

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

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

Findings from Northwest Colorado

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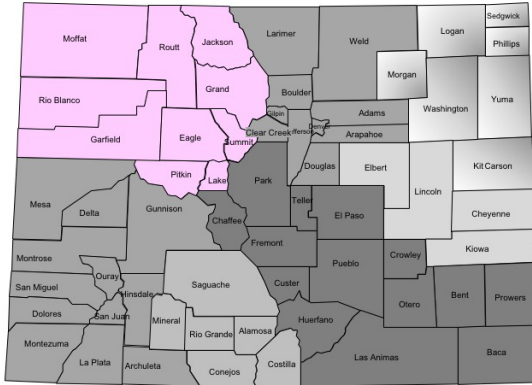
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# Executive Summary

Northwest Colorado



This report describes the background characteristics, employment conditions and the well-being of a sample of early educators in Northwest Colorado. The sample includes 51 directors, 155 lead teachers and 62 assistant teachers working in center-based early care and education (ECE) programs. It also includes 25 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 16 years, lead teachers average 11 years, assistant teachers average 8 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; 22% of directors, 24% of lead teachers, 39% of assistant teachers, and 10% of family child care providers have been in their jobs less than two years.

### EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Sixty-six percent of directors, 63% of lead teachers, 35% of assistant teachers, and 48% of family child care providers hold a B.A. degree or higher. However, more often than not, early educators with degrees do not hold a degree focused on 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 work days 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. The median hourly wage for directors is \$22.16, for lead teacher is \$16.45, for assistant teachers is \$15.00, and for family child care providers is \$14.48.
- Forty-five percent of teachers have access to employer-sponsored health insurance and 32% have employer-sponsored retirement savings accounts. Thirty-five percent of family child care providers have health insurance and 8% have a retirement savings account.
- As a result of these low wages and lack of work-place benefits, 21% of directors, 42% of teachers, and 16% of family child care providers have a second job. In addition, 14% of directors, 26% of teachers, and 24% 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 range from 14% to 43% annually, depending on the position. Eleven percent of both directors and family child care providers and over a quarter of both lead and assistant teachers plan on leaving their jobs soon.
- Sixty-eight percent of directors indicate that it is very 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 also 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 the increase in children's challenging behaviors.
- 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 ECE classes at the Associate’s (A.A.) degree level 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 under-staffed 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 Northwest Colorado. Such information can help decision-makers target policies and better understand the investments needed to help ensure an effective early educator workforce in Northwest 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 51 directors, 155 lead teachers, 62 assistant teachers, and 25 family child care providers who provide ECE services to children birth through age five in Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Lake, Moffat, Rio Blanco, Routt, Summit, and Pitkin counties. These counties are collectively referred to as Northwest Colorado. The sample reflects center level information<sup>1</sup> on 30% of the center and public school-based ECE programs and 32% of the licensed family child care (FCC) homes in Northwest 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 Northwest Colorado who responded to the survey.

In a number of instances throughout this report, the sample from Northwest 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 Northwest Colorado sample and the overall statewide sample are not considered representative of all early educators in Northwest 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 Northwest Colorado. 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 = 51)	Percent
Community	69%
Head Start	20%
Public School	11%
Lead Teacher (N = 155)	
Community	52%
Head Start	30%
Public School	18%
Assistant Teacher (N = 62)	
Community	27%
Head Start	43%
Public School	30%

<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 Northwest Colorado.

#### AGE

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

In Northwest Colorado:

- Directors average 46 years of age,
- Lead teachers average 40 years of age,
- Assistant teachers average 38 years of age, and
- Family child care providers average 50 years of age.

**TABLE 2. AGE BY JOB ROLE**

Age	Directors	Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers	FCC Providers
	NW (State)	NW (State)	NW (State)	NW (State)
<b>Under 20</b>	0% (0%)	2% (1%)	3% (6%)	0% (0%)
<b>20-29</b>	4% (7%)	26% (22%)	39% (27%)	12% (8%)
<b>30-39</b>	29% (25%)	29% (26%)	10% (21%)	4% (19%)
<b>40-49</b>	29% (28%)	18% (24%)	26% (21%)	32% (26%)
<b>50-59</b>	27% (27%)	16% (20%)	14% (18%)	36% (33%)
<b>60 or older</b>	11% (13%)	9% (7%)	8% (7%)	16% (14%)

#### EXPERIENCE

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



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

	Mean: State	Mean: NW	Min.: NW	Max.: NW
<b>Years of Experience in Field</b>				
Director	17.69	16.04	0.08	43.04
Lead Teacher	12.83	10.63	0.00	42.40
Assistant Teacher	8.28	7.34	0.00	33.50
Family Child Care Provider	16.23	16.23	0.08	40.50
<b>Years in Current Position</b>				
Director	8.67	8.45	0.08	35.25
Lead Teacher	6.75	6.12	0.00	26.83
Assistant Teacher	5.02	4.24	0.00	20.50
Family Child Care Provider	14.28	14.28	0.08	40.50

The figures suggest that early educators in Northwest 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:

- 22% of directors,
- 24% of lead teachers,
- 39% of assistant teachers, and
- 10% of family child care providers.

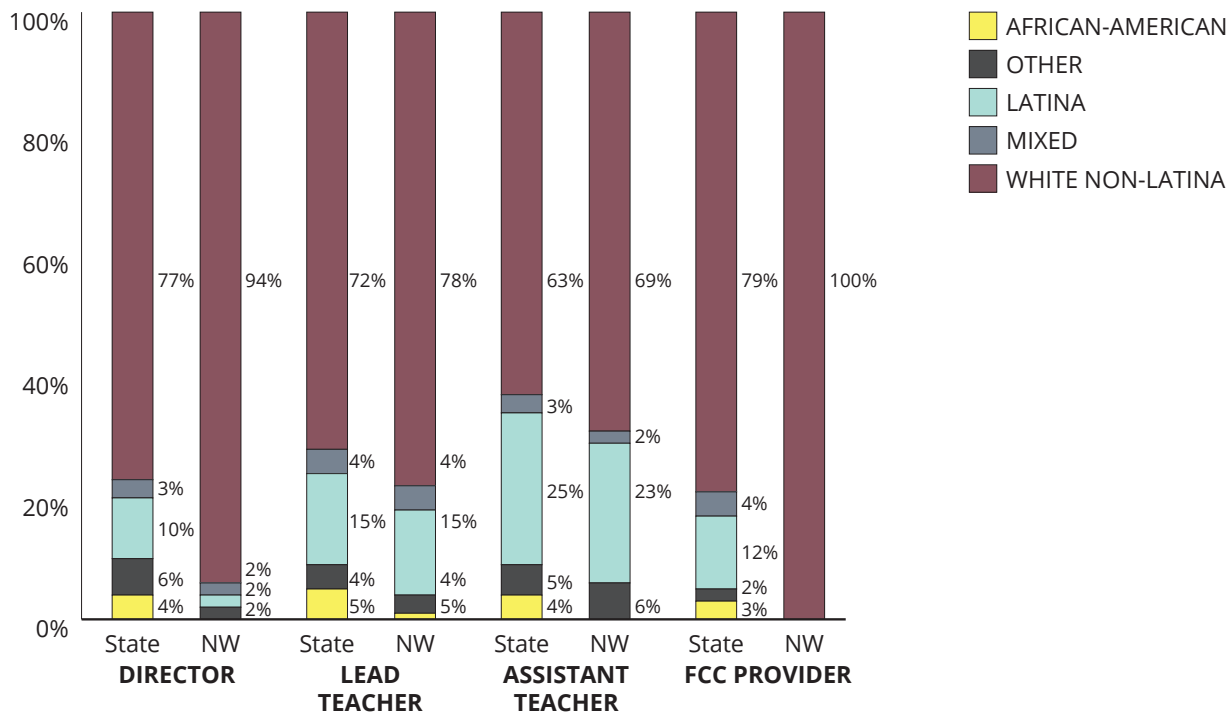
Alternatively, these figures suggest a relatively high degree of *job instability*, at least for center-based staff.

## ETHNICITY

Figure 1 displays the ethnicities<sup>1</sup> of both the state sample and the sample drawn from Northwest Colorado. The chart shows that across job roles, the majority in both samples is white, non-Latina, although the state sample demonstrates more racial/ethnic diversity; particularly with respect to directors and family child care providers, than does the Northwest Colorado sample. The figure also shows that a higher percentage of Latina early educators are in assistant teaching positions than are in lead teacher and director positions.

<sup>1</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 Northwest Colorado sample, 62% of teachers report not speaking the same language as all of the children in their classrooms. 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, 17% report not speaking the same language as all of the children in their program. When a language mismatch occurred, it was again 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 one instance 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 Northwest Colorado report experiencing in accessing higher education and in-service professional development.

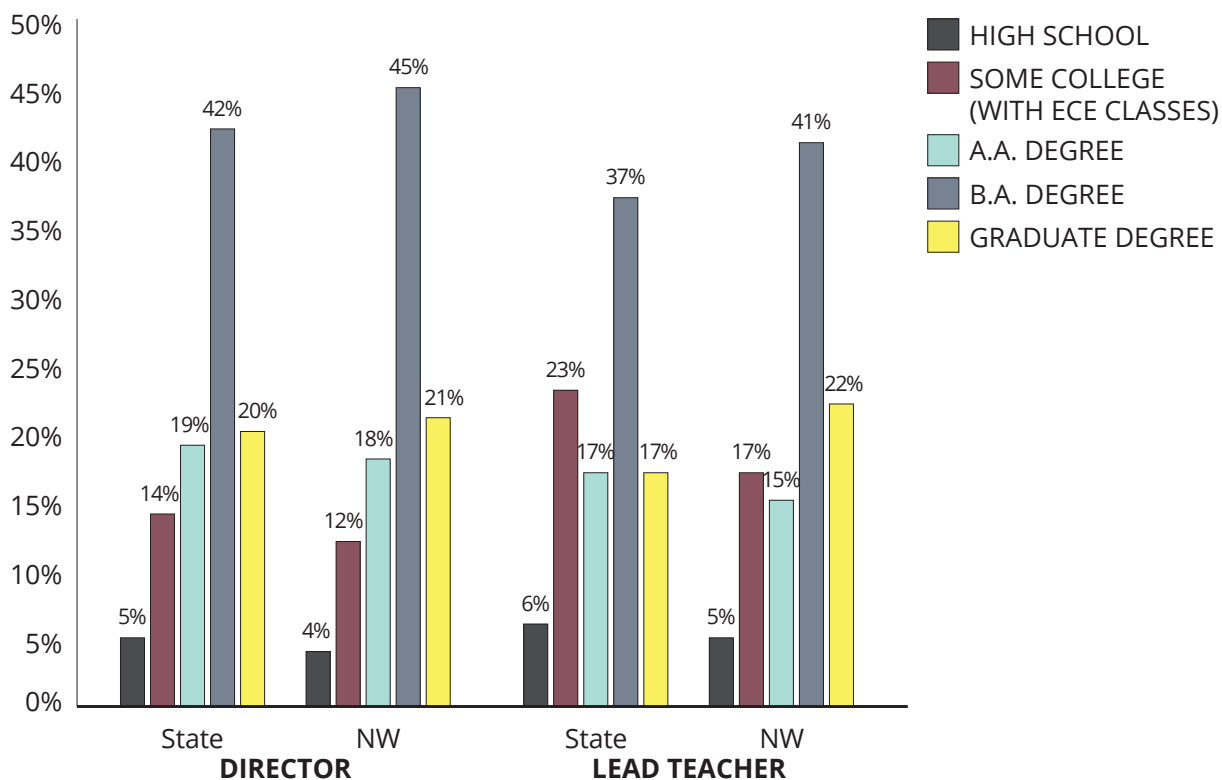
## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Figures 2 and 3 display the education levels of both the state sample and the Northwest Colorado sample by job role. The figures show that a sizable percentage of early educators in the sample have at least a B.A.<sup>1</sup> degree, including:

- 66% of directors,
- 35% of assistant teachers, and
- 63% of lead teachers,
- 48% of family child care providers.

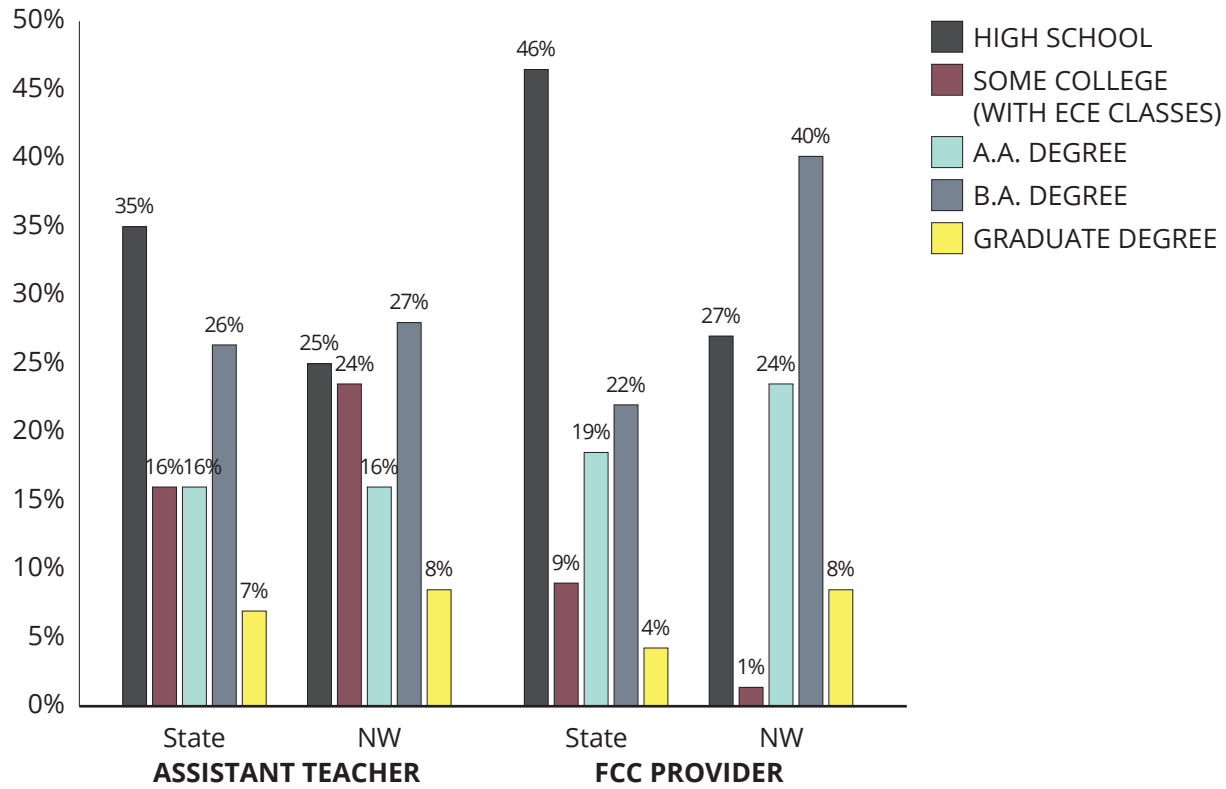
The figures also show that across job roles, early educators in Northwest Colorado have higher education levels than in the state sample. The most pronounced difference is observed with family child care providers where 48% of providers in the Northwest Colorado sample have attained at least a B.A. degree compared to just 26% in the state sample.

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



<sup>1</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**

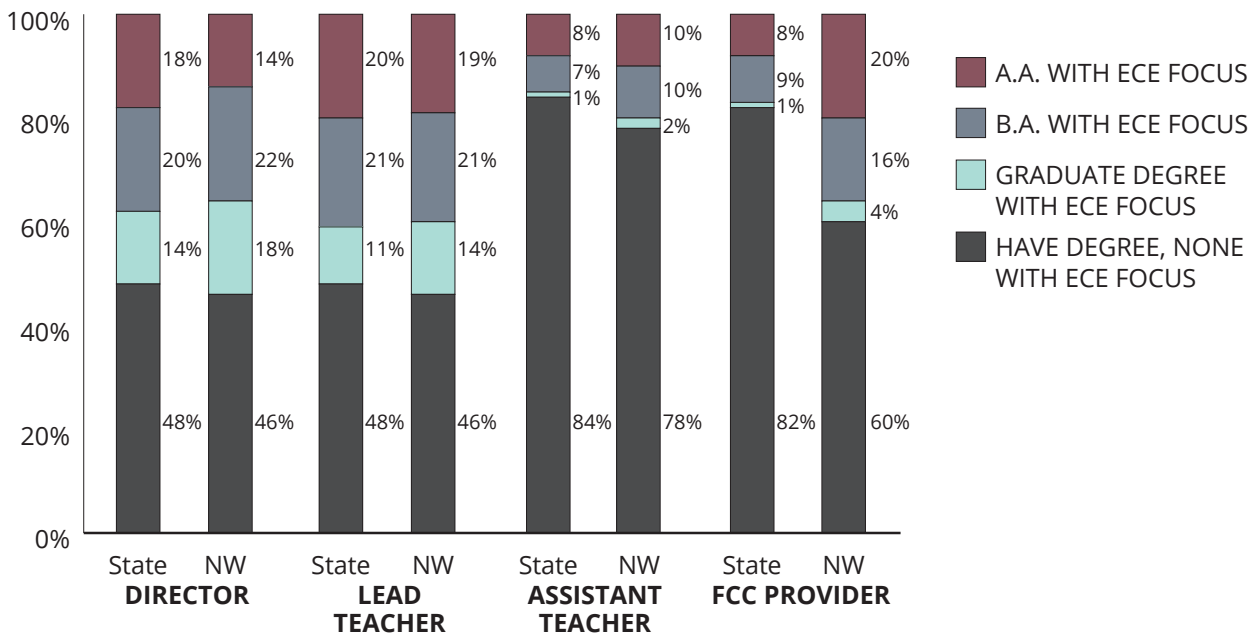


### DEGREE FOCUS

Figure 4 shows the percentage of degree holders in the state sample and in the Northwest 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, similar to the state sample, early educators in Northwest Colorado have a wide range of educational backgrounds. Slightly over half of directors and lead teachers hold a degree related to the care and instruction of young children. More family child care providers in the Northwest Colorado sample have specialized education related to young children than in the state sample.

**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.



**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	3.65	0.68	3.74	0.61
Children with developmental delays	3.12	0.72	3.01	1.21
Children with special health care needs	2.90	0.82	2.88	1.16
English language learners	3.09	0.85	2.97	1.25
Children from diverse cultural backgrounds	3.12	0.75	3.19	1.04
Children living in poverty	3.13	0.78	3.08	0.93
Children who have experienced trauma	2.72	0.79	2.51	1.16
Children with challenging behaviors	3.16	0.79	3.05	0.91
<b>How prepared to teach:</b>				
Language arts/literacy	3.26	0.72	3.38	0.93
STEM	3.11	0.81	3.32	0.93
Creative arts	3.22	0.74	3.32	0.98
<b>How prepared to:</b>				
Conduct and use child assessments	3.30	0.76	3.42	0.91
Work with diverse families	3.39	0.76	3.71	0.6
Run a business	NA	NA	3.65	0.64

In general, early educators in Northwest 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 needs, English language learners, and children who have experienced trauma. Across curricular areas, teachers report feeling slightly less prepared to teach STEM than language, literacy and creative arts.

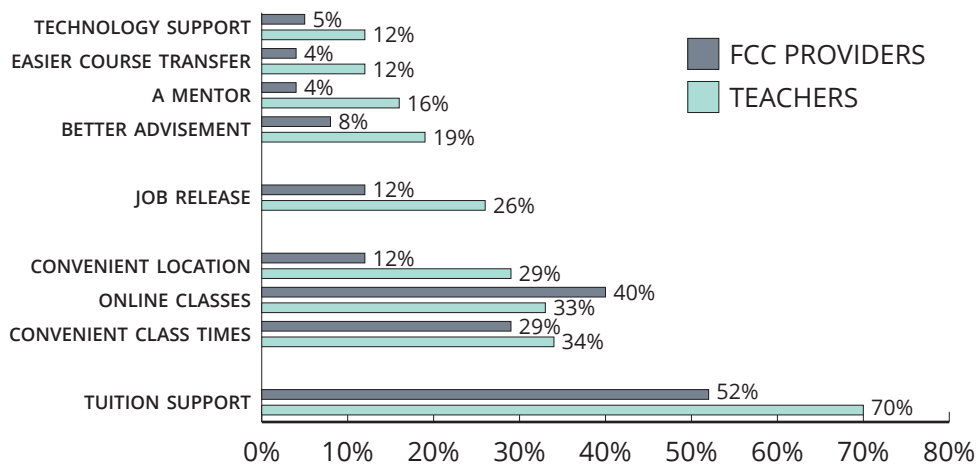
## ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

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 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 strong desire to continue their education from:

- 88% of teachers, and
- 68% of family child care providers.

Figure 5 displays the most commonly nominated supports that teachers and family child care providers in Northwest Colorado report that would motivate them to continue their education or 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.

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



**Financial:** By far the most commonly mentioned supports are financial, including scholarships and tuition assistance. Financial supports are considered necessary by approximately 70% of teachers and 52% of family child care providers.

**Coursework Structure:** A sizable portion of early educators in the sample also report that the lack of convenient course offerings for working adults in Northwest 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.

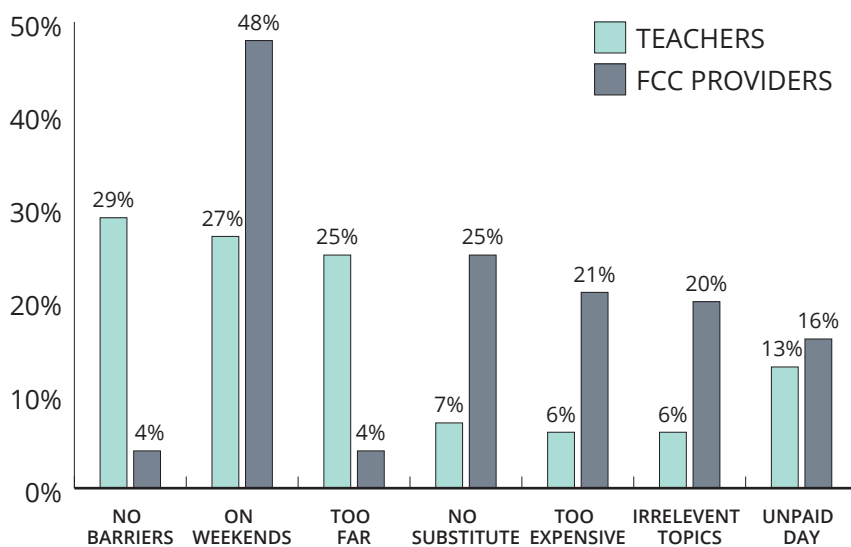
**Workplace Supports:** Approximately 26% of teachers and 12% of family child care providers indicate that having release time from their jobs, which would entail substitute coverage, would enable them to pursue higher education successfully.

**Student Services:** To a lesser extent than other supports, teachers and family home providers also note the importance of particular student services to enable their academic success and interest in pursuing higher education. In particular, teachers note a need for better advising (19%), mentoring to support the application of theory into classroom practice (16%), easier course transfer between colleges (12%), and support for using technology in coursework (12%).

## 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 4% 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 (27%) and family child care providers (48%) note 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. A quarter of teachers also note that distance to participate in trainings is frequently an obstacle to their participation.

For family child care providers, not having access to substitutes (25%) and having to take an unpaid work day (16%), coupled with the expense of trainings (21%) create a constellation of factors that prevent them from participating. In addition, approximately 20% of family child care providers also note 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.

# V. Compensation

## WAGES

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

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<sup>1</sup>.

As can be seen in Table 5, wages across job roles are low, yet are slightly higher in Northwest Colorado than in the state sample, likely due to the high cost of living associated with ski resort communities in the region. It is likely that the relatively large wage difference observed for assistant teachers in comparison to the state sample is a reflection of the Northwest Colorado sample of assistant teachers. In the Northwest Colorado sample, 30% of assistant teachers work in public school-based programs and 43% work in Head Start programs, percentages significantly higher than in the state sample. These ECE service sectors tend to pay more than community-based programs<sup>xvi</sup>.

Based on a 40-hour work week and 12-month school year, the median director earns approximately \$46,093 a year, the median lead teacher earns approximately \$34,216 a year, the median assistant teacher earns approximately \$31,200 a year, and the median family child care provider earns approximately \$30,118 a year<sup>2</sup>. In Summit County, for example, the self-sufficiency standard for a one-parent household with one preschool child is \$59,595 annually<sup>xvii</sup>. Across job roles, no position is earning near this self-sufficiency rate.

**TABLE 5. MEDIAN WAGES**

	Median State	Median NW	Min. NW	Max. NW
<b>Hourly Wage</b>				
Director	\$20.17	\$22.16	\$9.00	\$35.00
Lead Teacher	\$14.97	\$16.45	\$8.31	\$30.45
Assistant Teacher	\$12.00	\$15.00	\$8.31	\$21.25
Family Child Care Provider	\$12.63	\$14.48	\$8.50	\$33.00

<sup>1</sup> Because of the small sample size, it was not possible to examine how compensation varies by ECE service sector and education levels or how it contributes to workforce turnover, retention, and early educator well-being. Please see *The Colorado Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017 Final Report* for these analyses using the statewide sample.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that most family child care providers care for children more than 40 hours per week.

## ECONOMIC FRAGILITY

While median hourly wages in Northwest Colorado appear slightly higher than the median hourly wage in the state sample, it is important to note that these wages are still exceedingly low, especially in relation to the high cost of living in the region. Indeed, many early educators in Northwest Colorado report how difficult it is to make ends meet. As a result, a sizable portion of early educators in the region have a second job, including:

- 21% of directors,
- 42% of teachers (lead and assistant), and
- 16% 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:

- 14% of directors,
- 26% of teachers (lead and assistant), and
- 24% 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.

## BENEFITS

Table 6 displays the percentage of teachers<sup>1</sup> in community-based ECE centers who work at least 30 hours a week who receive different benefits<sup>2</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, many 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, 12% of teachers and 53% of family child care providers do not receive any benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis combines lead and assistant teachers.

<sup>2</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 NW (State)	FCC Providers NW (State)
Health Insurance	45% (40%)	35% (56%)
Dental Insurance	37% (28%)	22% (38%)
Vision Insurance	31% (22%)	12% (26%)
Life Insurance	18% (21%)	31% (39%)
Retirement	32% (26%)	8% (17%)
Family Leave	7% (13%)	NA
Paid Sick Days	57% (51%)	12% (21%)
Paid Vacation Days	52% (66%)	18% (37%)
Paid Professional Development Days	50% (37%)	4% (8%)
Free or Reduced Child Care	22% (30%)	NA
Receive No Benefits	12% (12%)	53% (28%)

# 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 Northwest Colorado<sup>1</sup>.

## TURNOVER

Figure 7 displays the turnover rates over the past 12 months for the state sample and for the sample in Northwest 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 particularly high turnover rates for paraprofessional positions (e.g., assistant and floater teachers) both in the state sample and in the Northwest Colorado sample. In the sample from Northwest Colorado, there are no differences in turnover rates between teachers working with infants and toddlers and teachers working in preschool classrooms (not shown).

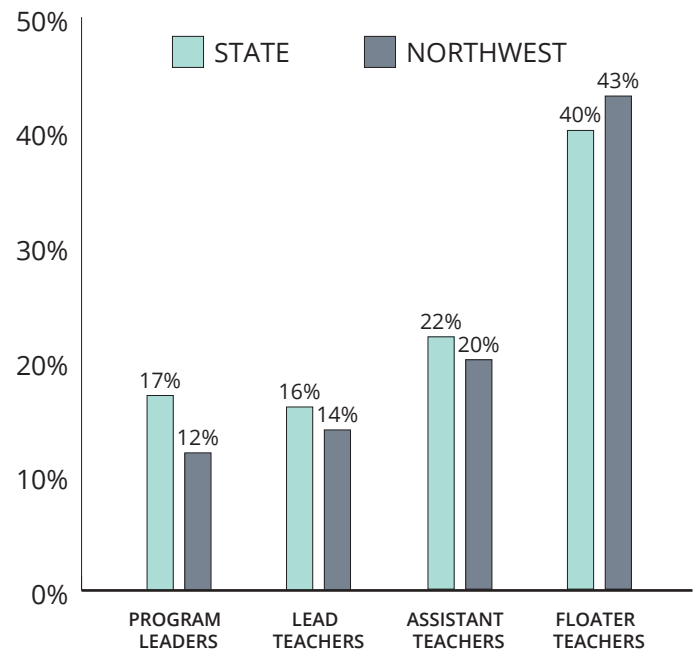
Because of the high rates of turnover among early educators, directors have to frequently fill vacant positions. Of the directors sampled in Northwest Colorado, 69% report that it is either “very difficult” or “difficult” to fill open teaching positions. Directors indicate that the average time it takes 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 sizable portion of early educators in Northwest Colorado, particularly those in teaching roles in centers, mention that they are planning on leaving their jobs within the next two years. This includes:

- 11% of directors,
- 27% of lead teachers,
- 28% of assistant teachers, and
- 11% of family child care providers.

FIGURE 7. ANNUAL TURNOVER RATES BY JOB ROLE



<sup>1</sup> Because of the small sample size in Northwest 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>1</sup> in Figure 8 and are displayed for family child care providers in Figure 9.

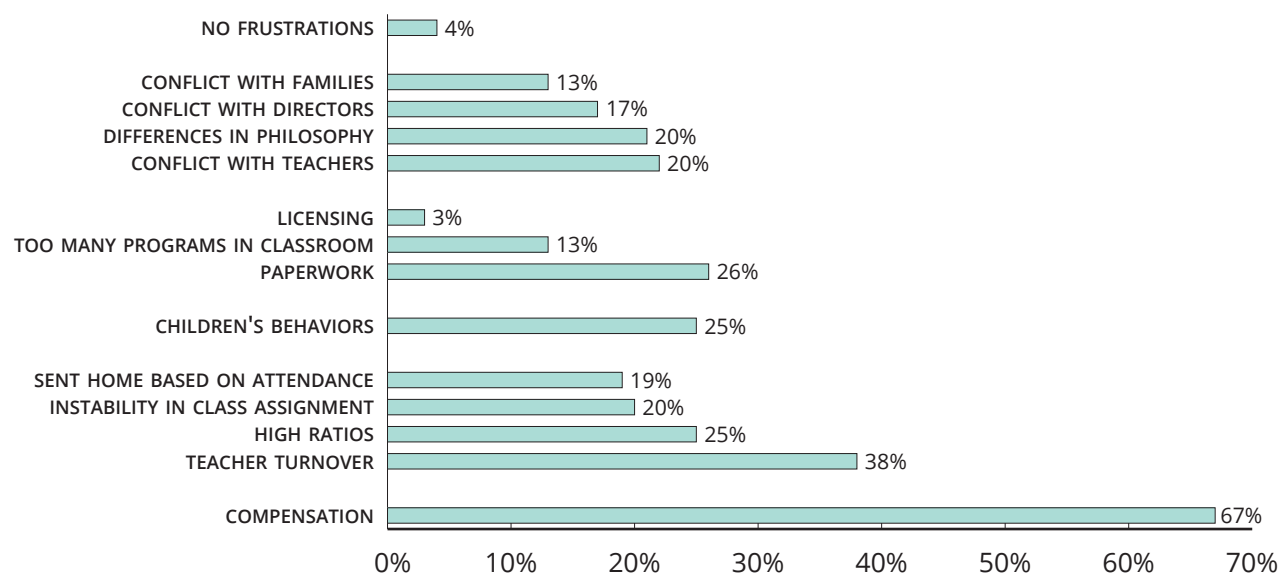
In a number of respects, teachers and family child care providers experience similar job frustrations. These frustrations typically fall within six categories: compensation, children's behaviors, policies, conflict, staffing, and work context.

**Compensation:** Both groups report that compensation is a major source of job frustration. For family child care providers (29%), lack of benefits serves a source of frustration for more providers than does low pay, which is the major concern for teachers in centers (67%).

**Children's Behavior:** Approximately a quarter of both groups mention frustration stemming from the amount and severity of children's challenging behaviors they experience in their programs.

**Policies:** For family child care providers, state licensing rules and regulations (30%), excessive paperwork and reporting (21%), and programs that they perceive push family child care homes to function more like centers (15%) emerge as important sources of job dissatisfaction. Teachers in centers also report that excessive paperwork (26%) and having multiple programs and quality initiatives in their classrooms (13%) is burdensome and takes away from their time with children, causing them job frustration.

FIGURE 8. TEACHER JOB FRUSTRATIONS



<sup>1</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 source of their conflicts appears different. For example, 20% of teachers report conflict with other teachers, 20% report differences in beliefs about teaching and caregiving with their center’s philosophy and 17% report conflict with their directors as job stressors. Alternatively, for some family child care providers, conflict with families cause work stress. Approximately 16% of family child care providers mention feeling underappreciated by families and report frustration with families over families not following drop-off or pick-up time policies.

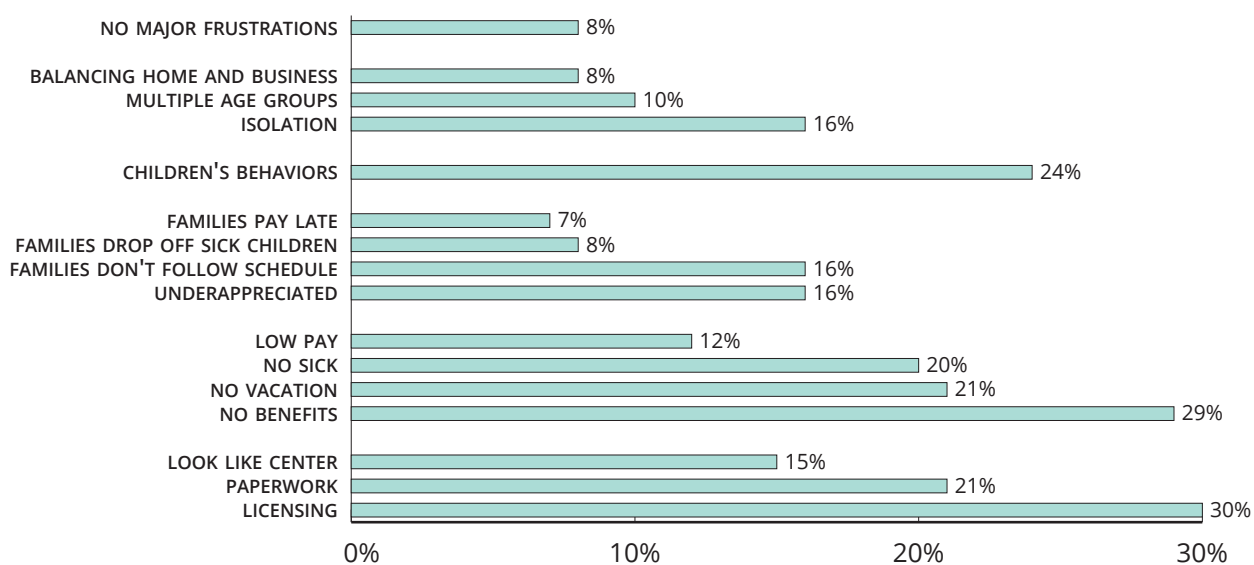
Teachers and family child care providers also experience job frustrations that are unique to their employment context.

**Staffing:** For teachers, staffing appears to be a significant source of frustration. Many express frustration over teacher turnover in their classrooms (38%), high teacher-child ratios (25%), lack of a stable classroom assignment characterized by teachers moving in and out of different classrooms throughout the day (20%), and being sent home without pay if child attendance is low (19%).

**Work Context:** For 16% 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*.

**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 Northwest Colorado.

### OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AND DEPRESSION

Three aspects of early educators' occupational burnout were measured using the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*<sup>xviii</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>xix</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	9.00	4.51	3.00	21.00
Depersonalization	4.86	2.72	3.00	21.00
Personal Accomplishment	17.81	3.18	9.00	21.00
Depression	4.31	3.59	0.00	19.00
<b>Family Child Care Providers</b>				
Emotional Exhaustion	10.01	5.52	3.00	18.00
Depersonalization	4.61	2.24	3.00	11.00
Personal Accomplishment	17.74	3.14	9.00	21.00
Depression	3.08	3.11	0.00	11.00



**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, 9% of teachers and 2% 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 Northwest Colorado sample is slightly higher than would be expected in the general population and lower for family child care providers than would be expected in the general population<sup>xx</sup>.

# IX. Policy and Practice Implications

- > Investing In Scholarship Programs
- > Creating An Expanded Set Of Higher Educational Pathways
- > Improving Access To Higher Education For Working Adults
- > Expanding And Tailoring In-Service Professional Development
- > Recruiting A Workforce In The Region
- > Improving Compensation

*The results of this report indicate several important areas in which Northwest Colorado might direct workforce 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.

## CREATING AN EXPANDED SET OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

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Relatedly, early childhood leaders might also consider working with institutions of higher education to develop additional educational pathways targeted to the needs of early educators who already hold degrees in areas other than early childhood, who constitute a sizable portion of early educators in the region. This might include developing a B.A. in ECE option for those with an A.A. degree in another field. It also might include developing a post B.A. licensure option that could articulate as the first year of a master's degree for those with a B.A. degree in another field so that early educators can pursue higher education in ECE at levels that are aligned to the educational needs and levels of the workforce in the region. There may also be a need to develop B.A. or M.A. tracks that specifically focus on the administration and leadership of early childhood programs given that many current directors in the region may be nearing retirement.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION 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, 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.

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

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Results from Northwest 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, who have special health and learning needs, who have behavioral challenges, and who are English language learners. 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 A WORKFORCE 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 two different 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. Simultaneously, the region might consider trying to develop loan forgiveness programs to attract already qualified early educators to the region.

Findings from this report also indicate a need to recruit more Spanish-speaking early educators. This report also finds that Latina early educators tend to be in more paraprofessional roles than in lead teacher and administrative roles. Consequently, targeting workforce recruitment and development efforts toward Spanish-speaking Latina early educators may be an important strategy to help ensure that Northwest Colorado's early educator workforce represents the children and families in the region and can support the learning needs of a growing Spanish-speaking child population. This might include targeting scholarships toward Latina assistant teachers and/or developing a leadership program for Latina early educators to advance their careers in early care and education.

## IMPROVING COMPENSATION

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Findings from this report also suggest 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>xxi</sup>. Early childhood leaders in the region might leverage the Right Start Project framework from Summit County to continue efforts to better compensate early educators to be able to retain them in the region. 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 in other areas of the region and of increasing the tax credit in Summit County to improve early educator compensation may be important strategies.

Another 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.

## 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, over 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 Northwest 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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