

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

**The Colorado Early Childhood  
Workforce Survey 2017:**  
Findings from Northeast Colorado

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*The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the University of Colorado Denver and NORC and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Human Services, Gary Community Investments, or the Buell Foundation.*

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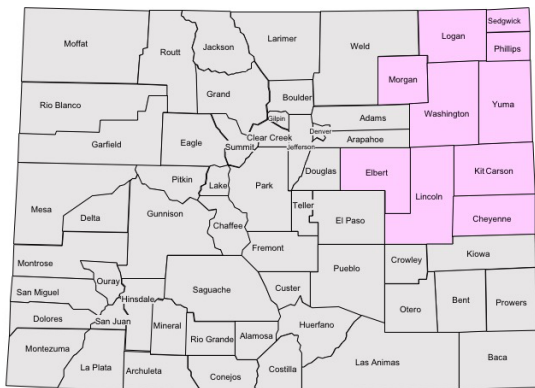
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# Executive Summary

Northeast Colorado



This report describes the background characteristics, employment conditions and the well-being of a sample of early educators in Northeast Colorado. The sample includes 33 directors, 58 lead teachers and 37 assistant teachers working in center-based early care and education (ECE) programs. It also includes 34 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 7 years, and family child care providers average 18 years in the early care and education profession.
- However, the sample demonstrates less stability within their jobs. Twenty-one percent of directors, 16% of lead teachers, 21% of assistant teachers, and 8% of family child care providers have been in their jobs less than two years.

### EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Forty-eight percent of directors, 38% of lead teachers, 17% of assistant teachers, and 6% of family child care providers hold a B.A. degree or higher. Considerably more lead teachers sampled in Northeast Colorado have degrees in ECE than in the state sample.
- 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 & ECONOMIC FRAGILITY

- The median hourly wages for early educators in the region are low—calculated at \$20.17 for directors, \$15.07 for lead teachers, \$10.63 for assistant teachers, and \$13.57 for family child care providers..
- Sixty-three percent of teachers have work-sponsored health insurance, and 49% have work-sponsored retirement plans. Forty-nine percent of family child care providers have health insurance, and 12% have a retirement savings plan.
- As a result of these low wages and lack of workplace benefits for many early educators, 24% of directors, 30% of teachers, and 15% of family child care providers have a second job. In addition, 21% of directors, 36% of teachers, and 41% of family child care providers receive at least one public subsidy reserved for low-income families.

## TURNOVER

- Average turnover rates among center-based staff in the region range from 14% to 22% annually, depending on the position. Nine percent of directors, 23% of lead teachers, 20% of assistant teachers, and 14% of family child care providers plan on leaving their jobs soon.
- Sixty-one percent of directors indicate that it is difficult to fill teaching positions and that it takes an average of 2.6 months to fill an opening. As a result, 43% 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 stress, as do policies governing ECE and the increase in children's challenging behaviors.
- Center-based teachers show rates of depression approximately twice as high as would be expected in the general population.
- Early educators in the sample 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 Northeast Colorado. Such information can help decision-makers target policies and better understand the investments needed to help ensure an effective early educator workforce in Northeast Colorado. 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 33 directors, 58 lead teachers, 37 assistant teachers, and 34 family child care providers who provide ECE services to children birth through age five in Elbert, Kit Carson, Cheyenne, Lincoln, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma counties. These counties are collectively referred to as Northeast Colorado. The sample reflects center level information<sup>1</sup> on 46% of the center and public school-based ECE programs and 51% of the licensed family child care (FCC) homes in Northeast Colorado 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 Northeast Colorado who responded to the survey.

In a number of instances throughout this report, the sample from Northeast Colorado 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 Northeast Colorado sample and the overall statewide sample are not considered representative of all early educators in Northeast Colorado 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 Northeast Colorado. For more information about the sample and how it was collected, please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report*.

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

Director (N = 33)	Percent
Community	36%
Head Start	15%
Public School	49%
Lead Teacher (N = 58)	
Community	36%
Head Start	15%
Public School	49%
Assistant Teacher (N = 37)	
Community	19%
Head Start	37%
Public School	44%

<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 Northeast Colorado.

#### AGE

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

In Northeast Colorado:

- Directors average 46 years of age,
- Lead teachers average 42 years of age,
- Assistant teachers average 38 years of age, and
- Family child care providers average 50 years of age.

Importantly, 42% of directors and 56% of family child care providers are approaching retirement age within the next 10 years.

#### EXPERIENCE

TABLE 2. AGE BY JOB ROLE

Age	Directors	Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers	FCC Providers
	NE (State)	NE (State)	NE (State)	NE (State)
Under 20	0% (0%)	0% (1%)	4% (6%)	0% (0%)
20-29	1% (7%)	18% (22%)	24% (27%)	9% (8%)
30-39	27% (25%)	26% (26%)	23% (21%)	9% (19%)
40-49	30% (28%)	28% (24%)	23% (21%)	26% (26%)
50-59	26% (27%)	21% (20%)	19% (18%)	41% (33%)
60 or older	16% (13%)	8% (7%)	7% (7%)	15% (14%)

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

The figures suggest that early educators in Northeast Colorado, 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:

- 21% of directors,
- 16% of lead teachers,
- 21% of assistant teachers, and
- 8% of family child care providers.

Taken together, it appears that there is a high degree of *job stability* for family child care providers, a moderate degree of job stability for lead teachers, a moderate degree of job instability for directors, but much more job instability for assistant teachers.

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

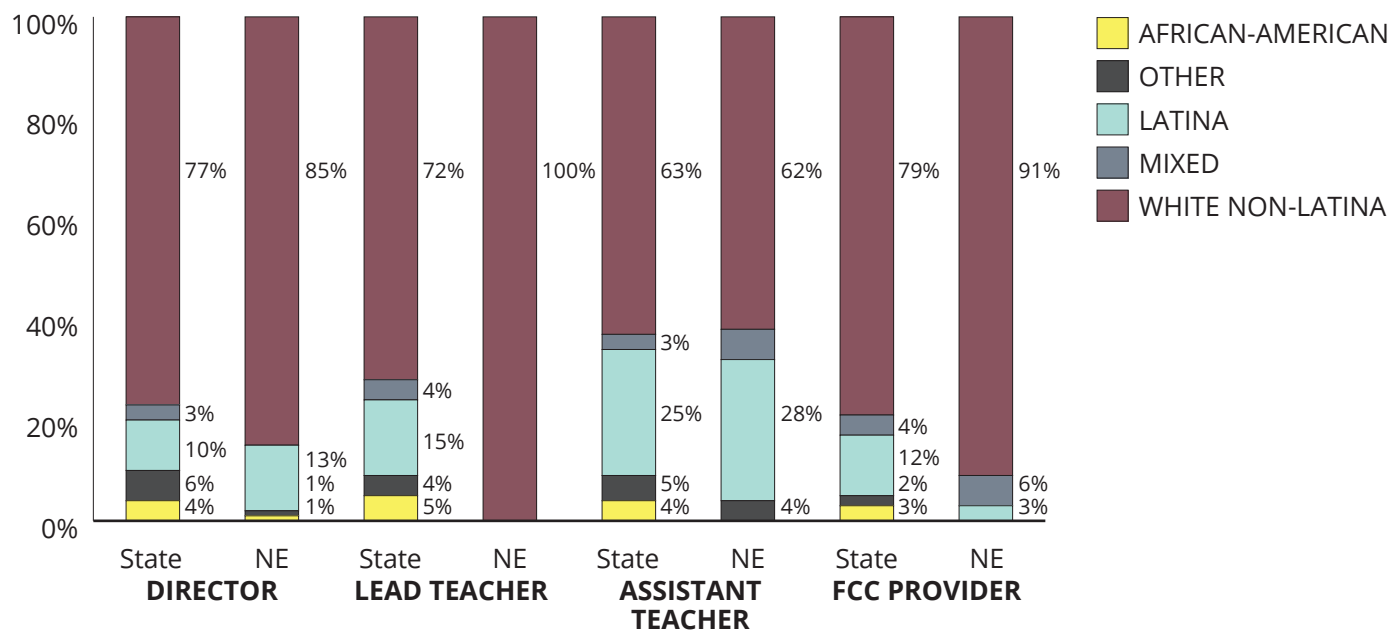
	Mean: State	Mean: NE	Min.: NE	Max.: NE
<b>Years of Experience in Field</b>				
Director	17.69	17.83	0.08	45.33
Lead Teacher	12.83	12.52	0.25	42.50
Assistant Teacher	8.28	7.34	0.08	40.58
Family Child Care Provider	16.23	18.18	0.08	40.50
<b>Years in Current Position</b>				
Director	8.67	9.68	0.08	33.40
Lead Teacher	6.75	7.29	0.17	25.42
Assistant Teacher	5.02	4.99	0.08	20.58
Family Child Care Provider	14.28	16.52	0.08	40.50

## ETHNICITY

Figure 1 displays the ethnicities<sup>2</sup> of both the state sample and the sample drawn from Northeast Colorado. The figure shows that across job roles, the majority in both samples is white, non-Latina, with the state sample showing significantly more racial/ethnic diversity across most job roles, with the exception of assistant teachers. In fact, no racial/ethnic diversity is observed in the lead teacher sample in Northeast Colorado. The figure also shows that Latina early educators are more likely to be in assistant teaching roles than in lead teacher or director positions in the region.

<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.

**FIGURE 1. RACE/ETHNICITY**



## LANGUAGE

In the Northeast Colorado sample, 48% 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 66% of the cases in which a teacher reported a teacher-child language mismatch.

Of family child care providers in the sample, 15% 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 21% of the cases. No other specific languages emerged as a mismatch in more than a few instances to be able to note additional trends.

## 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 Northeast Colorado report experiencing in accessing higher education and in-service professional development.

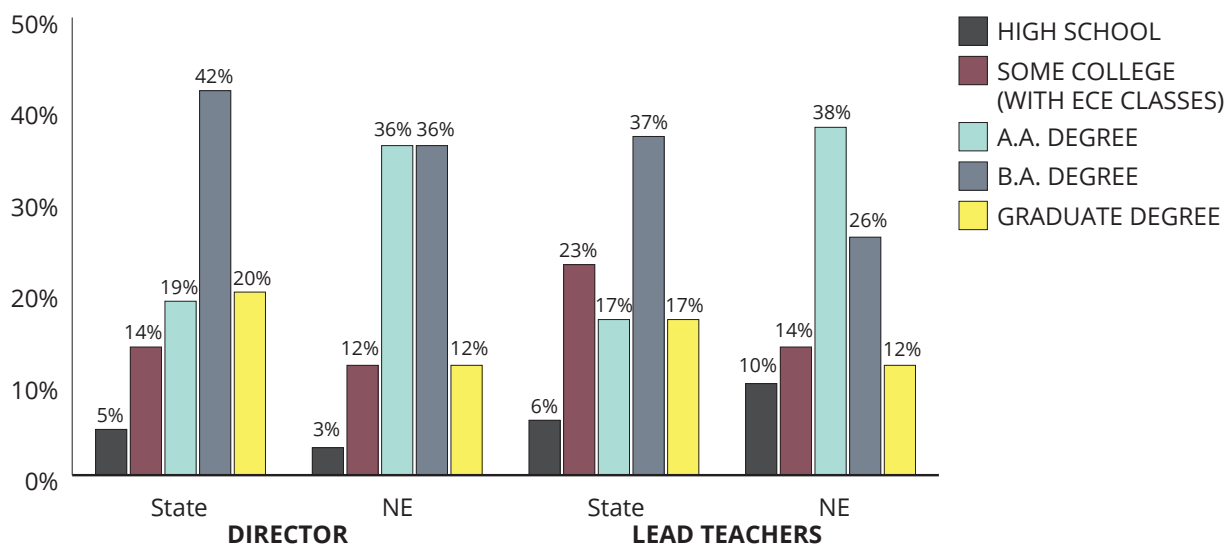
### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Figures 2 and 3 display the education levels of both the state sample and the Northeast Colorado sample by job role. The figures show that a sizable percentage of early educators in the sample have at least an A.A.<sup>3</sup> degree, including:

- 84% of directors,
- 76% of lead teachers,
- 36% of assistant teachers, and
- 21% of family child care providers.

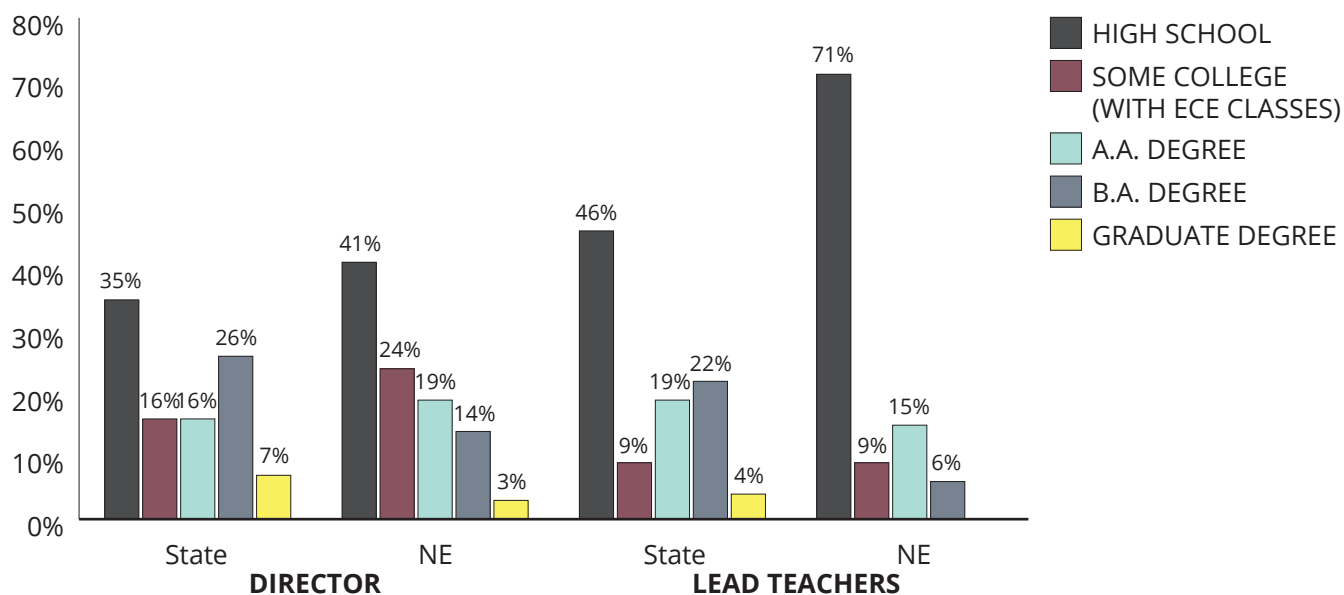
When considering directors and lead teachers, the state and Northeast Colorado sample show similar percentages who have A.A. degrees or higher. However, differences emerge when examining those with B.A.s or higher. Sixty-two percent of directors in the state sample have at least a B.A. degree compared to 48% in the Northeast sample. Similarly, 54% of the state sample of lead teachers have at least a B.A. degree compared to 38% in the Northeast sample.

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



<sup>3</sup> For ease of reading, references made to a bachelor's degree are abbreviated as a B.A. degree but also refer to bachelor's of science or B.S. degrees. References made to an associate's degree are abbreviated as an A.A. degree but could also refer to an associate's of applied science or A.A.S. degree.

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



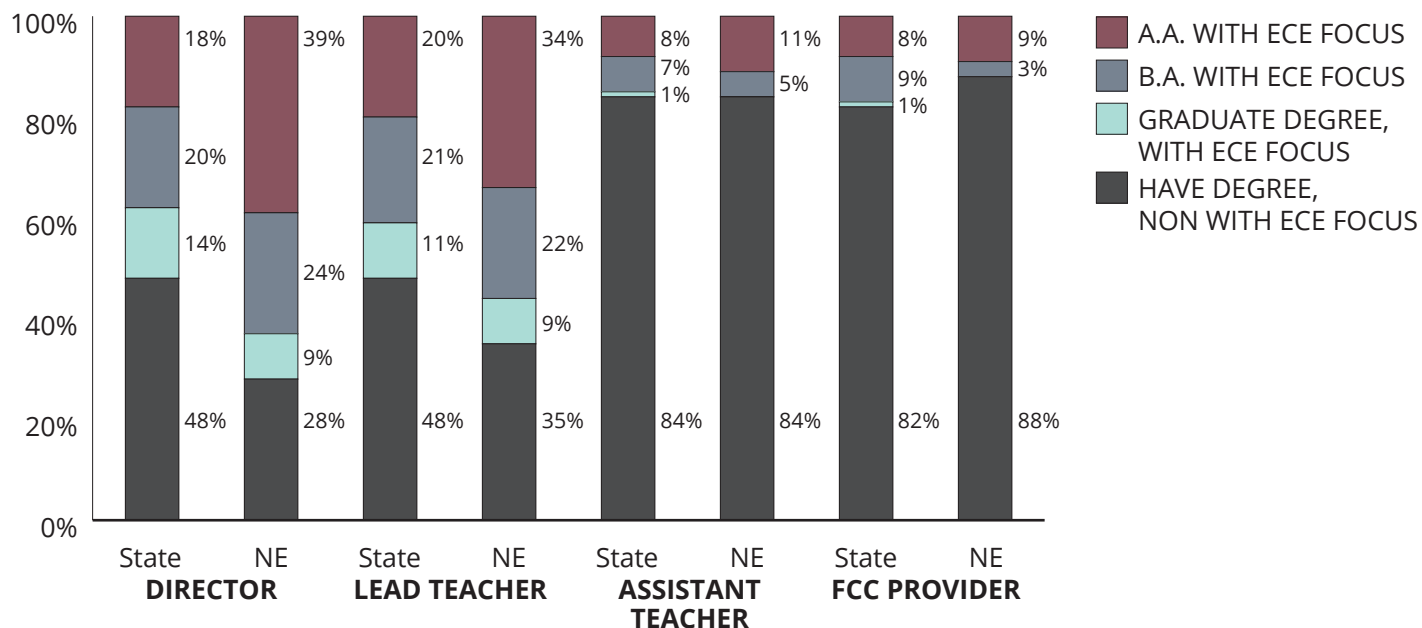
Lower education levels are also observed for assistant teachers and family child care providers in the Northeast sample compared to the state sample. The most pronounced difference occurs with family child care providers where 6% in the Northeast sample have at least a B.A. degree compared to 26% in the state sample.

### DEGREE FOCUS

Figure 4 shows the percentage of degree holders in the state sample and in the Northeast Colorado 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 significantly higher percentages of directors and lead teachers in Northeast Colorado who have degrees, have them in fields that focus on the care and education of young children than in the state sample. Much more variation in degree focus is observed with assistant teachers and family child care providers than compared to directors and lead teachers. Of the 36% of assistant teachers and of the 21% of family child care providers with degrees, only 16% of assistant teachers and 12% of family child care providers hold a degree focused on young children.

**FIGURE 4. DEGREE FOCUS BY JOB ROLE**



**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, teachers in Northeast Colorado 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 with special health care and behavioral needs, English language learners, children who have experienced trauma, and children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Across curricular areas, they report feeling slightly less prepared to support children’s emergent literacy than they do instructing in the creative arts.

Family child care providers in Northeast Colorado also report feeling prepared to meet the care and learning needs of typically developing children, working with families, and running a business. More so than teachers, they report feeling underprepared to work with children living in poverty, children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, working with children with special health, learning, and behavioral support needs, and supporting English language learners and children who have experienced trauma. They also report feeling less prepared than teachers to support children’s learning across curricular areas.

**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	3.68	0.53	3.45	0.68
Children with developmental delays	3.23	0.67	2.45	0.81
Children with special health care needs	2.92	0.74	2.21	0.89
English language learners	2.81	0.76	2.46	1.06
Children from diverse cultural backgrounds	3.07	0.63	2.30	0.74
Children living in poverty	3.24	0.67	2.36	0.81
Children who have experienced trauma	2.82	0.74	2.30	0.77
Children with challenging behaviors	3.04	0.65	2.52	0.72
<b>How prepared to teach:</b>				
Language arts/literacy	3.09	0.68	2.73	0.83
STEM	3.14	0.61	2.71	0.87
Creative arts	3.30	0.64	2.99	0.82
<b>How prepared to:</b>				
Conduct and use child assessments	3.34	0.59	2.96	0.69
Work with diverse families	3.33	0.65	3.30	0.77
Run a business	NA	NA	3.46	0.74

**ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION**

Teachers and family child care providers were also asked about their desire to pursue a degree or certificate focused on the care and education of young children and about 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:

- 90% of teachers, and
- 59% of family child care providers.

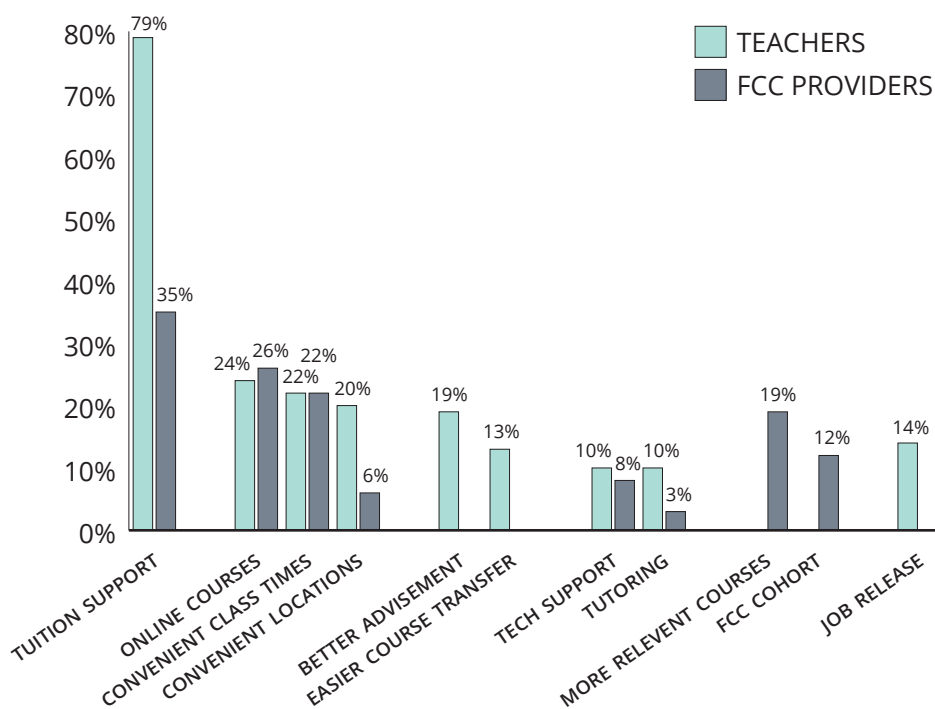
Figure 5 displays the supports that teachers and family child care providers in Northeast Colorado report that they would need to be successful at pursuing a degree or certificate. Supports appear on the figure if they were nominated by at least 10% of either teachers or family child care providers. 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 79% of teachers but only 35% of family child care providers.

**Improved Convenience:** A sizable portion of early educators in the sample also report that the lack of convenient course offerings for working adults in Northeast Colorado 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.

**Academic Support Services:** To a lesser extent, teachers and family child care providers mention the need for more academic support services, such as technology support and academic tutoring, which appears more important for teachers than for family child care providers.

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



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

**Greater Student Support Services:** Teachers, in particular, note the importance of particular student services to enable their academic success and interest in pursuing higher education. These include better advising (19%) and easier course transfer between colleges (13%) to ensure that they can finish a degree efficiently.

**Improved Relevance of Coursework:** Nineteen percent of family child care providers note that improving the relevance of coursework to include course content on providing care and education in home-based programs would be important to their consideration to pursue a certificate or a degree. Approximately 12% of family child care providers also mention that a family child care degree cohort would motivate them to advance their education.

**Job Release:** Approximately 14% of teachers note that having job release time to attend class would be an important support needed to advance their education.

## 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 often prevent them from participating. Thirty percent of teachers indicate that they do not experience any significant barriers related to in-service professional development, while no family child care providers report experiencing no barriers. Figure 6 displays the barriers that teachers and family child care providers report experiencing in accessing in-service professional development.

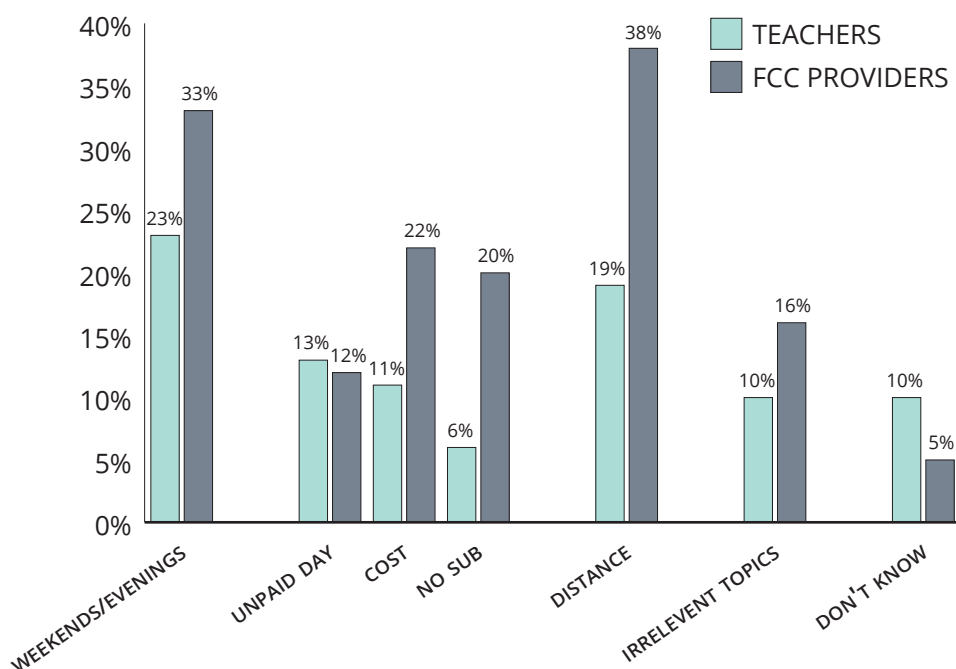
Of those who report barriers, many teachers (23%) and family child care providers (33%) mention that when professional development occurs in their communities, it is typically on weekends when they are too tired to attend or during other unpaid, non-work time. Both groups also indicate that distance to trainings is also a significant barrier that prevents approximately 19% of teachers and 38% of family child care providers from attending.

For some family child care providers, not having access to substitutes (20%) and having to take an unpaid work day (12%), coupled with the expense of trainings (22%) create a constellation of factors that prevent them from participating.

In addition, approximately 16% of family child care providers 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.

Approximately 10% of teachers and only 5% of family child care providers indicate that they do not know about the professional development opportunities available to them.

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





# V. Compensation

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

## 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.

Results suggest that based on a 40-hour work week and 12-month school year, the median director earns approximately \$41,954 a year, the median lead teacher earns approximately \$31,346 a year, the median assistant teacher earns approximately \$22,110 a year, and the median family child care provider earns approximately \$28,122 a year<sup>4</sup>. In Morgan County, for example, the self-sufficiency standard for a one-parent household with one preschool child is \$31,606 annually. This means that most lead teachers, assistant teachers, and family child care providers in the region are not making enough to meet basic self-sufficiency standards.

**TABLE 5. MEDIAN WAGES**

	Median	Median	Min.	Max.
	State	NE	NE	NE
<b>Hourly Wage</b>				
Director	\$20.17	\$20.17	\$9.00	\$35.00
Lead Teacher	\$14.97	\$15.07	\$9.00	\$30.45
Assistant Teacher	\$12.00	\$10.63	\$8.31	\$22.04
Family Child Care Provider	\$12.63	\$13.52	\$8.50	\$33.00

## BENEFITS

Table 6 displays the percentage of teachers<sup>5</sup> in community-based ECE centers who work at least 30 hours a week who receive different benefits through their employer<sup>6</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.

As can be seen in Table 6, more teachers in Northeast Colorado have access to work-sponsored benefits compared to the state sample of teachers. Nonetheless, many early educators, and in particular family child care providers, in the region do not receive the benefits they need to foster their economic and physical well-being. In this sample, 9% of teachers and over a third of family child care providers do not receive any benefits.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that most family child care providers care for children more than 40 hours per week.

<sup>5</sup> This analysis combines lead and assistant teachers.

<sup>6</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**

Benefits	Teachers NE (State)	FCC Providers NE (State)
Health Insurance	63% (40%)	49% (56%)
Dental Insurance	58% (28%)	22% (38%)
Vision Insurance	44% (22%)	19% (26%)
Life Insurance	35% (21%)	25% (39%)
Retirement	49% (26%)	12% (17%)
Family Leave	13% (13%)	NA
Paid Sick Days	63% (51%)	12% (21%)
Paid Vacation Days	39% (66%)	25% (37%)
Paid Professional Development Days	47% (37%)	6% (8%)
Free or Reduced Rate Child Care	20% (30%)	NA
Receive No Benefits	9% (12%)	36% (28%)

## ECONOMIC FRAGILITY

As a result of the low wages and lack of many work-sponsored benefits for some early educators in the region, many early educators in the region report having difficulties making ends meet. Indeed, a sizable portion of early educators in Northeast Colorado have a second job, including:

- 24% of directors,
- 30% of teachers (lead and assistant), and
- 15% of family child care providers.

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

- 21% of directors,
- 36% of teachers (lead and assistant), and
- 41% of family child care providers.

These public subsidies include Section 8 housing vouchers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid or Child Health Insurance Plans, The 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 Northeast Colorado<sup>7</sup>.

### TURNOVER

Figure 7 displays the turnover rates among center-based staff over the past 12 months for the state sample and for the sample in Northeast Colorado, 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.

The figure shows the highest turnover among assistant teacher positions. It also shows much less turnover among floater teacher positions in Northeast Colorado in comparison to the state sample. For more information about how turnover varies by job role and ECE service sector, please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report*.

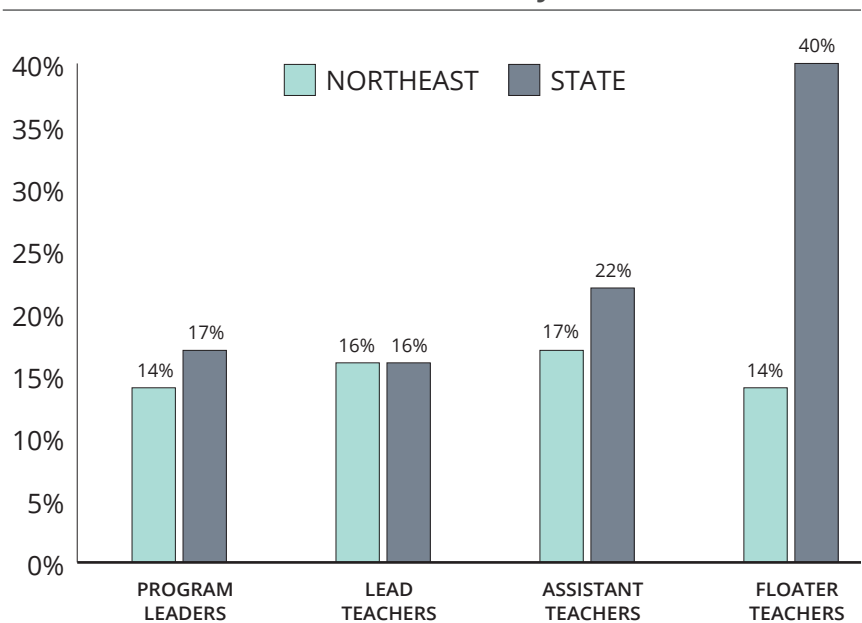
Because of these turnover rates, directors frequently have to fill vacant positions. Of the directors sampled in Northeast Colorado, 61% report that it is either “very difficult” or “difficult” to fill open teaching positions and that the average time it takes to fill a vacant position is 2.56 months. Approximately 43% also note that they are often forced to fill vacant positions with unqualified staff in order to keep classrooms open.

### JOB INTENTIONS

A number of early educators in Northeast Colorado, particularly those in teaching roles in centers, also report that they are planning on leaving their jobs within the next two years. This includes:

- 9% of directors,
- 23% of lead teachers,
- 20% of assistant teachers, and
- 14% of family child care providers.

FIGURE 7. ANNUAL TURNOVER RATES BY JOB ROLE



<sup>7</sup> Because of the small sample size in Northeast Colorado, it was not possible to examine 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.

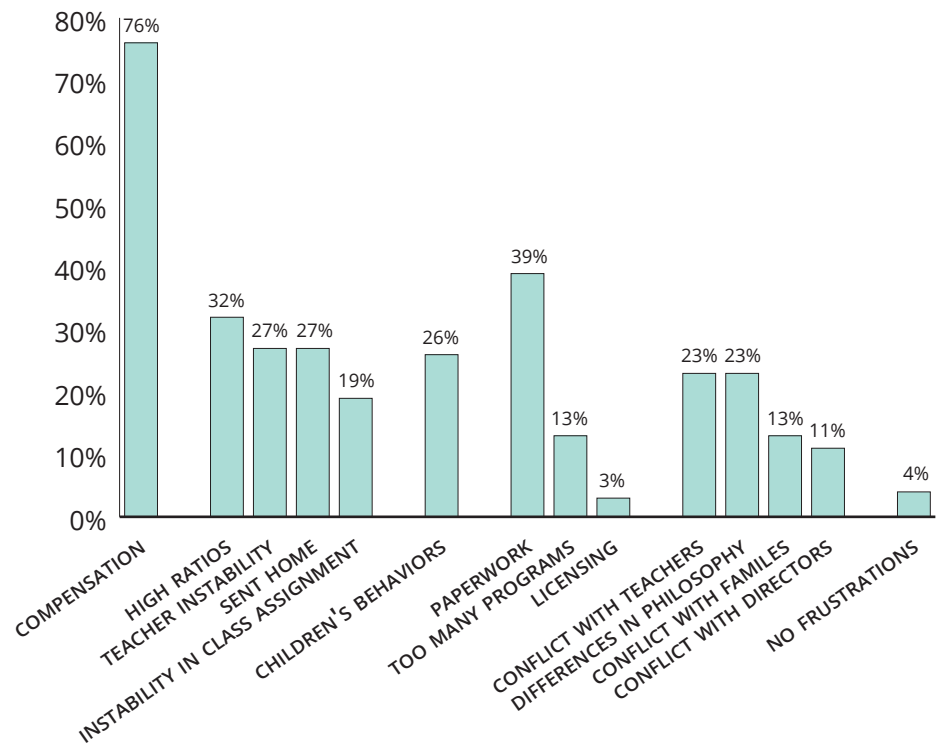
## VII. Work Environments

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>8</sup> in Figure 8 and 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 (34%) serves as a source of frustration for more providers than does low pay (14%), which is the major concern for teachers in centers (76%).

**Policies:** For family child care providers, state licensing rules and regulations governing the operation of home-based programs (44%) and quality improvement initiatives and programs that they perceive push family child care homes to function more like centers (18%) emerge as important sources of job dissatisfaction. Teachers in centers report that excessive paperwork (39%) is a source of job dissatisfaction as is having multiple programs and quality initiatives in their classrooms (13%) that they consider burdensome and that take away from their time with children.

**Children's Behavior:** Both teachers and family child care providers note children's challenging behaviors as a source of job frustration. However, teachers in centers (26%) appear more stressed by children's behavioral issues than do family child care providers (15%).

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of these analyses, lead and assistant teachers' responses are combined.

**Conflict:** Some teachers and family child care providers mention conflict as a source of work stress, although the sources of their conflict appears different. For example, 23% of teachers report conflict with other teachers and differences in beliefs about teaching and caregiving with their center’s philosophy as job stressors. Alternatively, for some family child care providers, conflict with families cause work stress. Approximately 12% of family child care providers mention conflict over families paying late and not following the provider’s drop-off and pick-up schedules as frustrating.

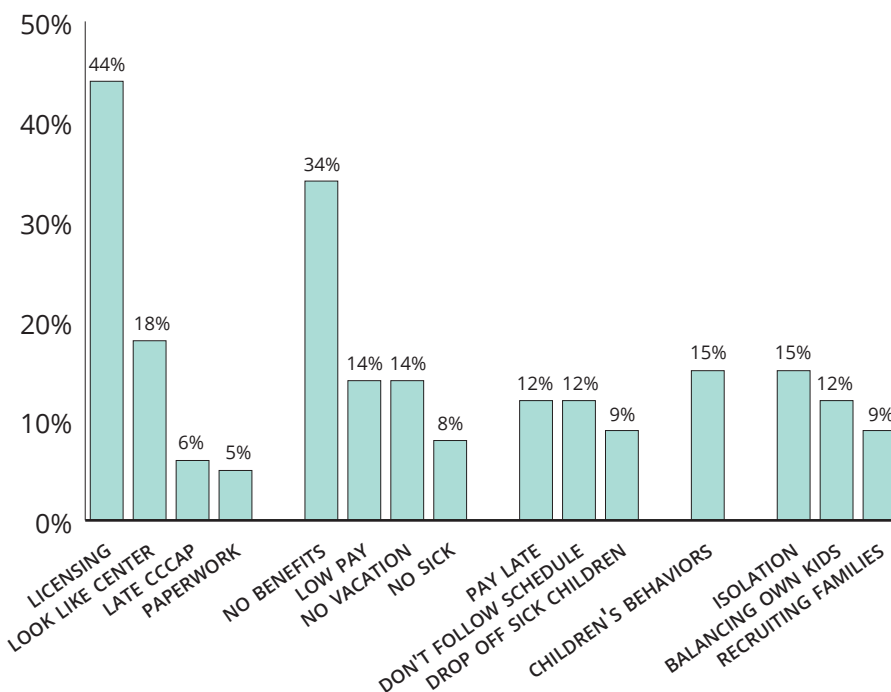
Teachers and family child care providers also experience job frustrations that are unique to their employment context.

**Staffing:** For teachers, staffing appears to be a significant source of frustration. Many express frustrations over high teacher-child ratios (32%) and teacher turnover in their classrooms and the instability it creates (27%). Many are also frustrated over being sent home without pay if child attendance is low (27%), and the lack of stable classroom assignments characterized by teachers moving in and out of different classrooms throughout the day (19%).

**Work Context:** For 15% of family child care providers, the isolation from other adults associated with providing home-based care emerges as a source of job dissatisfaction. Twelve percent of family child care providers also note the stress of trying to balance the needs of the children in their care with their own children’s needs.

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*.

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



# 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 Northeast Colorado.

## 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 burn-out). 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	9.82	3.81	3.00	21.00
Depersonalization	5.12	2.30	3.00	16.00
Personal Accomplishment	17.74	2.24	3.00	21.00
Depression	4.74	3.11	0.00	30.00
<b>Family Child Care Providers</b>				
Emotional Exhaustion	9.76	4.00	3.00	21.00
Depersonalization	4.49	2.01	3.00	21.00
Personal Accomplishment	16.43	3.48	8.00	21.00
Depression	4.36	3.84	0.00	19.00

**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 also indicate that the sample as a whole did not show symptoms of depression. However, 15% of teachers and 9% of family child care providers scored a 10 or above on the scale, indicating significant depressive symptomologies. The rate of depression among teachers in the Northeast Colorado sample is approximately twice as high as what would be expected in the general population<sup>xviii</sup>.

# IX. Policy and Practice Implications

- > Investing In Scholarship Programs
- > Improving Access to Appropriate Higher Education Pathways for Working Adults
- > Creating Leadership Development Programs
- > Expanding and Tailoring In-Service Professional Development
- > Recruiting Teachers in the Region
- > Improving Compensation

*The results of this research report indicate several important areas in which Northeast Colorado might direct workforce recruitment, retention, compensation, and development efforts.*

## **INVESTING IN SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS**

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The results of this report suggest that there is a strong desire by many early educators to advance their education. However, the low compensation received by many in the field make it difficult for most early educators to afford to be able to go back to school. Early childhood leaders might consider working with local community foundations and businesses to develop a scholarship fund for early educators that is robustly linked to their retention in their jobs or within ECE programs in the area to meet the dual goals of workforce development and early educator retention in the region. It is important to target these scholarships to professionals who have had some experience in the field and for whom a degree of work release can be provided to be able to successfully balance work and school.

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

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Early educators in the region also describe a number of barriers to accessing higher education and to finishing a degree efficiently, including lack of convenient course offerings, particularly at the B.A. level, lack of online courses and difficulties in transferring prior credits into a degree. Early childhood leaders might consider working with an institution of higher education to develop a hybrid online/face-to-face B.A. program responsive to the needs of rural communities. This might include bringing students in similar locations in the region together for weekly classes in which a university professor joins virtually, or having a monthly face-to-face class in the region with online work between sessions to facilitate better access to degree programs in the region. Leaders might also consider working with K-12 talent development specialists to advance an online B.A. P-3 licensure program to combine resources to address K-12 teacher shortages as well. Indeed, one or two successful B.A. cohorts could have substantial impact on developing a pipeline of well-qualified early educators for the region.

## **CREATING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

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There also appears to be a need to support current center directors and to develop a pipeline of new center directors in the region given that approximately 17% left their jobs last year and over



40% are nearing retirement. In addition, center climate, and in particular conflict among staff, appears to be an issue impacting job satisfaction for almost a quarter of the teachers sampled. Early childhood leaders might consider working with institutions of higher education to develop a B.A. track focused on program administration, leadership, and management that can be innovatively delivered in rural communities for working professionals. Developing or implementing existing non-credit bearing leadership development and apprenticeship programs might also aid in director development and retention efforts in the region (see McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership for a model). Targeting these programs to Latina early educators might also help to ensure that center directors represent the child and family population in the region.

### **EXPANDING AND TAILORING IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Results from Northeast Colorado also suggest that a sizable number of family child care providers and teachers feel underprepared to care for and instruct children who have experienced trauma, and who have special health, behavioral, and learning needs. Early childhood leaders might collectively examine the content of the professional development available in the region to better understand the extent to which current professional development covers this content and the extent to which ECE programs have access to trainings focused on these areas to determine how best to deploy resources.

Developing strategies such as instituting shared professional development days among centers in the region to offer joint professional development to groups of teachers during work days, offering grants for on-site professional development, or developing a substitute pool may be important strategies to also consider. Indeed, a sizable portion of early educators in the region report forgoing professional development during non-work hours or if it is too far away.

Early childhood leaders might also consider developing or adapting professional development content and coaching approaches specifically for home-based providers. Many family child care providers mention that they do not participate in professional development because they perceive the content is too geared toward teachers in centers.

### **RECRUITING TEACHERS IN THE REGION**

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Findings from this report also suggest that directors in the region are struggling to find qualified teachers to fill vacant positions. Early childhood leaders might consider several types of strategies to develop a pipeline of teachers at different points in their development. For example, concurrent-enrollment programs that recruit high school students into the profession might 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 a classroom. 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.

Similarly, early childhood leaders might also consider developing initiatives in which high school students are provided scholarships to pursue an ECE degree coupled with a part-time job in a participating ECE program through their studies. Tying the scholarship to a two-year work commitment in a center post graduation might be a strategy to meet the field's goals of educating a pipeline of teachers and retaining teachers as well as enabling a student to pursue education and part-time employment to be able to afford school and not leave school with loans. Simultaneously, the region might consider trying to develop loan forgiveness programs to attract already qualified early educators to the region.

### **RECRUITING FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS IN THE REGION**

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To help recruit family child care providers in the region, early childhood leaders across the region might consider jointly developing a proposal to fund several recruiter positions across the region to help potential family child care providers navigate the myriad of paperwork necessary to become licensed and maintain licensure. Currently these positions informally exist or formally exist but in combination with other job roles, limiting the impact of the position. Given the longevity of many family child care providers in their roles, focusing on recruiting family child care providers and robustly supporting the development of their program and their licensing applications may yield sizable increases in a service sector that traditionally stays in the field for many years and serves infants and toddlers.

### **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 in the region that contributes to high levels of turnover in the field<sup>xix</sup>. In the Northeast Colorado region, many early educators are employed by school districts. Consequently, opportunities may exist for universal pre-kindergarten initiatives in which preschool teachers are paid on par with K-12 teachers to ensure a livable wage for a sizeable segment of the early educator population in the region.

Opportunities might also exist for raising Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) reimbursement rates in counties in the region to incentivize programs to accept CCCAP and so that community-based 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.

## **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 Northeast Colorado 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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