76%) indicated that they had not been paid to participate in professional development required by state licensing standards.



Teacher Retention

One in 10 teachers (11%) said they plan to leave the field within the next 2 years, 22% said they plan to leave within 5 years, and 37% were not sure

Teachers who intend to leave the field within 2 years are more likely to work part time, have less than 5 years of experience, and to screen at risk for depression than other teachers.

Considerations for the Future

The influx of ARPA funds presents an opportunity to invest in policies and programs that will yield benefits after the 2-year funding period. Long-term solutions should ensure that ECCE businesses have steady revenue outside of family tuition and that this revenue be spent, in large part, on teacher compensation and professional development. We see a number of possibilities for acting on the results of this study.

Address barriers to professional development access.

Arkansas has a strong network of professional development providers, but many teachers are new to the field and have not had as many opportunities to engage in these learning opportunities. Barriers need to be addressed, especially in lower-quality programs, to help programs pay teachers for time spent learning outside of the classroom or outside of typical program hours.

Two possible strategies that stakeholders may consider are:

- a. **Coordinating a statewide communications campaign where all licensing and quality improvement staff as well as all state training partners promote the purpose of professional development and advertise free or low-cost options available to programs.**
- b. **Use ARPA funds to help programs in socially vulnerable areas pay for substitute teachers or program-wide professional development days.**

Sustain and expand efforts to promote higher education for ECCE staff.

ECCE teachers with college education are more likely to view teaching as a long-term profession. Arkansas is using ARPA funds to expand its T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, but the state will need to determine other funding sources to sustain it. Suggestions for supporting participation in higher education in the next 2 years are to:

- a. **Use data to steer communications plans and recruitment into T.E.A.C.H., particularly among teachers of color.**
- b. **Forgive college loans for individuals who earned ECCE-related degrees prior to T.E.A.C.H.**
- c. **Evaluate whether T.E.A.C.H. participation supports workforce retention and quality.**



Develop sustainable policies and programs that support financial stability for the ECCE workforce.

Arkansas is in the process of implementing a program called Step Up to WAGE\$ Arkansas (WAGE\$), which will provide salary supplements to teachers based on education and experience.

Similar to the T.E.A.C.H. expansion, the WAGE\$ launch will be temporarily funded through ARPA, and Arkansas will need to identify other long-term funding streams.

Meanwhile, Arkansas should consider braiding other programs and policies to improve teacher compensation. For example, the state could:

- a. **Offer refundable tax credits for ECCE staff based on education level, years of experience, and the quality rating of their program.** Louisiana’s School Readiness Tax Credit, established in 2007, has been a key driver of statewide improvements in teacher education and program quality.¹⁰
- b. **Fold model salary scales that incentivize college attendance and experience into grant and contract funding formulas, director training, and technical assistance.** For instance, North Carolina programs that receive ARPA-funded grants will receive higher amounts if they commit to pay staff according to the state’s model salary scale.

Build equitable compensation and education systems.

In Arkansas, ECCE teachers of color have fewer opportunities for professional and financial growth. They are paid less and do not see a return on their investment in higher education. These are factors that increase turnover risk and, as a recent Louisiana study showed, risk in the quality of interactions that children experience with their teachers.¹¹ Actions that would support equity in the state’s early childhood infrastructure include:

- a. **Use data from the CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index (SVI)^b to adjust funding formulas for communities of greatest need and to shape communications, policies, and programs for T.E.A.C.H., WAGE\$, and other professional development programs.** SVI takes into account minority status and socioeconomic status at the county level.
- b. **Ensure that trainers, technical assistants, and coaches who support program expansion and quality improvement receive training and practice to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in recruitment, program policies and practices.**



^b <https://svi.cdc.gov/map.html>

Brain development in the early years has a lifelong impact on a child’s success in school, careers, and relationships. For every dollar we spend on high quality early childhood education, we get back a 13% per year return on our investment.^a

The most influential component of quality is the teacher. Teachers with specialized knowledge shape learning environments that stimulate children’s growth and development and provide stability for children while parents are at work.

When we support the education, professional growth, and financial security of our early childhood educators, everyone benefits.