

*Transforming the \_\_\_\_\_*  
**Early Childhood Workforce**  
*\_\_\_\_\_ in Colorado*

## **The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017:**

Findings from Denver Metropolitan Area

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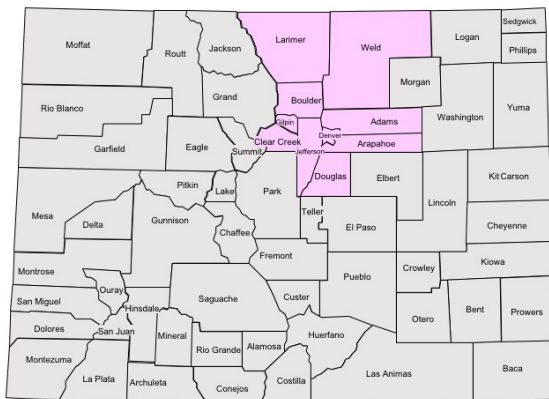
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# Executive Summary

Denver Metropolitan Area



This report describes the background characteristics, employment conditions and the well-being of a sample of early educators in the Denver Metropolitan area. The sample includes 447 directors, 327 lead teachers and 140 assistant teachers working in center-based early care and education (ECE) programs. It also includes 86 family child care providers working in licensed home-based settings.

## Key Findings

### EXPERIENCE

- Early educators in the sample have considerable experience in the field. Directors average 18 years, lead teachers average 13 years, assistant teachers average 9 years, and family child care providers average 16 years in the early care and education profession.
- However, the sample demonstrates much less stability within their jobs. Twenty percent of directors, 27% of lead teachers, 38% of assistant teachers, and 14% of family child care providers have been in their jobs less than two years.

### EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Sixty-three percent of directors, 59% of lead teachers, 35% of assistant teachers, and 30% of family child care providers hold a B.A. degree or higher. Frequently, however, these degrees are not focused on the care and education of young children.
- A sizable percentage of teachers and family child care providers would like to advance their education. Lack of financial support and convenient course offerings for working adults in the region prevent many from doing so.
- Family child care providers experience significantly more barriers in accessing in-service professional development than do teachers. These barriers include not having substitute coverage, having to take unpaid workdays to attend, and lack of professional development opportunities tailored to home-based providers.

## COMPENSATION AND ECONOMIC FRAGILITY

- The median hourly wages for early educators in the region are low, calculated at \$20.44 for directors, \$15.91 for lead teachers, \$12.97 for assistant teachers, and \$12.63 for family child care providers.
- Forty-one percent of teachers have work-sponsored health insurance, and 33% have a work-sponsored retirement plan; 58% of family child care providers have health insurance, and 20% have a retirement savings plan.
- As a result of these low wages and lack of workplace benefits, 17% of directors, 24% of teachers, and 26% of family child care providers have a second job. In addition, 15% of directors, 27% of teachers, and 26% of family child care providers receive at least one public subsidy reserved for low-income individuals or families.

## TURNOVER

- Average turnover rates among center-based staff in the region range from 13% to 38% annually, depending on the position. Seventeen percent of directors, 25% of lead teachers, 15% of assistant teachers, and 15% of family child care providers plan on leaving their jobs soon.
- Seventy-three percent of directors indicate that it is difficult to fill teaching positions and that it takes an average of 2.7 months to fill an opening. As a result, 47% of directors indicate that they are forced to hire unqualified staff to keep classrooms open.

## WORKFORCE WELL-BEING

- Low wages for teachers and lack of benefits for family child care providers serve as major sources of job frustration, as do policies governing ECE and increases in children's challenging behaviors.
- The rates of depression among teachers are twice as high as would be expected in the general population.
- Early educators appear to be moderately emotionally and physically drained by their jobs but also feel a strong sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in their work.



# I. Introduction

Several decades of research have established the benefits of high-quality early care and education (ECE) to children's short and longer-term social-emotional and academic outcomes<sup>i</sup>. Research also points to the important role that high-quality ECE can play in narrowing the achievement gap between lower-income children and their higher-income peers<sup>ii</sup>. Early educators are considered "*the single most important factor*" in high-quality ECE, as young children thrive when their early educators have the knowledge and skills needed to forge positive relationships with children and when they can respond to their individual learning needs<sup>iii</sup>.

In recent years, advances in the field's understanding of the science of early learning and the important role that early educators can play in fostering children's school readiness have resulted in increased job expectations for many early educators<sup>iv</sup>. In addition to supporting young children's emotional development and early friendships, many early educators now provide instruction in literacy, math, and science. Many are also charged with narrowing the achievement gap between lower-income children, many of whom have recently immigrated to the United States and are English language learners, and their English-speaking, higher-income peers. Many also support the development of children with special health, behavioral, and learning needs. Early educators certainly have a complex job that requires a complex set of knowledge and skills necessary to promote positive outcomes for the diverse array of young children that they serve.

Yet despite the fact that early educators' jobs have expanded in recent years, the professional qualifications required, the compensation that they receive, and the environments in which they work, often do not adequately reflect the professional nature of their job or the complexity of the work. Currently, Colorado requires just four classes at the Associate's (A.A.) degree level in ECE coursework to serve as a lead teacher in community-based ECE centers, two classes in ECE at the A.A. level to direct a small center, and 10 classes in ECE at the A.A. level to direct a large center. No formal education requirements exist for providers who care for children in licensed family child care homes. Educational requirements for teachers in Head Start and public school-based pre-kindergarten programs are often slightly higher. Head Start now requires that 50% of lead teachers hold a bachelor's (B.A.) degree in ECE, while educational requirements for public school-based lead teachers vary by school district, ranging from four ECE classes to a B.A. degree with licensure. Given the important role that early educators play in the lives of children, calls have been made by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council<sup>v</sup> to raise educational requirements for lead teachers to the level of a B.A. to better reflect the minimum level of professional knowledge needed to be effective in the job.

Similarly, the wages that most early educators receive have not kept pace with the professional nature of the work and are often less than those made by dog walkers and janitors<sup>vi</sup>. A recent national study documenting the compensation of early educators found that their average hourly wage qualified most for public assistance in nearly every state<sup>vii</sup>. Many early educators also have limited or no workplace benefits, including health insurance, employer sponsored retirement savings, or paid sick and vacation days<sup>viii</sup>. As a result, many struggle to make ends meet<sup>ix</sup>.

In addition, many early educators, especially if they work outside of public school settings, work in environments that do not reflect the professional needs of educators or the types of practice environments that enable effective instruction or security-enhancing relationships with children. Classrooms are often understaffed, and many teachers have unreliable work schedules in which they are sent home without pay if child attendance is low, or are required to move in and out of different classrooms throughout the day to meet teacher-child ratio requirements<sup>x</sup>. Many also have limited or no paid planning time or professional development days and work in settings in which attaining more education and training is not linked to substantial increases in wages.<sup>xi</sup>

These workplace conditions not only constrain an early educator's ability to deliver high-quality services to children, but they also contribute to occupational burnout and to high rates of turnover and persistent difficulties in attracting and retaining effective early educators in the field. Turnover rates among early educators are indeed one of the highest in the education profession<sup>xii</sup>. More importantly, ECE programs with high rates of turnover have been linked to decreases in children's school readiness skills, and the lack of stability in the classroom can lead to increases in children's challenging behaviors and to increased stress among staff who remain<sup>xiii</sup>.

Thus if ECE is to live up to its promises of narrowing the achievement gap and preparing children for elementary school and beyond, it is critical to elevate the profession. This includes improving the status and prestige of the field, the policies and infrastructure that support the professional preparation and ongoing professional learning opportunities available to early educators, and improving the compensation and working conditions of the professionals in the field.

## **TRANSFORMING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN COLORADO**

With this in mind, Early Milestones Colorado, the Colorado Department of Human Services, and the Colorado Department of Education spearheaded the *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado* project. The goal of this project is to develop strategies to support and retain a well-qualified early educator workforce in Colorado and to assure that they are appropriately compensated to be able to attract talented new professionals into the field. As a part of this project, the University of Colorado Denver and NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a statewide survey of early educators in Colorado to identify the current strengths, gaps, and unmet needs in the workforce.

The purpose of the current report is to examine the background characteristics, education levels, employment characteristics, and well-being of a subset of early educators from the statewide sample drawn from the Metro area. Such information can help decision-makers target policies and better understand the investments needed to help ensure an effective early educator workforce in the Metro area. It can also be used to understand where recruitment efforts can be targeted to build a workforce pipeline in the region.

## II. Sample

The sample used for this report is drawn from a statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Colorado. The sample includes 447 directors, 327 lead teachers, 140 assistant teachers, and 86 family child care providers who provide ECE services to children birth through age five in Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Clear Creek, Denver, Douglas, Gilpin, Jefferson, Larimer, and Weld counties. These counties are collectively referred to as the Denver Metropolitan area, abbreviated to the “Metro area” for ease of reading. The sample reflects center level information<sup>1</sup> on 30% of the center and public school-based ECE programs and 44% of the licensed family child care (FCC) homes in the Metro area participating in Colorado’s Early Childhood Professional Development and Information System (PDIS).

For the purposes of this report, community-based ECE programs are defined as centers not located in public schools and that do not receive Head Start or Early Head Start funding. Public school-based programs are considered those that are governed by a school district and are located in public schools. Head Start programs are defined as programs that receive Head Start or Early Head Start funding but are not located in public schools. Table 1 displays the percentages of center-based early educators working in different ECE service sectors in the Metro area who responded to the survey.

In a number of instances throughout this report, the sample from the Metro area is compared to the entire statewide survey sample. The statewide sample was drawn from 711 center directors, 2,306 lead teachers, 1,118 assistant teachers, and 496 family child care providers. It is important to note that the Metro area sample and the overall statewide sample are not considered representative of all early educators in the Metro area or in the state. Instead, the samples have been weighted to reflect a representative sample of early educators participating in the PDIS both at a state level and in the Metro area. For more information about the sample and how it was collected, please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report*<sup>xiv</sup>.

**TABLE 1. ECE SERVICE SECTOR OF CENTER-BASED RESPONDENTS**

Director (N = 447)	Percent
Community	40%
Head Start	31%
Public School	29%
Lead Teacher (N = 327)	
Community	57%
Head Start	22%
Public School	21%
Assistant Teacher (N = 140)	
Community	39%
Head Start	29%
Public School	32%

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, all community-based centers, Head Start centers, and public school-based programs are combined and referred to collectively as ECE “centers”. In the statewide report, figures for each type of early learning service sector are reported separately. For this report, the sample within each service sector was too small to report figures by service sector.

### III. Background Characteristics

The following section presents key findings related to the ages, experience levels and ethnicities of the sample of early educators in the Metro area.

#### AGE

Table 2 displays the ages of the sample by job role. The first figures in each column reflect the sample in the Metro area. The figures in parentheses reflect the state sample.

In the Metro area:

- Directors average 48 years of age,
- Lead teachers average 41 years of age,
- Assistant teachers average 40 years of age, and
- Family child care providers average 48 years of age.

**TABLE 2. AGE BY JOB ROLE**

Age	Directors	Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers	FCC Providers
	Metro (State)	Metro (State)	Metro (State)	Metro (State)
<b>Under 20</b>	0% (0%)	1% (1%)	6% (6%)	0% (0%)
<b>20-29</b>	8% (7%)	23% (22%)	25% (27%)	6% (8%)
<b>30-39</b>	24% (25%)	27% (26%)	20% (21%)	21% (19%)
<b>40-49</b>	28% (28%)	24% (24%)	20% (21%)	27% (26%)
<b>50-59</b>	28% (27%)	19% (20%)	21% (18%)	33% (33%)
<b>60 or older</b>	12% (13%)	7% (7%)	7% (7%)	12% (14%)

#### EXPERIENCE

Table 3 displays the average years of experience in the field and in their jobs for the sample in the Metro area. For comparison purposes, the first column provides figures for the state sample.

The figures suggest that early educators in the Metro area, at least those in this sample, have considerable experience in the field and have an unexpected degree of *occupational stability*. However it is also important to note that many early educators in the sample have been in their jobs for less than two years, including:

- 20% of directors,
- 27% of lead teachers,
- 38% of assistant teachers, and
- 14% of family child care providers.



Alternatively, these figures suggest a relatively high degree of *job instability*, at least for center-based staff.

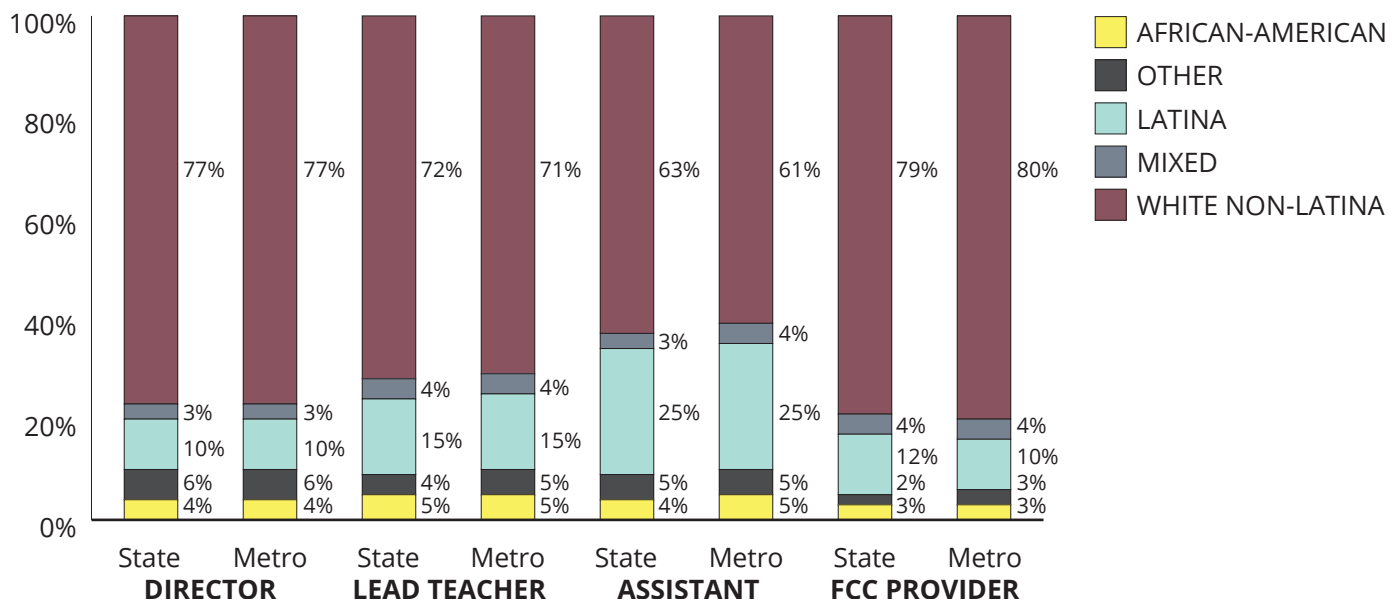
**TABLE 3. EXPERIENCE IN FIELD AND IN CURRENT POSITION**

	Mean: State	Mean: Metro	Min.: Metro	Max.: Metro
<b>Years of Experience in Field</b>				
Director	17.69	17.87	0.00	45.33
Lead Teacher	12.83	12.75	0.00	47.67
Assistant Teacher	8.28	8.56	0.00	47.00
Family Child Care Provider	16.23	16.04	0.08	40.50
<b>Years in Current Position</b>				
Director	8.67	8.56	0.00	45.33
Lead Teacher	6.75	6.77	0.00	40.75
Assistant Teacher	5.02	5.06	0.00	47.00
Family Child Care Provider	14.28	14.11	0.08	40.05

## ETHNICITY

Figure 1 displays the ethnicities<sup>2</sup> of both the state sample and the sample drawn from the Metro area. The figure shows that across job roles, the majority in both samples is white, non-Latina. The figure also shows that a higher percentage of Latina early educators are in assistant teaching positions than in lead teacher or director positions.

**FIGURE 1. RACE/ETHNICITY**



<sup>2</sup> The "Other" group consists of Native American, Pacific Islanders, and Asian and Asian American early educators. These groups were combined because there were very few respondents in each category.

## **LANGUAGE**

In the Metro area sample, 54% of teachers report not speaking the same language as all of the children in their classroom. When a language mismatch occurred, it was most commonly in classrooms in which there are children who speak Spanish but the responding teacher does not. This occurred in 60% of the cases in which a teacher reported a teacher-child language mismatch. Other less common language mismatches occurred when children spoke Mandarin/ Cantonese, Vietnamese, or Arabic and teachers did not.

Of family child care providers, 21% report not speaking the same language as all of the children in their program. When a language mismatch occurred, it was most commonly that the provider did not speak Spanish but at least one child in the program did. This mismatched occurred in 18% of the cases. No other specific language mismatches occurred in more than a few instances to detect a trend.

# IV. Professional Preparation and In-Service Professional Development

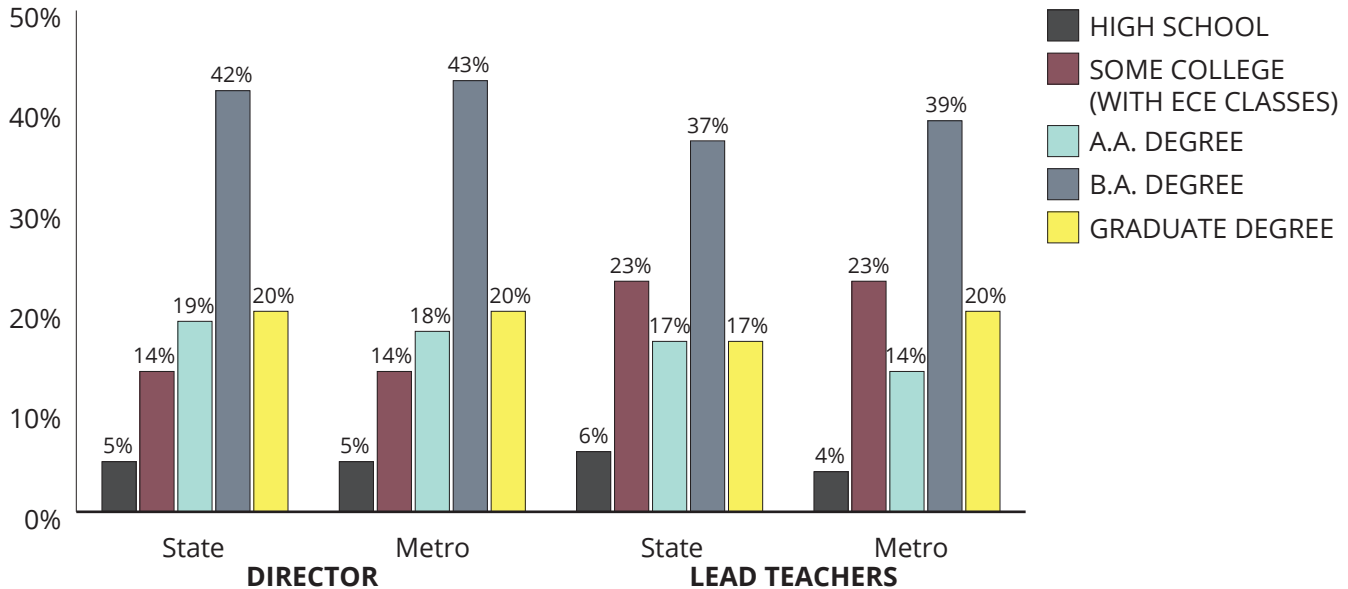
This section provides information on the educational background of the sample, including their educational attainment, degree focus, perceptions of their professional preparation, and the barriers that early educators in the Metro area report experiencing in accessing higher education and in-service professional development.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

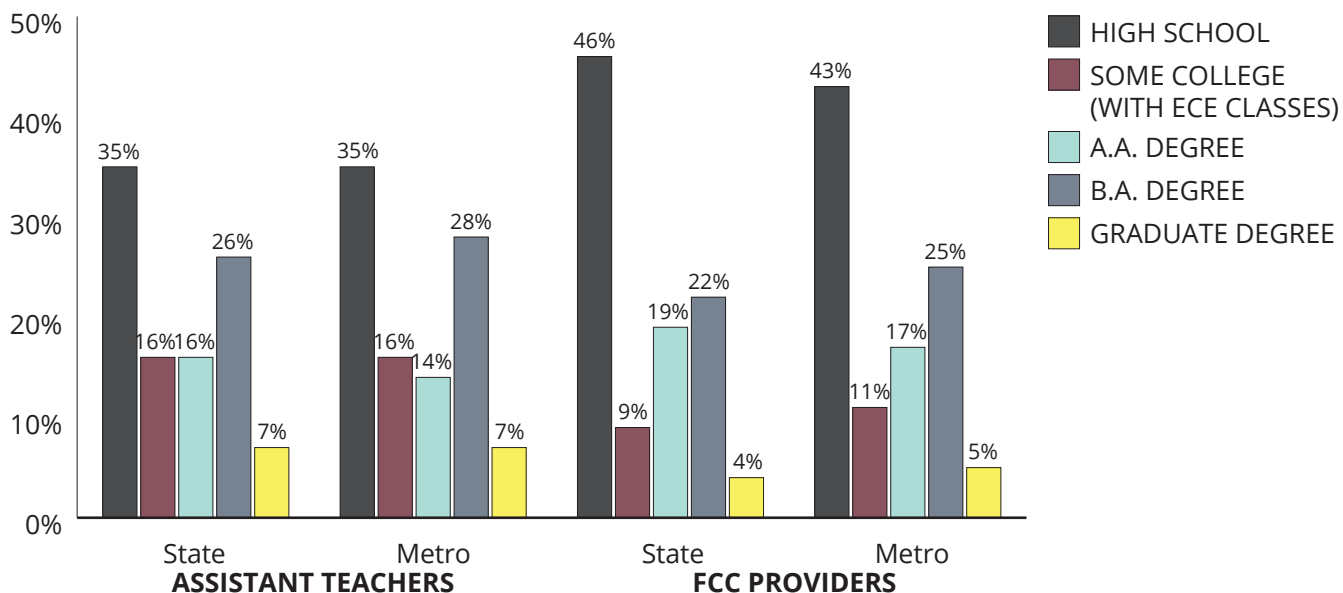
Figures 2 and 3 display the education levels of both the state sample and the Metro area sample by job role. The figures show similar educational levels across job roles between the two samples.

In the Metro area, the majority of directors (63%) and lead teachers (59%) hold at least a B.A. degree. In addition, 81% of directors, and 73% of lead teachers hold at least an A.A. degree. Lower education levels are observed for assistant teachers and family child care providers where 35% of assistant teachers hold at least a B.A. degree and 49% hold at least an A.A. degree. For family child care providers, 30% hold at least a B.A. degree, while 47% hold at least an A.A. degree.

**FIGURE 2. EDUCATION LEVELS: DIRECTORS AND LEAD TEACHERS**



**FIGURE 3. EDUCATION LEVELS: ASSISTANT TEACHERS AND FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS**

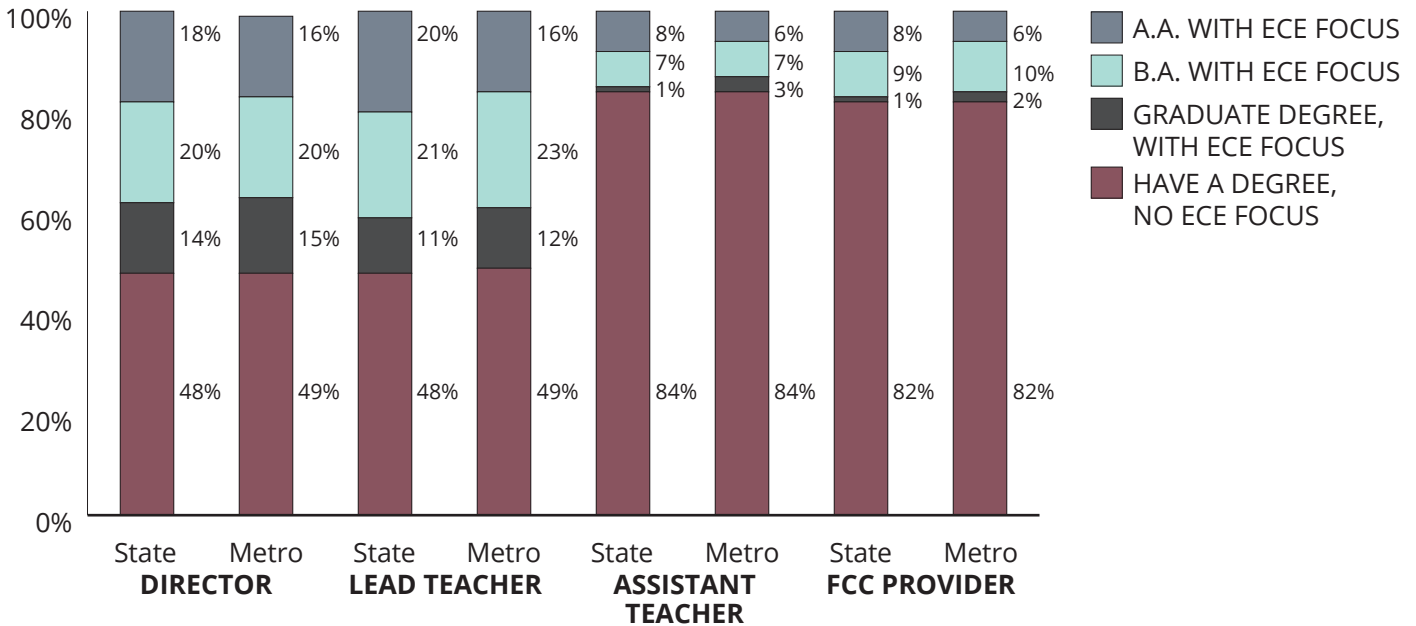


### DEGREE FOCUS

Figure 4 shows the percentage of degree holders in the state sample and in the Metro area sample who hold at least one degree focused on young children. These degrees could include Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Child Development, or Human Development and Family Relations, which collectively are referred to as a degree with an ECE focus.

The figure shows that, similar to the state sample, early educators in the Metro area have a wide range of educational backgrounds. Of those with degrees, 51% of directors and lead teachers, 16% of assistant teachers, and 18% of family child care providers have a degree focused on the care and education of young children.

**FIGURE 4. DEGREE FOCUS**



**PERCEPTIONS OF PREPARATION**

Early educators were also asked to rate how well prepared they feel to meet the care and learning needs of different children and to provide instruction across curricular areas. They rated their preparation on a four-point scale, with four denoting very prepared. For this analysis, lead and assistant teachers are combined. Table 4 displays results.

In general, early educators in the Metro area perceive themselves to be prepared to meet the care and learning needs of typically developing children and to work with diverse families. They report feeling less prepared to meet the needs of children living in poverty, children who have experienced trauma, children with special health, behavior, and learning needs, and English language learners. Across curricular areas, teachers and family child care providers both report feeling slightly less prepared to support children’s emergent literacy and STEM learning than they do instructing in the creative arts.



**TABLE 4. PERCEPTIONS OF PREPARATION FOR JOB**

	Teachers		FCC Providers	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>How prepared to support the needs of:</b>				
Typically developing children	3.62	0.75	3.73	0.58
Children with developmental delays	3.01	0.82	2.89	0.82
Children with special health care needs	2.77	0.91	2.56	0.93
English language learners	2.96	0.92	2.73	1.05
Children from diverse cultural backgrounds	3.16	0.82	3.07	0.85
Children living in poverty	3.09	0.88	2.86	0.90
Children who have experienced trauma	2.71	0.82	2.63	0.90
Children with challenging behaviors	3.05	0.86	2.92	0.81
<b>How prepared to teach:</b>				
Language arts/literacy	3.11	0.84	3.20	0.86
STEM	3.18	0.84	3.20	0.86
Creative arts	3.30	0.81	3.34	0.79
<b>How prepared to:</b>				
Conduct and use child assessments	3.41	0.80	3.14	0.83
Work with diverse families	3.92	0.97	3.44	0.60
Run a business	NA	NA	3.66	0.64

## ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

Teachers and family child care providers in the Metro area were also asked about their desire to pursue a degree or certificate focused on the care and education of young children and the types of supports that they believe that they would need to do so successfully. Results suggest that, of the teachers and family child care providers not currently enrolled in a degree or certificate program, there is a desire to potentially continue their education from:

- 87% of teachers, and
- 73% of family child care providers.

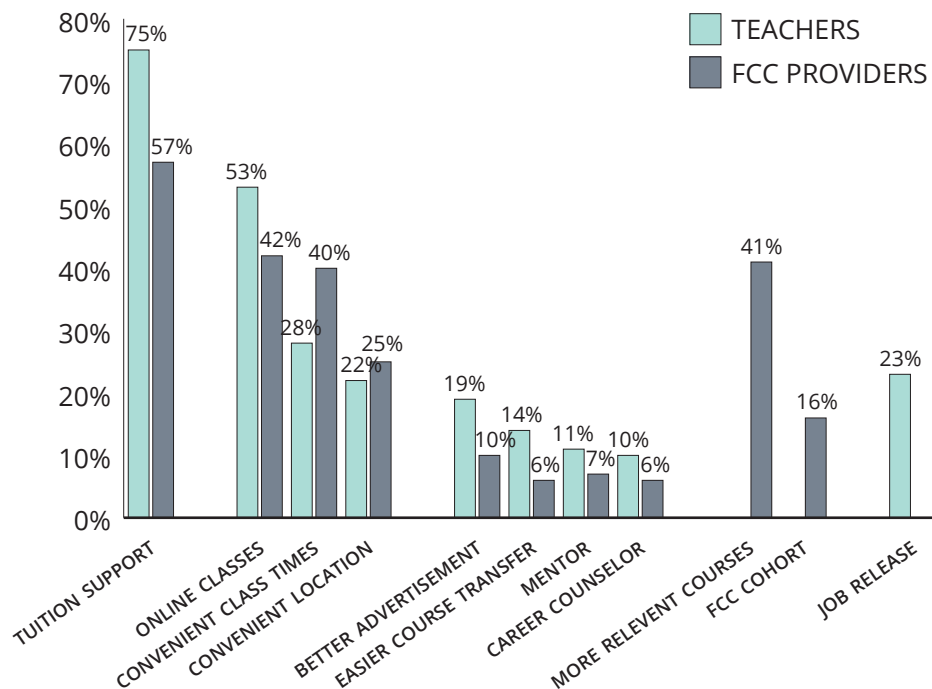
Figure 5 displays the supports that teachers and family child care providers in the Metro area report would motivate them to continue their education or that they would need to be successful at pursuing a degree or certificate. Supports appear on the figure if they were nominated by at least 10% of either teachers or family child care providers. For the purpose of this analysis, lead and assistant teachers are combined.

**Financial Support:** By far the most commonly mentioned supports are financial, including scholarships and tuition assistance. Financial supports are considered necessary by approximately 75% of teachers and 57% of family child care providers.

**Improved Accessibility:** Sizable percentages of both family child care providers and teachers report that the lack of convenient course offerings for working adults in the Metro area prevent many from enrolling in school. They indicate that more convenient class times, more online course offerings, and more convenient class locations are important to their decision to pursue higher education.

**Greater Student Support Services:** Some teachers and, to a slightly lesser extent, family home providers note the need for and importance of particular student services to enable their academic success and interest in pursuing higher education. These include better advising, easier course transfer between colleges, career counseling, and mentoring to support the translation of theory into classroom practices.

**FIGURE 5. SUPPORTS NEEDED TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION**



There were also supports unique to teachers and to family child care providers that they suggest would enable their academic advancement.

**Improved Relevance of Coursework:** Family child care providers, in particular, note that improving the relevance of coursework to include course content on providing care and education in home-based programs would be important for approximately 41% of them and would motivate them to consider pursuing a certificate or a degree. In addition, 16% of family child care provid-

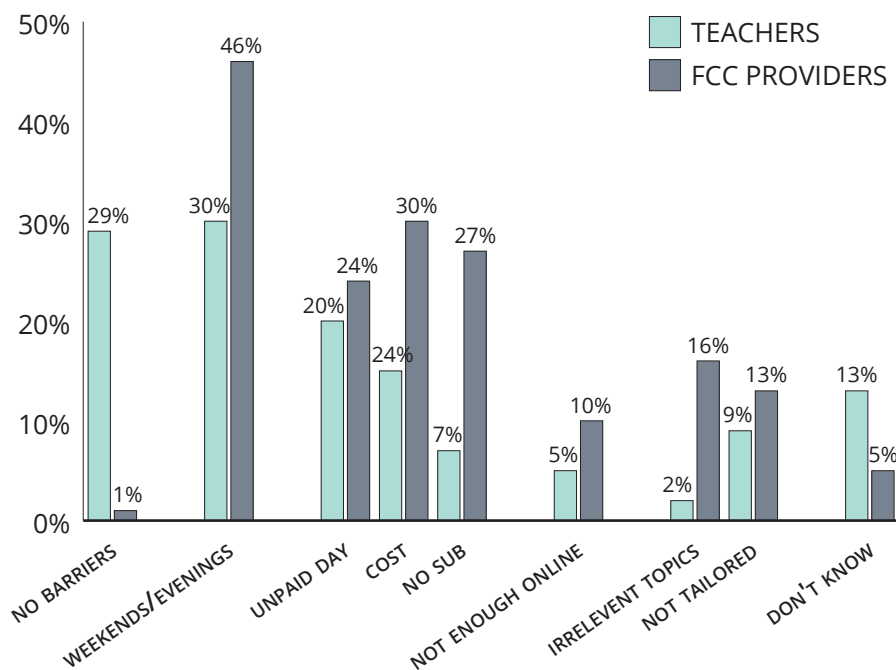
ers also mention that the availability of a family child care degree cohort would weigh into their decision to advance their education.

**Job Release:** Approximately 23% of teachers note that having job release time to attend class would be an important support that they would need to enroll in school.

### ACCESSING IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Early educators in the region were also asked about the barriers that they experience in accessing in-service professional development that might prevent them from participating. Figure 6 displays their responses by job role. The figure shows that family child care providers appear to experience more barriers than do teachers. Twenty-nine percent of teachers indicate that they do not experience any significant barriers related to in-service professional development, while only 1% of family child care providers report experiencing no barriers.

**FIGURE 6. BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING IN IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**



Of those who report barriers, a sizable percentage of both teachers (30%) and family child care providers (46%) mention that when professional development occurs in their communities, it is typically on weekends when they are too tired to attend or during other unpaid, non-work time.

For family child care providers, not having access to substitutes (27%) and having to take an unpaid work day (24%), coupled with the expense of trainings (30%) create a constellation of factors that prevent them from participating.

In addition, approximately 16% of family child care providers also indicate that many of the professional development offerings available are focused on teachers in center-based programs and are not tailored to home-based ECE settings. Consequently, they find them to be irrelevant to home-based programs and they often elect not to participate. Similarly, approximately 9% of teachers and 13% of family child care providers mention that professional development opportunities are often not tailored to experienced practitioners and thus they often forego trainings.

Thirteen percent of teachers report that they do not typically know about professional development opportunities in their area. However, only 5% of family child care providers mention that they are unaware of professional development opportunities.

# V. Compensation

This section describes the hourly wages, benefits, and economic fragility of the sample of early educators in the Metro area.

## WAGES

Table 5 displays the median hourly wages, by job role, earned by the sample. For comparative purposes, the first column of the table presents the median hourly wages of the state sample.

Based on a 40-hour work week and 12-month school year, the median director earns approximately \$46,675 a year, the median lead teacher earns approximately \$32,456 a year, the median assistant teacher earns approximately \$26,978 a year, and the median family child care provider earns approximately \$26,270 a year<sup>1</sup>. In Denver County, for example, the self-sufficiency standard for a one-parent household with one child is \$47,914<sup>xv</sup> annually. Thus, across job roles, no position is earning a wage that enables self-sufficiency.

**TABLE 5. MEDIAN WAGES**

	Median State	Median Metro	Min. Metro	Max. Metro
<b>Hourly Wage</b>				
Director	\$20.17	\$20.44	\$9.35	\$35.00
Lead Teacher	\$14.97	\$15.91	\$8.31	\$43.06
Assistant Teacher	\$12.00	\$12.97	\$8.31	\$28.00
Family Child Care Provider	\$12.63	\$12.63	\$8.50	\$33.00

For more information about how wages vary by ECE service sector and by education level, please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report*.

## BENEFITS

Table 5 displays the percentage of teachers<sup>2</sup> in community-based ECE centers who work at least 30 hours a week who receive different employer-sponsored benefits<sup>3</sup> and the percentage of family child care providers who either purchase different benefits or receive them through their spouse or partner’s job. We focus on community-based early educators because typically school districts and Head Start programs offer an employer-sponsored benefits package. For comparative purposes, the figure in parentheses reflects the percentage of the state sample that receives a particular benefit.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that most family child care providers care for children more than 40 hours per week.

<sup>2</sup> This analysis combines lead and assistant teachers.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that teachers were asked whether they received particular benefits from their employers. It is possible that they elected not to enroll in their work-sponsored benefits program.



**TABLE 6. BENEFITS RECEIVED BY COMMUNITY-BASED EARLY EDUCATORS**

Benefits	Teachers Metro (State)	FCC Providers Metro (State)
Health Insurance	41% (40%)	58% (56%)
Dental Insurance	31% (28%)	41% (22%)
Vision Insurance	25% (22%)	28% (12%)
Life Insurance	25% (21%)	42% (31%)
Retirement	33% (26%)	20% (8%)
Family Leave	13% (13%)	NA
Paid Sick Days	51% (51%)	26% (21%)
Paid Vacation Days	51% (66%)	43% (37%)
Paid Professional Development Days	38% (37%)	9% (8%)
Free or Reduced Child Care	21% (30%)	NA
Receive No Benefits	16% (12%)	25% (28%)

As can be seen in Table 6, a sizable percentage of early educators, and in particular, family child care providers, do not receive the benefits they need to foster their economic and physical well-being. In this sample, 16% of teachers and 25% of family child care providers do not receive any benefits.

### **ECONOMIC FRAGILITY**

As a result of the low wages and lack of many work-sponsored benefits, early educators report having difficulties making ends meet. Many early educators in the region have a second job, including:

- 17% of directors,
- 24% of teachers (lead and assistant), and
- 26% of family child care providers.

In addition, a number of early educators in the region receive at least one public subsidy reserved for very low income families, including:

- 15% of directors,
- 27% of teachers (lead and assistant), and
- 26% of family child care providers.

These public subsidies include Section 8 housing vouchers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid or Child Health Insurance Plans, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps), Colorado Child Care Assistance Program subsidies, and free and reduced school lunches.

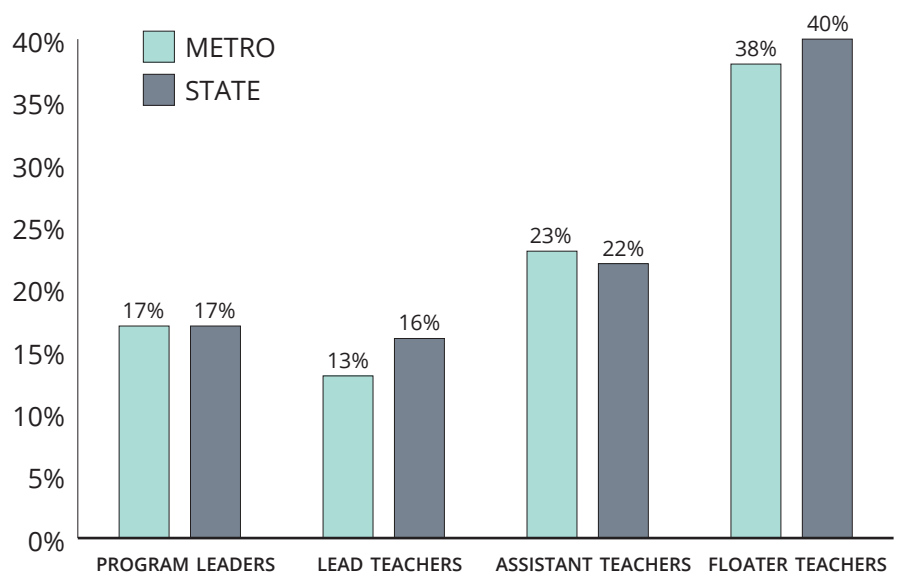
# VI. Turnover and Job Intentions

This section presents information on the turnover rates of center-based staff and on the job intentions of the sample of early educators in the Metro area.

## TURNOVER

Figure 7 displays the turnover rates over the past 12 months for the state sample and for the sample in the Metro area, as reported by directors. For this analysis, program leaders include job roles such as directors, assistant directors, curriculum coordinators, and any other type of similar positions. Floater teachers are defined as teaching assistants who are not assigned to one particular classroom but instead provide support across different classrooms in a center throughout a day. Because the nature and structure of their job roles are different from teachers assigned to one classroom, they are treated as a distinct type of teacher in this analysis.

FIGURE 7. ANNUAL TURNOVER RATES BY JOB ROLE



The figure shows especially high rates of turnover for paraprofessional positions (e.g., assistant and floater teachers) both in the state sample and in the Metro area sample. No differences in turnover rates were observed between infant/toddler teachers and preschool teachers (not shown).

Because of the high rates of turnover among early educators, directors have to frequently fill vacant positions. Of the directors sampled in the Metro area, 73% report that it is either “very difficult” or “difficult” to fill open teaching positions and that the average time it takes to fill a vacant position is 2.71 months. Approximately 47% also note that they are often forced to fill vacant positions with unqualified staff in order to keep classrooms open.

## JOB INTENTIONS

Many early educators in the Metro area, particularly those in lead teaching roles in centers, report that they are planning on leaving their jobs within the next two years. This includes:

- 17% of directors,
- 15% of assistant teachers, and
- 25% of lead teachers,
- 15% of family child care providers.

For more information on how turnover and job intentions vary by early learning service sector, please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report* for these analyses using the statewide sample.

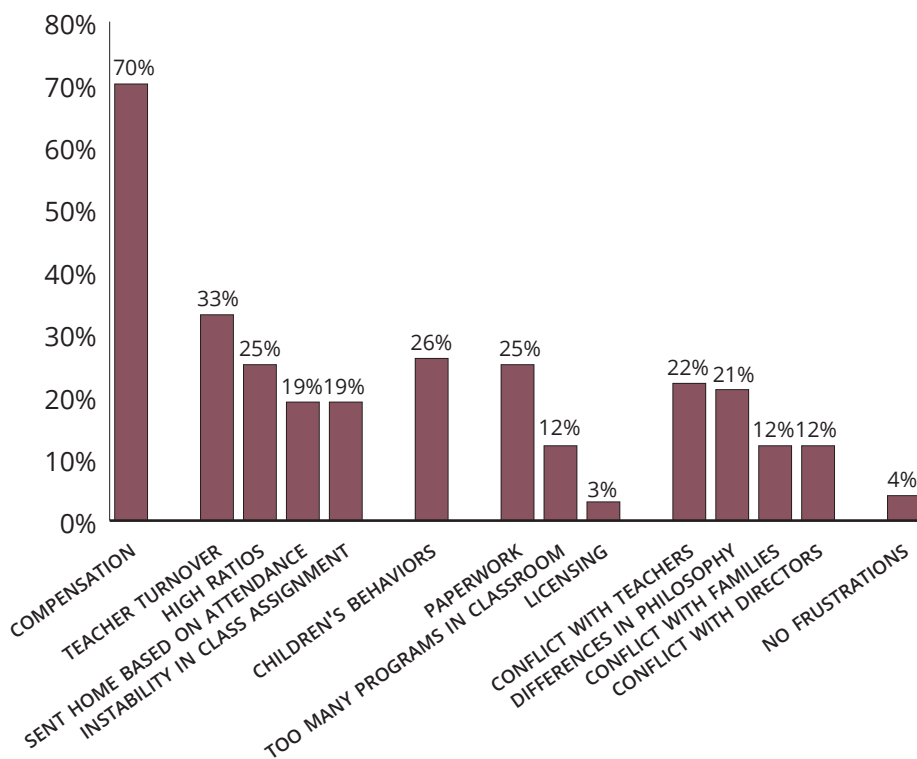
# VII. Work Environments

The following section presents information on early educators' work environments, including their job frustrations.

## FRUSTRATIONS

Early educators were asked to report on their three most significant job stressors and frustrations. Results are displayed for teachers<sup>1</sup> in Figure 8 and are displayed for family child care providers in Figure 9. In a number of respects, teachers and family child care providers experience similar job frustrations. These frustrations typically fall within six categories: compensation, policies, children's behaviors, conflict, staffing, and work context.

**FIGURE 8. TEACHER JOB FRUSTRATIONS**



**Compensation:** Both groups report that compensation is a major source of job frustration. For family child care providers, lack of benefits (23%) serves a source of frustration for more providers than does low pay (16%), which is the major concern for teachers in centers (70%).

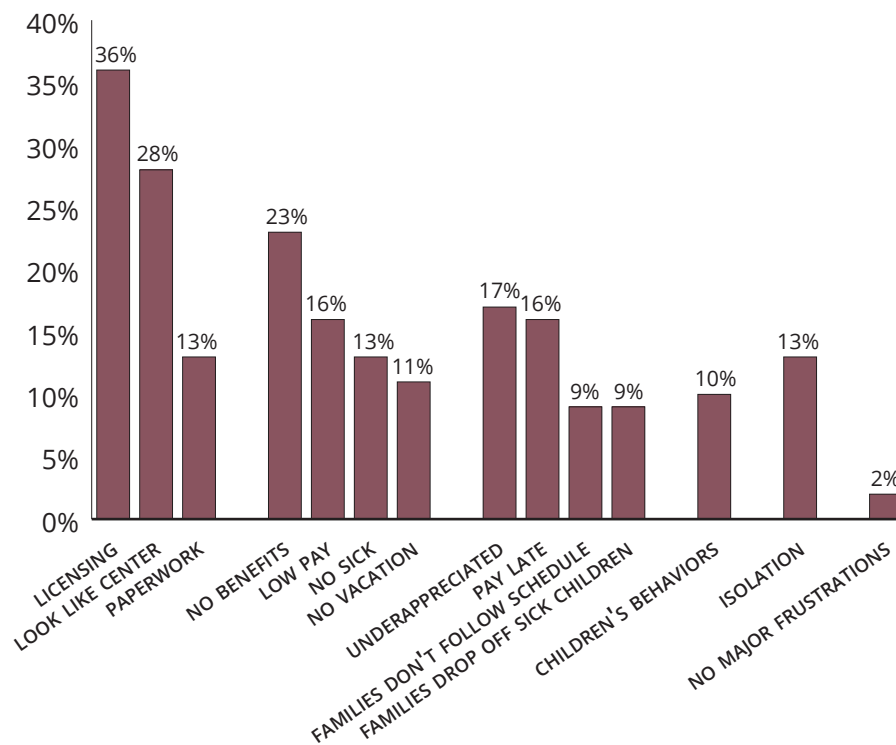
**Policies:** For family child care providers, state licensing rules and regulations governing the operation of home-based programs (36%), quality improvement initiatives and programs that they perceive push family child care homes to function more like centers (28%), and excessive paperwork and reporting (13%) emerge as important sources of job dissatisfaction. Teachers in centers also report that excessive paperwork (25%) is a source of job dissatisfaction, as are having multiple programs and quality initiatives in their classrooms (12%) that they consider burdensome and that take away from their time with children.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of these analyses, lead and assistant teachers responses are combined.

**Children's Behavior:** Both teachers and family child care provider note children's challenging behaviors as a source of job frustration. However, more teachers in centers (26%) appear stressed by children's behavioral issues than do family child care providers (10%).

**Conflict:** Some teachers and family child care providers also mention conflict as a source of work stress, although the sources of their conflict appears different. For example, 22% of teachers report conflict with other teachers, 21% report differences in beliefs about teaching and caregiving with their center's philosophy as a source of conflict and stress. Alternatively, for some family child care providers, conflict with families cause work stress. Approximately 17% of family child care providers mention feeling undervalued and underappreciated by families. Approximately 16% experience conflict over families paying late, while 9% report frustration over families not following drop-off and pick-up schedules or sick child policies.

**FIGURE 9. FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDER JOB FRUSTRATIONS**



Teachers and family child care providers also experience job frustrations that are unique to their employment context.

**Staffing:** For teachers, staffing appears to be a significant source of frustration. Many express frustration over teacher turnover in their classrooms (33%), high teacher-child ratios (25%), being sent home without pay if child attendance is low (19%), and lack of a stable classroom assignment characterized by teachers moving in and out of different classrooms throughout the day (19%).

**Work Context:** For 13% of family child care providers, the isolation from other adults associated with providing home-based care emerges as a source of job dissatisfaction.

For an examination of the associations among these and other aspects of early educators' work environments and turnover, retention, job intentions, and early educator well-being, please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report*.



## VIII. Early Educator Well-Being

This section provides information on the occupational burnout and depression rates among the sample of teachers and family child care providers in the Metro area.

### OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AND DEPRESSION

Three aspects of early educators' occupational burnout were measured using the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*<sup>xvi</sup>. The first dimension, *Emotional Exhaustion*, assessed the extent to which early educators feel worn out or depleted by their job. The second dimension, *Depersonalization*, assessed the extent to which early educators psychologically withdraw from children as a result of work stress. The third dimension, *Sense of Personal Accomplishment*, measured the extent to which early educators feel effective in and fulfilled by their work. Scores on each of these dimensions can range from 3.00 – 21.00, with high scores on each representing greater feelings of *Emotional Exhaustion*, *Depersonalization*, and *Sense of Personal Accomplishment* (e.g., less burnout). Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7 also displays descriptive statistics on a shortened version of the *Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale*<sup>xvii</sup>, which was administered to early educators in the sample. Scores on this scale can range from 0 – 30, with higher scores indicating greater depressive moods. A score of 10 or higher indicates clinical levels of depression.

**TABLE 7. EARLY EDUCATORS' LEVELS OF OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AND DEPRESSION**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
<b>Teachers</b>				
Emotional Exhaustion	9.99	4.77	3.00	21.00
Depersonalization	5.14	3.05	3.00	21.00
Personal Accomplishment	17.46	3.49	3.00	21.00
Depression	5.03	4.38	0.00	30.00
<b>Family Child Care Providers</b>				
Emotional Exhaustion	9.67	4.32	3.00	21.00
Depersonalization	4.56	2.25	3.00	21.00
Personal Accomplishment	17.88	3.20	9.00	21.00
Depression	4.35	3.93	0.00	27.00

**Occupational Burnout:** In general, teachers and family child care providers report moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, suggesting that to some extent they perceive their work to be draining. On the other hand, low scores on the *Depersonalization* subscale suggest that the average teacher and family child care provider is psychologically engaged in their work with children. Teachers' and family child care providers' work also appears to provide them with a strong sense of personal accomplishment and fulfillment, as the average provider reports feeling effective in their work.

**Depression:** Scores on the depression inventory for both teachers and family child care providers indicate that the sample as a whole did not show symptoms of depression. However, 14% of teachers and 11% of family child care providers scored a 10 or above on the scale, indicating significant depressive symptomologies. The rates of depression among early educators are higher than would be expected in the general population, and rates of depression are twice as high for teachers in this sample as in the general population<sup>xviii</sup>.

# IX. Policy and Practice Implications

- > Recruiting a Workforce in the Region: Innovative Scholarship Models
- > Recruiting a Workforce in the Region: Concurrent Enrollment
- > Improving Access to Appropriate Higher Education Pathways for Working Adults
- > Developing Spanish-Speaking and Latina Early Educators
- > Improving Compensation

*The results of this report indicate several important areas in which the Metro area might direct workforce recruitment, retention, compensation, and development efforts.*

## **RECRUITING A WORKFORCE IN THE REGION: INNOVATIVE SCHOLARSHIP MODELS**

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Most directors in the region report struggling to find qualified teachers to fill vacant positions. Given the geographic proximity of the region to a number of two and four-year colleges and universities, early childhood leaders might consider working with philanthropic and public-private partnerships to develop innovative scholarship programs that simultaneously meet the need for: addressing the current staffing crisis, building a future workforce, and retaining the workforce for a longer period of time. Currently, ECE scholarships are almost exclusively provided to professionals already in the field who often have to balance a stressful job, families, going back to school, and sometimes even a second job. This often results in many early educators leaving school without a degree if additional workplace and higher education supports are not in place to support students<sup>xix</sup>. In addition, most ECE scholarship programs do little to promote longer-term retention in jobs or to help bring more professionals into the field.

Therefore, in addition to scholarships for current professionals, scholarship programs may be developed for *future* professionals that could also help to ensure some relief for current staffing shortages. These models might include a scholarship that graduating high school students could apply for and use in two or four-year Colorado public universities with an early childhood education program. After receiving all other financial-aid available, the student could receive a scholarship to cover their remaining tuition need and would be provided with a part-time job at a “participating, high-quality ECE center” that agrees to serve as a job placement. Students would be expected to work in the program as an aide or assistant teacher during their degree program 20 hours a week and would agree to work as a lead teacher in the program for two additional years post-graduation for A.A. degree scholarship recipients, and for four additional years for B.A. scholarship recipients. This type of model would enable programs to retain staff for four to eight years or more. Scholarship recipients would leave school debt free and would have a stable part-time job needed by most students while in school. Individual ECE programs might “buy-into” the scholarship program or purchase a membership, as savings in staff retention would offset the cost of contributing to the scholarship pool.

## **RECRUITING A WORKFORCE IN THE REGION: CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT**

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Concurrent enrollment and apprenticeship programs that recruit high school students into the profession might also be important to consider. In concurrent enrollment programs, students take a set of community college ECE courses while in high school that would enable them to leave high school prepared to enter the profession and assume an assistant teacher role. Early childhood leaders might also provide incentives to centers to hire concurrently enrolled students after high school and to provide job release or part-time employment for students to continue their education.

## **IMPROVING ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE HIGHER EDUCATION PATHWAYS FOR WORKING ADULTS**

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Early educators in this study also describe a number of barriers to accessing higher education and to finishing a degree efficiently, including lack of convenient course offerings, lack of online courses and difficulties in transferring prior credits into a degree. Early childhood leaders might consider conducting a scan of higher education opportunities in the region to better understand where more convenient course times, locations, and online course offerings are needed and to better understand the availability and quality of financial and academic advisement to students and where investments in student support services may be needed. Importantly, ensuring that articulation agreements are in place to ensure a smooth transition from A.A. courses to B.A. degrees with licensure is important as well as ensuring that early educators with B.A. degrees in an unrelated field have access to ECE coursework and degrees at the appropriate levels that advance their education forward.

## **DEVELOPING SPANISH-SPEAKING AND LATINA EARLY EDUCATORS**

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Results from this report note a need to develop Latina assistant teachers for lead teacher and director roles, to develop Spanish-speaking early educators in the region, and to enhance professional development opportunities focused on meeting the learning needs of English language learners. Indeed, a sizable percentage of early educators in the sample report having children in their classroom who speak Spanish and feeling underprepared to meet the needs of English language learners. Early childhood leaders might work with institutions of higher education to develop specialized coursework in this area and to develop more intensive professional development focused on dual language learning. Targeting scholarships to Spanish-speaking paraprofessionals and to Latina paraprofessionals may also build a pipeline of bilingual professionals and better ensure that early educators in the region reflect the child and family population.

## IMPROVING COMPENSATION

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Not surprisingly, this report also finds that many early educators in the region are struggling to make ends meet and that low compensation is a major job frustration for early educators that contributes to high levels of turnover in the field<sup>xx</sup>. An important strategy that might be considered is pursuing raising Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) reimbursement rates in counties in the region so that programs serving lower-income children can afford to raise compensation for all staff. Currently counties link these rates to an ECE program's Colorado Shines quality rating. Counties might consider requiring that any differential reimbursement above the base rate that programs receive for children receiving CCCAP subsidies be directed toward staff compensation. Counties might also consider adding a supplemental reimbursement for programs that employ highly qualified staff that could be earmarked for compensation to help ensure that programs serving the most vulnerable children can employ the most highly-qualified staff.

Another strategy that may be considered by some school districts is to pursue universal pre-kindergarten through a ballot initiative. When crafting bills, it is important to consider that pre-kindergarten teachers are held to the same (albeit adapted) educational requirements as elementary teachers and that they are paid the same as elementary school teachers.

Early childhood leaders in local communities might also consider the extent to which it is politically feasible for a ballot initiative similar to the Right Start Project in Summit County. The Right Start Project is funded through a voter-approved tax that, in part, provides salary supplements to early educators in Summit County. Developing public awareness campaigns, conducting additional research that examines the impact of lack of ECE in the area as a result of early educator shortages on the business community, and conducting polling research to better understand the viability of a tax initiative may be important strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Early childhood education can indeed be a rewarding career. Early educators in the region report that, in spite of the low pay and often poor working conditions, they do experience fulfillment in their work with children and families. Nonetheless, a quarter of teachers indicate that they plan to leave their jobs within the next two years. Thus, passion for the work and personal fulfillment may not be enough to enable early educators in the region to continue to pursue a career in the field. Consequently, major public investments are needed in the early educator workforce in the Metro area and across the state to ensure that teaching in early childhood is a viable career and that children in the region are cared for and instructed by well-qualified and appropriately compensated professionals who can support their learning and development.

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