



The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Alaska

CHALLENGES &
OPPORTUNITIES



Stellar
Group



“

“I want to do work that connects me to a community that really does feel like I am doing something for somebody - making a difference in both individuals’ lives and the landscape of the community.”

– EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR



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“I’ve always felt like I need to follow my heart and do what I love... It was a passion...”

– EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR



01 | Executive Summary

The early childhood education sector is an integral part of a thriving economy with both states and local municipalities playing a role in supporting this sector.¹ Alaska, like many states across the nation, is facing a crisis of limited availability of quality early childhood education options. This long-standing crisis in Alaska continues growing amid early childhood education workforce declines, resulting in statewide economic stress. In response, on April 6, 2023, Governor Mike Dunleavy issued Administrative Order No. 346 establishing the Governor’s Task Force on Child Care (Task Force) within the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC). The purpose of the Task Force is “to develop a plan to improve availability and affordability of quality child care throughout Alaska,” while recognizing that a well-compensated early childhood education workforce is central to achieving goals of affordability, accessibility, and quality.² A substantial public investment along with change at multiple levels of the system is needed to stabilize the sector.

About This Report

In 2019, The Johns Hopkins School of Education Innovation in Development, Engagement and Learning Systems (IDEALS) Institute conducted a study on a Wage and Compensation Model for Alaska’s Early Care and Education in Alaska (JHU Study), finding that the early childhood education workforce in Alaska faces significant instability. The purpose of this report is to update the JHU Study and provide an up-to-date analysis of the current workforce, with a focus on workforce shortages and relevant recommendations. The report has the following sections:

- ***An updated review of factors affecting the early childhood education workforce throughout the United States, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic***
- ***An analysis of the status of the early childhood education workforce in Alaska, including a scan of workforce shortages, turnover, and licensed capacity in Alaska with attention to regional trends***
- ***An analysis of factors impacting the early childhood education workforce crisis in Alaska, highlighting low compensation, inadequate benefits, and poor working conditions***
- ***A summary of current early childhood education workforce supports in Alaska, including progress made on recommendations from the JHU Study, including financial supports, wellness programs, educational opportunities, and professional development programs***
- ***An exploration of workforce stabilization strategies adopted by other states and their relative successes, including a discussion of the feasibility of implementing such strategies in Alaska***
- ***A set of recommendations drawn from this research to inform local and statewide workforce stabilization efforts***

The Nationwide Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis

The availability and affordability of early childhood education is in crisis across the United States. Federal COVID-19 relief funds have provided temporary relief for early care and learning providers and the educators they employ; however, this funding is nearing its conclusion. As COVID-19 relief funding ends, early childhood education systems throughout the country are thinking creatively about how to dedicate sustainable funding to support the workforce long term with wages, benefits, and workplace supports to encourage retention.

While the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions made clear the essential role of early childhood education in supporting healthy families and state economic conditions, the factors affecting the crisis remain consistent. National research shows that a chronic undervaluation of the early childhood education workforce has resulted in and reinforced low wages, which are the strongest predictor of turnover. Low wages are often coupled with a lack of adequate benefits, with early childhood educators often lacking basic benefits such as health insurance, retirement, and paid leave. Challenging workplace conditions such as lack of adequate staffing, poor workplace culture, and lack of support for challenging child behaviors contribute to burnout. Many efforts seek to increase professionalization and raise the quality of care through increased education and professional development requirements, however without attention to wages and benefits, and equitable access to training and professional development, these efforts can increase exploitation of a low-wage workforce by requiring but not compensating them adequately for their higher education and standards.

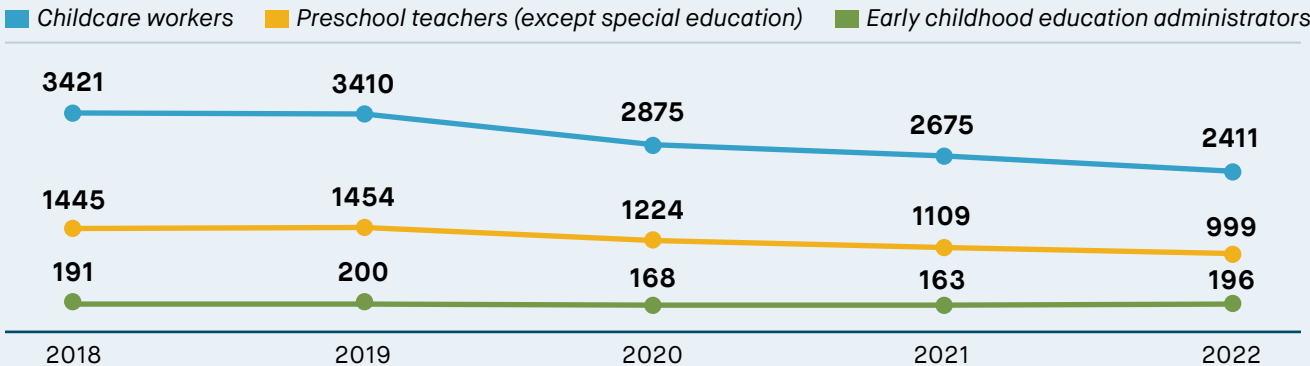
Status of The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Alaska

“ I want to do work that connects me to a community that really does feel like I am doing something for somebody - making a difference in both individuals' lives and the landscape of the community.”

– Early childhood educator

Alaska is facing a decline in early childhood education workforce numbers, including high levels of staff turnover. This decline in workforce numbers is accompanied by a decline in licensed early care and learning providers across the state, which has decreased 19% since 2019. However, the picture in Alaska does include a promising element: there exists a passionate and dedicated workforce in Alaska that, if supported and invested in, has the potential to flourish.

The number of both child care workers and preschool teachers has dropped by nearly one-third in recent years.



State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

Factors Impacting the Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis in Alaska

The decline of the early childhood education workforce in Alaska is affected by several factors – all of which are interconnected. The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey and interviews with early childhood educators show that the key factors influencing the crisis in Alaska are low wages, a lack of benefits, and challenging working conditions. One bright spot is in access to professional development, an area that has received considerable investment and focus over the past few years.

LOW WAGES

“ You can work at the post office and get higher pay there. You can work at the airport and get higher pay there. You can be an instructional aide in the school district in the upper grades and get \$5 more an hour than you would if you worked as the director at the daycare.”

– Early childhood educator

Findings revealed that low wages and limited opportunities for wage increases with further education and experience present a frustrating and untenable situation for early childhood educators. Wages do not increase significantly with years in the field and higher education does not guarantee higher wages.

Despite personal investments in their careers, their lack of ability to earn a living wage often leads early childhood educators to leave the field for higher pay. As one educator said, “[I] **absolutely loved my job. However, I literally couldn’t survive, and that’s why I had to leave.**”

LACK OF BENEFITS

“ I think the root of [burnout] is being paid poorly and not having any benefits like sick time or anything... If we had employees that we could keep, then people who were sick could take sick days, and we could just help each other out more... I know that’s why we can’t keep people.”

– Early childhood educator

While some sectors of the early childhood education workforce receive benefits, in most early childhood education workplaces, the lack of health insurance, paid time off, and retirement benefits remains an ongoing challenge to the stability of the workforce. Ninety-three percent of survey participants indicated that workplace benefits are at least moderately important to them regarding their employment decisions, however nearly one in five report no benefits of any kind. Those in licensed homes and group homes were the least likely to have access to any benefits, with only 5% reporting access to employer sponsored health care.

“ Having a job that doesn’t provide benefits, that has no health insurance, [that] has no retirement - when [I was] in my twenties [and] in my thirties, I was like, oh, whatever. But now in my forties, yes... this changes the picture.”

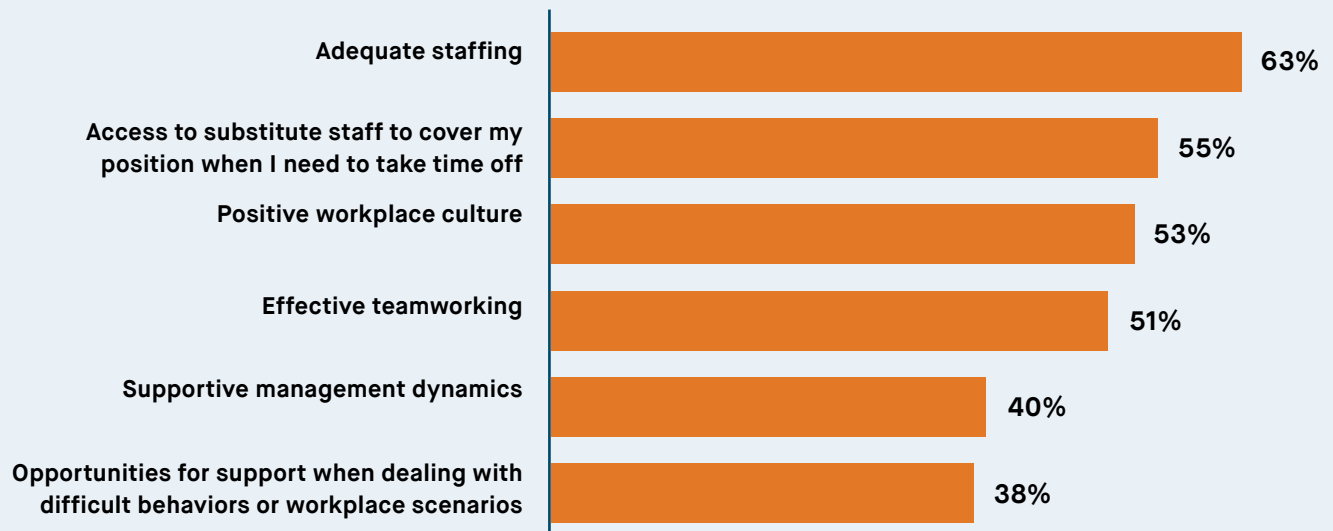
– Director of a licensed center

One area that has received investment in the past few years is professional development. The Child Care Program Office (CCPO), thread, local school districts, and other community agencies work together to provide professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, and there is high satisfaction, with 82% of early childhood educators reporting satisfaction with their access to professional development. However, access is not equal and early childhood educators in licensed homes and group homes were the least likely to report access to paid professional development or paid time off to participate in it.

CHALLENGING WORKPLACE CONDITIONS

Although 69% of early childhood educators said they were at least moderately satisfied with the current supports in place to help them navigate the challenges of their work, almost all (95%) indicated that improved workplace wellness supports would motivate them to remain in their current position, signifying the need to prioritize the wellbeing of the early education workforce through strategies that impact the day-to-day conditions educators experience. Seventy-nine percent of educators report an increase in challenging behaviors since the COVID-19 pandemic and 74% saying their jobs are more demanding.

Early childhood educators identified factors related to adequate staffing, positive interpersonal dynamics, and supportive teamworking as the most important wellness supports affecting their employment decisions.



2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey. N=510

Finally, a strong workforce requires attention to workplace conditions that influence early childhood educators' ability to participate in a coordinated, welcoming, and supportive environment (i.e., adequate staffing, mental health supports, etc.). Absence of adequate supports has led to high levels of burnout among early childhood educators in Alaska: 62% of survey respondents reported feeling emotionally drained from their work. As one said, ***"People are getting overworked. There's not enough time to take a break... I can't even use the bathroom. It's physically and mentally not healthy for me to be in this work environment."***

Current Efforts to Strengthen The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Alaska

Several agencies and organizations across the state are thinking creatively about how to support the workforce. The CCPO, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), thread, and other agencies often partner to provide vital support, including professional development, scholarships, financial support, the Alaska System for Early Education and Development (SEED) Registry, and Learn & Grow and there has been some limited progress on the JHU Study recommendations.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Alaska has some important infrastructure in place to support the early childhood education workforce. thread houses both the Alaska SEED Registry and Learn & Grow, the State's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). The SEED Registry enables early childhood education professionals to track their professional development and education in one place. This can be helpful for applying for jobs, meeting licensing requirements, and tracking yearly professional development requirements. Learn & Grow helps early care and learning providers strive for higher quality by setting tiered quality standards and offering support through financial incentives, administrative and classroom coaching, and education.

AVAILABLE SUPPORTS FOR WAGES

Alaska has one statewide wage bonus program and encourages transparent pay scales that reward education and tenure through Learn & Grow. While the bonus program has offered meaningful relief, funding for it is inconsistently available, and therefore early childhood educators cannot depend on it as part of their compensation. The City and Borough of Juneau has also designed its own local subsidized wage program.

AVAILABLE SUPPORTS FOR BENEFITS

There remains no progress on the JHU Study's recommendation to support early care and learning providers to develop, deliver, and document benefits packages for early childhood educators or to establish partnerships to provide universal health insurance options and retirement plans.

AVAILABLE SUPPORTS TO IMPROVE WORKPLACE CONDITIONS

The JHU Study recommended offering mental health and leadership support to improve the quality of the early childhood education workforce. Since then, workforce burnout has become a common topic in early childhood education professional development courses offered by thread – both how to avoid and manage burnout in oneself and, for administrators, how to cultivate workplace environments that help reduce burnout.

CURRENT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

In Alaska, recent attention has been given to expand the ways in which current and potential early childhood educators can build their credentials, education, and learning, with increasing attention to lowering barriers for rural and remote individuals through remote options, subsidizing learning, and alternative pathways that integrate classroom-based learning and experience, including apprenticeship programs. As many of these supports are in their infancy, there is limited data demonstrating their effectiveness. These efforts are also directly tied to improving the overall quality of early care and learning provided in the state.

Other States' Strategies to Strengthen The Early Childhood Education Workforce

Alaska's pressing issues of low wages, lack of benefits, and difficult workplace conditions for early childhood educators are challenges felt across the nation. At least 22 governors have recognized the foundational importance of a well-prepared early childhood workforce and spoke about the need for increased and new childcare investments in their 2023 state addresses.³ In discussions with other states and a review of recent reports on strategies to address the early childhood workforce crisis, the following themes emerged about how other states are approaching the crisis:

- ***Improving wages and benefits for early childhood education employees is central to most state efforts with many different approaches being used***
- ***No single early childhood education workforce strategy stands in isolation. Strategies recognize that compensation, licensing, quality, and workforce development are intertwined***

- **Multi-faceted strategies require coordination across state programs and with key stakeholder groups. States with strong coordination and centralized authority are often able to be more efficient, leverage resources more easily, and move more quickly to act on priorities**
- **Rethinking early childhood financing strategies is necessary. While many states leveraged COVID-19 relief funds to pilot and scale their initial approaches, states have now found it necessary to increase funding to sustain their efforts**

Specific examples of programs to increase wages, benefits, and workplace wellness, as well as broader workforce development efforts, including targeted supports for in-home providers, are described in the full report.

Recommendations

To build a strong and sustainable early childhood workforce, complementary efforts are needed across these priority areas: wages, benefits, workplace conditions, workforce development, small business supports, along with systemic infrastructure to back these efforts. While all recommendations have the potential to lead to productive and sustainable outcomes, some may require higher investment and in turn deliver a higher level of impact. Additionally, recommendations differ on the time required for implementation; some can be implemented immediately, while others require additional time for strategic planning, coordination, and implementation. These considerations are noted below.

The findings in this report echo findings in prior reports and many of the recommendations are aligned with those made in other recent reports and plans for Alaska’s early childhood education system: the JHU Study, First Children’s Finance’s report, and Early Childhood Alaska, the state’s current strategic plan for the early childhood system. Areas of alignment between recommendations in these reports and the current report’s recommendations are noted throughout the full report.

RECOMMENDATION 1: INCREASE WAGES

Wages emerged as the number one reason early childhood educators have left or are thinking about leaving the field. Recognizing the value of the service that early childhood educators provide, wages should be tied to the value of the sector and state-level economic indicators. Recommended strategies include:

- **Continue Income Supports (Immediate)**
- **Align the CCPO Early Childhood Educator Scholarship Program with Wage Scale and Income Supports (Immediate)**
- **Develop and Fund Implementation of a Wage Scale (Mid-Range; High Investment, High Impact)**

RECOMMENDATION 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO BENEFITS

Health insurance, paid time off, and retirement emerged as the most important benefits for study participants’ employment decisions, and research revealed that other benefits, such as subsidized child care costs, are also well-received. In-home providers are particularly vulnerable to a lack of benefits. Recommended strategies include:

- **Implement Categorical Eligibility for Child Care Providers (Immediate; High Investment, High Impact)**
- **Grants for Providers to Increase Educator’s Benefits (Immediate; High Investment, High Reward)**
- **Leverage Group Purchasing Power for Benefits (Mid-Range)**
- **Support Development of Substitute Pools (Mid-Range; High Investment, High Impact)**
- **Create Conditions for Collective Bargaining (Mid-Range; High Investment, High Impact)**

RECOMMENDATION 3: SUPPORT HEALTHY WORKPLACE CONDITIONS

Working conditions encompass the elements people need to succeed; feel supported, competent, and healthy; and contribute effectively to the organization. While improved wages and benefits are needed to address adequate staffing, other supports can affect working conditions, many of which are related to training opportunities, highlighting the intertwined nature of these needs. Recommended strategies include:

- *Increase Training on Equity and Inclusion (Immediate)*
- *Expand Access to Leadership Development Training (Immediate)*
- *Expand Access to Wellness Resources (Immediate)*
- *Expand Access to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Coaching (Long-Term; High Investment, High Impact)*

RECOMMENDATION 4: STRENGTHEN CAREER PATHWAYS

Alaska has made many recent investments in workforce development pathways, including educational and professional development opportunities, that should be sustained; however, many of these opportunities are new and in development with uncertainty about key elements and effectiveness. There are opportunities for Alaska to be more intentional to ensure a strong foundation with diverse options equitably available in rural, remote, and urban areas. Alignment between Alaska's quality standards and the workforce pipeline is key and can be enhanced by continuing to encourage innovation and creativity that responds to unique challenges and opportunities in Alaska. Recommended strategies include:

- *Continue to Offer Free Professional Development (Immediate)*
- *Develop and Implement a Workforce Development Plan (Mid-Range; High Investment, High Impact)*

RECOMMENDATION 5: PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR IN-HOME PROVIDERS

In-home providers are a key part of the early childhood education system in Alaska, particularly in smaller communities that can not support a larger center. However, while in-home providers encounter many of the same challenges that center-based care providers face, they also face unique challenges as part of running their own business and having fewer or no staff members aside from themselves. Recommended strategies include:

- *Offer Start-Up Grants (Immediate; High Investment, High Impact)*
- *Develop a Staffed Child Care Network (Long-Term; High Investment, High Impact)*

RECOMMENDATION 6: IMPROVE SYSTEM COORDINATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The early care and learning system in Alaska has a strong set of engaged stakeholders who are critical to success. These include local, tribal, and state governments; the university system; nonprofits focused on early childhood; economic development agencies; employers; and the early care and learning providers themselves, along with the families they serve. Efforts such as the creation of Alaska's Strategic Direction are evidence that shared values and goals have emerged throughout the field. However, infrastructure to help the state move forward on those priorities more cohesively and efficiently is needed. Recommended strategies include:

- *Increase Communication and Outreach (Immediate)*
- *Finance Strategically (Long-Term; High Investment, High Impact)*
- *Improve Data Systems (Long-Term; High Investment, High Impact)*
- *Increase Alignment and Coordination (Long-Term; High Investment, High Impact)*

The early childhood education sector is an integral part of a thriving economy with both states and local municipalities playing a role in supporting this sector.⁴ Alaska, like many states across the nation, is facing a crisis of limited availability of quality early childhood education options. This long-standing crisis in Alaska unfortunately continues to grow amid early childhood education workforce declines, resulting in statewide economic stress. In response, on April 6, 2023, Governor Mike Dunleavy issued Administrative Order No. 346 establishing the Governor’s Task Force on Child Care (Task Force) within the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC). The purpose of the Task Force is “to develop a plan to improve availability and affordability of quality child care throughout Alaska.”⁵ The Administrative Order recognizes that a well-compensated early childhood education workforce is central to achieving goals of affordability, accessibility, and quality. However, the economics of a thriving early childhood education ecosystem have presented puzzles in states across the nation, resulting in myriad approaches and substantial public investment to stabilize the sector. A substantial public investment, along with change at multiple levels of the system, is typically needed to stabilize the sector.

Alaska’s Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis

In 2019, The Johns Hopkins School of Education Innovation in Development, Engagement and Learning Systems (IDEALS) Institute conducted a study on a Wage and Compensation Model for Alaska’s Early Care and Education in Alaska (JHU Study), finding that the early childhood education workforce in Alaska faces significant instability. Their findings showed that about half of the study participants intended to leave their current job early childhood education in the next five years or so, reporting low pay and a lack of benefits as primary reasons.⁶ The AECCC’s recently adopted strategic plan, *Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025* (Alaska Strategic Direction), also recognizes the need to prioritize the early childhood workforce and has a number of priorities related to strengthening the early childhood education workforce, as well as the broader early childhood system.

Since the JHU Study and adoption of the Alaska Strategic Direction by the AECCC, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated additional pressures for the early childhood education workforce, both in Alaska and nationally. In addition to ongoing concerns about low wages and often insufficient benefits packages, the workforce is facing new challenging behaviors, developmental delays, and childhood mental health concerns following the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ These stressors are compounded by chronic understaffing and challenging workplace dynamics. As a result, the early childhood education workforce is experiencing increased workplace stress and burnout that may lead to lower job satisfaction and high turnover – a cycle that exacerbates staff shortages across the field.

A 2022 National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) survey found that 75% of programs in Alaska are experiencing a staffing shortage.⁸ Moreover, it found that 63% of early childhood educators in Alaska were considering leaving their job or closing their in-home facility, compared to an average of 29% nationally. A 2022 First Children’s Finance Report (FCF Report) for the State of Alaska Child Care Program Office (CCPO) similarly found that early childhood educators in Alaska faced multiple challenges and barriers, and shared recommendations to strengthen the state’s use of subsidy dollars to better support them.⁹

The lack of an adequate early childhood education workforce has several important direct effects on Alaskan families and Alaska’s economy. High turnover rates drive up costs and undermine early care and learning providers’ ability to maintain high quality care.¹⁰ The cost in Alaska is already significantly higher than the US average.¹¹ Further, when inadequate staffing leads to classroom closures, parents may be forced to remove themselves from the workforce to care for their children; a 2021 report published by the Alaska Chamber of Commerce found that 77% of parents in Alaska have missed work in the last three months due to child care issues, leading to an estimated \$165 million loss for Alaska’s economy.¹²

About This Report

The purpose of the Alaska Early Childhood Education Workforce Study is to update the JHU Study to provide an up-to-date analysis of the current workforce, with a focus on workforce shortages and relevant recommendations. The report has the following sections:

- ***An updated review of factors affecting the early childhood education workforce throughout the United States, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic***
- ***An analysis of the status of the early childhood education workforce in Alaska, which includes a scan of workforce shortages, turnover, and licensed capacity in Alaska, with attention to regional trends***
- ***An analysis of factors impacting the early childhood education workforce crisis in Alaska, highlighting low compensation, inadequate benefits, and poor working conditions***
- ***A summary of current early childhood education workforce supports in Alaska, including progress made on recommendations from the JHU Study related to financial supports, wellness programs, educational opportunities, and professional development programs***
- ***An exploration of workforce stabilization strategies adopted by other states and their relative successes, including a discussion of the feasibility of implementing such strategies in Alaska***
- ***A set of recommendations drawn from this research to inform local and statewide workforce stabilization efforts***

A table summarizing progress made on the JHU Study’s recommendations is in Appendix A. As this report is focused on early childhood education specifically, many topics related to the provision of high quality and accessible early childhood education were beyond the scope of this report, for example, true costs of care of early childhood education, additional structural considerations, and certain factors at the provider level.

Additionally, while the early childhood workforce includes a wide variety of positions who work with young children and their families, this report is specifically focused on the early childhood education workforce that provides early care and learning opportunities for young children in licensed, school-based, or other institutionalized settings, excluding informal care and learning opportunities. While some out-of-school time providers are included in the survey, they may not be fully representative of the sector in Alaska, and the out-of-school time providers’ needs may be distinct from those of the early childhood education workforce.

Early childhood educators work in a wide variety of settings, from small in-home providers to large networks of Head Start providers. Licensed early care and learning providers in Alaska are those who are regulated by the CCPO, which is housed within the State of Alaska Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance, or by the Child Care Licensing Program (CCL) within the Municipality of Anchorage. Details on the different types of

licensed early care and learning providers and their associated requirements can be found in Appendix B. It is also important to note that this report is focused primarily on the needs of the individuals within the workforce rather than the needs of the institutions that employ them. However, there is some discussion of the specific challenges that in-home providers experience as both business owners and providers.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. Primary data includes a survey of the early childhood education workforce, referred to throughout as the 2023 Alaska Early Childhood Education (ECE) Workforce Survey which garnered 699 responses, as well as 25 interviews and three focus groups with early childhood educators throughout the state. Thirteen interviews were conducted with educational and professional development key informants in Alaska, as well as 13 interviews with programs in other states. Secondary data was provided by the CCPO, the State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), the University of Alaska Institutional Research Office, the Council for Professional Recognition, and thread Alaska. Additional secondary data includes reports on the early childhood workforce and programs that serve them from local, state, and national sources. A more comprehensive methodology is found in Appendix C.

Due to the time-sensitive nature of the report, data collection and analysis were completed over a relatively short timeframe, between July and November 2023. This limits the depth of analysis that could be conducted.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

The default language throughout this report refers to members of the early childhood education workforce as “early childhood educators”, in an effort to accurately capture the skillsets and educational responsibilities upheld within the profession; however, language throughout this report also reflects terms and titles used in official data sources. For example, “child care workers” and “preschool workers” are used according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics definitions when speaking to DOLWD data. Additionally, in alignment with Alaska Strategic Direction language, facilities of all types (as opposed to the individuals who own or are employed by facilities) are referred to throughout as “early care and learning providers” or “providers.”



03

The Nationwide Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis

The availability and affordability of early childhood education is in crisis across the United States. One of the primary factors contributing to the crisis is high turnover rates and an overall decline of the early childhood education workforce.¹³ In 2019, the JHU Study summarized the existing research on the role of compensation, including wages and employee benefits, in the early childhood education system. The study found that inequity in wages, including low wages that are inconsistently tied to competency or tenure, disincentivizes retention. This section provides an update to the National Landscape Review provided in the JHU Study, focusing specifically on summarizing research and reports that have been published since 2019. Many of the themes have remained consistent throughout the four years since the JHU report, but instead of seeing progress in the intervening years, the added stress and pressures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have only further exacerbated ongoing issues.

Federal COVID-19 relief funds have provided temporary relief for early care and learning providers and the early childhood educators they employ; however, this funding is nearing its conclusion. In many states, COVID-19 relief funds were used to pilot programs related to workforce stabilization to test strategies and learn what might work best in their state moving forward. In other cases, the relief funds were utilized for more short-term efforts to provide immediate relief. In the latter instances, the funds were often effective in providing relief and a measure of immediate support for the workforce, but the strategies were not designed to be sustainable. The ending of COVID-19 relief funds is expected to have a fallout for many early care and learning providers, with the NAEYC reporting that across the nation, 43% of center directors and 37% of in-home providers predict having to raise tuition to compensate for the end of relief funding, and 27% of center-based and 29% of in-home providers expect to cut wages at the expiration of these grants.¹⁴ As COVID-19 relief funding ends, early childhood education systems throughout the country are thinking creatively about how to dedicate sustainable and long-term funding to support the workforce with wages, benefits, and workplace supports to encourage retention.

The federal government is also considering additional investments. In January of 2023, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (US DHHS) announced the launch of the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center, formed to support research and assistance for states, communities, and tribal nations to improve conditions for early childhood educators, including a \$30 million investment over the span of five years to support these goals.¹⁵ This accompanies nearly \$300 million in funding for new preschool development grants awarded to 42 states, intended to support the early childhood education workforce and improve the coordination of preschool programming.¹⁶

Even more recently, a presidential Executive Order has called for increased access to high-quality care in the country, including an increase in compensation and incentives for early childhood educators in federally funded child care centers and support for the professionalization of the workforce.¹⁷

Early Childhood Educators Are Essential Yet Undervalued

COVID-19 pandemic disruptions made clear the essential role of early childhood education in supporting healthy families and state economic conditions. Parents and employers rely on the early childhood education workforce so they can go to work and operate businesses. It is estimated that early childhood education has a national economic impact of over \$99 billion in revenue and spillover to other industries.¹⁸ There is an emerging understanding of the critical need for the early childhood workforce with at least 28 states designating early childhood educators as essential workers.¹⁹ The role of the educator is not simply to observe children's development, but to stimulate and guide it. This work has a deep and lasting impact. However, recognition of the necessity of this service has not always translated to public respect or a living wage for those who provide it.

Despite the essential role of early childhood educators, the workforce is chronically undervalued across the nation, leading to low wages, inadequate benefits, and a lack of sustained investment in crucial workforce stabilization programs and efforts.²⁰ Explanations for the undervaluation of early childhood educators may be multifold yet is often linked to the historical and pervasive undervaluing of labor performed by women, and especially women of color in the United States. Data from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care of Education (NSECE) reports that early childhood educators in the United States are 97% women, and 38% are women of color, finding that the early childhood education workforce is more racially diverse than the general population.²¹ Of the few men in the early childhood education workforce, almost half (44%) leave the field within five years.²² The gender imbalances within the early childhood education workforce have a reinforcing nature, with research showing that low and stagnant wages are a key barrier to men joining the field, as men are still the primary earners in two-thirds of families in the United States.²³ However, the ongoing trend of a female-dominated industry can reinforce low wages and a lack of benefits, illustrated through a breadth of findings on “women’s work” (including, but not limited to early childhood education) having lower wages on average than male-dominated fields, and less likelihood to offer employer-provided benefits.²⁴

Improving the public perception of the field requires an understanding and demonstration of the important value that educators have to society, not only in regards to child development, but to the functioning of a thriving economy, as child care providers are at times referred to as “the workforce behind the workforce.”²⁵ Improved public perception can in turn spur expanded strategies and increased investment of public and private dollars to increase wages, benefits, and workplace conditions while demonstrating value to society.²⁶

Low Wages Remain The Strongest Predictor Of Turnover

Low wages are the key challenge facing the early childhood workforce, with early childhood educators continuing to be one of the lowest-paid occupations in the nation.²⁷ According to 2016 projections, early childhood educators have the lowest projected earnings of all college graduates.²⁸ Consistently across many national and state-level studies, low wages are the strongest predictor of high turnover in the field, with a recent study finding staff turnover rates were 23% in centers paying below \$10 per hour, falling to below 8% in centers paid at or above \$25 per hour.²⁹

Research increasingly contextualizes the low wages of early childhood educators through comparison to those occupations working with school-aged children, finding that a pay penalty exists for those working with younger children. The Early Educator Workforce Index reports that those working exclusively with infants and toddlers were paid up to \$8,375 less per year than those working with preschool-age children, with even starker differences in comparison to education positions within elementary and secondary school.³⁰ The economics of providing early childhood education present unique challenges for in-home providers, where self-employed individuals are often

paid last after accounting for all revenue and expenses. This has led to a decline in in-home providers across the US, with decreases as high as 61% in Wisconsin between 2007 and 2016, and a 30% decrease in California from 2008 to 2017.³¹

Low wages have led to higher poverty rates among early educators, with a reported average eight times higher than those of school-aged teachers (K-8), and double those of other occupations.³² In turn, this leads to high utilization of public income assistance programs within the occupation, including the Federal Income Tax Credit, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).³³ However, efforts to increase wages within the sector should also be conscious of the complexities of wages and public assistance programs, as recent research has found that small wage increases can pose difficult problems for early childhood educators who may lose access to public assistance programs while still not earning an adequate wage.³⁴

Employee Benefits Are Central For A Stable Workforce

A lack of comprehensive non-wage benefits, such as health insurance, retirement, and paid leave, is an ongoing challenge for the retention of the early childhood education workforce, with research indicating that job satisfaction and worker wellbeing extend beyond wage earnings.³⁵ A 2020 survey conducted by the Child Care Services Association found that 25% of respondents who had recently left the early education profession in North Carolina cited a lack of benefits as their reason for departure.³⁶ School-sponsored centers are more likely to offer health and retirement benefits than other centers; however, research also shows that early childhood educators face challenges related to the unaffordability of health insurance premiums through employer-sponsored plans.^{37, 38}

A breadth of other research emphasizes the importance of benefits in early childhood education workforce retention, with recommendations to include healthcare benefits in long-term compensation strategies and scales.³⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the consequences of a lack of health benefits and paid sick leave for early childhood educators, with educators facing the difficult decision of receiving pay during the pandemic or prioritizing their own and their families' health. National research indicates that benefits such as paid leave and sick time support workforce productivity and wellbeing, enabling educators to take care of themselves.⁴⁰

Workplace Conditions Contribute To Burnout

Research is placing increasing attention on staff burnout as a predictor of turnover within the sector.⁴¹ While high turnover rates are strongly correlated to low compensation and limited training in positive teaching practices, analysis of 2014 Survey of Early Childhood Educators: US project data found general levels of stress in their workplace was a key predictor of intentions to leave the profession, independent of salary or levels of training.⁴² Staffing levels, management and teamworking styles, and support for responding to challenging behaviors are all components of a supportive workplace.⁴³

Research suggests that site-specific turnover does not always indicate a departure from the education field, but rather a dissatisfaction with center-related conditions.⁴⁴ The Institute of Education Sciences examined turnover across various roles and centers, reporting that turnover rates were highest among providers serving children ages birth to five in comparison to those serving ages three to five.⁴⁵ The study further found that private pay centers (i.e., those funded directly from family tuition payments) serving children ages birth to five see the highest rates of staff turnover due to a number of center characteristics, including lower wages, a lack of non-wage benefits, and smaller staff sizes.

A competent and supportive manager is critical to the overall workplace culture. Managers must consider staff-child ratios, competitive wages and benefits, and a consistent schedule and workload to foster a positive work environment for their staff.⁴⁶ The US DHHS acknowledges early childhood educators are better able to provide care and nurturing for children when they work within programs focused on their well-being.⁴⁷ The US DHHS

recommends that early childhood educator workplace environments which are inclusive of strategies for staff physical, emotional, and mental health are recommended; however, these benefits or programs are considered difficult to enact by many providers. The US DHHS's Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center offers resources to promote staff wellness, mental health, and physical health.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented additional factors associated with workplace conditions and burnout among early childhood educators. The increased personal stress and decline in mental health among educators as a result of the global pandemic was compounded by increasing stressors in the workplace, including increased sanitation and health monitoring, widespread staff shortages, and employment instability due to center closures and reduced revenue.^{48,49} Even as the country moved on from the height of the pandemic, staffing shortages and facility closures have continued. Longer-term ramifications of the pandemic generated additional pressures for the workforce, including perceptions of more challenging behaviors, developmental delays, and mental health concerns among the children in care.⁵⁰ Having both the skills to cope with and understand young children is related to retention as the workforce can feel better equipped to address child behaviors and needs as a strategy to combat burnout.⁵¹ Ongoing and incentivized training beyond basic care and supervision is a necessary part of a supportive workplace.



***“I think
the root of
[burnout] is
being paid
poorly and not
having any
benefits like
sick time or
anything...”***

**– EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATOR**

Equitable Training And Professional Development Pathways Are Necessary

There is a wide range of terms used to describe early childhood educators, ranging from teacher, provider, child care worker, and caregiver, among others, with these roles employed in a range of settings including home-based care, school- and public-sponsored facilities, and private facilities.⁵² Accompanying this range of labels is a range of educational requirements and standards for each position.⁵³ Professionalization efforts in the early childhood education workforce are often focused on aligning the educational requirements, training and preparation for early childhood educator occupations in the field, and improving the public perception and respect for the occupation through a recognition of the unique skills and standards expected for the early childhood education workforce.⁵⁴

In their 2020 report, The Early Childhood Workforce Index put forth a policy recommendation to align qualification requirements across settings, with a focus on establishing minimum requirements (i.e., a Child Development Associate Credential or equivalent) for all early childhood teaching staff, and a bachelor's degree with early childhood education specialization, and individual licensure for all lead teachers and program leads.⁵⁵ However, efforts towards professionalization requires an equity lens: as families require and deserve access to a diverse and high quality range of early childhood education, the early childhood education workforce also requires equitable opportunity to thrive and provide quality education within their state's early childhood education landscape.⁵⁶



Professional development for the existing workforce must also be approached in a manner that ensures equity for early childhood educators, including strategies to promote further learning without placing an additional burden on the current workforce. This includes embedding professional development into the paid workday and compensating educators for the time spent on professional development.⁵⁷ With the already low wages among early childhood educators, depending on unpaid labor to pursue training and credentialing presents a substantial barrier to equitable access.⁵⁸ A focus on equity also requires attention to systemic barriers to accessing higher education, including the accessibility and affordability of higher education in different geographic areas and for potential educators from diverse linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. National research and policy points towards potential strategies to increase access to education pathways, including dedicated scholarship

programs for future educators (in addition to needs-based aid), funding for registered apprenticeship programs, paired with academic advising and assistance for non-traditional and non-English speaking students to navigate the higher education system. Institutions themselves play an important role in creating equitable pathways for potential early childhood educators, and strategies to facilitate this include utilizing funding to support flexible and accessible education pathways, such as courses in alternative locations and remote-learning opportunities.⁵⁹

However, without an overall improvement of wages across the field, educational requirements and professional standards have the potential to reinforce an exploitation of early childhood educators in the field, wherein educators are required to provide increasingly high-quality education and care without corresponding compensation. Research emphasizes the importance of providing a “compensation-first” framing of education, credentialing and professional development, wherein improved compensation for early childhood educators must be in place to reward expectations of higher education and higher standards.⁶⁰

04

Status Of The Early Childhood Education Workforce In Alaska

In line with national findings on the early childhood education workforce crisis across the country, Alaska is facing its own decline, with far-reaching impacts on not only the overall availability of early care and learning opportunities in the state, but also on communities, families, and the quality of care that remains available. However, the picture in Alaska does include a promising element: there exists a passionate and dedicated workforce in Alaska that, if supported and invested in, has the potential to flourish. This section will show that despite strong evidence that much of the early childhood education workforce wants to remain in the field, the workforce is in decline and has high levels of turnover.

Early Childhood Educators Enjoy Their Work

The 2023 ROOTS (Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers Stipends) Awards Evaluation Survey of the early childhood education workforce found that 100% of participants enjoy being an early childhood educator, a sentiment echoed in interviews with early childhood educators across this study.⁶¹ Early childhood educators play a crucial role in the development, education, and well-being of children across Alaska – a role many educators see as not only their vocation, but a passion and calling. Many educators discussed how rewarding it can be to watch children learn and develop, while others spoke to the importance of feeling that one’s work is supporting not only individual children, but the wider community.

“ I’ve always felt like I need to follow my heart and do what I love... It was a passion... You know, that whole, ‘I would do this for free’ sort of thing, but I’m glad I don’t have to.”

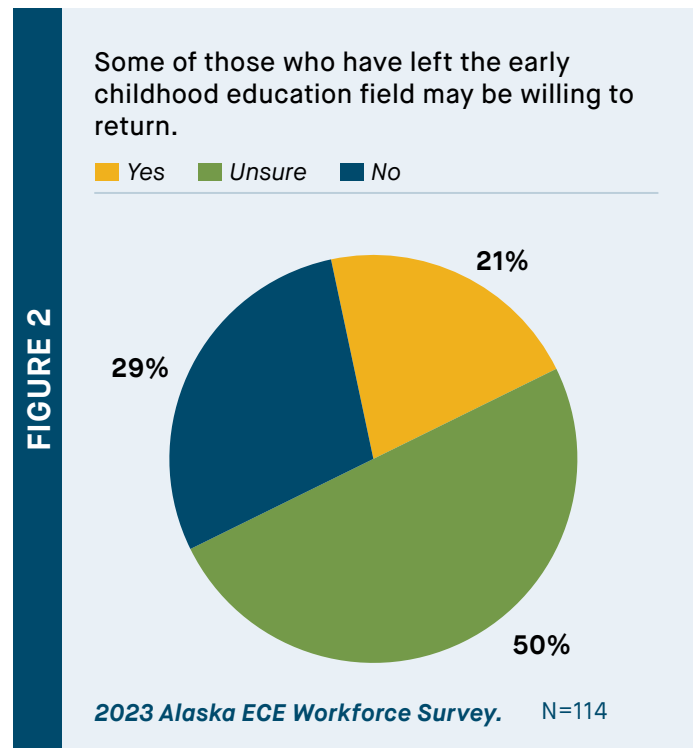
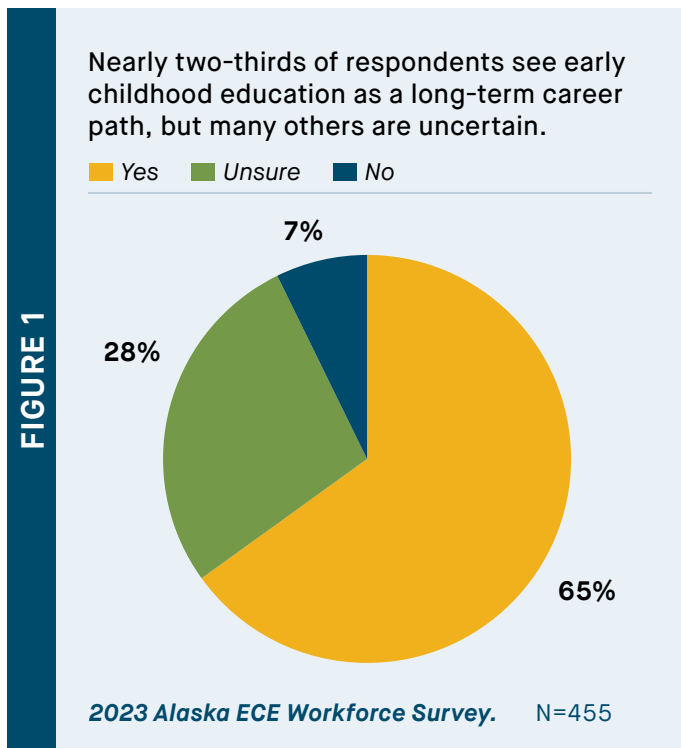
– Early childhood educator

“ I want to do work that connects me to a community that really does feel like I am doing something for somebody – making a difference in both individuals’ lives and the landscape of the community.”

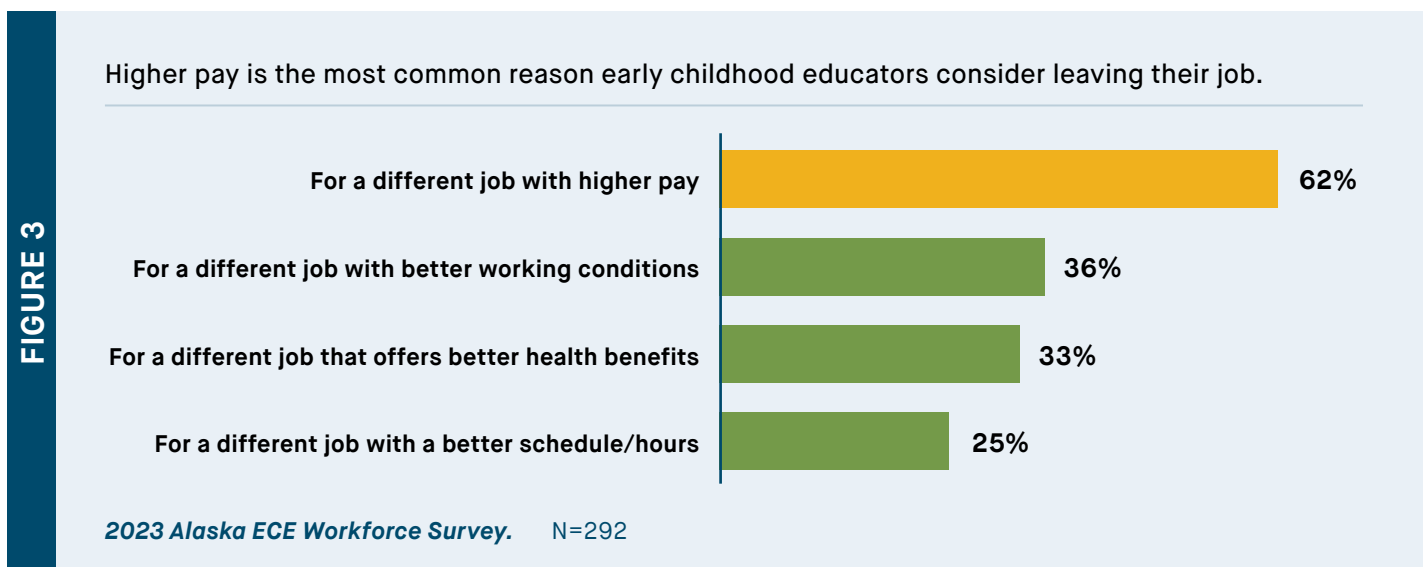
– Early childhood educator

Supporting these findings, the 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey found that many early childhood educators enter the workforce with the intention to stay. Almost all (93%) surveyed educators either see early childhood education as a long-term career path or are unsure, indicating that only a small percentage of early childhood educators plan on departing from the field. These numbers are even higher for in-home providers (n=44), of whom 98% see early childhood education as a long-term career.

Also encouraging is that among those who have recently left the field of early childhood education, there is some interest in returning – although, there still remains a high degree of hesitancy, with half of respondents indicating that they are unsure if they will return.



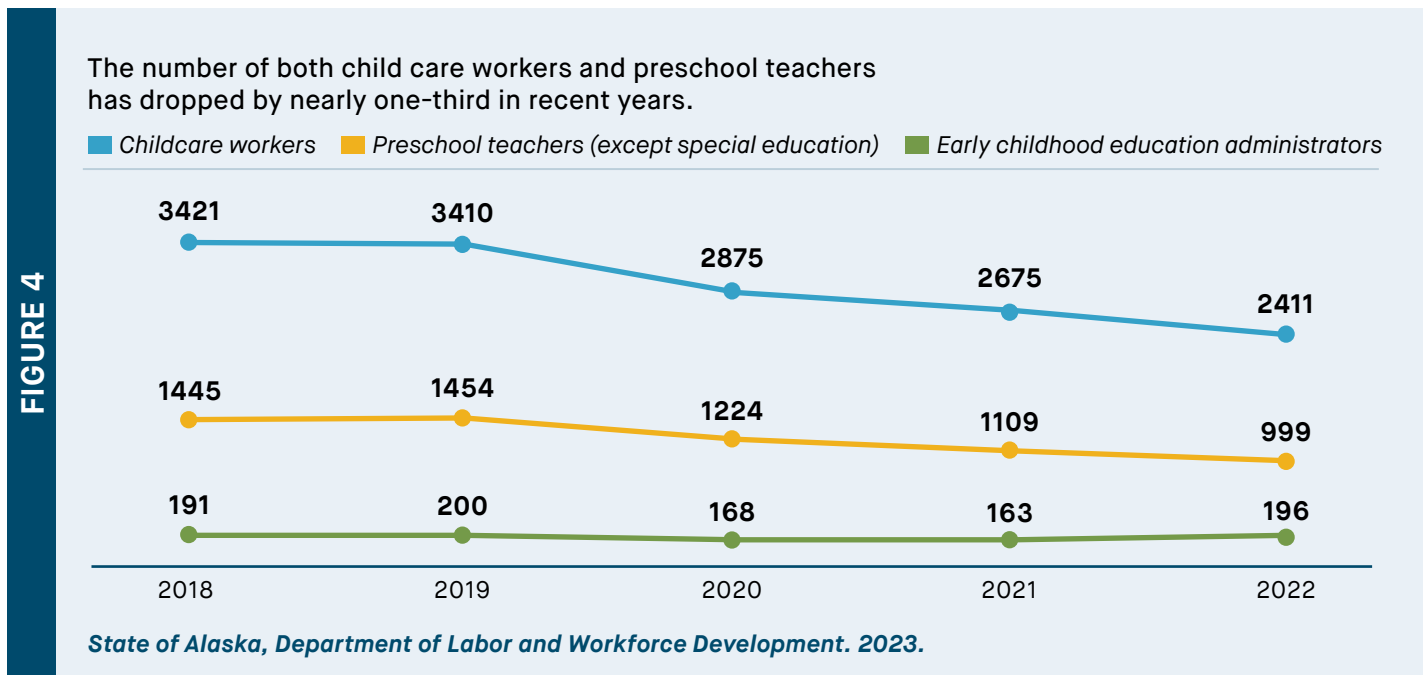
Understanding the passion and dedication of the early childhood education workforce is an important starting point to consider why the workforce is in decline – specifically, what factors and conditions are influencing early childhood educators’ decisions to leave the field, despite their interest in staying and their enjoyment of the work. The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey data shows parallels in Alaska to national research findings: the most significant barriers to a stable workforce include low pay, untenable working conditions, and a lack of access to workplace benefits.



With a preliminary understanding of early childhood educators’ intentions and barriers to remain in the field, the remainder of this section provides an overview of the decline in workforce numbers in Alaska, including the associated decline in licensed capacity in the state.

Workforce Numbers Are Declining

The early childhood education workforce has seen an overall decline across the state of Alaska in the past five years, despite DOLWD projections that the number of workers needed in the field will grow between 11% and 16% by 2030 (16 new positions for early childhood education administrators, 73 for preschool teachers, and 265 for child care workers). DOLWD data provides a picture of declining workforce numbers. While a higher worker count can indicate high turnover (when a job turns over during a year, there will be two workers counted for that job and thus a higher worker count), a decline in worker count does not indicate stabilization either. Rather, a decline in worker count may indicate an overall decline in workforce numbers as people leave their jobs and replacements are not found. DOLWD data shows a 30% decline in child care workers and a 31% decline in preschool teacher¹ total worker counts² between 2018 and 2022 (see Figure 4). However, after a brief dip, early childhood education administrators have regained workforce numbers in the same period when looking at Alaska as a whole, even though rural areas have seen a sharp decline (see Figure 7).



REGIONAL IMPACTS

A regional framing of the workforce provides additional insight. While all regions of the state have seen declines, Anchorage has seen the most significant decrease in the number of child care workers: a 45% decline from 2018 to 2022, followed by Juneau (27% decline) and rural Alaska³ (13% decline).

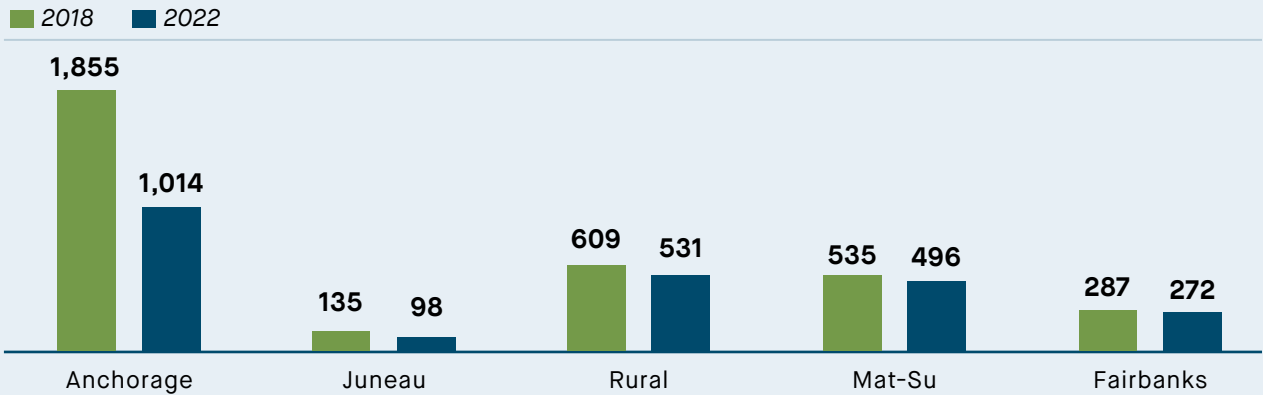
¹DOLWD utilizes occupational definitions created by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Standard Occupational Classification system, which defines child care workers as those who "attend to children at schools, businesses, private households, and child care institutions and perform a variety of care tasks. Pre-school teachers are defined as those who instruct pre-school-aged students, following curricula or lesson plans, in activities designed to promote social, physical and intellectual growth." Education and childcare administrators, preschool and daycare (referred to in this report as early childhood education administrators) are defined as those who "plan, direct, or coordinate academic or nonacademic activities of preschools or child care centers and programs, including before- and after-school care." More information can be found at live.laborstats.alaska.gov/erg/occmanual.pdf.

²According to the DOLWD annual worker count data represents the total number of unique individuals who worked in the occupation at any point and for any duration during the year in the area specified.

³In data provided for this report, rural Alaska is defined by DOLWD as all areas of the state not included in the City and Borough of Juneau, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and Municipality of Anchorage. This is a nonstandard classification and was utilized due to data limitations in less populous geographic areas.

FIGURE 5

Anchorage saw a 45% decline in the number of child care workers from 2018 to 2022, the most significant decline in the state.

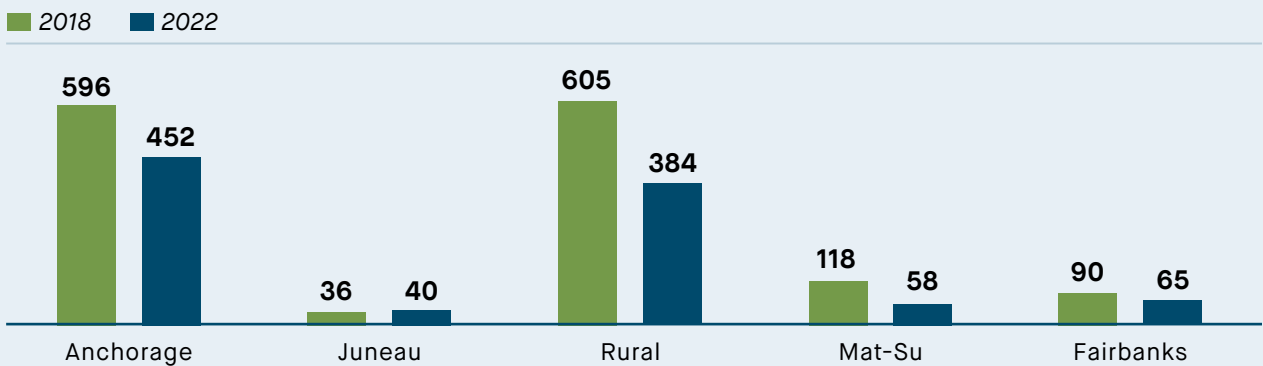


State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

Preschool teachers, however, have seen the largest decline in Mat-Su and rural Alaska, with a decline of 51% and 37% respectively, while Juneau has some slight growth in its preschool teacher workforce numbers between 2018 and 2022.

FIGURE 6

Mat-Su and rural Alaska saw the most significant decline in preschool teachers from 2018 to 2022.

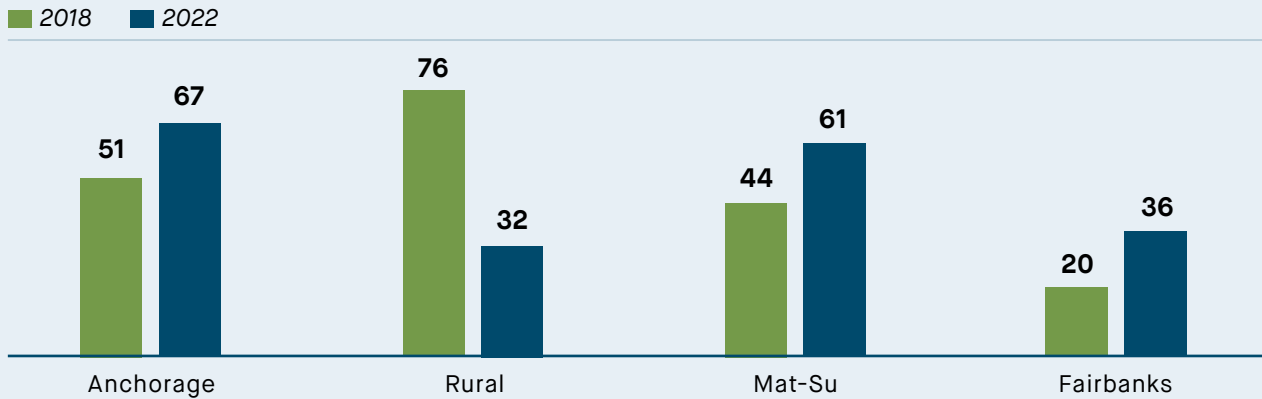


State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

The number of early childhood education administrators has increased in all regions except for rural Alaska, which has seen a significant decline of 58% since 2018. Rural areas may have barriers to the recruitment and retention of early childhood education administrators unique to their geographic circumstances. According to data provided by The Council for Professional Recognition, there are 125 people living in rural Alaska who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, which meets the educational requirements for becoming an administrator. Therefore, while there are many communities located throughout rural Alaska, on the surface, the decline in early childhood education administrators does not appear to be caused by a deficit in qualified individuals.

FIGURE 7

Despite increases in all other regions, rural Alaska has seen a significant decrease in early childhood education administrators.



State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

Note: Early childhood education administrator data is not available for the Juneau region.

It is important to note, however, that this data does not capture in-home or other providers who are either self-employed, out-of-school time or school-age providers, or those coded to a different occupational label. However, drops in licensed in-home providers show a workforce in similar decline (see Figure 13).

Turnover Is High

Turnover within the early childhood education workforce is high across the state for all positions. Child care workers have an average turnover of between 42%-55%, depending on region, while preschool teachers and early childhood education administrators have an average turnover rate between 23%-48% and 21%-38%, respectively.^{iv} Additionally, according to DOLWD data, child care workers have the shortest occupational retention in Alaska when compared to other occupations requiring similar investments in training and education; child care workers in Alaska worked a mean of 1.66 years within a five-year period (see Table 1). High levels of staff turnover have significant impacts on early childhood education settings and the field itself, including impacts to program operations, workplace conditions, and the quality of education for the children.

Many programs have responded to staffing shortages by reducing opening hours: **“We ended up cutting our opening hours because of that,”** explained one early childhood education administrator, **“We used to be open a lot later and a lot earlier, and we couldn’t manage it. We couldn’t keep our staff, so we had to shorten it.”**

“ There’s not enough space for kids because we don’t have teachers that are able to work to allow us to open our programs ... And so, we did. We rode the wave... of closing classrooms because we had too many teachers out. We were putting a lot of burden on our families, which isn’t fair.”

– Early childhood educator

^{iv}For this report, average turnover is the percentage of the workers in the occupation who need to be hired every year because of workers leaving their occupation.

**TABLE 1:
MEAN YEARS IN OCCUPATION**

Occupation	Mean Years
Child care workers	1.66
Office clerks	1.83
Early childhood education administrators	2.04
Personal care aides	2.17
Community health workers	2.20
Preschool teachers, except special education	2.21
Teaching assistants	2.45
Education administrators, elementary and secondary school	3.41

State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

Note: These numbers are an estimate of the total years worked in the occupation from 2018 to 2022 by individuals identified as working in the occupation in 2018. The data include individuals who worked for different employers in the specific occupation and those who left the workforce and then returned to the same occupation.

Other programs have responded to staff turnover and shortages by reducing classroom capacity and enrollment numbers due to the inability to maintain the staffing ratios required for licensing, meaning that many providers are not operating at their full capacity.

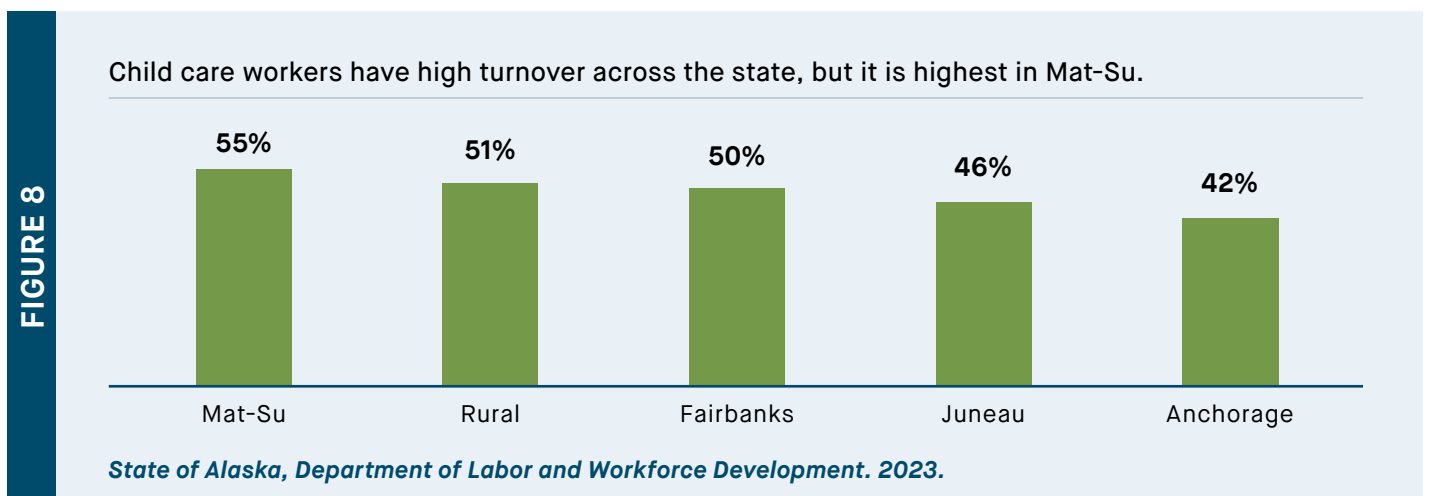
High staff turnover also adds additional stress for facility staff and early childhood education administrators, burdened with not only recruitment, hiring, and onboarding of new staff, but also the day-to-day exhaustion and stress of operating with inadequate supports and staffing numbers in place (discussed in more in the Factors Impacting the Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis in Alaska section). Staff turnover is also expensive for providers, as the cost of recruitment, hiring, and training – particularly given the necessary expenses associated with background checks and onboarding – can add up significantly over time.⁶²

Early childhood educators also emphasized the impacts that staff turnover can have on children; they stressed the importance of having healthy and stable adults in a child’s life. Staff turnover disrupts these child-educator relationships that are so central to child development and exacerbate challenging behaviors. One early childhood educator pointed out: **“If their turnover rate is extremely high at the preschool, then that doesn’t give the kids a chance to build a relationship with a teacher. It’s a huge interruption every time there’s a new teacher.”**

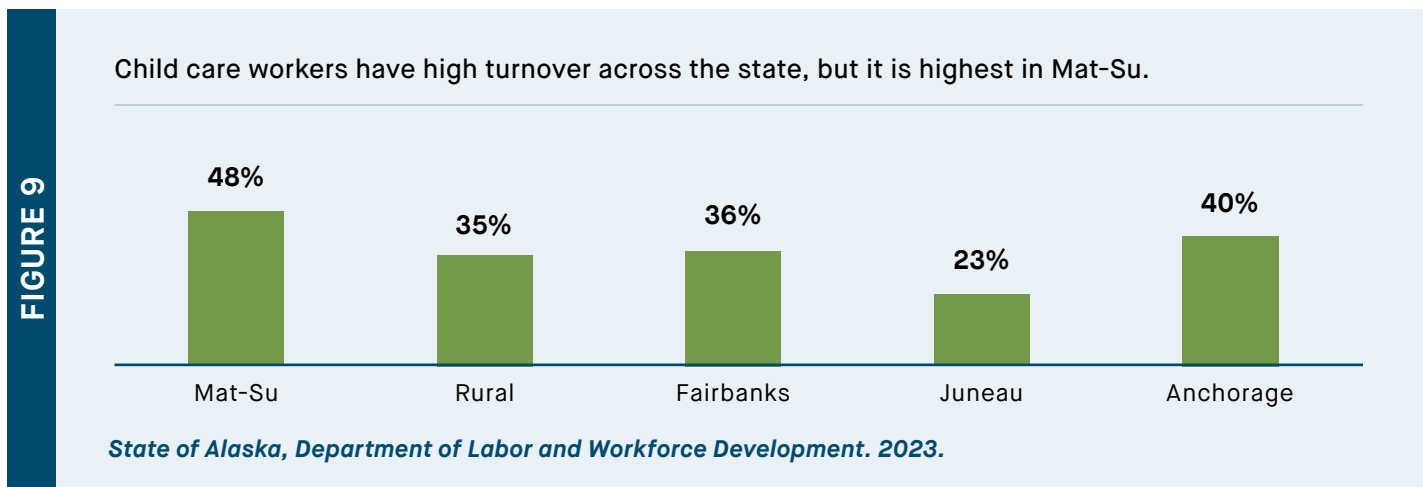
Crucially, staff turnover and staffing shortages have forced some providers to close. As one rural Alaskan early childhood educator shared: **“Because of that high turnover with staffing there, we just haven’t even been able to open again. So we are now a village without child care.”**

REGIONAL IMPACTS

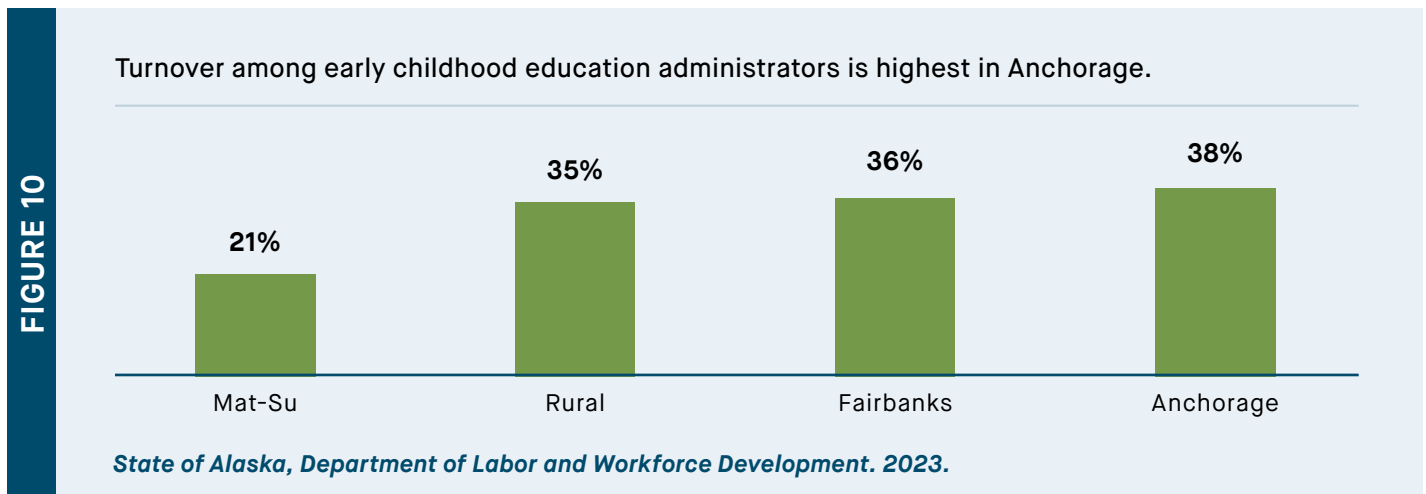
Turnover rates differ slightly by region for all three positions, yet no significant trends indicate that one region of the state suffers from higher turnover than others. For child care workers, the turnover rate is slightly higher in Mat-Su (55%) than in other regions, and the turnover rate is lowest in Anchorage (42%).



For preschool teachers, Mat-Su also sees the highest turnover rate, while Juneau has the lowest.



The turnover rate for early childhood education administrators is similar in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and in rural Alaska, while turnover is lowest in Mat-Su – an interesting finding considering the high turnover of both child care workers and preschool teachers in Mat-Su.



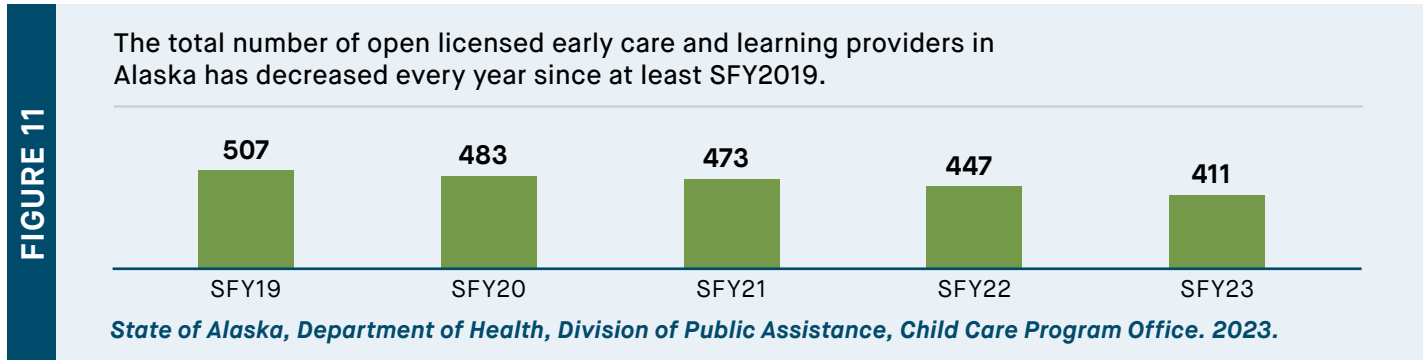
“We’re not just entertaining your kids. We’re having fun, but we’re also doing it for a purpose...”

– EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

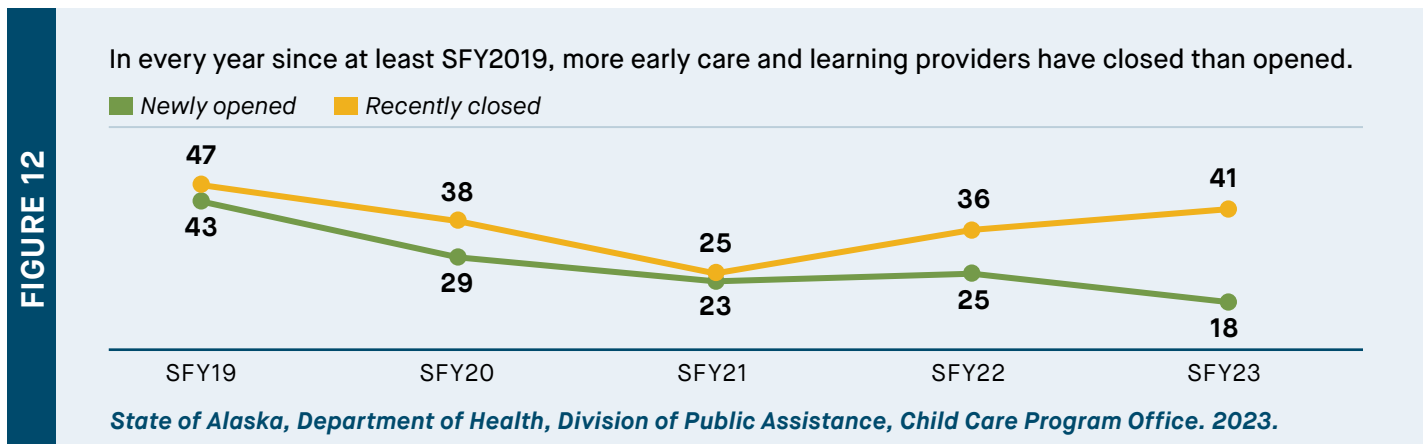


The Number of Licensed Early Care and Learning Providers is Declining

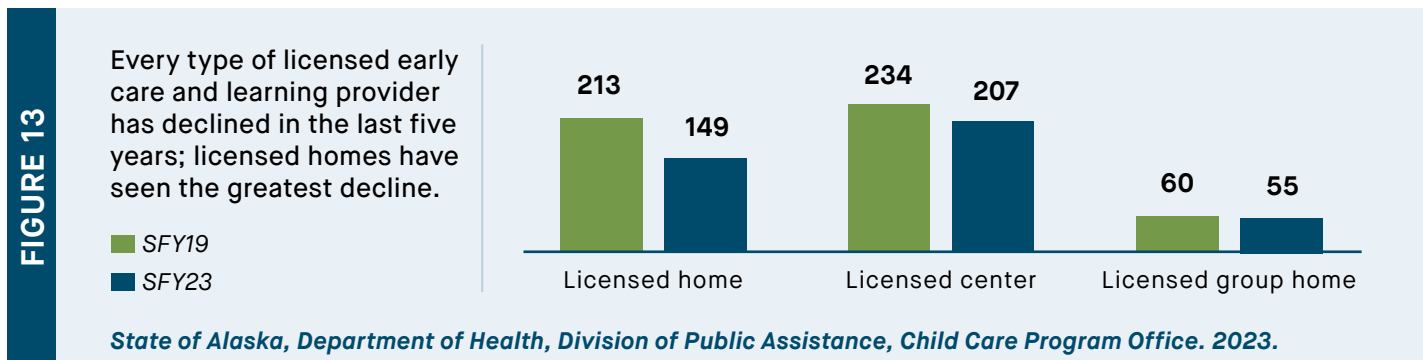
High levels of staff turnover and the declining early childhood education workforce is accompanied by a decline in licensed early care and learning providers across the state. The total number of licensed providers in the state has declined by 19% since SFY2019.



More licensed early care and learning providers have closed than opened in every year since at least SFY2019 and this gap is widening. In SFY2023, more than twice as many providers closed than opened, pointing to a crucial junction where both the departure of the workforce and the corresponding decrease in licensed providers are not being replaced at a rate to maintain Alaska’s early childhood education capacity.



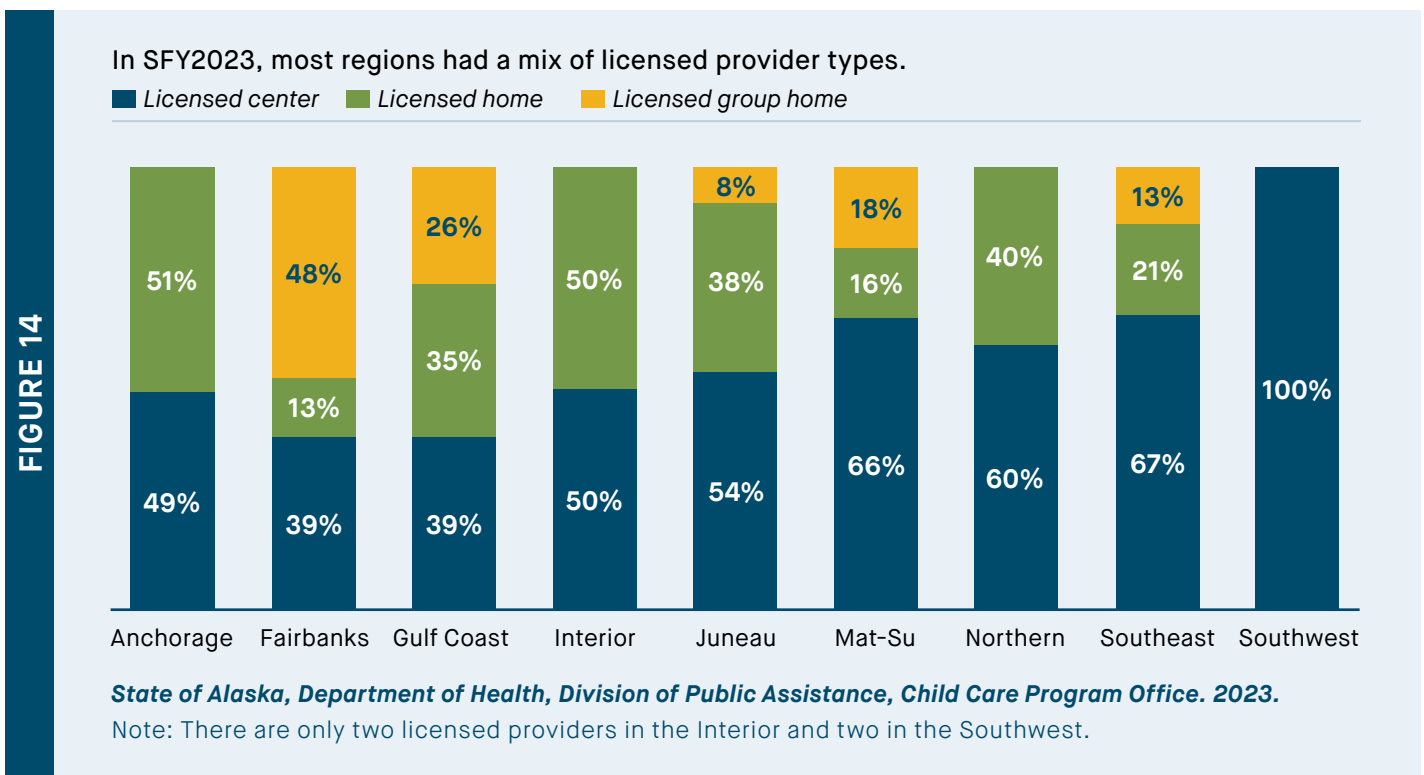
This decrease in licensed early care and learning providers is observed across all types of providers, including licensed centers, licensed homes, and licensed group homes. However, licensed homes have seen the greatest decline, with a 30% decrease between SFY2019 and SFY2023. CCPO data indicates that the rate at which licensed homes in particular are opening has dropped greatly since SFY2019, suggesting that licensed homes may experience barriers that hinder or discourage the development of this sector of the workforce.



REGIONAL IMPACTS

The most common types of licensed early care and learning providers differ by region. While licensed homes and group homes make up almost half (48%) of all licensed providers in Alaska as of SFY2023, some regions see a higher proportion of licensed homes and group homes than others. Homes can grow their business and become a group home. Group homes are paid the same subsidy rate as centers, so it benefits a licensed home to hire a caregiver and become a group home if they have enough space to do so; however, a home may not have enough required space to obtain group home licensing in some of the regional areas.

In Anchorage in SFY2023, just over half (51%) of licensed early care and learning providers were homes, and 49% were centers (group homes do not exist within the Municipality of Anchorage licensing jurisdiction). The proportion of in-home care is similarly high in Fairbanks and the Gulf Coast region, where only 39% of licensed providers are licensed centers, and more than half are licensed homes and group homes. Other regions in Alaska see a higher proportion of licensed centers, ranging from half of licensed providers in the interior, 54% in Juneau, and over 60% in Mat-Su, Northern and Southeast regions. The Southwest region has only two licensed centers, and no licensed homes or group homes as of SFY2023.



It is important to note that the percentage of a type of early care and learning provider in a region is not the same as the percent of children each type of provider can serve. For example, although 51% of early care and learning providers in Anchorage are licensed homes, due to the larger capacity of centers, most capacity in Anchorage lies in centers.

Anchorage has seen a 23% decrease in licensed providers – the most significant decline of all regions in Alaska. As noted earlier, Anchorage has also had the largest relative decline in child care workers (45%, see Figure 5). Other regions across the state are also seeing declines, and those maintaining the number of open licensed early care and learning providers are doing so with an already limited number.

05

Factors Impacting The Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis In Alaska

The decline of the early childhood education workforce in Alaska is affected by a number of factors – all of which are interconnected. The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey and interviews with early childhood educators show that the key factors influencing the crisis in Alaska are low wages, a lack of benefits, and challenging working conditions. It is important to note that although some of these findings provide new detail and nuance to the crisis in Alaska, these themes are consistent with trends and findings found in other studies and reports – both within Alaska and across the nation. See Appendix C, Table 8 for key demographics of survey participants.

An underlying theme that permeates these findings is the consistent devaluing of early childhood education as a field of work and of the early childhood education workforce itself, despite the central importance of early childhood education to children’s healthy development and future success and the vital role that early childhood education plays in the economy. Many early childhood educators spoke to the frustrations of the field being viewed as “daycare” and educators themselves as “babysitters,” with disregard for the skill and education that they have and how important their role is as providers of early learning.

“As a whole, the field is viewed as daycare, or not even daycare: it’s viewed as babysitting... We’re not just entertaining your kids. We’re having fun, but we’re also doing it for a purpose... and that’s something that isn’t necessarily perceived in the general public.”

– Early childhood educator

As one early childhood educator poignantly stated, **“They should bring [the perception] up to a more professional level so that we can get the babysitter out the way and let it be a real business and a real career.”**

As is seen in the national context, the undervaluation of those who care for children is seen globally and is largely a gendered challenge, as women make up a significant sector of the early childhood education workforce.⁶³ This trend shows up in the 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey and interviews, with men

accounting for only 5% of respondents and only 4% of enrollment for University of Alaska’s early childhood educational pathways. Moreover, there is a larger proportion of Black and Hispanic individuals in the early childhood education workforce compared to the overall workforce.⁶⁴

Expanding the workforce will be highly dependent on multi-pronged approaches that include correcting public perception of the field, and in turn, improving wages, benefits, and working conditions. The following discussions on wages, benefits, and working conditions are all closely related and reinforced by public perception of the field and should be understood with this underlying challenge in mind.

Low Wages

Low wages are the most significant factor causing instability and decline throughout the early childhood education workforce in Alaska. Low wages and limited opportunities for wage increases with further education and experience present a frustrating and untenable situation for early childhood educators. Despite personal investments in their careers, their lack of ability to earn a living wage often leads them to leave the field for higher pay. These findings are explored throughout this section along with the impacts low wages have on workforce recruitment and retention in the state.

LIVABLE WAGES

TABLE 2: LIVING WAGE IN ALASKA

	Hourly wages
Child care workers	\$15.14
Preschool workers	\$17.09
Poverty wage	\$8.17
Minimum wage	\$10.85
Living wage with 0 children	\$17.15
Living wage with 1 child	\$35.46
Living wage with 2 children	\$45.56
Living wage with 3 children	\$60.65

State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023; Glasmeier, Amy K. "Living Wage Calculation for Alaska." 2023. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/02>

frustrating." As another added, the pay would have to "double or triple" to meet their needs: **"I couldn't pay my most basic bills at the end of each month."**

The severity of low wages within the early childhood education field becomes even more apparent when compared to other occupations with similar qualifications or training paths. Despite clear objectives to increase wages and achieve pay parity with similar fields detailed in Alaska Strategic Direction, large discrepancies persist. For example, office clerks, which require similar investments in education, have a median wage of almost 50% more than child care workers (see Table 3).

In addition, the JHU Study recommended that Alaska set a long-term goal of pay parity with K-3 educators for early childhood educators. However, wage data reveals the still glaring gap between early childhood education wages and those at the elementary level.

The median wage in 2022 for the child care worker occupation in Alaska was \$15.14 per hour, or just over \$31,000 per year if assuming full-time work at 40 hours per week (estimated at 2,080 hours annually). (In qualitative data, many early childhood educators discuss working far more than 40 hours per week.) Preschool workers earn a slightly higher median wage of \$17.09 per hour, or just over \$35,000 per year if full-time.

Although these wages place educators above Alaska's minimum wage (\$10.85 in 2023 and rising to \$11.73 in 2024), the median wage for child care workers and preschool teachers is below the living wage in Alaska for a single adult without children, and far below the living wage for an adult with children. Many early childhood educators feel unable to take care of their and their families' needs due to a lack of adequate wages. As one educator shared **"you have to take care of your family, and it [is] really stressful if you choose a job that doesn't pay as much, and you can't make the things happen because you're too busy working at this job that's not paying you."**

Other early childhood educators spoke to the frustration of having to rely on an income that is below a living wage: **"We're having trouble living off of our income... It gets frustrating. It gets really**

TABLE 3: WAGE COMPARISONS

Occupation	2022 Median Wage
Child care workers	\$15.14
Preschool teachers	\$17.09
Home health and personal care aides	\$17.24
Office clerks	\$22.26
Community health workers	\$24.81
Elementary school teachers	\$32.01
Secondary school teachers	\$38.90

State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

“ You can work at the post office and get higher pay there. You can work at the airport and get higher pay there. You can be an instructional aide in the school district in the upper grades and get \$5 more an hour than you would if you worked as the director at the daycare.”

– Early childhood educator

Elementary teachers have a median wage of \$32.01, more than double that of child care workers and almost 90% more than preschool teachers, who are often required to have bachelor’s degree. The median wage for secondary school teachers is an even more drastic gap, with a median wage of \$38.90.

Early childhood educators interviewed for this study highlighted their frustrations with wages, noting the “disheartening” reality that many positions outside of the early childhood education field can offer better wages than even director positions in early childhood education. For example, one person explained they have a master’s degree

in education and a Montessori teaching certificate yet are only paid \$15 per hour for their work.

The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey provides an additional perspective on wages within the early childhood education field. It is important to note, however, that this survey sample differs from DOLWD wage data and includes a broader range of occupation types, including in-home providers, school-age programs, and other categories not captured in DOLWD occupational categories. The wages reported by survey respondents are generally higher than DOLWD median wages, which may be explained by possible recent wage increases and/or the different demographics of the survey sample in comparison to the census data collected by DOLWD, including the inclusion of a wider variety of positions and sectors of the workforce that are not captured by DOLWD classifications (described above), as well as a likely underrepresentation of non-English speakers. Additionally, annual salaries were converted to hourly wages based on a forty-hour workweek, although many salaried staff spoke to working far more. With these limitations in mind, survey responses can still provide insight into how position and early care and learning provider type influence wages within the sample, while years of experience and education have little impact on wage progression.

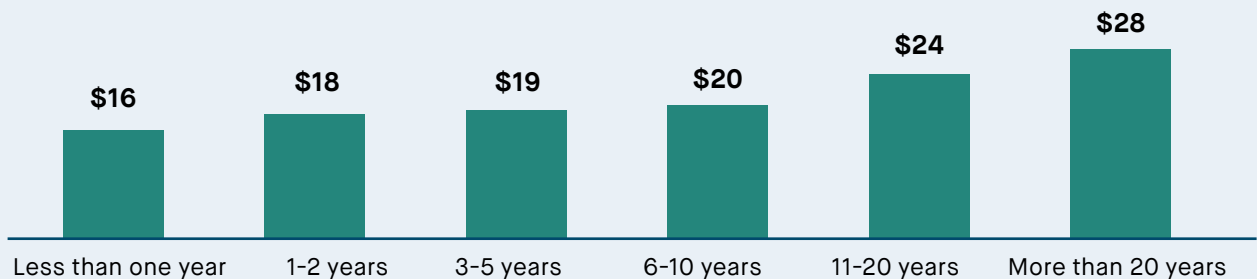
“ I don’t know the solution, but everybody needs to get paid a livable wage, and according to their experience and their education and all of those things - [they] should factor in, too.”

– Early childhood educator

WAGE PROGRESSION

The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey indicates that factors such as years in the field and education level have minimal impacts on wage progression. Wages remain low, even as early childhood educators gain years of experience in the field, with an increase of only \$4 per hour with six to 10 years of experience. Even for educators with more than 20 years of experience, the median wage remains below the living wage for an adult with one child (\$35.46).

Median wages do not increase significantly with years in the field.

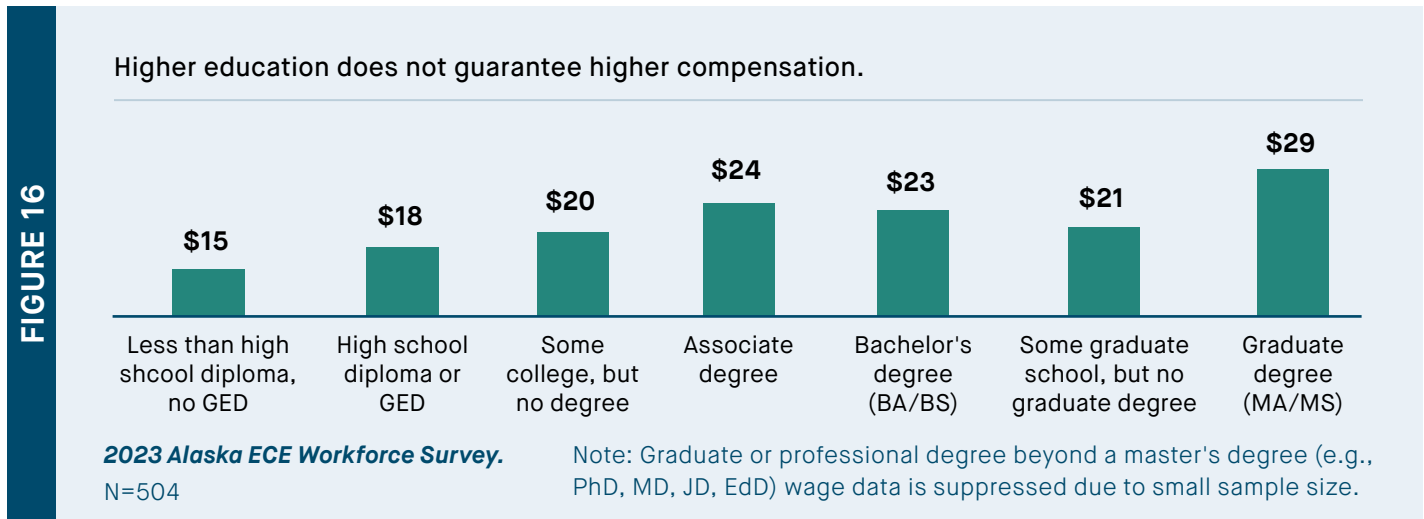


2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey. N=420

FIGURE 15

Early childhood educators describe tension around employees with years of experience in their positions being compensated at the same level as recent hires. For example, as one early childhood educator explained, **“They’re seeing that person come in the door, and they’re making just as much money as they are, and they’ve invested five years of their life. That’s really hard to talk to that point, right?”** This frustration is inextricably linked to a lack of any coordinated or structural alignment with market rate compensation for the workforce, as market-adjusted salaries that promote recruitment benefit only new workers, while other wages may remain stagnant.

Educational milestones are not necessarily associated with wage increases across early care and learning providers. The median wage reported for those with an associate degree is \$24 per hour, which is a higher average wage than the average for those with more advanced education such as a bachelor’s degree or some graduate school.



“The number - the dollar amount that you put on work really does matter.”

– Former early childhood educator

Among the 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey sample, low wages were the most cited reason among both those who had left the early childhood workforce and those who considered leaving the workforce. As illustrated by the above data, many early childhood educators – despite investments in their education, training, and tenure in the field, will always earn below the living wage needed as an adult with one child. One early childhood educator explained, **“It took me at least 15 years to make what I made now, which is still – it’s a good amount – but at the end of the day, with all the bills, you still end up broke.”**

The low starting wage in the field paired with limited ability to progress not only disincentivizes education and career progression, it also leads many early childhood educators to leave the field out of necessity. One early childhood educator spoke to the need to depart the field to support their family: **“I don’t want to go, but my family comes first,”** while another echoed this sentiment: **“[I] absolutely loved my job. However, I literally couldn’t survive, and that’s why I had to leave.”**

Even if a living wage were to be achieved for early childhood educators, the lack of structured and attainable wage progression impacts feelings of appreciation, closely related to the public perception of the occupation. One spoke to the need to move beyond the concept of a living wage, and instead focus on a “thriving wage” – one that adequately reflects the responsibility and importance of early childhood education.

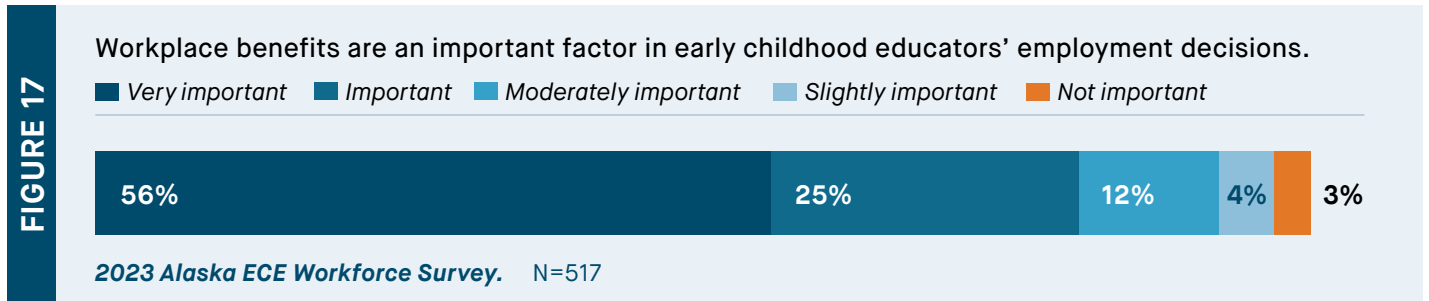
“The financial aspect to have not just a living wage, but a thriving wage, is pretty huge.”

– Former early childhood educator

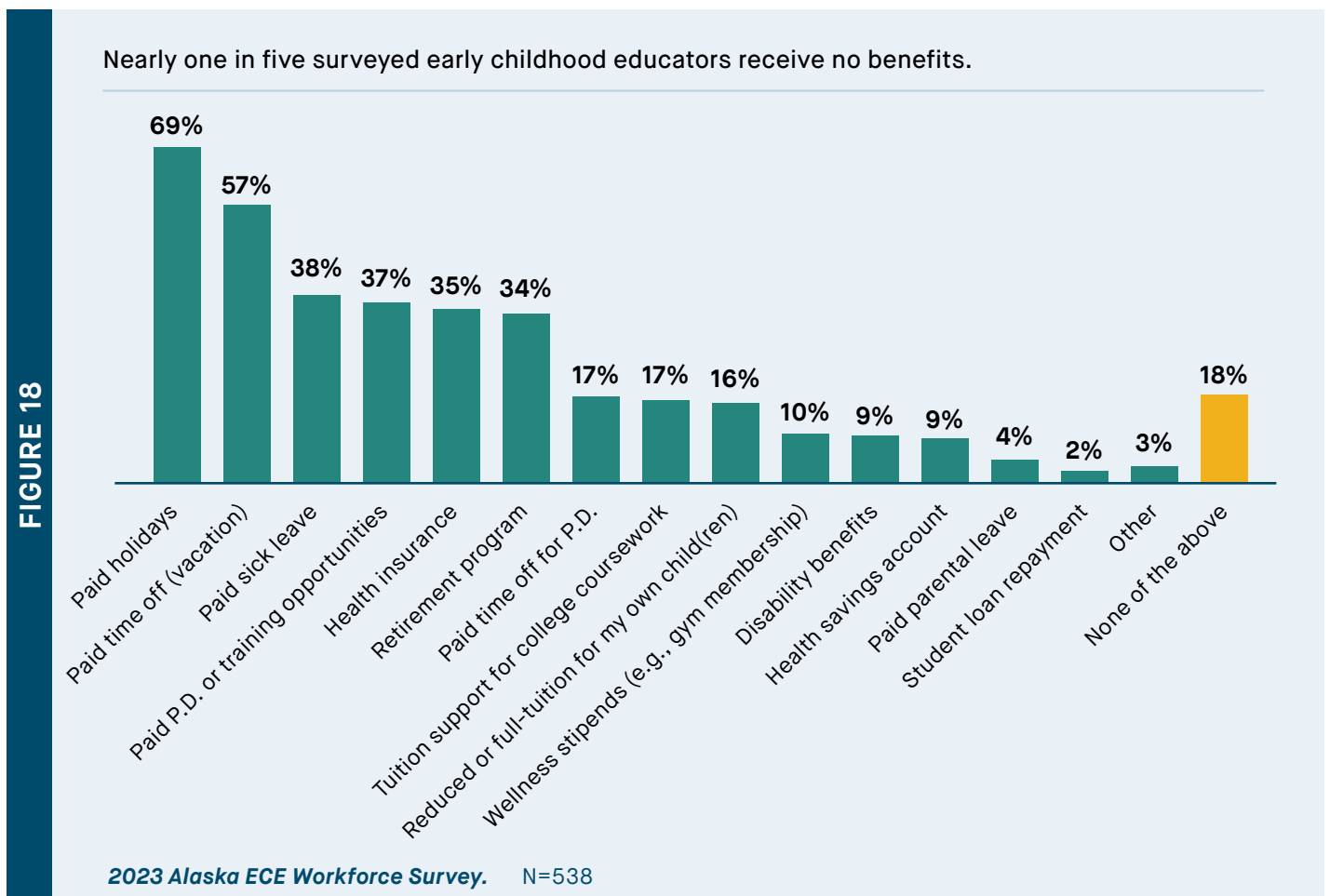
Examples of strategies to increase wages in other states, including wage subsidies and bouses, payments to early childhood educators, and collective bargaining is discussed in more detail in the Other States’ Strategies to Strengthen the Early Childhood Education Workforce section.

Access to Benefits

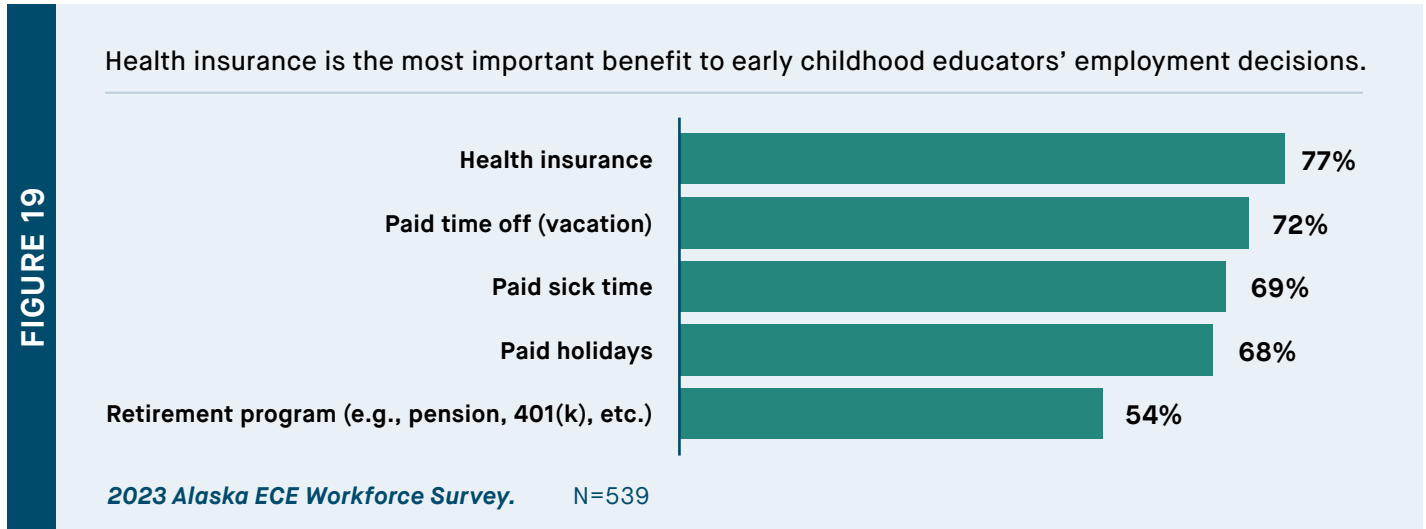
Employer-sponsored benefits are a key component of workplace compensation. While some sectors of the early childhood education workforce receive benefits, in most early childhood education workplaces, the lack of health insurance, paid time off, and retirement benefits remains an ongoing challenge to the stability of the workforce. Ninety-three percent of survey participants indicated that workplace benefits are at least moderately important to them in regard to their employment decisions.



Although early childhood educators overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of workplace benefits, outside of federally funded programs comprehensive benefits packages are rare, and specific benefits (such as paid sick time) are spotty across the field – a finding also referenced in the JHU Study. The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey illustrates this lack of benefits: 18% of respondents receive no workplace benefits at all, and those working in licensed homes and group homes are the least likely to have many forms of employer-sponsored benefits, including health insurance, retirement programs and paid time off. Figure 18 provides an overview of benefits received (or lack thereof) by survey respondents; specific benefits are explored in more detail in subsequent sections.



The benefits deemed most important to early childhood educators also reflect findings of past studies and reports: early childhood educators are in vital need of access to health insurance and paid time off. Over three-quarters of surveyed early childhood educators identified health insurance among the top five most important benefits for their employment decisions, followed closely by three forms of paid time off (vacation, sick time, and holidays), and finally, access to an employer-sponsored retirement program. Each of these benefits will be discussed in more detail in the remainder of this section, including a more focused discussion on how access to these benefits differs between early care and learning provider types and the implications of these benefits on workforce stability.



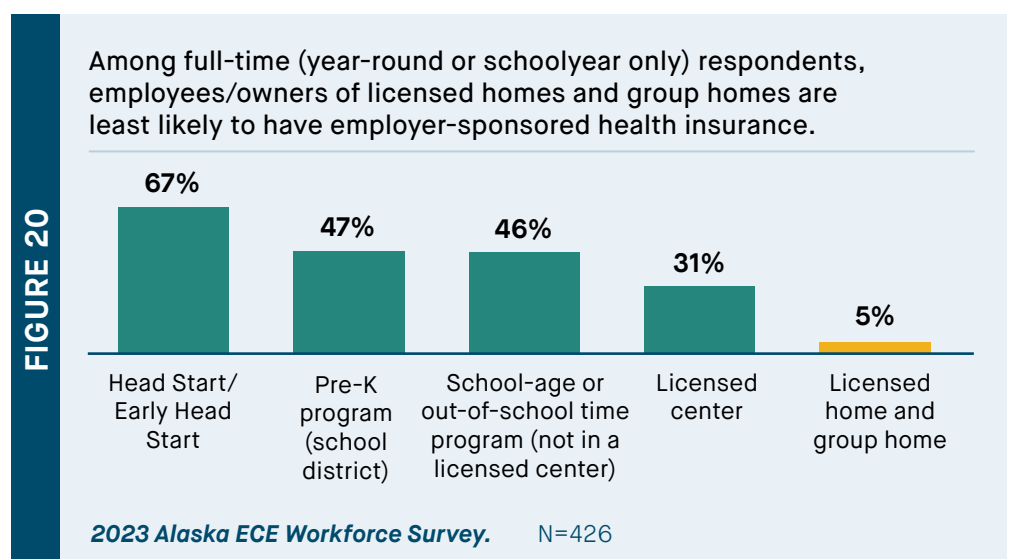
HEALTH INSURANCE

Health insurance emerged as the most important benefit influencing employment decisions in this study, echoing past national research. Despite the importance of health insurance, only 35% of all respondents receive health insurance through their employer. The other 65% of the workforce must access health insurance through other means, such as Medicaid, using a family member's insurance coverage, or paying for their own insurance. Some may be uninsured. For many, the ability to remain in the field without employer-provided health insurance is dependent on whether they are receiving benefits elsewhere, such as from a spouse or a parent. This may contribute to workforce turnover among younger educators as they age out of their parent's health coverage.

“ Before I even was applying to anywhere, I was checking out their health programs, because there was no point in applying if I wasn't going to be able to afford to work there because of the health care.”

– Early childhood educator

Early care and learning provider types that are more likely to offer health insurance to their employees can draw educators away from smaller programs. Full-time employees at Head Start centers and school district-based programs are more likely to receive health insurance than employees in other settings, while only 31% of full-time employees at licensed centers receive health insurance from their employer.



One early childhood educator spoke to this discrepancy between early care and learning types, highlighting that if access to health insurance in licensed centers were to be more in line with other early care and learning provider types, more educators may be willing to stay in those positions. However, even among those early care and learning providers that do offer some form of health insurance or insurance subsidy, it still may not be an affordable option for many employees – particularly those with families.

Licensed homes and group homes are the least likely to have access to employer-sponsored health insurance, likely due to the self-employment nature of in-home providers and thus lack of employer-sponsored benefits. For in-home providers, the lack of health insurance is an additional stressor, with healthcare expenses often coming out of their own pocket, in addition to all other overhead costs.

“ [Benefits are] all out of our own pockets when it comes to a home daycare provider... it’s a hard deal. That’s what [we in-home providers are] looking for - backup where we can have an IRA, we can have medical insurance. We have to provide it out of our own pockets, unfortunately.”

– In-home provider

While many employers recognize the importance of offering health insurance, insufficient revenue remains a key barrier in offering a sustainable benefits package to employees, particularly when the increased revenue needed to do so would have to be drawn from staff wages or an increase in rates to families. In-home providers echoed this barrier, also highlighting that an increase in revenue to support these needs would require charging families more – something that many were unwilling or unable to do.

PAID TIME OFF

“ I think the root of [burnout] is being paid poorly and not having any benefits like sick time or anything... If we had employees that we could keep, then people who were sick could take sick days, and we could just help each other out more... I know that’s why we can’t keep people.”

– Early childhood educator

The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey showed that paid time off of all types (vacation, sick, and holiday) are all important benefits influencing early childhood educator retention, with only wages being higher ranked, which highlights the need to prioritize access to paid time off across all sectors of the workforce. Although paid time off may be offered in multiple ways (e.g., sick leave only, paid vacation only, both paid sick leave and paid vacation, or both forms combined into one “paid time off” benefit), 36% of survey respondents reported not receiving paid sick leave OR paid time off (vacation).

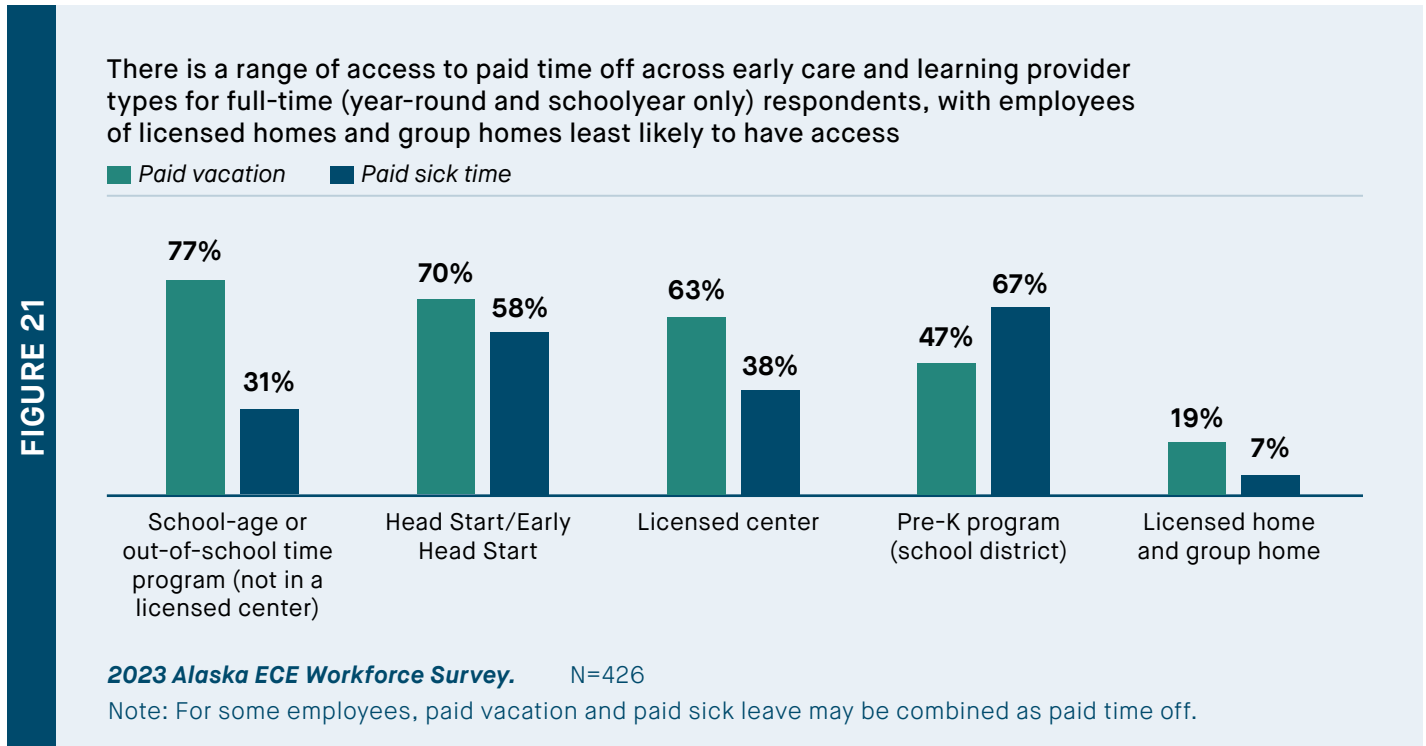
Paid time off is particularly important considering the intense demands and propensity for burnout in the field. Early childhood educators who are able to maintain their own health and wellbeing are more likely to remain in the workforce. One early childhood educator illustrated this, noting that being rested and ready for work shows up in their patience and ability to meet children’s needs:

When I’m well-rested, I don’t feel burnt out, because when I show up in the morning, and they start asking me all these questions and asking for help, it’s so much easier for me to be like, ‘Yeah, let me help you with this’ and give them extra energy.

Many early childhood educators spoke to the importance of time off beyond the typical weekend breaks as a more far-reaching benefit that facilitates work-life balance, and that people can factor into their approach to taking care of themselves and their needs. For example, paid sick leave is key for workforce well-being, particularly given the frequency at which early childhood educators are exposed to germs and sickness in their workplace: ***“Getting sick all the time... that comes with the territory, but I think getting overworked contributes to a low immune system.”***

Without paid sick leave, early childhood educators may be faced with difficult scenarios wherein they cannot personally afford to miss work to take sick leave, or they are unable to take sick time due to a lack of support and

organization from their employer. **“I’m not allowed to have a sick day,”** explained one early childhood educator, **“because if I am sick, then that means I either have to have a doctor’s note or I have to quit.”** Paid sick days or other forms of leave are crucial to early childhood educators, who may otherwise be forced to decide between their health and their wages.



Similar to health insurance, paid time off varies by early care and learning provider type. Early childhood educators employed by school-age or out-of-school time programs, Head Start, and licensed centers are most likely to receive this benefit. Conversely, those working at licensed homes and group homes are least likely to receive paid time off, with only 19% receiving paid vacation and 7% receiving paid sick leave. The lack of paid time off presents a unique challenge for in-home providers, who often resort to closing their programs and taking unpaid leave for vacations, holidays, and sick leave. Strategies from other states to improve access to time off among early childhood educators are discussed in more detail in Other States’ Strategies to Strengthen the Early Childhood Education Workforce section.

RETIREMENT

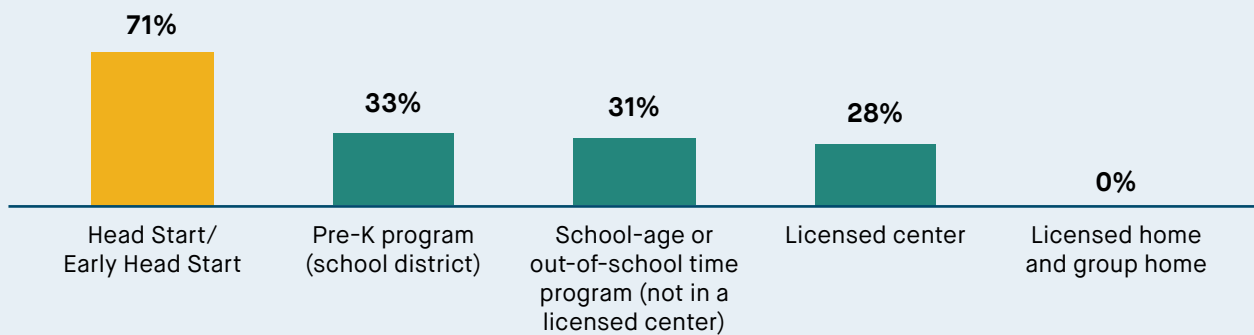
Another important benefit for early childhood educators is access to an employer-sponsored retirement program, such as a pension, 401(k) or other retirement plan. As with other benefits, access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan is more likely in Head Start and school-based programs. The importance of retirement benefits was evident when early childhood educators spoke of the stress of having to plan for retirement out of their own pocket, particularly considering the other financial stressors associated with being paid below a living wage. The importance of a retirement program increased among respondents over the age of 40 years old, with 60% selecting an employer-sponsored retirement plan as a top five benefit important to their employment decisions, compared to 49% of respondents up to age 40.

“ Having a job that doesn’t provide benefits, that has no health insurance, [that] has no retirement - when [I was] in my twenties [and] in my thirties, I was like, oh, whatever. But now in my forties, yes... this changes the picture.”

– Director of a licensed center

FIGURE 22

Among full-time (year-round or schoolyear only) respondents, employees/owners of licensed homes and group homes are least likely to have employer-sponsored health insurance.



2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey. N=426

Note: The smaller sample for Pre-K and school aged program staff means these differences should be interpreted with caution

Full-time employees of Head Start programs are the most likely to receive an employer-sponsored retirement program. Surprisingly, only one-third of full-time school district pre-K employees reported having a retirement plan. As with other benefits, licensed homes and group homes are the least likely to have access to a retirement program, adding yet another cost in-home providers must administrate, manage and fund on their own as self-employed members of the workforce: **“I have 20 more years to retire. I’m thinking about my retirement, because I have to pay it out of pocket.”** One in-home provider discussed the difficulty of contributing to their retirement fund in light of the financial uncertainty and instability that comes with operating a small business, and that the opportunity for a collective retirement program for in-home providers would have a significant impact on this stress:

Maybe the government can help us with that... some type of 401(k) or some type of health program that they can come up with that we can qualify for just because we’re self-employed... That would relieve so much... I mean, it’s at least \$10,000 out of pocket just to stay with a 401(k) that nobody’s matching, which is on the low end.

PAID PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned in Appendix B, all early childhood educators working in licensed early care and learning facilities are required to receive 24 hours of professional development. In Alaska, the CCPO, thread, local school districts, and other community agencies work together to provide professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, all of which are explored in more detail in the section titled Current Efforts to Strengthen the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Alaska.

According to the 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey, most (82%) educators surveyed were satisfied with their access to professional development opportunities.

FIGURE 23

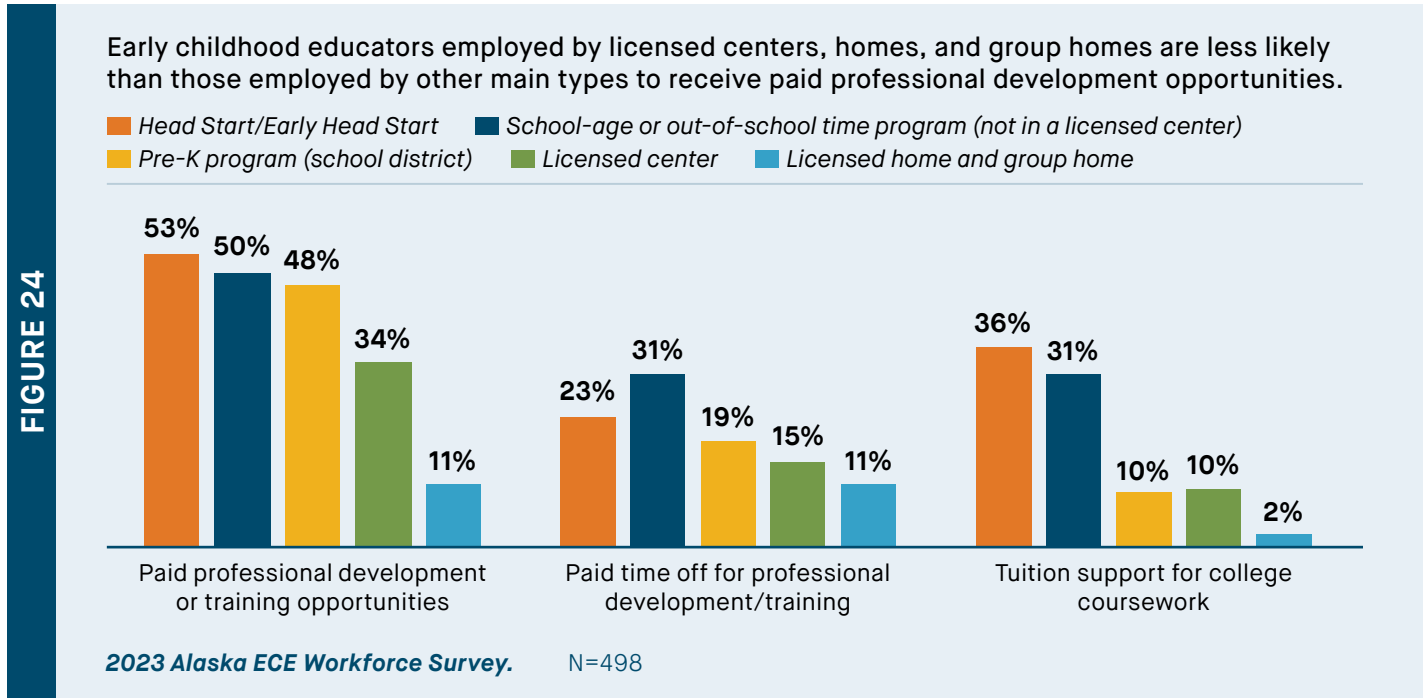
Eighty-two percent of the surveyed workforce are satisfied with the access to professional growth and development opportunities that they have.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree



2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey. N=510

Early childhood educators have varying levels of access to paid professional development as a workplace benefit – specifically, access to paid professional development or training opportunities, paid time off for professional development/training, and tuition support for college coursework. Early childhood educators at Head Starts/Early Head Starts and school-age or out-of-school time programs were most likely to be compensated for the time it takes to acquire professional development, while those at licensed centers, homes, and group homes were least likely.



Despite the overall satisfaction with professional development and growth opportunities, some interview participants mentioned that there is room for improvement related to communication across the field about course availability throughout the year and coordination across the various agencies that offer courses geared toward early childhood education, while others mentioned the need for increased internet connectivity for virtual courses. Overall, the yearly requirements for professional development did not emerge as a significant challenge among surveyed educators. However, given the professional development requirements within the early childhood education profession, benefits relating to paid professional development opportunities should be considered as a tool to promote workforce recruitment and retention.

TUITION BENEFITS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' CHILDREN

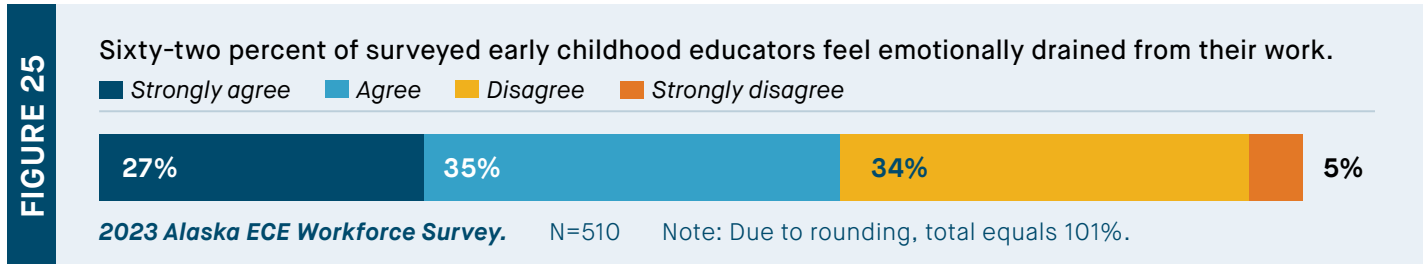
Which benefits are most important to individuals often depends on their circumstances and stage of life. The 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey shows that younger members of the workforce place greater importance on certain benefits, such as paid parental leave or tuition support for their own children to attend early childhood education. Almost a quarter (22%) of respondents under the age of 40 ranked reduced or full tuition for their own child to attend early childhood education among their top five most important benefits, and 33% ranked paid parental leave among their top five benefits. In fact, certain benefits, such as tuition support for their own children, fuel positive perceptions of overall compensation, as one early childhood educator at a licensed center shared:

Do I feel adequately compensated? It's interesting. I do and I don't. I definitely did when my kids were there... Because my equivalent salary would've been \$70,000. Of course, I'm saying the \$70,000, because if I'd paid full tuition for my kids, that's what it would've cost – definitely worth it.

Examples of tuition benefits in other states and its potential as a recruitment and retention strategy is discussed in more detail in the section entitled Other States' Strategies to Strengthen the Early Childhood Education Workforce.

Challenging Workplace Conditions

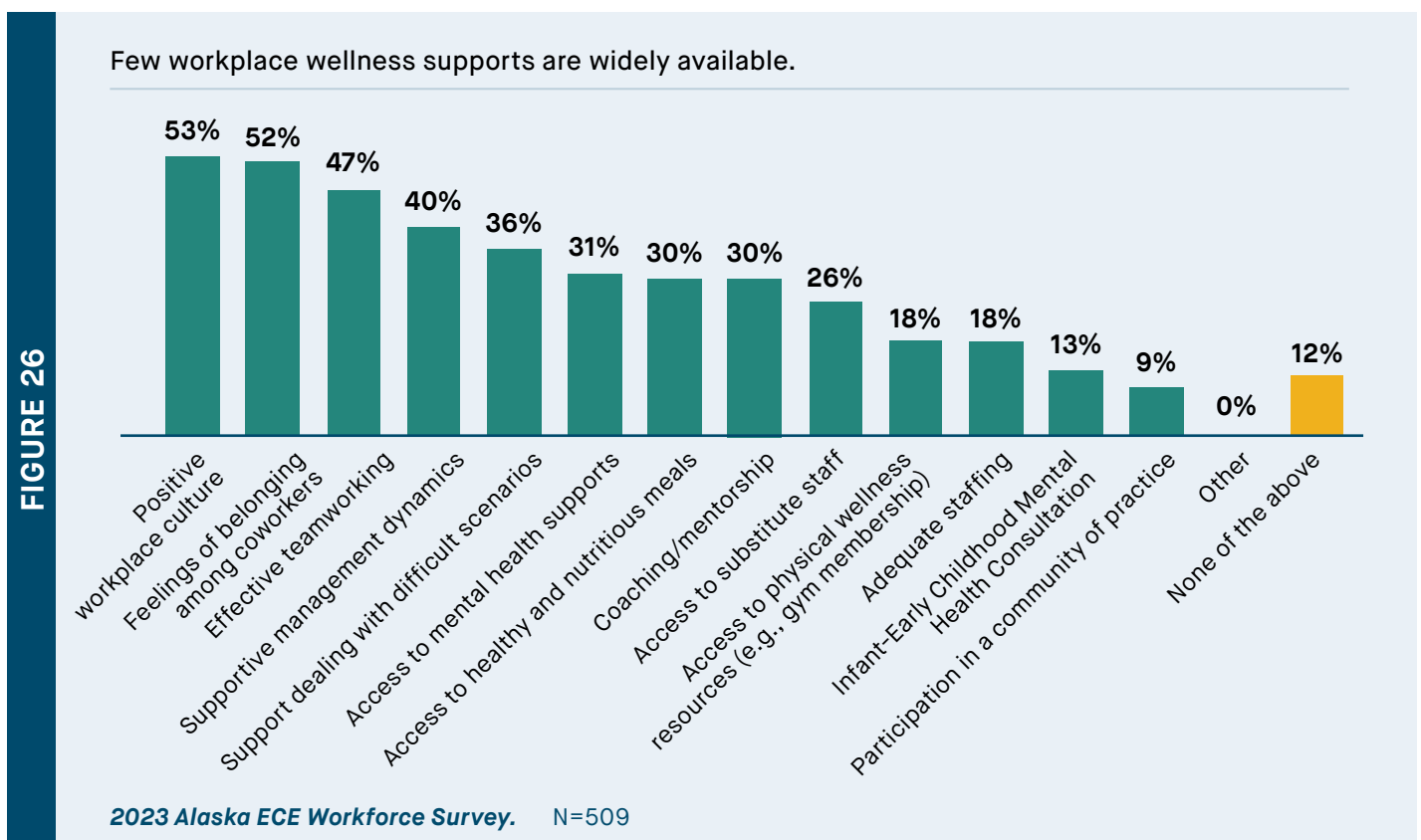
Workforce stability depends on more than compensation and includes attention to the conditions present at the workplace that influence early childhood educators' ability to participate in a coordinated, welcoming, and supportive environment. There is a high level of burnout among early childhood educators in Alaska; 62% of survey respondents reported feeling emotionally drained from their work.



The high levels of exhaustion became clear through interviews with early childhood educators, and many discussed the physical and emotional demands of the work and the impacts this has on their wellbeing. One former early childhood educator shared their experience:

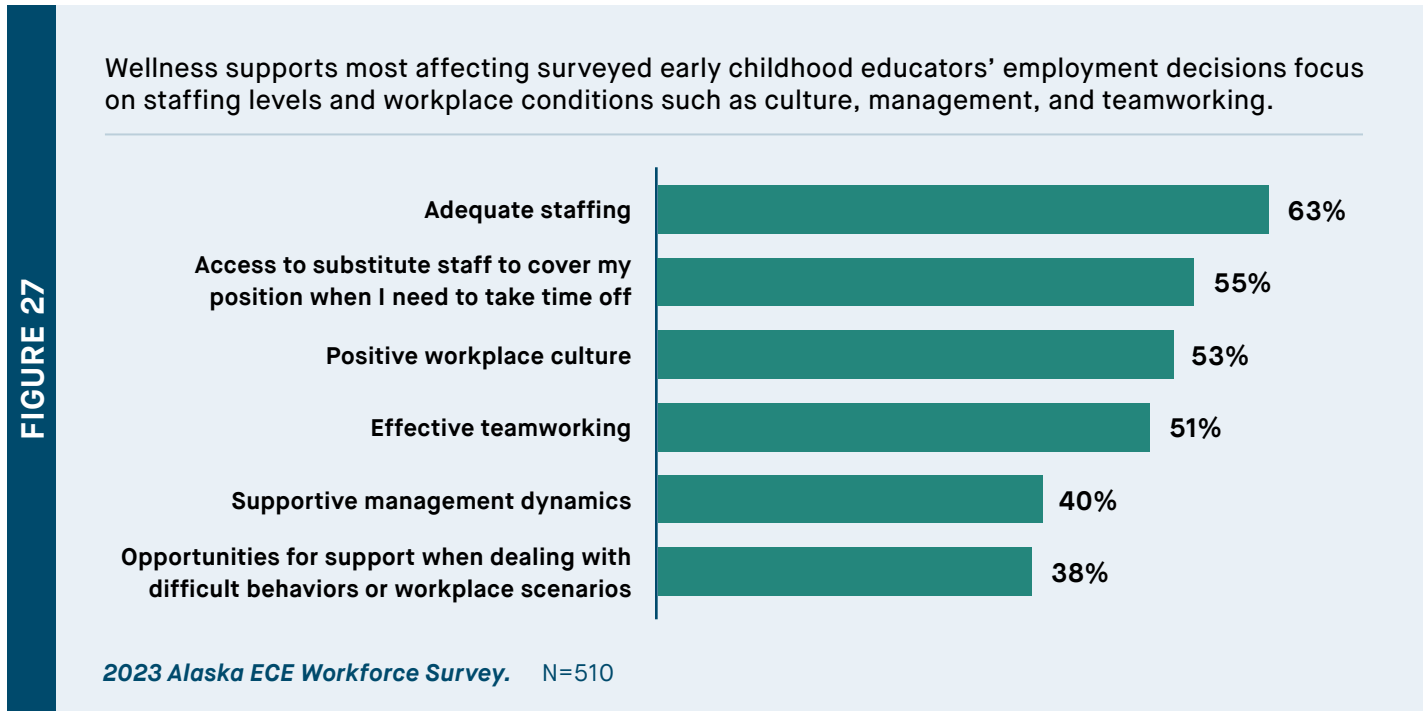
They think it's an easy job, but it's not a job for everyone. You have to be mentally there [and] emotionally and physically there, because for me, I was taking care of infants. They are so dependent on me. I do everything for them, which can be physically draining, and I get so tired. You should know how to handle the kids, who to take care of first, [and] who has the greatest needs. So, it's not just a matter of saying, 'I'm just going to go and work with children. It's just play.' No, it's not just play. It takes a lot of your wellbeing. It's so overwhelming.

Figure 26 provides an overview of workplace wellness supports available to 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey respondents; specific supports are explored in more detail in subsequent sections.



Although 69% of early childhood educators said they were at least moderately satisfied with the current supports in place to help them navigate the challenges of their work, almost all (95%) indicated that improved workplace wellness supports would motivate them to remain in their current position, signifying the need to prioritize the wellbeing of the early education workforce through strategies that impact the day-to-day conditions educators experience. Further, 26% of respondents from licensed homes and group homes reported no workplace wellness supports (compared to 10% of all other respondents).

There are clear priorities among early childhood educators on which wellness supports are most important to their employment decisions. Staffing supports, improvements to workplace environment and relationships, and opportunities for targeted supports when dealing with workplace stressors emerged as the top priorities among educators.



This section will discuss each of these supports in more detail, with a particular emphasis on differences by early care and learning provider type and impacts on staff retention.

ADEQUATE STAFFING

The importance of adequate staffing is multifold, crucial not only to the operation of the early care and learning provider, but also to the well-being of individual staff members. When an early care and learning provider is short-staffed, existing staff are often required to fill in, thereby extending their hours and responsibilities, and increasing their workplace stress. One Head Start educator explained:

It sounds simple, but I think it would just be easier if I could just do my job and not have to do two or three other people's jobs – if I could focus on what my specialty is and what I'm able to devote the most knowledge [to]. It's just hard, because when people are not here, then we're just expected to pick up the pieces... And so then parts of your job get pushed to the side.

The impacts of increased responsibilities and a lack of support can lead to a harmful work environment. Many early childhood educators spoke to their inability to support their individual needs during the workday, including taking a break for lunch or even taking a bathroom break, due to classroom staff-to-child ratios needing to be upheld. As one early childhood educator explained, "People are getting overworked. There's not enough time to take a break... I can't even use the bathroom. It's physically and mentally not healthy for me to be in this work environment."

The prevalence of understaffing is widespread across the field. Only 18% of all surveyed early childhood educators felt that their workplace was adequately staffed, with no significant differences between early care and learning types, suggesting that even with provider-specific recruitment and retention efforts in place (such as higher wages or access to benefits), chronic understaffing is affecting the entire field.

Adequate staffing also includes the ability to access substitute staff when early childhood educators need to take time off. For many, the ability to take time off hinges not only on whether this time will be compensated but also whether there is access to substitute staff to cover their position. Only 26% of early childhood educators had access to substitute staff in their current position, and this shortage is even more dire for certain members of the workforce. For example, administrators are less likely to have access to substitute staff than other positions (18% compared to 28%), pointing to an additional need for staff with adequate qualifications to fill in when administrators take time off.

“It’s eight families that you’re putting out when we close. I want them to go to work so they can pay me, because we’re a team, so we work for each other. I’m always here. They can depend on me. I know that they’re always going to see me, and I don’t wake up with a cold and be like, ‘Oh, I’m just going to call in sick.’ That’s not how it works. Those days are long gone... So it’s a lifestyle when you’re a home provider.”

– In-home provider

Licensed homes and group homes are the least likely to have access to substitute staff, with only 12% of in-home providers indicating that they have access to substitutes. Many try to have a backup caregiver in case of emergency, which often falls to a family member in the home who can step in without training for up to 20 hours per month. However, for most, this is an inconsistent system, and many need to close their business to attend appointments, when sick, or to go on vacation. Forced closures due to a lack of access to substitutes not only impacts their income stability but also affects families who rely on access to early childhood education. The link between inadequate staffing and workforce destabilization is cyclical – understaffing is linked to burnout and exhaustion, spurring staff turnover, which then worsens and reinforces chronic understaffing for those remaining in the field.

TEAMWORK AND MANAGEMENT

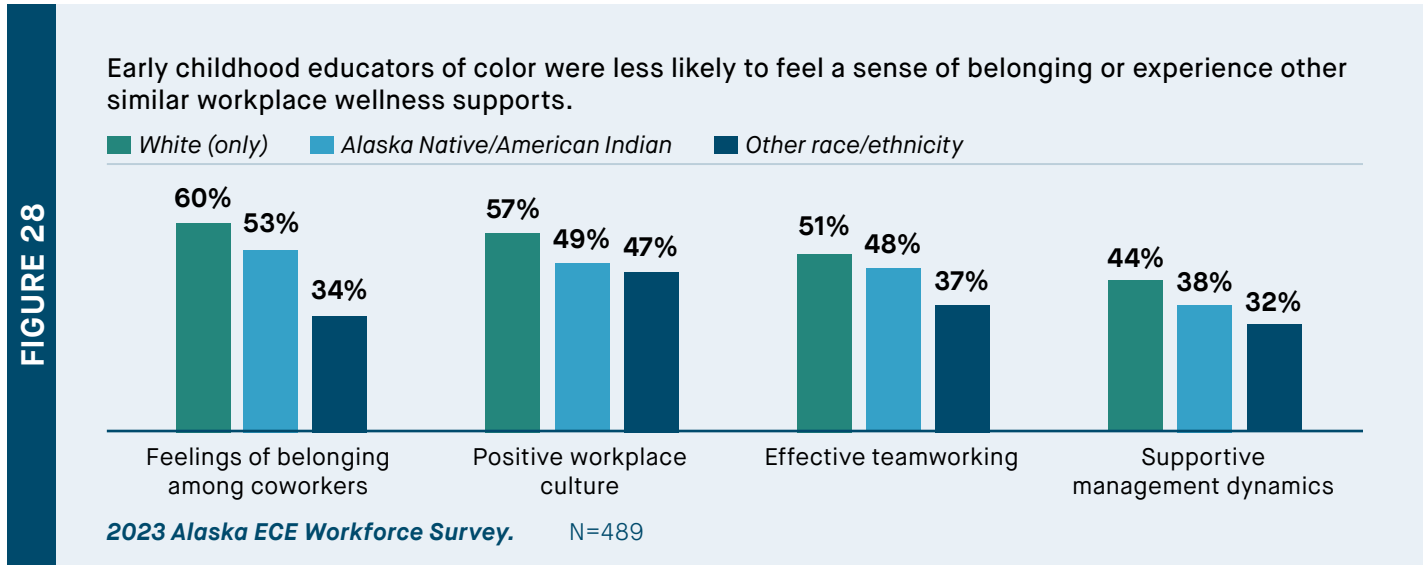
A positive workplace environment, including effective teamwork and supportive management dynamics, can make a significant difference in an early childhood educator’s ability to process stressors and demands of the job and their interest in remaining in their position.

Only around half of the surveyed workforce reported having a positive workplace culture (53%) or feelings of belonging among coworkers (52%). When these supports are missing, there is the potential for what one early childhood educator described as a “toxic” workplace. This can compound the already significant stressors that educators experience, particularly when it leads to feelings of isolation or a lack of appreciation among coworkers.

Supportive management is also central to a positive workplace environment, yet only 40% of participants reported having supportive management dynamics at their place of work. According to early childhood educators, supportive management is crucial in helping educators feel validated and respected for their role in the workplace.

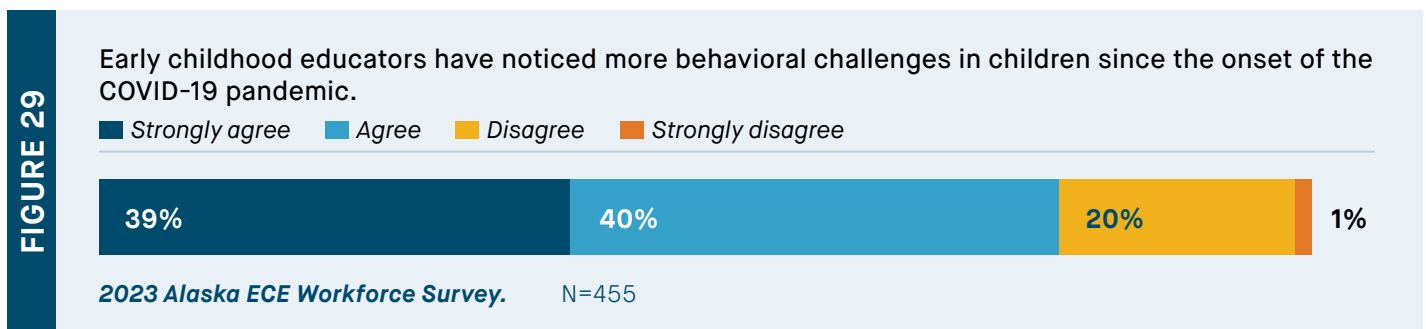
Supportive management also plays a crucial role in encouraging and supporting their staff through difficult workplace stressors, highlighting the role that this can play in the retention and stability of staff; when workplace stressors compound, guidance and support from workplace leadership can help mitigate the stressful environment. On the other hand, management styles that leave employees feeling taken advantage of or unappreciated can have a swiftly negative effect on an employee’s willingness to stay at a particular early care and learning provider. Early childhood educators sometimes noted that they’d even prefer to work for lower wages than in a toxic work environment.

Further, different groups experience the workplace differently. Although the sample size of male respondents is small (n=24 in this instance), just 42% of male early childhood educators experience a positive workplace culture, compared to 54% for other genders. Additionally, early childhood educators of color were less likely to feel a sense of belonging among coworkers or experience a positive workplace culture, effective teamworking, or supportive management dynamics. This difference is most stark when exploring feelings of belonging among coworkers: 60% of White (only) early childhood educators felt a sense of belonging among coworkers, compared to 53% of Alaska Native/American Indian educators and just 34% of educators of another race/ethnicity.



SUPPORT WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS AND SCENARIOS

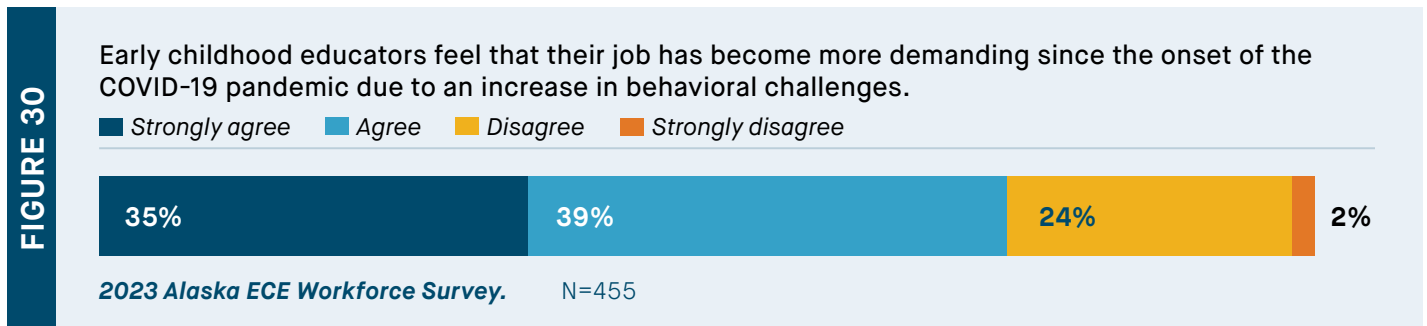
The need for support when dealing with challenging behaviors or scenarios has become increasingly clear within the early childhood education field since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many early childhood educators (79%) have seen an increase in behavioral challenges among children in recent years, including struggles with self-regulation, learning milestones, engagement, and a need for special attention. According to multiple interview participants, the increase in challenging behaviors can be linked to disruptions to learning, isolation from peers, and the high levels of stress within families and households as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Behavioral challenges put additional pressure on early childhood educators who are already stretched thin.



“ We’re experiencing very different children since the pandemic. And their behaviors are intense; their emotions are intense. And if you don’t have a skilled teacher, it’s super challenging and scary to work with children like that, and it’s stressful. So I find that that tends to be more of the turnover that we have than anything else.”

– Early childhood educator

Interviewed early childhood educators explained that supporting children through developmental transitions and challenging behaviors requires a skilled workforce, yet even then can still lead to stress and burnout among staff. Almost three-quarters (74%) of early childhood educators feel that their job has become more demanding since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic due to an increase in behavioral challenges among children (N=455).



Early childhood educators may also be overburdened by the specific demands of supporting individual children with unique needs, ranging from specific learning and behavioral needs to more holistic social-emotional support for children with stressors in their home life. These burdens, again, are compounded by staff shortages and increased responsibilities of individual early childhood educators. One early childhood educator illustrated these challenges:

What’s been very challenging for me in my job and what has really caused me the burnout is...I’ve got four children in my classroom, two of which we are looking to get autism testing on. Another one’s got a behavioral referral... I’ve got foster families. I’ve got homeless families who live in shelters. I’ve got broken families where the kids are moving back and forth... all that stuff. So you’ve got a lot of behavioral things happening all the time. And then plus having children who do have special needs and just having two teachers in the classroom. And so I’m just getting really, really burnt out and overworked.

Support for dealing with difficult behaviors can include both effective teamworking strategies and supportive management dynamics but can also include concrete and structured supports, such as access to an infant and early childhood mental health consultant. Only 13% of surveyed early childhood educators have access to infant and early childhood mental health consultation. Access to mental health consultation is currently concentrated mostly in Head Start/Early Head Start programs, which are mandated to offer this resource. However, demand for consultation in Alaska is expected to grow, not only because challenging behaviors have increased, but also because infant and early childhood mental health consultation is a program standard of the Alaska Reads Act⁶⁵ and is a quality standard that contributes to reaching level five of quality in Learn & Grow, Alaska’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System for early care and learning providers.⁶⁶



06

Current Efforts To Strengthen The Early Childhood Education Workforce In Alaska

Several agencies and organizations across the state are thinking creatively about how to support the workforce. The CCPO, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), thread, and other agencies often partner to provide vital supports, including professional development, scholarships, financial supports, the Alaska System for Early Education and Development (SEED) Registry, and Learn & Grow. In addition, Alaska has three active chapters of the Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) associated with National AEYC.

This section summarizes the available supports for early childhood educators related to wages, benefits, and workplace conditions, along with education and professional development. It mentions where these supports correspond with recommendations made in the JHU Study for workforce supports. A table detailing the progress on each of the JHU Study recommendations is in Appendix A.

Importantly, while a lack of education and professional development opportunities did not emerge as one of the primary factors influencing the current early childhood education workforce crisis, it is a key element in the system for building, sustaining, and supporting the workforce and is one part of the pipeline that has been focused on in recent years. These efforts are also directly tied to improving the overall quality of early care and learning provided in the state. Two key programs that anchor these efforts are described below.

Infrastructure For Quality Improvement And Professional Development

thread houses both the Alaska SEED Registry and Learn & Grow, the State's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). Each of these systems receives investment from the State of Alaska Department of Health, and SEED also receives investments from DEED. Examples of how other states have leveraged their workforce registries and QRIS systems to tie increased wages and payments to higher levels of education and/or subsidy payments is also discussed in the next section.

THE ALASKA SEED REGISTRY

The SEED Registry enables early childhood education professionals to track all of their professional development and education in one place. This can be helpful for applying for jobs, meeting licensing requirements, and tracking yearly professional development requirements. (Yearly professional development requirements are discussed in more detail in Appendix B.) The Alaska SEED Registry is free and open to all early childhood educators, school-age educators working in before and after school programs, trainers and consultants, and early interventionists working in Early Intervention/Infant Learning Programs. Based on the information each registry member uploads

into the Alaska SEED Registry system (e.g., transcripts, course completion certificates, etc.), each professional is assessed on the SEED Career Ladder.

The SEED Career Ladder has 12 levels, summarized as follows:

LEVEL 1: Working or learning in the early childhood/school-age education profession

LEVEL 2: 24 hours SEED-approved training

LEVEL 3: 40 hours SEED-approved training OR 1 SEED EC related field* credit

LEVEL 4: 80 hours SEED-approved training OR 2 SEED EC related field* credits

LEVEL 5: 120 hours SEED-approved training OR 3 SEED EC related field* credits

LEVEL 6: 6 SEED EC related field* credits

LEVEL 7: 12 SEED EC related field* credits

LEVEL 8: Associate Degree in unrelated field with 12 SEED EC related filed credits OR 24 SEED EC related field* credits

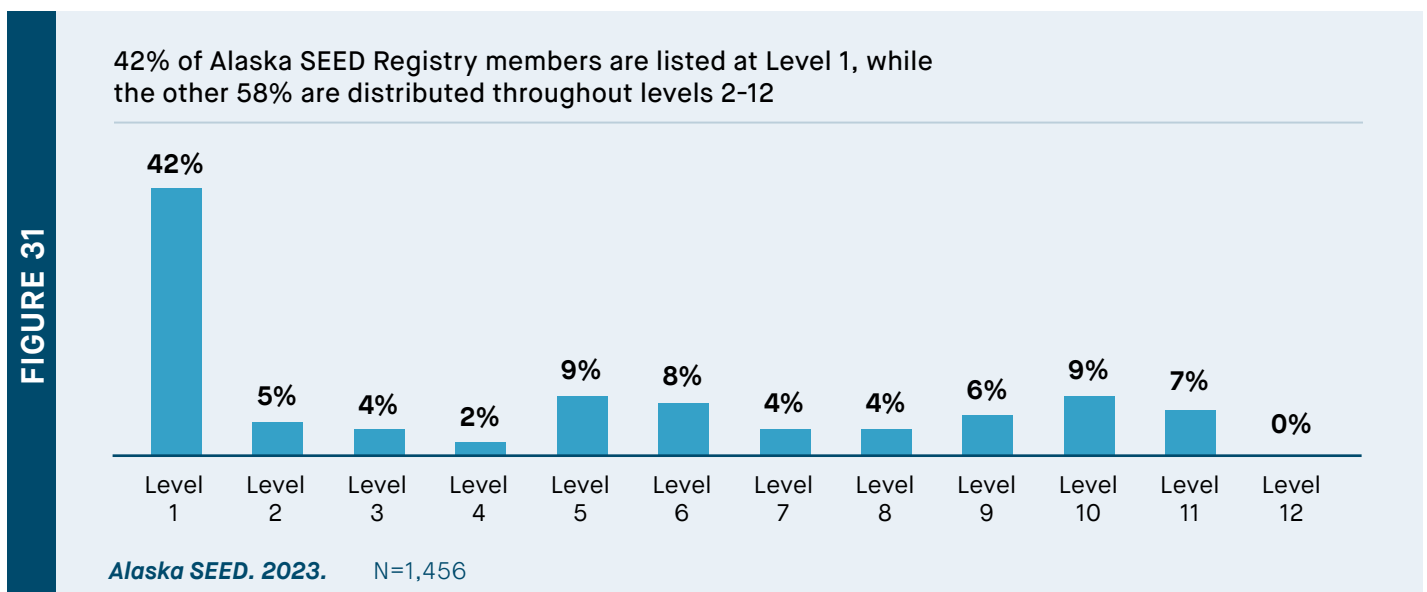
LEVEL 9: Associate Degree in EC or related field* OR Bachelor's Degree in unrelated field with 12 SEED EC related field* credits

LEVEL 10: Bachelor's Degree in EC or related field* OR Bachelor's Degree in unrelated field with 30 EC related field* credits

LEVEL 11: Master's Degree in EC or related field OR Master's Degree in unrelated field with 30 SEED EC related field* credits

LEVEL 12: Doctorate in EC or related field* OR Doctorate in unrelated field with 30 SEED EC related field* credits

Figure 31 shows the distribution along the Alaska SEED Career Ladder of all current members of the Alaska SEED Registry (as of June 2023).



* SEED Early Childhood related fields include: Child Psychology, Early Childhood Education, Early Child Development, and Early Childhood Special Education. Degrees from the following fields can also count as "EC related" if they include coursework that aligns with at least four of the seven Standards of the Alaska Early Care and Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies: social work, speech language pathology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, human services, nursing, Montessori, infant mental health, elementary education, school-age education, youth development, or recreational/outdoor education.



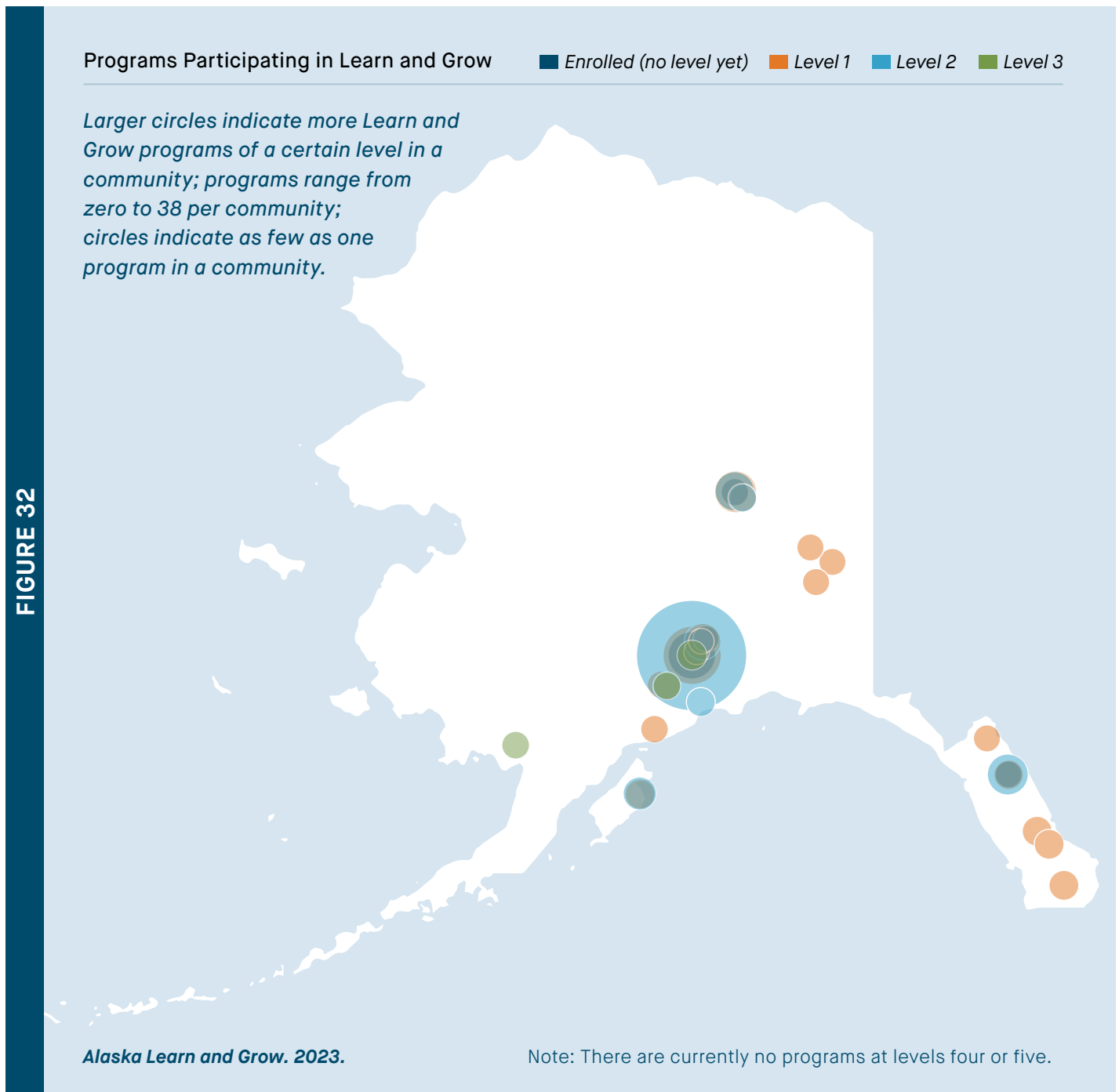
The 24 hours of annual professional development that early childhood educators who work in licensed facilities are required to receive⁶⁷ will steadily advance them through the first five levels within the first five years of their employment. Currently, 47% of all members are at Level 5 or higher. Level 10, which indicates a bachelor's degree, also holds 9% of members. The fact that 42% sit at Level 1 could indicate a relatively inexperienced, new-to-the-field workforce reflecting high turnover rates throughout the field, but this may instead indicate a relatively low level of engagement with the Alaska SEED Registry. The SEED Manager has noted that the significant proportion of members on Level 1 may not be a fully accurate indication of education and training levels because members need to upload proof of their degrees, certificates, or completion of courses, they may not have gotten to it yet. Incentives such as the ROOTS Awards, discussed below, may motivate early childhood educators to join the Alaska SEED Registry (membership is a requirement for ROOTS Awards eligibility), but not necessarily motivate full engagement with the Career Ladder and related services. At the end of FY2022, there were 1,522 Alaska SEED Registry members; at the end of FY2023, there were 1,456 members.

LEARN & GROW

Learn & Grow helps early care and learning providers strive for higher quality by setting tiered quality standards and offering support through financial incentives, administrative and classroom coaching, and education.

Learn & Grow has five levels of quality, each defined by elements in four quality domains: 1. Administration & Leadership; 2. Early Childhood Educator Qualifications & Professional Development; 3. Learning Environment, Adult-Child Interactions & Child Outcomes; 4. and Family & Community Engagement. To achieve higher quality levels, early care and learning providers participating in Learn & Grow must meet specific base requirements for each level plus choose elements to incorporate into their program models from a menu of options worth points. While higher quality levels are not associated with increases in state subsidies in Alaska and participation in Learn & Grow is not

mandatory for licensure, providers may choose to participate in the Learn & Grow program to access free supports and advertise their quality level to families. There are currently 125 programs participating in Learn & Grow:



Available Supports for Wages

As emphasized by 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey participants, low wages continue to be the most pressing issue for retaining a strong workforce. Alaska has one statewide wage bonus program and encourages transparent pay scales that reward education and tenure through Learn & Grow. The City and Borough of Juneau has also designed its own local subsidized wage program.

While these strategies demonstrate interest in making progress on the JHU Study’s recommendations to improve early childhood educators’ wages, they fall short of addressing the issue of insufficient wages or establishing a more equitable wage profession. Additional sustained funding is necessary to make progress on sustainable wage increases, including the goal of achieving parity with K-3 educators recommended in the JHU Study.

INCENTIVIZING TRANSPARENT AND TIERED PAY SCALES

Following the JHU Study recommendations to establish transparent wage scales based on experience and education, Learn & Grow has added options for gaining points in the Human Resources quality domain related to pay scales:

- *Program has a transparent pay scale (worth 1 point)*
- *Program has a pay scale that reflects years of experience and education level in alignment with the Alaska SEED Career Ladder (worth 2 points)*⁶⁸

Learn & Grow administrator coaches work with programs that are on Learn & Grow Level 3 to develop pay scales that align with the Alaska SEED Career Ladder. Lastly, the SEED Wage and Compensation Subcommittee is working to develop an equity-based shared formula across the state that takes local/regional costs of living and costs of providing care into account to make recommendations for local-level community grant distribution and local-level wage guidance.

THE SEED ROOTS AWARDS

Although not wage-based, Alaska has utilized the Retaining Our Outstanding Teachers Stipends (ROOTS) Awards as income support when funding has been available. Since the 1990s, the CCPO and SEED have partnered to offer the ROOTS Awards to subsidize income for early childhood educators at licensed early care and learning providers throughout Alaska. SEED has previously distributed awards based on specific criteria. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022, the awards were designed as a form of pandemic relief to make up for lost wages and increased costs of living. To qualify, early childhood educators must have been on the Alaska SEED Registry (or have an in-process application), been working at a licensed early care and learning provider and completed an application by the deadline. All qualified individuals received a uniform lump sum of money regardless of years of experience or education. In 2021, 617 early childhood educators received \$500, and in 2022, 1,546 early childhood educators received \$3000.⁶⁹

A 2023 report evaluating the effectiveness of the 2021 and 2022 ROOTS Awards found that the awards had a substantial effect on recipients’ morale and motivation to remain in the field.⁷⁰ However, because the ROOTS Awards are contingent on available funding and are not guaranteed each year, educators did not conceptualize the awards as part of their compensation package. Therefore, the ROOTS Awards alone were not seen as a sustainable solution to the problem of low wages.

JUNEAU OPERATING STIPENDS AND AEYC-SEA HEARTS AWARDS

In 2021, the City and Borough of Juneau began committing a portion of the city operating budget, currently \$1.2 million, to operating stipends for early care and learning providers, according to the executive director of the Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC-SEA). In 2020, Juneau providers received similar operating stipends, initially funded by COVID-19 relief funds; the city subsequently voted to keep the program going with local investment.⁷¹ For the past two years, the CCPO has also contributed funds, bringing the total to about \$3 million per year for operating stipends. Part of the funds provide per-child stipends: \$400 per month for every child under six months a licensed center serves and \$100 per month for every child aged three through school-age, plus an additional \$100 for every child who receives child care assistance. Qualifying programs also receive \$600 per month for every employee. Per-employee stipends began during the fiscal year 2023, funded by a one percent sales tax. In 2021, when the ongoing operating stipends began, the first thing most programs did was increase wages for their employees. A key informant explained that the average starting wage in Juneau is now \$20 per hour.

For early childhood educators working in Juneau, AEYC-SEA offers the Hiring, Educating, and Retaining Teaching Staff (HEARTS) Awards.⁷² These are monetary awards for Juneau-based providers who have demonstrated commitment to the field of early childhood education by acquiring training and credentials. To be eligible, educators must have at least a CDA or 12 college credits. From there, the HEARTS Awards are tiered based on the Alaska SEED Career Ladder, with higher levels receiving a larger award.⁷³

- **Tier 1: SEED Levels seven and eight receive \$2,500 per year**
- **Tier 2: SEED Level nine receives \$3,500 per year**
- **Tier 3: SEED Levels 10, 11, and 12 receive \$5,900 per year**

The awards are distributed twice a year in January and July. In 2021 a total of 64 HEARTS Awards were given out, and in 2022, 68 HEART Awards were given out.⁷⁴

Available Supports for Benefits

There remains no progress on the JHU Study's recommendation to support early care and learning providers to develop, deliver, and document benefits packages for early childhood educators or to establish partnerships to provide universal health insurance options and retirement plans.

Available Supports to Improve Workplace Conditions

The JHU Study recommended offering mental health and leadership support to improve the quality of the early childhood education workforce. Since then, workforce burnout has become a common topic in early childhood education professional development courses – both how to avoid and manage burnout in oneself and, for administrators, how to support staff and provide them with workplace environments that help reduce burnout. In addition, COVID-19 relief funds were used to implement several wellness initiatives. Despite efforts, survey respondents and interviewees expressed that emotional exhaustion and burnout continue to be a significant concern, and more work in this area is needed. This section includes examples of current or ongoing efforts.

WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Early childhood educators who work in programs licensed by the Municipality of Anchorage and are members of the Alaska SEED Registry can apply for The Early Educator Health and Wellness: Building Resilience for Early Education Workforce, Children, and Families Grant. In 2023, thread received a grant from the Municipality of Anchorage Health Department to offer the supports, which are funded by a new 5% sales tax on retail purchases of alcohol within the Municipality.⁷⁵ The grants include opportunities to access three supports:

- **Access to wellness training – Deep Support: How Self-Care & Boundaries Foster Resilience – led by The Integration Group, LLC and hosted by thread in Fall 2023; participating educators receive a \$60 stipend**
- **Access to unlimited telemedicine for one year and monthly teletherapy visits for one year for both the ECE professional and their family through AllyHealth/Optima Benefits and Payroll**
- **Assistance navigating the HealthCare exchange with United Way of Anchorage**

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

In addition to the wellness benefits grant described above, thread has also allocated Municipality of Anchorage alcohol tax funds to support high-level training on Facilitated Attuned Interaction (FAN) for two cohorts of licensed early care and learning program administrators in the Municipality of Anchorage. The funds fully cover the cost of the training and stipends for up to 48 participants in the Municipality. The cohorts began in Fall 2023 and the training consists of a two-day training followed by six months of reflective supervision. While this opportunity for

administrators in Anchorage is a limited temporary program, there are plans to use Alaska Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five funding will be utilized to expand FAN training across the state. FAN is a program developed by the Erikson Institute that aims to bolster self-awareness, collaboration, and reflective skills among supervisors; improve provider-parent relationships; and, in turn, relay those skills to parents to become more engaged and attuned to their children.⁷⁶ FAN training is aligned with the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health competency guidelines for their Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health.⁷⁷

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2019, Alaska SEED adopted a strategic plan outlining the development of a Relationship-Based Professional Development (RBPDP) System for Alaska. While the plan has been somewhat delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains a high priority, and a SEED RBPDP credentialing program is scheduled to pilot in 2024. RBPDP coaches build one-on-one relationships with early childhood educators in their pursuit of professional growth.⁷⁸ Such coaching relationships are an evidence-based approach, with research demonstrating that combining training with a reflective style of coaching is more effective than studying, demonstrations and practice alone.⁷⁹ Alaska SEED aims to design the program in such a way that receiving RBPDP coaching can count as professional development hours, contributing to early childhood educator's annual required hours. To facilitate a relationship-based coaching experience in rural and remote communities that may not have local coaches available, thread has purchased Swivl robots, which are swiveling screens equipped with cameras and artificial intelligence technology that observe classroom learning environments and enable coaches to provide feedback from recorded and live observations.⁸⁰

Current Workforce Development Initiatives

Recent attention has been given to expand the ways in which current and potential early childhood educators can build their credentials, education, and learning, with increasing attention to lowering barriers for rural and remote individuals through remote options, subsidizing learning, and alternative pathways that integrate classroom-based learning and experience. As many of these supports are in their infancy, there is limited data demonstrating their effectiveness. However, education and professional development did not emerge as a factor influencing the workforce crisis among 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey respondents or interviewees. This suggests that employee turnover and reluctance to enter the field are usually unrelated to challenges with credentialing, licensing, or education. This does not suggest that less support is needed, but that existing and emerging pathways should continue to receive investment as key strategies for workforce recruitment.

During SFY2023, the CCPO granted 53 variances to licensed centers related to the educational and training requirements for becoming a Child Care Associate (CCA), accounting for 50% of the total variances granted in the state. CCAs are able to supervise a center with up to 30 children per CCA in the absence of the administrator. There were also three variances granted for administrator credentials. When a variance is requested, the early care and learning provider lays out a plan for meeting the requirement within one year and must provide an update to their licensing specialist every three months until the requirement is met.⁸¹

Note that there is a significant need for education and training for specialized support positions such as infant and early childhood mental health consultation, which requires a master's degree and clinical licensure.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

All early childhood educators who work for a licensed provider are required to receive 24 hours of professional development each year. Often, educators must complete these hours on their own time and, if there is a cost, they must cover it. In Alaska, early childhood educators can obtain their needed hours of professional development through the following avenues:

thread Professional Development Courses

thread teams up with the CCPO to offer a variety of courses, including in-person, virtual, and asynchronous. Between 2018 and 2022, 1,132 trainings were provided—an average of about 226 trainings per year on topics such as positive social/emotional development, early childhood mental health, culturally and linguistically appropriate practices, and infant/toddler and school age specific topics.⁸² All trainings offered by thread align with Alaska’s Early Learning Guidelines and Alaska’s Core Knowledge and Competencies. In FFY22, 2,193 people attended thread trainings. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, thread has continued to offer many courses online, which has substantially increased the availability of professional development across the state. Some areas of the state struggle with stable internet connections, but the virtual courses are still able to reach a broader audience than in-person classes, which are often concentrated in places such as Anchorage, Kenai, and Fairbanks. thread’s Professional Development Director explained that thread conducts surveys and solicits feedback from early childhood educators to understand their needs and interests, then does its best to accommodate. For example, to enhance administrators’ knowledge related to managing the financial, legal, and marketing aspects of running their business, thread has partnered with the Alaska Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to offer 15 free pre-recorded webinars (available from February 2023 to February 2024). thread also offers a variety of virtual and asynchronous options; for example, thread recently purchased access to an online training platform called ProSolutions to offer asynchronous training opportunities. ProSolutions is also approved by the Council for Professional Development, which is the accrediting body for the CDA. In response to early childhood educator needs related to escalating levels of burnout and stress, thread increased professional development opportunities related to wellness and how to navigate children’s challenging behaviors.

SEED Reimbursements and Other Financial Supports

Members of the Alaska SEED Registry who are working for licensed early care and learning providers are eligible to receive several forms of financial support for education and training. There are four main types of financial support available:

- 1 | **Professional development reimbursement:** *Early childhood educators can receive up to \$1,500 each fiscal year to reimburse them for their education and training expenses from an accredited college or university in early childhood education or a related field, or educators can receive up to \$500 for SEED-approved training or conferences.*
- 2 | **Travel reimbursement:** *Early childhood educators can receive up to \$1,000 to cover travel costs to attend higher education or professional development training within Alaska.*
- 3 | **CPR/first aid support:** *Early childhood educators can receive up to \$500 for CPR or first aid training. This is deducted from the total amount they can receive for professional development reimbursement.*
- 4 | **CDA support:** *SEED will directly cover the costs of early childhood educators’ CDA application or renewal up to \$500 (the full costs of a paper application via U.S. mail), or educators can receive a reimbursement if they have fronted the costs.*

TABLE 4: SEED FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Type of Support	FY2023 Recipients
Professional Development Reimbursement	166
Travel Reimbursement	24
CPR/First Aid Support	96
CDA Support	32
TOTAL	318

Alaska SEED. 2023.

In FY2023, \$75,526 was distributed through SEED for financial supports. Table 4 summarizes the numbers of early childhood educators who received each type of support in FY2023.

DEED Statewide Professional Development Supports

For early childhood educators who are required to meet Reads Act educators qualifications, DEED also sponsors access to one free DEED-approved professional development course.⁸³ DEED is especially focused on providing professional development opportunities related to promoting early literacy and assessment tools, including equipping early childhood educators with materials and resources in students' primary languages and that depict Alaskan cultures. DEED also recognizes that accessing professional development courses in rural and remote regions of Alaska requires extra care and planning. A key informant explained that DEED provides funding for early childhood educators to attend three statewide conferences each year: the Northern Interior Alaska AEYC Annual Conference (usually in the fall), the Anchorage AEYC Annual Conference (in the winter), and the SEAAEYC Annual Conference (in the spring).

DEED also supports training related to Alaska's statewide pre-elementary assessment tool, Teaching Strategies GOLD. Teaching Strategies GOLD is an observation-based tool that facilitates the collection of multiple types of data, including photos, videos, notes, and digital samples of children's work.⁸⁴ Analyzing the data, Teaching Strategies GOLD offers instructional resources to tailor lesson plans to the child's needs. A key informant explained that all State-funded programs are required to use the tool, licensed by DEED, and other programs can opt in if they would like.⁸⁵ All 17 of Alaska's Head Start programs, all recipients of the pre-elementary grants, and all districts participating in the district-wide early education program supported by the Alaska Reads Act use Teaching Strategies GOLD.⁸⁶ In addition, through a memorandum of understanding with thread and Learn & Grow, early care and learning providers that are working toward Level Three on the Learn & Grow quality rating system can opt-in to using Teaching Strategies GOLD.

The Alaska Head Start Collaboration Office housed by DEED hosts a monthly community of practice for all early care and learning providers who use Teaching Strategies GOLD. This offers them an opportunity to share with others how they are using the tool in their program. Often, the assessments are used to develop plans for staff professional development. For example, if the assessment shows many students score low on literacy, they may bring in an early literacy specialist for staff training.

PATHWAYS FOR OBTAINING CREDENTIALS

Alaska currently has several programs to help prospective and current early childhood educators pursue the credentials they need to succeed in the field.

Child Development Associate (CDA)

The CDA is a standard credential recognized by both state and federal regulating bodies and is granted by The Council for Professional Recognition. Generally, early childhood educators earn their CDA while working in an early childhood education setting and must:

- **Complete 120 hours of early childhood education training in several subject areas**
- **Work with a CDA professional development specialist to complete a verification visit, which includes observation of the early childhood educator's work with children**
- **Pass an exam**⁸⁷

CDAs must be renewed every three years. Some local Head Start programs and thread have formed cohorts of early childhood educators pursuing CDAs to create a collaborative learning experience, and thread recently devoted grant funds to an in-person CDA cohort model that offers up to a \$1,400 stipend to 15 participants. thread is also in the process of forming a virtual CDA cohort. Along with offering financial support for the application and renewal costs, thread has staff qualified and approved by The Council for Professional Recognition to perform the necessary in-person observations required for the CDA verification process. When an educator earns their CDA, they climb Alaska SEED Career Ladder to Level six (or higher if they have additional credentials). In Alaska, 509 individuals hold a current CDA credential.⁸⁸

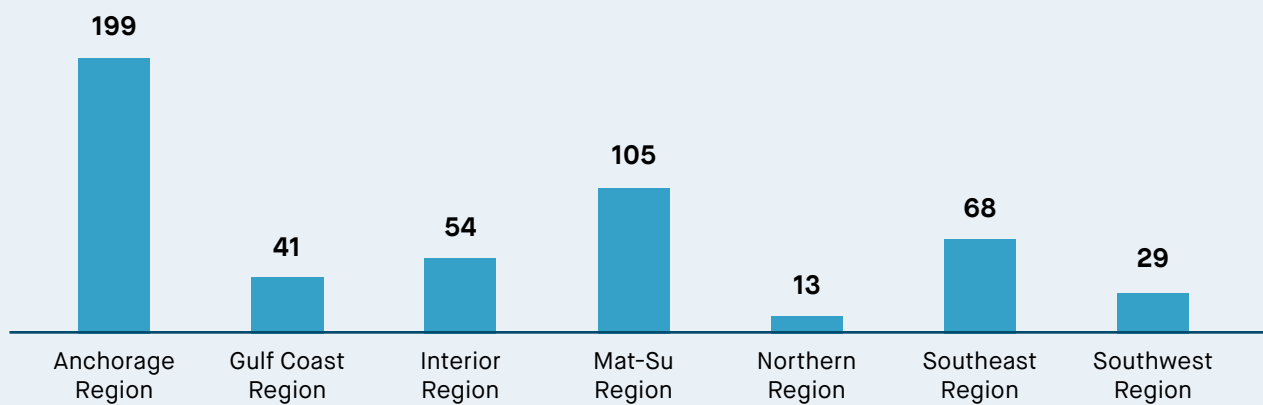


“I was taking care of infants. They are so dependent on me... You should know how to handle the kids...”

– EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

FIGURE 33

There are early childhood educators with CDAs in each of Alaska’s seven public health regions.



Council for Professional Development. 2023 N=509

If early childhood educators with a CDA wish to further their education, the University of Alaska system works with them to convert their CDA into six elective credits that can be used toward either an associate or bachelor’s degree in early childhood education (the credits do not apply to the occupational endorsement certificates, as those programs do not use elective credits). The student pays a \$150 fee for these six credits (\$25 per credit).

While not a CDA, a similar conversion is being developed for early childhood educators from military early care and learning providers (which have rigorous training expectations for their educators) to turn their required training into university credits. The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is currently working with Ohio State University to determine which credits it may be able to offer to early childhood educators who have completed training and worked in the early care and learning providers on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

The University of Alaska System

The University of Alaska (UA) system offers several educational tracks for prospective early childhood educators, depending on their career goals. Both University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and UAA have endorsement and degree programs.

TABLE 5: COURSES OF STUDY RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRENTLY OFFERED IN THE UA SYSTEM

<i>Department</i>	<i>Credential</i>
University of Alaska Anchorage	
School of Education	Occupational Endorsement Certificate (OEC) in Infant and Toddler Development
	Associates of Applied Science (AAS) in Early Childhood Development
	Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Early Childhood Education Three tracks: 1) Professional Early Childhood Educator 2) Child Life Specialist 3) Licensure Programs (PK-3)
Department of Psychology	Minor in Children’s Mental Health
	Graduate Certificate in Children’s Mental Health
Department of Human Services (College of Health)	Occupational Endorsement Certificate (OEC) in Children’s Behavioral Health
University of Alaska Fairbanks	
Early Childhood Education Program (UAF Community and Technical College)	Certificate in Early Childhood Education
	Associates of Applied Science (AAS) in Early Childhood Education
	Occupational Endorsement Certificate (OEC) in Nanny Caregiving
	Minor in Early Childhood Education
College of Rural & Community Development	Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Child Development and Family Studies
	Three tracks: 1) Administration within the Early Childhood Field 2) Curriculum and Teaching 3) Family Support

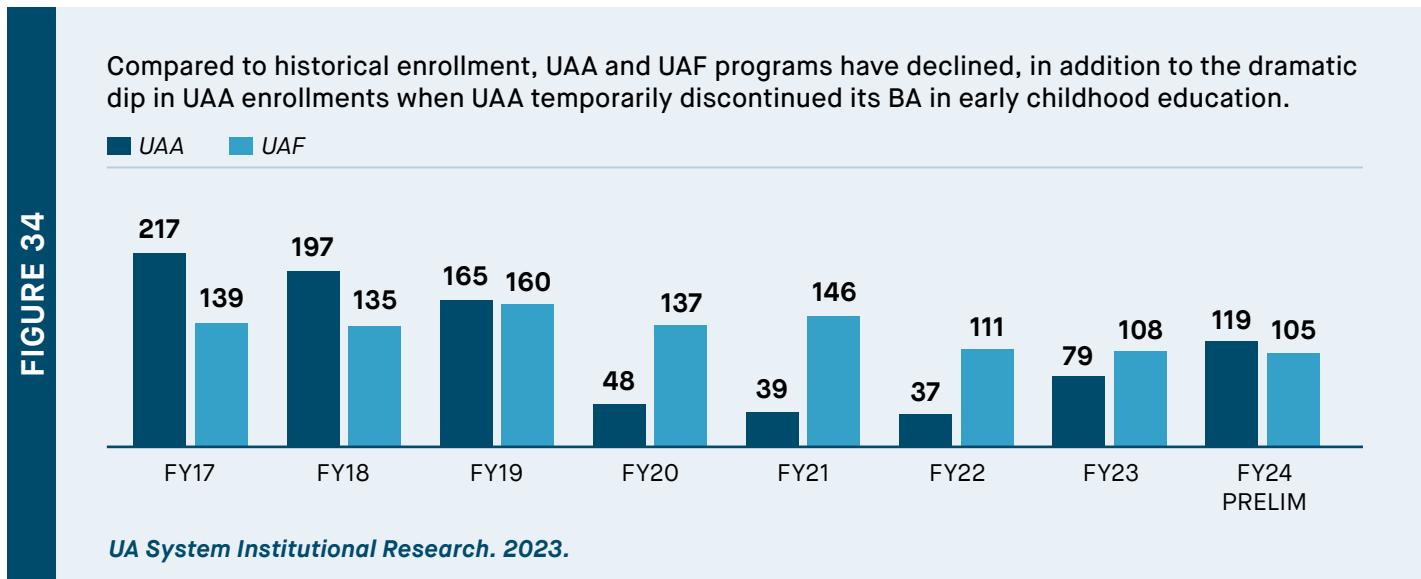
UAA and UAF Academic Catalogs.^{89, 90}

Table 5 describes the courses of study currently offered in the UA system.

Occupational Endorsement Certificates and Associates of Applied Science degrees are often obtained to enhance current early childhood educators’ careers and help them climb the SEED Career Ladder, but they are not required for entry into the field. UAA’s early childhood education courses can all be taken online or at UAA’s two community campuses: Kodiak College and Kenai Peninsula College.

All UAA and UAF Early Childhood Education degree programs are also available online. Many of the classes within the UA system — from the 100 to the 400 level — have labs and activities that involve spending time with children and making observations in classroom settings. In addition, if students are not already employed at an early care and learning provider, they are required to participate in practicum programs in which students are placed in an early childhood education setting through partnerships with local providers.

In addition to the above early childhood education programs, University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), UAF, and UAA all have degree programs related to early childhood education, such as elementary education programs, special education programs, and a children’s behavioral health program. While credits from these programs often count toward the required credits from “early childhood-related fields” on the Alaska SEED Career Ladder, they are not specifically designed to prepare students for careers in early childhood education.⁹¹



UAA School of Education Accreditation Loss

In 2019, the UAA School of Education lost its accreditation with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), leading to the discontinuation of their bachelor’s degree in early childhood education.⁹² While UAA continued offering the AAS, about a dozen students working toward BAs moved to join UAF’s bachelor’s degree program in Child Development and Family Studies. These accreditation changes and the subsequent shifts in UAA’s degree offerings may have contributed to instability and uncertainty in the early childhood education workforce. After UAA’s program lost its accreditation in 2019, there were three school years during which a BA in early childhood education was not offered at UAA. Moreover, two early childhood special education programs — the undergraduate minor and the MEd in Early Childhood Special Education — were discontinued at UAA in 2020 and 2022, respectively. In 2021, UAA’s School of Education began offering an Occupational Endorsement Certificate in Infant and Toddler Development; and in 2022, they began offering a redesigned BA in early childhood education with the three tracks listed above.

Honoring Field Experience: UAA Competency-Based Credits

In addition to granting six college credits to early childhood educators who have earned a CDA, the UA system has a process for granting university credit for years of experience in the field for early childhood educators. For example, if an early childhood educator has been working in the field for many years and has already learned the necessary information related to a particular course, the student can put together a portfolio of documents and evidence that they have already mastered the stated outcomes for that specific course. If the portfolio is approved through the system, the student pays a small fee and can be excused from that course requirement. These academic credits can be used toward the 12 credits required for an administrator or CCA at licensed facilities.

CCPO Scholarships Prioritizing Members of the Workforce

To help facilitate the acquisition of both the college credits required for administrators and the professional development hours required for all members of the workforce at licensed early care and learning providers, the CCPO provides funding through UAF for the Professional Development Support for Early Care and Learning Scholarship, which can be used for classes at any of the UA system campuses. The scholarship covers tuition and

fees for three to six credits (usually two classes) and prioritizes providing opportunities for current members of the workforce who may not be seeking a degree but want access to higher education courses. Scholarship applicants are prioritized based on their status in the workforce: individuals currently working for licensed early care and learning providers are the first priority; second priority is people working in licensed Head Starts; third priority is people working in licensed pre-elementary programs; fourth priority is people working in unlicensed Head Starts; and any fifth priority is other scholarship applicants, for example full-time students who are not yet working in the field. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the CCPO distributed a total of \$181,394 through 108 scholarships to 73 Alaskans from 33 different communities.⁹³

Program In Development: Bristol Bay Region Career Technical Education Program

The Bristol Bay Region Career Technical Education (BBR-CTE) Program is a collaborative effort between Lake and Peninsula Borough, Bristol Bay Borough, Southwest Region, and Dillingham City School Districts, serving 23 communities in the region. The school preparing to launch an Early Childhood Education Program.⁹⁴ According to a key informant involved in the program, the current model plan will start as an apprenticeship certificate and will provide participating high school students with 18 dual college and high school credits. It will also involve practicum experience at local sites – Head Start, pre-K, or even kindergarten or first grade if the students’ local community doesn’t have Head Start or pre-K. The program developers have identified at least three potential funding streams to pay the students for their practicum hours. **“The idea is that we’re growing our own in our own communities,”** explained one community leader, **“We need more local people to be working local jobs.”** Due to challenges related to things like housing, they explained that relying on people from outside the community to provide education has not been a successful model, and creating a pipeline to develop the workforce locally benefits the communities.

Apprenticeship Programs

In the last three years, apprenticeship programs have become the fastest growing early childhood education workforce development strategy across the country.⁹⁵ In 2023, the U.S. DOL awarded the Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development \$342,148 in State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula funds for apprenticeship expansion in high-growth, high-demand industries.⁹⁶ The Child Care Services Association has an approved U.S. DOL apprenticeship pilot program open to interested states.^{97,98} However, Alaska is one of nine states that have not implemented an apprenticeship program registered with the U.S. DOL for the early childhood education workforce.⁹⁹ However, that is set to change in 2024.

Coming Soon: UAA Registered Apprenticeship in Early Childhood Education

The UA system is currently working with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development and local employers to offer three registered apprenticeships in early childhood education. Content from all three of UAA’s early childhood education degree programs — the OEC, AAS, and BA — is being adapted as instructional material for registered apprenticeships:

- **Apprenticeship 1:** Curriculum from the OEC in Infant and Toddler Development
- **Apprenticeship 2:** Curriculum from the Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development; requires prior completion of Apprenticeship 1 **or** completion of UAA’s OEC in Infant and Toddler Development
- **Apprenticeship 3:** Curriculum from the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education; requires prior completion of Apprenticeship 1 and 2 **or** completion of AAS degree

Local organizations that host apprentices partner with the UAA School of Education, which provides the coursework as the apprenticeship’s supplemental instruction provider. Apprentices earn their academic credentials at the end of their apprenticeships. Any wage progression is the responsibility of the providers.

UAA and UAS Partnership Unregistered Apprenticeship Program

UAA has also indicated that it can offer brokered instruction for unregistered apprenticeship programs in collaboration with community partners who have independent funding sources to support apprenticeship programs. For these programs, the university offers course instruction at a brokered rate, meaning the funding source is not charged the full amount for course tuition and enrollment fees. This education is free to the workers who will receive a wage for their work.

A formal partnership between SEAAEYC, UAA, and UAS has generated a new unregistered apprenticeship program for which the first cohort of students is currently being recruited. The program offers one of the six required courses (18 credits total) for UAA's OEC each semester in person on the UAS campus in Juneau. Students are required to work at an early care and learning provider in the Juneau area for \$20 per hour while taking each of the offered courses. A high school diploma is not necessary, but students must be at least 16 years old.

Opportunities for High School Students

There are opportunities throughout the state for high school students to begin their education related to early childhood education, including the following pathways:

Dual-Credit Options

UAA offers three dual-credit models for high schoolers interested in becoming early childhood educators:

- **Independent Dual Credit:** High schoolers can enroll independently in select 100- and 200-level courses to earn credits. A number of seats are held for dually enrolled students.
- **Partnership Dual Credit:** School district teachers are the instructors for the course curriculum in their local settings. UAA can help with practicum placements if applicable. The program at King Tech High School described below is an example of this partnership model.
- **Cooperative Dual Credit:** UAA offers "Distance Learning in a Box" to schools across the state.

These credits can be used toward degree programs if the student decides to pursue a degree after graduating high school.

Dual Credit Example: King Tech High School

Since the 1970s, the King Tech High School (formerly King Career Center) has operated an early childhood education lab school in Anchorage for high school juniors and seniors. The two-year King Tech early childhood education program balances classroom teaching with supervised hands-on experience with children in their on-site early care and learning provider and delivers the content of four UAA early childhood development courses. Students who enroll in the program for four semesters (from the beginning of their junior year to the end of their senior year) are able to graduate high school with their CDA. A key informant explained that this year, the program is on track to graduate five students with their CDAs. King Tech is not municipally licensed because they are covered under the school district, so students are not eligible for thread to cover the costs of their CDA, but so far, King Tech has covered the costs of the CDA (\$500) for their graduates.

Career and Technical Education Programs for Rural High School Students

DEED and UAF have developed a series of four one-credit courses in early childhood education as a CTE program, which can be delivered by UAF staff or school districts themselves with support from UAF. The credits can then be used toward the Occupational Endorsement in Nanny Caregiving at UAF.

07

Other States' Strategies To Strengthen The Early Childhood Education Workforce

Alaska's pressing issues of low wages, lack of benefits, and difficult workplace conditions for early childhood educators are challenges similarly experienced by states across the nation. At least 22 governors have publicly recognized the foundational importance of a well-prepared early childhood workforce and spoke about the need for increased and new child care investments in their 2023 state addresses.¹⁰⁰

In discussions with other states and a review of recent reports on strategies to address the early childhood workforce crisis, the following themes emerged about how other states are approaching the crisis:

- ***Improving wages and benefits for early childhood educators is central to most state efforts with many different approaches being used***
- ***No single early childhood education workforce strategy stands in isolation. Strategies recognize that compensation, licensing, quality, and workforce development are intertwined***
- ***Multi-faceted strategies also require coordination across state programs and with key stakeholder groups. States with strong coordination across programs serving the sector and centralized authority are often able to be more efficient, leverage resources more easily, and move more quickly to act on priorities***
- ***Rethinking early childhood financing strategies is necessary. While many states leveraged COVID-19 relief funds to pilot and scale their initial approaches, states have now found it necessary to increase funding to sustain their efforts***

This section describes specific model programs and approaches that other states have found helpful to address similar issues of wages, benefits, and workplace conditions, as well as strategies for building a high-quality statewide workforce. Some of these programs, such as WAGE\$ and Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) were also reviewed for the JHU Study and have had prior evaluations, while others are new approaches for which the long-term impacts are not yet known. In addition, many states spoke to developing specific strategies to provide targeted support for in-home providers, including navigation and start-up funding.

Strategies to Increase Wages

States use a variety of mechanisms to increase wages for the early childhood education workforce, with some directed at early childhood educators and some at their employers, aiming to indirectly impact employees. Strategies include wage subsidies and bonuses for early childhood educators, payments to early childhood educators to increase wages, leveraging of the state child care subsidy, and collective bargaining. Many of the systemic solutions require legislation, while income supplements, such as wage bonuses, do not.

WAGE SUBSIDIES AND BONUSES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

While they do not entail a sustained wage increase, subsidized employment programs (i.e., subsidies as an incentive for professional development and/or education) have been used in the early childhood workforce to increase quality, reward retention, and to stabilize the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰¹

Historically, subsidized employment programs are used to get unemployed people back into the workforce and increase marketable skills to improve long-term job prospects.¹⁰² Evidence is unclear on the use of subsidized employment as a durable wage increase strategy; however, early childhood workforce employment subsidies tied to educational advancement are common. This strategy is supported by evidence suggesting a well-educated child care staff reduces turnover and benefits children's immediate and lifelong outcomes.^{103, 104}

Child Care WAGE\$ Program

WAGE\$ is an education-based, tiered subsidized wage supplement paid to teachers, directors, and early childhood educators working with children between the ages of birth to five.¹⁰⁵ WAGE\$ was developed by Child Care Services Association in North Carolina to increase retention, stability, skills, and education of the early childhood educator workforce. Employment subsidies are typically provided twice a year, and participants can increase their subsidy amount by gaining more education. It is commonly paired with T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood which provides scholarships for early childhood educators (described on page 56).

As of fall 2023, WAGE\$ (renamed as INCENTIVE\$ in some states) is currently licensed and operating in five states across the country. Research and key informants report that Rhode Island and Arkansas are piloting WAGE\$ through a time-limited federal Preschool Development Birth through Five Planning Grant, and 10 other states are currently considering WAGE\$ as a model.¹⁰⁶

Administration requirements, subsidy levels, educational standards, and other programmatic and eligibility guidelines for receiving a WAGE\$ supplement are established state by state; however, typical eligibility for early childhood educators includes:

- **Earning less than a locally established income**
- **Work with children ages birth to five**
- **Work at least 10 hours per week in a licensed child care program**
- **Work at least six months in the same child care program**
- **Have a level of education listed on the locally determined salary supplement scale¹⁰⁷**

A FY2021 Child Care Services Organization WAGE\$ program evaluation showed positive outcomes for programs and early childhood educators:

- **Lower turnover rates: 12-15% turnover for WAGE\$ participants, compared to 30% for non-WAGE\$ participants**
- **High levels of educational attainment: 50% of participants have an Associates in Early Childhood Education or higher**
- **98% shared that WAGE\$ eases financial stress**
- **97% of participants felt encouraged to stay with their employer¹⁰⁸**

WAGE\$ Iowa

WAGE\$ Iowa is now in its tenth year according to a local key informant. It is coordinated by the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children, in partnership with the State, with the expressed goals of increasing retention, education, and compensation. The funding allocated for the original pilot program was under \$700,000 and it served about one-third of the counties in the state. COVID-19 relief funds were used to expand statewide. The key informant further described that the budget has been around \$7 million since SFY2021, with over \$5.5 million directly paid in wage subsidies, and it remains at that level for SFY2024. Finally, the key informant shared that the success of the program has led to a desire to maintain funding levels using Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) funds as COVID-19 relief funds run out.

Like in the pilot model in North Carolina, the Iowa program pays income subsidies, with higher subsidies available for early childhood educators with higher levels of education. Minimum qualifications for a subsidy are twelve college credits in early childhood or a CDA, working at least 20 hours/week with children ages birth to five, and making less than \$25/hour.¹⁰⁹ The average subsidy increases income by about \$2/hour, for a payment of over \$2,000 every six months for those who work full-time, although master's level early childhood educators could qualify for \$5,250 every six months.¹¹⁰ To be eligible, the early childhood educator must have been at their program for the prior six months. If they leave, even for another early childhood program, the six-month window starts again.

An Iowa key informant also reported that for early childhood educators with a CDA, the subsidy lasts two years; but, for those who attain an early childhood related associate's level of education or higher (up to a PhD), the subsidy continues as long as they are meeting the other qualifications. The key informant went on to explain that in Iowa, WAGE\$ is implemented alongside T.E.A.C.H. (scholarships) to help educators more easily meet education requirements and to encourage retention.

The key informant explained that WAGE\$ income supplements are considered taxable income, which may affect some people's desire to participate. However, according to key informants in both Iowa and North Carolina, their programs had not heard of any participants losing eligibility for other public benefits because of their participation.

Virginia RecognizeB5

Virginia's RecognizeB5 Program is one facet of the broader statewide Unified Virginia Quality Birth to Five System (VQB5),¹¹¹ a measurement and improvement system to rate publicly funded early care and learning programs, similar to Learn & Grow in Alaska. The VQB5 is intended to improve quality of programs.¹¹²

RecognizeB5 provides an income supplement for early childhood educators who are employed by providers enrolled in the VQB5 system; it aims to reduce turnover and, in turn, improves the quality of children's experiences in early care and learning programs.¹¹³

Administered by the Virginia Department of Education, RecognizeB5 offers a wage supplement twice a year to qualified early childhood educators. Early childhood educators are eligible if they work at least 30 hours/week with children birth to five (not yet enrolled in kindergarten) in a classroom setting at a qualified VQB5 enrolled program; early childhood educators employed by the school district are not eligible, but Head Start employees are.¹¹⁴ Because retention is a goal, if an early childhood educator moves sites, they lose their eligibility for the remainder of the program year. There are no education requirements for the supplement, and everyone receives the same amount.¹¹⁵

For the SFY2024 program year, the stipend will be \$1,500 every six months, up from the SFY2019 amount of \$750 every six months when the program was first established. In SFY2023 RecognizeB5 distributed approximately \$25 million to more than 11,400 early childhood educators.¹¹⁶

The establishment of the VQB5 and alignment of subsidies underneath was part of a broader legislative mandate to establish a more unified and coordinated public-private system for early care and education.¹¹⁷ The legislation included creation of a new Early Childhood Advisory Committee and creation of the VQB5 to improve quality. The VQB5 program, along with all other early childhood education programs, including the Virginia pre-school initiative and any other school-based early childhood and care and education program (licensed and unlicensed) were then consolidated into the Department of Education.¹¹⁸

PAYMENTS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS TO INCREASE WAGES

Several states have developed or are working on mechanisms to increase wages through payments to early care and learning providers, who then distribute it to early childhood educators through wages. In Alaska, the 2023 ROOTS Award Evaluation had found that a shortcoming of the bonus program was that while early childhood educators appreciated the wage supplement, they could not conceptualize it as part of their compensation because it was not guaranteed year to year. In addition, the awards did not engender loyalty to recipients' employers because the subsidy did not come from them. These models address some of those concerns but do place an additional administrative burden on the employers.

Washington D.C. Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund

In 2022, Washington D.C. codified its Early Childhood Educator Pay Scale and established child care subsidy payment rates for child development providers caring for children aged birth to five.¹¹⁹ Beginning in SFY2024, licensed providers that enter into an agreement with the Department of Education, will receive funding to supplement assistant and lead teachers' salaries.¹²⁰

The raises are differentiated by role and credentials, and tiered minimums are on par with public school teachers.¹²¹ For example, an Assistant Teacher with a CDA has a minimum annual salary of \$51,006, while a Lead Teacher with a bachelor's in early childhood education has a minimum annual salary of \$75,103.¹²² The tables establishing minimum salaries are required to be updated yearly to maintain parity.¹²³

Funding for D.C.'s Early Childhood Educator Pay Scale comes from a newly established Early Childhood Equity Pay Fund.¹²⁴ The fund builds from a tax on wealthy households earning more than \$250,000 in annual taxable income, with residents earning more than \$1 million paying a larger increase and accounting for more than 90% of the new revenue.¹²⁵ In FY2022, \$54 million was deposited into the fund. In FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025, approximately \$70 million will be deposited each year.¹²⁶

In contrast with other payment mechanisms, Washington D.C.'s Compensation Scale for the DC Child Care Workforce report released in 2021 specifically recommended avoiding increasing subsidy to finance the pay scale due to concerns that it would distort the marketplace to increase subsidy payments. Instead, the payments are considered supplemental to subsidy payments.¹²⁷

Minnesota Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program

In May 2023, Minnesota signed into law a program to increase pay for the early childhood education workforce.¹²⁸ This now permanent program uses a non-competitive grant process to award licensed early care and learning providers funding, based on the number of full-time equivalent staff positions who care for children in their program.¹²⁹ All funding from the program must be used by early care and learning centers to increase compensation and benefits while in-home providers have a little more flexibility in how the funding can be used.¹³⁰

To be eligible, the early care and learning provider must be licensed, certified, or registered; be in good standing with the Minnesota Department of Human Services or their tribe; be open, operating and serving a minimum number of children during the funding period; and meet additional technical requirements.¹³¹

Funding is appropriated from a general revenue fund to the commissioner of human services. The law signed in May 2023 budgeted \$109.6 million for the program in FY2024, \$206.4 million for FY2025 and \$129.8 million for each following year through 2027.^{132, 133}

Minnesota also offers grants for start-up, professional development, curriculum, assessment tools, and emergency situations.¹³⁴

Maine Early Childhood Educator Salary Supplement Program

In 2022, Maine legislators unanimously passed comprehensive support for the state's early care and education system, including establishing a monthly salary supplement for early childhood educators.¹³⁵ In this model, Maine's program pays the supplement to the early care and learning providers, who then disburse it to their staff. Additional funding (7.65% of costs) was made available to providers for administering the supplement.¹³⁶ The 2022 budget provided \$12 million in general funds for salary supplements.¹³⁷ Initially established as a \$200/month salary supplement, in SFY2024 a tiered system based on education and experience levels was to be adopted.¹³⁹

Programs that are eligible to receive the supplement must be active in Quality for ME, (Maine's QRIS) and must be a licensed center or in-home provider. For early childhood educators to be eligible, they must be employed by an eligible program, registered in Maine Roads to Quality Registry (similar to SEED in Alaska), and provide direct education services to children. Owners and directors are also eligible.¹⁴⁰

The legislation more broadly provides for a range of additional supports within the early childhood education system, including but not limited to:

- ***Establishment of an early childhood integrated data system***
- ***Improved use of the subsidy to increase early childhood educator reimbursements to match the true costs of quality care***
- ***Reimburse early care and learning providers based on enrollment***
- ***Increase income eligibility for families***
- ***Establishment of a staffed early childhood educator task force to provide ongoing oversight and recommendations to the department***¹⁴¹

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

As of fall 2023, eleven states - California, Oregon, Washington, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, Illinois, Maryland, New York, and Rhode Island - have collective bargaining policies in place for in-home providers, with Illinois becoming the first in 2005.¹⁴² New Mexico has legislation in place, but early childhood educators have not yet organized.¹⁴³

The right to organize comes through the legislative designation of the in-home providers as public employees when they accept public funding (i.e., state child care subsidies).¹⁴⁴ While each union is different, unions representing in-home providers have successfully negotiated with their states for:

- ***Increased wages***
- ***Access to health and dental care***
- ***Retirement funds***
- ***Time off for personal leave and/or professional development***
- ***Establishment of substitute pools***^{145, 146, 147}

Alaska House Bill 46: Child Care Provider Collective Bargaining is a pending bill which would allow early childhood educators that receive state child care subsidies to organize and collectively bargain with the Alaska Department of Health.¹⁴⁸

Strategies to Increase Benefits

In addition to wage increases, support for early childhood education workforce benefits like health insurance, retirement, paid time off, and child care assistance for the early childhood workforce have also been a focus. These benefits are often part of broader compensation packages, and for some benefits like retirement, there were limited to no examples of stand-alone initiatives found.

HEALTH INSURANCE

States are designating funds through legislation to subsidize health insurance costs for the early childhood education workforce. Some are utilizing grants to providers in order to cover premium costs and many are utilizing their state healthcare exchange and/or arranging buying groups (i.e., grouping populations to accumulate and manage cost-effective purchasing power such as a 'network').¹⁴⁹

Massachusetts Commonwealth Cares for Children Grants (C3)

The Massachusetts legislature allocated \$475 million for "C3 grants", a non-competitive grant process with an option to use funds to pay for healthcare subsidies for the early childhood education workforce.¹⁵⁰ Licensed early care and learning providers are eligible for the grant. Priority for grants is ranked by percent of State-subsidized enrollment. Awardees can use funds to subsidize monthly premiums, deductibles, and copayments for early childhood educators they employ.¹⁵¹

General revenue funds account for 53% of this budget with the balance coming from the state’s High-Quality Early Education & Care Affordability Fund.¹⁵² The High-Quality Early Education & Care Affordability Fund was enacted for SFY2023, with a budget transfer of \$175 million from the state’s general fund to this account and may receive deposits from public and private sources, earns interest, and unexpended money does not return to the general fund.¹⁵³

PAID TIME OFF

Access to paid time off, including personal leave, paid holidays, sick leave, and paid time for professional development is often part of a broader benefits package offered by employers. Due to lack of other available staff, in-home providers in particular struggle with access to paid time off. To create access to paid time off, several states have turned to the development of substitute pools, particularly for in-home providers.^{154, 155}

Washington Early Care and Education Substitute Pool

Through a Collective Bargaining Agreement, Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families established the first statewide early care and education substitute pool in 2015 through the Early Start Act, which was recently updated in May 2023.¹⁵⁶ The purpose of the substitute pool is to support continuity of care for children, time off for early childhood educators, and workforce recruitment into the field.¹⁵⁷

The substitute pool is managed through The Imagine Institute, an early care and education professional development organization.¹⁵⁸ There are approximately 160 to 200 certified substitutes statewide at any given time and the substitute pool is provided at no cost for early childhood educators as long as they meet eligibility requirements to use the pool, which include:

- **Licensed early care and learning providers who serve at least one subsidized child in the last 12 months**
- **Licensed in-home providers who have not served one subsidized child but have staff participating in Early Achievers, can access the substitute pool while focusing on Early Achievers participation and progress**
- **Licensed early childhood educators participating in Early achievers can access the substitute pool while focusing on Early Achievers participation and progress¹⁵⁹**

Additional shifts can be accessed through private pay options. Washington is currently using COVID-19 relief funding, but continued funding for the substitute pool, along with other early childhood initiatives, will come from the Fair Start for Kids Act, which levies a new capital gains tax on high income residents beginning in 2023.^{160, 161}

CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

One creative new benefit that states are offering is to subsidize child care for their early childhood education workforce. Key informants shared that the benefit is intended to incentivize people to join the workforce, when it might not otherwise make economic sense given the low wages. States are typically utilizing their state child care assistance program subsidies to sponsor child care for the workforce. Kentucky, Rhode Island, Iowa, and Illinois have begun to enact categorical eligibility for early childhood educators as part of their CCDF plan.^{162, 163} Categorical eligibility differs from income-based eligibility, which is typically how families qualify for child care assistance. For example, in Alaska, under the State CCDF plan categorical eligibility is extended to children in child protective services.¹⁶⁴



Kentucky's Categorical Eligibility for Early Childhood Educators

After COVID-19 disruptions, usage of Kentucky's child care assistance program plummeted, and lack of staff for early childhood educators was found to be a major driver that was preventing early care and learning providers from operating at full capacity, and inhibiting families from being able to enroll their children.¹⁶⁵ To attract new early childhood educators, in 2022 Kentucky created a new category of categorical eligibility to allow educators and staff working in child care settings to access child care subsidies for their own children. The new category features include:

- *Early childhood educators receive child care assistance subsidies for their own children regardless of income*
- *Early childhood employees must work in Certified Family Child Care Homes & Centers*
- *Early childhood employees are eligible if they work 20 hours or more a week*
- *Early childhood educators cannot be paid to take care of their own children*¹⁶⁶

A key informant reported that 226 families enrolled under this category in the first month it was enacted. Since its inception in 2022, 3,421 new children have been enrolled in early education and care under categorical eligibility and there has been an overall increase of all families utilizing the subsidy, increasing by more than 7,000 from pre-COVID-19 levels. Key informants also reported anecdotal information that categorical eligibility has resulted in elementary teachers and previously 'stay at home' mothers entering the early childhood education workforce. Key to their success was marketing the availability of this new benefit to both early childhood educators and the general public.

In addition, a key informant interview revealed Kentucky has a robust scholarship program to support early childhood educator workforce retention and recruitment. The scholarship program provides early childhood educators access to education opportunities, professional development, and supports quality staffing. Both new and existing early childhood educators are eligible to take advantage of these opportunities, which contributes to the State's quality goals.

Improving Workplace Wellness

Improving workplace wellness is imperative to reducing burnout, fostering a sense of belonging, and providing early childhood educators a safe and supportive workplace environment. To support educators, several programs and strategies have been developed to address adequate staffing, leadership development, and support with challenging child behaviors.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Supportive leadership can mitigate burnout and stress for early childhood educators, yet administrator credentials or support requirements can vary widely.¹⁶⁷ In some states, training for leadership development can be integrated into quality recognition and improvement systems, other accreditation standards, and can be a part of credentialing processes. In Alaska, one of the Learn & Grow quality domains is Administration & Leadership.¹⁶⁸

Aim4Excellence

Aim4Excellence is an online national director credential for early childhood administrators developed in 2010 by McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. The program is recognized as a training organization by the National Workforce Registry Alliance. Aim4Excellence includes nine self-paced modules, each of which are 16 hours of professional development. Generally, most states who invest in Aim4Excellence sponsor participation through their QRIS.¹⁶⁹ Each module costs \$150, for a total price of \$1,350.¹⁷⁰ The overall focus is on the core leadership and management competencies known as the Whole Leadership Framework.¹⁷¹ When there is a sponsoring entity, facilitated cohorts and communities of practice can be developed to extend learning and support to staff who are going through the program.¹⁷²

College credits may be available from partnering institutions. For example, Indiana embedded Aim4Excellence in their Early Childhood Bachelor's degree at no additional cost to the student, paid for in part by CCDF.¹⁷³ Aim4Excellence assists with meeting Administrator Criteria for NAEYC Accreditation and is aligned to professional standards in many other states.¹⁷⁴ In North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, each state has funding available to support early childhood educator administration participation in Aim4Excellence.¹⁷⁵ Alaska SEED also accepts Aim4Excellence professional development credentials related to core knowledge and competency areas for accounting, budgeting, cash flow management, grant writing, and fundraising for Center Administrators only.^{176, 177}

SUPPORT WITH HANDLING CHALLENGING CHILD BEHAVIORS

Challenging child behaviors contribute to burnout and stress for early childhood educators. Many publicly funded programs such as Head Start and State-sponsored Pre-K are implementing systems of support including coaching, consultation, and reflective supervision for staff and programs when they are dealing with challenging situations. For early care and learning providers, offering these types of supports can lead to higher quality ratings, including in Alaska where access to infant and early childhood mental health consultation and related supports are built into Learn & Grow.

Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators Program

Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators Program (CHIME) is an eight-week mindfulness compassion-based program offered to early childhood educators.¹⁷⁸ Developed by the University of Nebraska in 2017, the program was co-created by educators, child care directors, and family health providers and continues to evolve.¹⁷⁹ For example, a key informant shared that foundational concepts within CHIME are being considered through an indigenous practices' lens by Dr. Michael Yellow Bird, Dean of the University of Manitoba.

The purpose of CHIME is to support early childhood educators' and administrators' well-being through mindfulness, social-emotional learning, culturally responsive practices, and equity as foundational principles. Preliminary findings from two pilot studies suggest CHIME participation enhanced awareness of emotions and promoted strategies to manage them, supporting workplace well-being.¹⁸⁰ Reports from comparison groups by level of participation indicate those who were most stressed benefited the most from CHIME.¹⁸¹ According to one key informant, important considerations for implementation include buy-in from leadership both in practice and support, as well as designation and/or creation of spaces for early childhood educators to engage in wellness practices. Reflective supervision to support early childhood educators after participating in CHIME is now being integrated into the model. CHIME is owned by the University of Nebraska Extension Office and is available as an open-source document.

Professional Development of a High-Quality Statewide Workforce

In combination with strategies to improve wages, benefits, and workplace wellness in the early childhood education workforce, states are investigating broader policies to continue to grow and sustain quality early childhood educators. Adequate staffing also contributes to staff having the time and energy to participate in training and professional development opportunities, which are often tied to other state initiatives to incentivize and improve the quality of early care and learning.

Dedicated early childhood grants and scholarships as well as easily transferrable credits across learning institutions are key to many states' early childhood workforce professional development opportunities.¹⁸² Most states are piloting paid apprenticeships and educator scholarships. For example, many states are coupling WAGES and T.E.A.C.H. These strategies involve substantial investment to ensure affordable and equitable access to training and professional development opportunities, particularly for educators in rural and remote communities.¹⁸³

PAID APPRENTICESHIPS

Within the last three years, apprenticeships have become the most popular early childhood education workforce development strategy across the country.¹⁸⁴ There are both federally registered and unregistered employer-based apprenticeship programs. Both models are typically driven by their respective industries with structured training and standards; however, U.S. DOL federally registered apprenticeships always require supplemental education (virtual or in-person), have available funding, and have other required standards described in the National Apprenticeship Act of 2023.^{185, 186}

Quality apprenticeship programs consist of five core components:

- 1 | **Business Involvement:** employers may choose to work with an existing program or sponsor and develop their own;
- 2 | **Structured On-the Job Training (OJT):** training from an experienced mentor with industry certified knowledge and skills;
- 3 | **Related Technical Instruction (RTI).** technical industry related knowledge and skills delivered in a classroom or online;
- 4 | **Reward Skill Gains:** structured wage increases as apprentices gain higher skills;
- 5 | **Nationally Recognized Credentials:** this might be a CDA or a university degree.^{187, 188}

Federally registered apprenticeship programs must have an administrator (intermediary agency for delivery and compliance), an educational partner (accredited curriculum), and a sponsor (employer site). Programs and employer sponsor sites must adhere to labor and health and safety standards outlined in the act, including regulations that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), sexual orientation, age (40 or older), genetic information, and disability.¹⁸⁹ Including these labor and health standards, there are 23 overall provisions to which an apprenticeship program must adhere.¹⁹⁰

The process to become a registered U.S. DOL Apprenticeship program starts with a written plan (program standards) including the terms and conditions of employment, training, and supervision, an employer sponsor, and an educational partner.¹⁹¹ The written plan can be developed using either state approved or federally approved standards, available in the online process for becoming a registered apprenticeship program.

Funding for registered apprenticeship programs is available from the U.S. DOL Open Funding Opportunities & Apprenticeship Expansion Formula grant, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Programs (* to be funding eligible must be on state or locally approved workforce board approved apprenticeship list), GI Bill, and from any state designated funds.¹⁹²

Collaborative agreements with educational institutions are a major component of most apprenticeships; sometimes universities act as intermediaries to run programs on behalf of the state.¹⁹³ Currently T.E.A.C.H. is also serving as a national U.S. DOL approved intermediary and piloting apprenticeship programs aligned to its professional development pathway.¹⁹⁴

Hawai'i Residency-based Apprenticeship Program

The University of Hawai'i College of Education at Manoa is helping design and implement an apprenticeship program in collaboration with two community-based Native Hawai'ian educational organizations.¹⁹⁵ A key informant explained that the university's model is an early childhood education residency training program with coaching, mentoring, and technical instruction to move students along an established career pathway as they earn degree credentials and coursework credit on the job. Apprentices receive higher pay when reaching career pathway milestones. Milestones include first aid/CPR training certification, CDA certificate, community college credits, and an associate's degree. At the end of the residency, students have the opportunity to transition into an advanced degree program, with continued help through an advisor and intensive mentor relationship.¹⁹⁶

According to the key informant, the program was developed after extensive research, including a statewide study of the early childhood education workforce. Planning for the apprenticeship program began in 2021, through an innovation grant from Early Educator Investment Collaborative. A key aspect of the program design was ensuring the pathway was in pace, and tying it to early childhood educator competencies. The key informant also described how a culture-based focus has been infused into the model by one of the sponsors. The sponsoring entities have also been active in seeking out additional resources to support the program.

EDUCATOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Offering educational opportunities at low or no cost for early childhood educators is an important part of quality improvement strategies. Wage subsidy programs can increase access to scholarships and incentivize early childhood educators to pursue higher education. Scholarships typically focus on achieving credentials early childhood educators need.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program

Child Care Services Association (the same organization in North Carolina that developed WAGE\$) created an early childhood workforce scholarship program in 1990 named Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Project.¹⁹⁷ The program was designed specifically for those working in licensed early education and pre-school settings (i.e., not public-school settings) and includes scholarships for early childhood apprentices. Since the pilot, the program is now fully operating as the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program. The T.E.A.C.H strategy has been adopted across the country in 23 states.¹⁹⁸

Key informants explained that T.E.A.C.H. varies from state to state though it prioritizes early childhood educators working for early care and learning providers, including in-home providers, outside of Head Start and public-school systems. States adopting T.E.A.C.H. set their own guidelines for scholarship models. Some states include full scholarships, while others use cost-sharing models. Most include stipends for travel and bonuses for successful completion of each semester. Costs vary widely across organizations that administer the program due to their existing salary and staffing structures. Beyond personnel costs, scholarships are tied to tuition costs within a state's higher education system and degree coursework.¹⁹⁹

To become a licensed program, a T.E.A.C.H key informant explained that states are required to identify funding for their T.E.A.C.H. program, identify a not-for-profit partner to administer the program, and be trained in T.E.A.C.H. In many states, administration is provided by NAEYC state affiliates, child care resource and referral state networks, or any statewide early childhood organization.²⁰⁰ The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center can provide technical assistance including identification of possible funding sources, operational policies, scholarship model, participant recruitment, a database designed for the program, and an annual professional development symposium, according to the key informant.

Most states that administer T.E.A.C.H. do so using CCDF funds from the quality set-aside portion. Additional funding may come from private co-pays or contributions collected from employing programs who are sponsoring a staff person on the scholarship program.²⁰¹ States have initiated T.E.A.C.H. with as little as a \$200,000 to \$500,000 investment.²⁰²

There is evidence T.E.A.C.H. is an effective workforce development strategy with latest reports indicating site-based retention for associate degree recipients as 95%, and bachelor's degree recipients as 97%. It was reported and echoed by a key informant, noting that early childhood educators who participated in a T.E.A.C.H program accrued little to no debt while achieving their degrees. T.E.A.C.H. in combination with a subsidy or wage supplement program (e.g., WAGE\$) that rewards continued education has proven a powerful strategy in advancing a quality early childhood educator workforce.²⁰³

New Mexico Internship-Based Scholarship Program

The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD), launched in 2020, established an early childhood scholarship program combined with recruitment practices.²⁰⁴ The scholarship pays for 100% of tuition, fees, textbooks, and Praxis testing costs (used in the teacher certification process) at the certificate, associates and bachelor's level and 80% at the master's and doctorates level.²⁰⁵ The state partners with a workforce development non-profit which supports participants by providing education scholarships, incentives for bilingual early childhood educators, and financial support through a wage supplement program and pay parity.^{206, 207} This is a progression model that offers education scholarships at six levels of educational courses ranging from early childhood education certificates, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and master's degree.²⁰⁸ Wage supplements work in partnership with the scholarship program, with increases with additional earned college credit.²⁰⁹

This is also a cost-share model available to anyone working at a licensed or registered early care and learning setting, including: tribal child care, Pre-K or early Pre-K community-based programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, State-funded home visiting programs, State-funded Family Infant Toddler (FIT) – Early Intervention Programs, and ECECD-funded Early Childhood Coalition Programs.²¹⁰ Scholars must reapply every semester; the scholarship pays 100% of tuition, fees, and textbooks for approved courses.²¹¹ Participants must have a high school diploma or equivalent, be enrolled in a qualifying New Mexico institution of higher education and work a minimum of 20 hours per week at a qualifying program or as determined by pre-approved internship program.²¹²

Targeted Supports For In-Home Providers

As small business owners, in-home providers of small early care and learning settings have administrative burdens which can be challenging. In-home providers are often juggling collecting tuition, managing subsidy payments, grant reporting, staff compensation/payroll, and other back-office functions, in addition to caring for children.²¹³ Due to licensing enrollment caps, in-home providers generally have less enrollment capacity and therefore lower revenues than larger centers. In the 2022 First Children's Finance Report, in-home providers in Alaska lacked administrative support, leading to difficulties navigating various state systems.²¹⁴ Administrative supports, technical assistance, and start-up costs have all been utilized across the country to bolster this sector. Additionally, economy-of-scale approaches allow in-home providers to opt into an alliance or network (i.e., collective, network, or other pooled small business group) to share administrative costs, save on supplies and healthcare by purchasing in bulk, and increase competitiveness to access grant opportunities.²¹⁵

“No, it’s not just play. It takes a lot of your wellbeing. It’s so overwhelming.”

– FORMER EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR



ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Numerous models for providing administrative supports exist, including videos available on the Administration for Children and Families website for family child care businesses.²¹⁶

Staffed Family Child Care Networks

Staffed family child care networks are organizations that have a paid staff member and offer home-based early childhood educators services to improve quality, support technical assistance, training, and/or peer support.²¹⁷ Staffed family child care networks can offer a variety of supports and services to early childhood educators, including, but not limited to:

- *Program visits to in-home providers*
- *Training and other professional learning opportunities*
- *Peer support*
- *Referrals of families*
- *Health and safety supplies*
- *Financial support (including grants, loans, scholarships)*
- *Physical and mental health screening and consultation*
- *Help obtaining licensure and accreditation*
- *National Association for Family Child Care accreditation*²¹⁸

States benefit with an increased capacity, supply, and quality of in-home providers.²¹⁹ Lack of start-up capital for in-home providers to participate in licensing, subsidy, or QRIS are addressed by providing financial assistance through staffed family child care networks.²²⁰ Peer support and helping providers with basic administrative and business tasks are also common, although not offered universally across network examples.²²¹ Other opportunities for staffed family child care networks are ongoing self-care activities, development of a substitute pool, as well as the ability to apply for grant funding when available.²²²

Typically, Family Child Care Networks are funded through child care assistance programs, QRIS, and federal Head Start. A cost estimation tool is available from the National Center on Early Childhood.²²³

Wonderschool

In interviews with key informants, Wonderschool was described as a for-profit organization whose primary function is to create new early care and learning programs, with a focus on in-home providers. Currently operating in 47 states, they do this through recruiting people interested in becoming early childhood educators, train them by linking them to available professional development (i.e., licensing required training/accreditation as well as higher education along with any available grants/scholarships), helping them through the licensing process, and providing small business development acumen and training. Wonderschool partners with interested early childhood educator entrepreneurs, state agencies, and early care and learning providers to quickly establishing new in-home providers.²²⁴ Costs to contract with Wonderschool can vary based on the specific scope of services. One key informant shared that Wonderschool charges by each new early child care provider at the rate of \$30,000 for two years of support. They further explained that at the end of the two years, established guidance remains through established peer-support networks and administrative support systems put in place (i.e., software for billing, subsidies, human resource functions, etc.). Additional services at additional fees are available per state requests. Some examples include partnering with states in accessing their healthcare marketplace on behalf of the early childhood workforce²²⁵ as well as assisting with the creation of substitute pools.

Massachusetts Neighborhood Villages

Neighborhood Villages is a non-profit organization in Boston, Massachusetts which provides centralized support for a collective of child care providers, modeling a school district for early education.²²⁶ According to a key informant, services include providing partner centers with operations staff, family navigators, free teacher credentialing program,

resources for wraparound programming, and instructional coaching. Additionally, they act as a lab for piloting and testing programs in early education with a goal of scaling programs statewide. This is part of a statewide effort to demonstrate the necessary infrastructure for high quality, affordable and equitable early childhood education.²²⁷

GRANTS TO ASSIST IN START-UP COSTS

Assisting early childhood educators with start-up costs to open in-home early care and learning centers can decrease the barrier to operating licensed facilities. In addition to typical small business costs, other costs for in-home provision can add up quickly, including equipment, first aid supplies, cleaning supplies, office supplies, food, and licensing.²²⁸ Both the costs and process can be discouraging for otherwise interested early childhood educators. Certain states are addressing these challenges through specific grants and investments to mitigate the barriers of steep start-up costs.

Nevada Children's Cabinet Start Up Grants

The Children's Cabinet in Nevada offers start-up grants for in-home providers in the process of becoming a licensed facility. This includes grants for center-based care and out-of-school time programs. There is an application process and required business practice training including budgeting and marketing classes. Grants may cover application fees, background checks, inspection fees, and other costs associated with completing licensing. It was shared by a key informant the amount of the award is based on start-up costs and how far along the in-home provider is in the licensing process, since base grants are around \$10,000, but awards are flexible and based on provider needs and context.²²⁹

Caring for Michigan's Future Grants

Caring for Michigan's Future Grants include grants for pre-licensure programs, startup costs, facility improvement, and workforce and business sustainability grants (i.e., business consultations, trainings, webinars, CDA scholarships).²³⁰ All grants are currently funded through COVID-19 relief funds as part of an initiative to open 1,000 new or expanded child care businesses by the end of 2024 across Michigan. The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs and Child Care Licensing Bureau manages grant applications, while funds are distributed by the Michigan Department of Education Child Development and Care Office.²³¹

While eligibility requirements apply, early childhood educators can receive up to \$10,000 in pre-licensure grants for starting an early learning and care center, and new in-home providers can receive up to \$5,000; additionally pre-licensed in-home providers can receive up to \$15,000 in startup grants.²³² Since inception, key informants spoke to the fact that Michigan has received numerous grant applications, representing nearly 985 new early childhood educators. To keep the program going, Michigan has since developed new partnerships with Michigan Economic Development Corporation for additional small business grants, as well as with Michigan Housing Development Agency for potential down payment assistance and energy efficiency programs for in-home providers.

Care Access Real Estate

Care Access Real Estate (CARE)TM is a national effort by the investment company, Mission Driven Finance, to provide home-ownership pathways for early childhood educators.²³³ CARETM is a real estate investment trust that consists of a portfolio of commercial and residential properties that are available for lease for early childhood educators. CARETM prioritizes early childhood educators who fall under 100% of the median income for their area, and providers living in child care deserts.²³⁴ Educators can use these properties to start or expand their in-home or center-based early care and learning business.²³⁵ After two years, the tenant may have the opportunity to purchase the property at a discounted price.²³⁶

In Nevada, Mission Driven Finance partnered with the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services with the State Department of Health and Human Services and the Children's Cabinet.²³⁷ A key informant described how Nevada is using \$7.8 million in COVID-19 relief funds to pay for mortgages, targeting 40 group in-home providers that can care for up to 12 children each in a low-income, urban child care desert. After leasing for two years, the tenant will have the opportunity to purchase the home at a reduced price.²³⁸

While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing problems, the fundamental issues facing the early childhood education workforce in Alaska are far from new. The following recommendations are crafted to address the challenge in Alaska, building upon the infrastructure and momentum that is already in place, and applying lessons learned from other states' approaches to the unique conditions in Alaska. To build a strong and sustainable early childhood workforce, complementary efforts are needed across these priority areas: wages, benefits, workplace conditions, workforce development, specific supports for in-home providers, and workforce development, along with the system coordination and infrastructure to back these efforts.

While all recommendations have the potential to lead to productive and sustainable outcomes, some may require higher investment and in turn deliver a higher level of impact. These are the strategies that hold significant potential to help resolve Alaska's current child care crisis and build a thriving early childhood education system. The strategies, like the factors contributing to the crisis, are intertwined. Additionally, recommendations differ on the time required for implementation; some can be implemented immediately, while others require additional time for strategic planning, coordination, and implementation. These considerations are noted below.

As these recommendations are honed, we further recommend continued engagement with the early childhood educators whom these recommendations are designed to benefit, and the inclusion of diverse voices that may not have participated in this research project due to language or other accessibility barriers, or a lack of participation in SEED. These early childhood educators may have other needs that are not fully considered in these recommendations, but that are essential to consider moving forward to ensure the system supports **all** early childhood educators.

Alignment With Other Plans and Priorities

The findings in this report echo findings in prior reports and many of the recommendations are aligned with those made in other recent reports and plans for Alaska's early childhood education system: the JHU Study, First Children's Finance's report, and Early Childhood Alaska, the state's current strategic plan for the early childhood system. Areas of alignment between recommendations in these reports and the current report's recommendations are noted throughout.

EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA: A STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR 2020-2025

Published in 2020, Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025 (Strategic Direction) represents a unified vision for a strong and equitable early childhood system in Alaska. The plan's three overarching goals prioritize families' health and safety, quality early learning experiences, and system infrastructure. The health and stability of Alaska's early childhood education workforce is integral to all three of these goals.

THE JOHNS HOPKINS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IDEALS INSTITUTE WAGE AND COMPENSATION MODEL FOR ALASKA'S EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IN ALASKA STUDY

In 2019, thread commissioned Johns Hopkins University to conduct a study of wage and compensation needs among early childhood educators in Alaska. The current study echoes many of JHU Study findings related to low wages, insufficient benefits, and increasing levels of burnout. JHU's final report included a set of recommendations aimed at "(1) improving EC educators' compensation by closing the gap between ECE and K-3 education and improving equity within the ECE field; and (2) strengthening the competency of ECE educators."²³⁹

FIRST CHILDREN'S FINANCE REPORT FOR THE STATE OF ALASKA CHILD CARE PROGRAM OFFICE

In 2022, the CCPO commissioned First Children's Finance to conduct a study of Alaska's child care subsidy system. The resultant report, Recommendations to Maximize Alaska's Federal Funding Allocated to Child Care Subsidy, presents four goals: expand family participation, increase the supply of child care businesses, boost community engagement efforts, and enhance CCPO infrastructure, with over 40 detailed recommendations to accomplish them.²⁴⁰

RECOMMENDATION 1: Increase Wages

Wages emerged as the number one reason early childhood educators have left or are thinking about leaving the field. Recognizing the value of the service that early childhood educators provide, wages should be tied to the value of the sector and state-level economic indicators. To recover from the current crisis, a permanent wage increase is the most important pressing financial need in the early childhood education system.

The JHU Study and Strategic Direction both identify wage parity as a key goal. The JHU Study specifies wage parity with K-3 educators, and the Strategic Direction notes the importance of parity among early childhood professionals and with other professions that have similar responsibilities and educational qualifications.

CONTINUE INCOME SUPPORTS (IMMEDIATE)

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, OBJECTIVE 11.3:

Improve wages and compensation for early childhood professionals.

Action a. Establish wage and compensation equity within the early childhood education field.

Action b. Achieve parity for early childhood professionals with compensation comparable to professionals with similar responsibilities and qualifications in education and health care.

Action c. Support early childhood education programs to establish their own transparent pay scale that reflects experience, years in the field, and education.

Immediate and short-term income support is necessary. The ROOTS Awards delivered through Alaska SEED have been an effective way to increase early childhood educators' income, when they are available (see Current Efforts to Strengthen the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Alaska section). To increase the impact of the ROOTS Awards, they should be tiered so that the amount distributed increases with early childhood educators' years of experience and education levels. This will have the added benefit of incentivizing quality throughout the field and is consistent with the JHU recommendation to award educators for tenure and competency. Similar to the above, if a tiered model is adopted, there will need to be ample consideration to ensure the model is equitable and does not inadvertently create additional pay disparities due to structural barriers i.e., lack of access to training or professional development for a rural early childhood educator, and mechanisms to track how well the strategy works for early childhood educators across Alaska.

ALIGN THE CCPO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM WITH WAGE SCALE AND INCOME SUPPORTS (IMMEDIATE)

As wages are not often tied to education levels, motivation to pursue education may be low. Continued investment in the CCPO scholarship program to support current early childhood educators to pursue university-level education and apprenticeship programs is needed. These scholarships are strongest when they are paired with wage scales and other system-building efforts to improve quality through professional development.

DEVELOP AND FUND IMPLEMENTATION OF A WAGE SCALE (MID-RANGE; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

More work is needed to develop a wage scale that addresses the goals of wage parity and pay equity established in the Strategic Direction and recommended in the JHU study, and that promotes the aligned goals of high-quality early care and education. This process should include building upon the existing infrastructure of the SEED Registry.

An additional consideration for the development of an equitable wage scale is that income supports can be offered directly to early childhood educators, as ROOTS awards currently are, or through their place of employment. When tied to place of employment, it is possible to address other aspects of compensation, such as access to health care and retirement benefits, in addition to supplementing wages. However, models in which awards are distributed by employers must account for the additional administrative cost for providers.

Whatever the final tiers and compensation amounts provided, offering consistent and reliable income support is paramount. The wage scale must have sustained funding. If a decision is made to tie wage supports to professional development or other educational milestones, then it is crucial that professional development pathways are accessible to early childhood educators of all backgrounds, including those who have faced historical challenges accessing professional development and higher education.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Increase Access to Benefits

The second most important factor causing high levels of turnover and low levels of recruitment and retention in the early childhood workforce is insufficient employee benefit packages. Health insurance, paid time off, and retirement emerged as the most important benefits for study participants' employment decisions, and research revealed that other benefits such as subsidized child care costs are also well-received. In-home providers are particularly vulnerable to lack of benefits. The JHU study also recommended that ECE programs be supported to provide benefit packages for early childhood educator.

SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE FOR PROVIDERS WITH CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY (IMMEDIATE; HIGH-INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

For early childhood educators who themselves have young children, child care assistance is an important benefit, contributing substantially to their conceptualization of their overall compensation. Establishing categorical eligibility within the State subsidy system for early childhood educators is one relatively easy way to offer an additional benefit to early childhood educators and has the potential to be a powerful recruiting tool to entice people to the field. An added benefit to the State is that it can encourage more providers to accept child care assistance.

GRANTS FOR PROVIDERS TO INCREASE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' BENEFITS (IMMEDIATE; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

One way to increase the number of providers that are able to provide health care and/or retirement benefits to their employees is to provide grants specifically for funding health care premiums, co-payments, and/or retirement costs for employees. This form of restricted funding ensures that the benefits are made available to early childhood educators, although it is important to have a verification method that the benefits are actually

being provided. The models being developed in the true cost of care study can help identify the actual costs and corresponding amounts per employee that would be worth administering. This strategy also has the potential to act as a bridge while other longer-term strategies are being developed. As with other potential strategies, having dependable funding will be important for ensuring the benefits offered can be sustained.

LEVERAGE GROUP PURCHASING POWER FOR BENEFITS (MID-RANGE)

Group purchasing in a pooled benefits system that supports both healthcare coverage and retirement benefits could make benefits more accessible to smaller providers. Group purchasing in a pooled cost structure not only lowers costs but also has potential to lessen the administrative burden of individual providers managing benefits programs. This is not necessarily a State function, but it could be a vehicle for the State to provide financial support. The JHU Study also recommended exploring universal health insurance options and retirement plans that could be made available to all early childhood educators.

SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF SUBSTITUTE POOLS (MID-RANGE; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

To support paid time off, whether for sick leave, personal leave, or professional development, early childhood education facilities need substitutes. In-home providers have fewer options for back-up providers and are a priority population for substitute pools to serve. It is also possible that substitute pools can function as a potential mechanism for recruitment into the early childhood education field.

Priorities for the substitute pool, including eligibility, amount of access that can be provided (e.g. number of days of substitute access), and for what reasons, will need to be developed. While State funding will be needed to support the substitute pool, a third-party administrator is typically needed to develop the infrastructure, recruit, screen, and train substitutes, and coordinate ongoing access to the substitute pool.

CREATE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING (MID-RANGE; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

Collective bargaining has been used in several states to increase the wages and benefits available to in-home providers. For in-home providers to be able to bargain with the state, legislative action is required to designate in-home providers as State employees. This is typically done by recognizing in-home providers who accept the state Child Care Assistance Program payments as a particular class of State employees, who can then vote to unionize. An added benefit is that it can encourage more providers to accept child care assistance.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Support Healthy Workplace Conditions

The third most important factor causing early childhood educators to leave the field is poor working conditions. Working conditions encompass the elements people need to succeed; feel supported, competent, and healthy; and to contribute effectively to the organization. While improved wages and benefits are needed to address adequate staffing, other supports can affect the working conditions and give early childhood educators tools to manage workplace stress, including fostering positive work environments, receiving targeted support for challenging behaviors, and access to continued training and professional development to build their skills.

The Strategic Direction has numerous goals related to fostering healthy and inclusive workplaces and developing supports for the early childhood educators and the programs they work in, including related to the availability of infant and early childhood mental health consultation and early childhood coaching. The JHU study also recommended mental health and leadership supports be offered to reduce burnout and improve the quality of the workforce.

INCREASE TRAINING ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION (IMMEDIATE)

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 2, OBJECTIVE 6, STRATEGY 11.4

Increase diversity across the early childhood workforce.

Action d. Identify opportunities to promote diversity of the early childhood workforce to better represent and be reflective of the children and families in programs.

The early childhood education workforce is diverse and dominated by women. There are disparities in how different groups experience their workplaces, suggesting a need for more tailored opportunities for learning about how to work well across cultures and foster inclusive workplaces. This can help with both recruitment of new providers and retention. It is also aligned with Alaska SEED's focus on a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. An additional benefit of fostering a more culturally and linguistically diverse workforce is that it can create more inclusive and welcoming environments

for Alaska's increasingly diverse children and families. This also points to a need for continued study, to ensure trainings are having the desired impact on the workplace environment. It also points to the need to ensure that coaches, IECMH consultants and reflective supervisors also have appropriate training to ensure that they are able to appropriately assess challenges staff and families may be facing, and offer supports specifically targeted to creating inclusive environments.

ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING (IMMEDIATE)

Administrators who are managing employees must have leadership training, and access to resources related to cultivating a positive workplace culture, treating employees with respect and appreciation, and utilizing effective team building techniques. In addition to learning about early childhood development and curriculum development, developing effective leadership techniques is paramount to running a successful business. SEED's Alaska Early Childhood Administrator Credential is a required quality activity for center-based facilities on Learn & Grow Level 2 and for in-home providers on Learn & Grow level 3. In addition to training, communities of practice can help deepen learning and generate peer support.

EXPAND ACCESS TO MINDFULNESS RESOURCES (IMMEDIATE)

Early childhood educators need training to prepare them to effectively navigate challenging child behaviors and their own reactions to them. Mindfulness programs designed for early childhood educators that incorporate a community of practice model and reflective supervision can be helpful for building self-awareness, self-regulation skills, and compassion. In addition, training related to early childhood brain development and the root of challenging behaviors is helpful. Communities of practice also lessen feelings of isolation and provide a safe environment for venting work-related stressors. To date, professional development programs have been responsive to emergent needs in Alaska's early childhood education workforce, and this study highlights the need to continue to sustain those opportunities and address new ones. Professional development and wellness resources are most helpful when it is not only free to the educator, but also when compensation is provided for the time spent. The ability to take the time for the training or participation in a community of practice is also tied to adequate staffing and can also be supported by access to substitutes with administrator credentialing.

EXPAND ACCESS TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION AND COACHING (LONG-TERM; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

In Alaska, there is a very limited number of individuals who are trained to provide reflective supervision or infant and early childhood mental health consultation, which can require specialized training on top of advanced degrees and licensure requirements for mental health providers. Infant and early childhood mental health consultants help guide early childhood educators to navigate challenging child behaviors, sometimes working also with parents. Along with early childhood coaches, they can also help address programmatic issues related to team dynamics among staff members, or policy-level issues related to supporting infant and early childhood mental health.

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, OBJECTIVE 11, STRATEGY 11.1

Action d. Increase the number of trained Relationship-Based Professional Development (RBP) Coaches, Infant/EC Mental Health Consultants, technical assistance, and mentors to support the early childhood education work-force.

GOAL 2, OBJECTIVE 6, STRATEGY 6.1

Action f. Increase access to and availability of supports and resources for all early childhood education program types and educators such as coaching, early childhood mental health consultation and reflective supervision, professional development, and funding for staff planning time.

Programs for which staff access to an infant and early childhood mental health consultant is a requirement—including Head Starts, Early Head Starts, and Pre-Elementary programs, as well as programs reaching for higher levels of quality in Learn & Grow—find it almost impossible to meet the requirement. There are various efforts among many different programs, but no central plan to prioritize needs, assign roles and responsibilities, and identify needed resources to achieve them exists yet.

A multi-year, multi-pronged plan that includes workforce development goals is needed to guide responsible investment in the system and to ensure that all partners are aligned towards common goals, quality standards are in place, and the varied resources of each stakeholder group are maximized to support the plan. This could also be a part of a broader early childhood workforce development plan (see recommendation four). A statewide needs assessment on infant and early childhood mental health currently underway may also provide useful information about gaps and opportunities to guide system investments.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Strengthen Career Pathways

Alaska has made many recent investments in workforce development pathways, including educational and professional development opportunities, that should be sustained; however, many of these opportunities are new and in development with uncertainty about key elements and effectiveness. There are opportunities for Alaska to be more intentional to ensure a strong foundation with diverse options equitably available in rural, remote, and urban areas.

Alignment between Alaska's quality standards and the workforce pipeline is key and can be enhanced by continuing to encourage innovation and creativity that responds to unique challenges and opportunities in Alaska. As noted earlier, given the diversity of Alaska's early childhood workforce, and the barriers and challenges that many can face accessing higher education, it will be important to pay attention to ensuring that the career pathways are inclusive, affordable, and accessible for all Alaskans. This is in line with SEED's focus on creating inclusive pathways to support a diverse workforce and the JHU Study recommendation to conduct further research on content and delivery mechanisms for professional development needs.

CONTINUE TO OFFER FREE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (IMMEDIATE)

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, OBJECTIVE 11.2

Action c. Provide local, easily accessible trainings for early childhood educators with in-person trainers in communities, video training for onboarding of new staff and train the trainer courses.

Offering free professional development began during the COVID-19 pandemic and was well-received by early childhood educators. It is important that Alaska continues to invest in making the opportunities for training and professional development needed to meet licensing requirements free and widely available. As noted earlier, additional supports such as substitute pools can strengthen early childhood educators' ability to take advantage of professional development opportunities.

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (MID-RANGE; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

Alongside strategies to bolster compensation and workplace conditions for early childhood educators, a long-term plan to meet projected increased demand for different positions within the early childhood workforce is needed. The plan should set measurable and specific goals for workforce development that align with broader efforts to improve quality, identify needed building blocks, allocate roles and responsibilities across stakeholders, and provide a roadmap for allocating adequate resources to meet those goals.

The plan should include consideration of the unique needs of rural and remote communities. For example, in rural areas, providing local in-person opportunities for prospective early childhood educators to get the training they need to excel in the field is important. While online programming has expanded access to virtual training opportunities, increasing options for in-person and on-the-job training throughout Alaska should be prioritized. In addition, the plan needs to account for the specific education requirements for each provider type in Alaska's mixed delivery system and the various standards employees must meet. The needs for specially trained support staff, such as the infant and early childhood mental health consultants discussed above, should also be included.

The role of apprenticeship programs should also be considered, as they have become a key strategy for building the workforce across the country. It is important to cultivate registered apprenticeship models that offer the full benefits of apprenticeship, including fair and equitable wage progression.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Provide Additional Support for In-Home Providers

In-home providers are a key part of the early childhood education system in Alaska, particularly in smaller communities that cannot support a larger center. However, while in-home providers encounter many of the same challenges that center-based care providers face, they also face unique challenges as part of running their own business and having fewer or no staff members aside from themselves. The First Children's Finance Report found that the licensing process is confusing and challenging and start-up costs are prohibitive; many providers have trouble navigating the licensing process and getting support for business development. The JHU Study similarly found that family child care providers often lack sufficient resources and supports and recommended more attention to their needs.

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 2, OBJECTIVE 4, STRATEGY 4.3:

Increase technical assistance opportunities from the state and partners to improve access to high quality early childhood education programs.

Action a. Increase the number of licensed and regulated early childhood education programs, prioritizing equitable access in rural and underserved areas of the state.

Supports to help potential providers navigate licensing requirements and business development processes, as well as start-up funds to help with necessary renovations and repairs or purchasing equipment and supplies can help reduce barriers. The First Children's Finance report similarly recommends start-up grants and recommends special attention to ensure that Alaskans in rural and urban areas, including those who speak other languages can access and benefit from the resources offered.

OFFER START-UP GRANTS (IMMEDIATE; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

The State should develop and fund start-up grants for in-home providers, considering what barriers commonly exist, and ensuring start-up funds are targeted to reducing barriers such as high construction/renovation costs, particularly in rural and remote communities, needed to meet health and safety inspections. This can include railings, fencing, and other minor renovations, as well as the costs of equipment such as tables, chairs,

and supplies such as curriculum and related materials and training to offer high quality programming and meet licensing requirements. This was also a recommendation in the First Children's Finance report similarly recommended providing start-up funds or grants to help increase supply. Start-up grants can be offered through staffed family child care networks.

DEVELOP A STAFFED CHILD CARE NETWORK (LONG-TERM; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

Staffed family child care networks can support individuals who want to become in-home providers in navigating the requirements to become licensed and approved. Currently, the various elements that early childhood education business owners must master—including licensing regulations, child care subsidy procedures, SEED, Learn & Grow, continuing professional development, and others—are dispersed and complicated. An integrated, coordinated program staffed with expert navigators can increase program success and the quality of new programs and decrease closure rates among existing programs. The First Children's Finance Report similarly recommended that the state partner with or provide guidance to in-home providers throughout the licensing process.

There are some well-developed models currently available for states to invest in and other states have also developed their own models; Alaska should continue to explore the feasibility of each of these programs for adoption in Alaska or develop its own model.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Improve System Coordination and Accountability

The early care and learning system in Alaska has a strong set of engaged and collaborative partners. These include local, tribal, and state government; the university system; nonprofits focused on early childhood economic development; employers; and the early care and learning providers themselves, along with the families they serve. However, the early childhood education system within the state has suffered from silos, which limits the ability to leverage resources and create shared accountability for addressing shared goals and priorities.

The Strategic Direction is evidence that shared values and goals have emerged throughout the field. However, many of the infrastructure goals in the Strategic Direction that are needed to increase coordination and accountability throughout the system have not yet seen forward momentum. Accordingly, all the following suggested strategies are long-term in nature, and focused on building infrastructure needed to strengthen and sustain an equitable, high-quality, family-focused early care and learning system in Alaska: improved financing, data for decision-making, and increased coordination and accountability.

INCREASE COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH (IMMEDIATE)

As noted earlier there are many passionate and interested stakeholder groups who need and want to be engaged for a variety of reasons. Transparent and accessible communication with various audiences will be important to solicit feedback on proposed actions moving forward and share priorities, decisions, and changes as they are made, as well as to bolster support for new initiatives and investments.

Early childhood educators and providers often expressed frustration with their attempts to access information and they were often unaware of programs that they were eligible for or had difficulty understanding how to participate in different programs, from scholarship offerings to the child care subsidy program. They also reported difficulty helping families navigate the Child Care Assistance Program. More streamlined and accessible communication is needed to ensure all early childhood educators and providers are aware of programs and supports available to them and can share accurate and accessible communications with families.

As the state and its implementation partners consider new programs or initiatives, it will also require reciprocal communication with the intended audience to ensure the audience has the opportunity to provide feedback. As noted earlier, it is particularly important that communications and outreach to early childhood educators

consider the diversity of the workforce, the variety of languages spoken, and their work schedules which can make it difficult to participate in daytime activities.

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, STRATEGY 8.2

Develop and implement communications and marketing strategies to increase public awareness about the importance of early childhood.

The First Children's Finance Report had several recommendations to boost communication including development of a communications plan, creation of a family advisory committee, creation of a provider advisory committee, and both family-centered and provider-centered marketing campaigns with accessible language.

Finally, communicating more broadly about the value of early childhood education, to continue to build public awareness and foster support for these investments, as well as early childhood education as a potential career pathway, would also be useful. This was also a recommendation in the Strategic Direction.

FINANCE STRATEGICALLY (LONG-TERM; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, OBJECTIVE 9

Funding for early childhood care and education is coordinated, based on current data, and supports the goals of this statewide plan.

Solutions for funding early care education systems, from maintaining licensing and quality standards to workforce development initiatives, are complex. Strategies to improve wages, compensation, and workforce conditions and to continue developing the workforce pipeline will require resources scaled to the size of the need. Several recommendations require one-time investments to build infrastructure and support

planning and decision-making but will require less funds to maintain over time. The state may want to pilot some approaches before taking them to scale. However, stable and consistent funding is required for many of these strategies to be effective.

Funding decisions are also policy decisions and there are many possible pathways forward. A budget for these priorities has not yet been developed. While not a focus of this report, ensuring there are appropriate resources available to support both stabilizing and then sustaining the workforce to address the needs and gaps will be a critical and continual need moving forward.

Many states shared the mix of financing strategies they use during their interviews, highlighting that creative use of existing revenue streams and new funding are typically needed. Some potential resources, such as those through the US DOL for apprenticeship programs have yet to be tapped into in Alaska.

The Strategic Direction outlines plans for both assessing how current funding streams are allocated to early childhood services, including in ways that incentivize quality and target high-needs populations, and identifying strategic ways to maximize new funding sources. Alaska can also continue to learn from the variety of mechanisms that other states have used to develop sustainable funding plans to support the early childhood education workforce.

IMPROVE DATA SYSTEMS (LONG-TERM, HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

Alaska's Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, OBJECTIVE 10

Collection and use of reliable data on early childhood is coordinated, centralized, accessible, and actionable.

Comprehensive, accurate data is necessary for decision-making and to support quality, efficiency, and transparency. Policymakers and stakeholders throughout the system want to know what impact their investments are making and data should be available to answer those questions. High quality data and subsequent analyses can help ensure that resources are directed towards both highest needs, as well as efforts that are having the desired impact. However, much

of the available data is in silos and reliable data about the functioning of the system is not always available.

Alaska lacks an integrated early childhood data system that can answer long-term questions about how targeted supports affect children, families, and the early childhood workforce over time. The planned upgrades to the CCPO data system are a start. However, more linkages are necessary to provide quality data to decision-makers and program managers and to track whether the changes Alaska makes are reaching their intended populations and having the intended impact. For example, the First Children’s Finance report specially notes that if categorical eligibility is extended to child care workers for child care assistance, there must be a mechanism to track early childhood educators’ continued employment in early childhood education, such as through a linkage with the SEED registry.

INCREASE ALIGNMENT AND COORDINATION (LONG-TERM; HIGH INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT)

There are many partners in Alaska’s early childhood education system, and even within the state there are multiple programs in both Department of Health and Department of Education and Early Development that fund, regulate, and support various aspects of the early childhood education system, and others whose role may increase, such as the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Streamlining and coordinating across agencies creates consistency for families, providers, and the workforce, as well as for partners and stakeholders across the early childhood system such as tribes, the university system, local governments, school districts, head start programs, nonprofit partners, and private businesses.

Many states have found that housing early childhood programs together has helped them increase coordination and better leverage resources to support their shared priorities, and several interviewees spoke to the efficiency and speed with which they are able to get things done, including mobilizing funding, when working under or with programs that were horizontally aligned under one agency, while others spoke to obstacles arising from lack of organizational alignment among the programs with which they were required to coordinate. Many states have created new cabinet level agencies, while others have consolidated specific early childhood education programs into a single office or division.²⁴¹ Alternatively, some have created an internal mechanism to coordinate across programs that have regulatory oversight and/or provides funding for early care and learning programs. Some states have also looked to establish staffed boards, commissions, or offices with ongoing authority for planning and oversight to ensure sustained attention to the needs and gaps in the early childhood education system, foster public-private partnership, and investment, and support ongoing communication with various stakeholder groups, including early childhood educators and families. Key to these is establishing clear lines of authority and ensuring accountability for desired outcomes.

Alaska’s Strategic Direction

GOAL 3, OBJECTIVE 12.2

Create an improved sustainable and accountable governance approach with decision-making authority.

The Alaska Strategic Direction recommends improving governance, and further points to the need for alignment and coordination to accomplish the goals in the plan. The First Children’s Finance report specifically recommended increased collaboration with tribal CCDF administrators, to align tribal and state resources to address child care deserts and gaps in equity and access.

APPENDIX A:

Progress On Johns Hopkins University IDEALS Institute Recommendations For Alaska

The JHU Study contained a set of 12 recommendations based on their proposed wage and compensation model for Alaska, “C³ Alaska: Alaska’s Commitment to Compensation and Competency.”²⁴² This model requires a collaborative approach between the CCPO, SEED, and Learn & Grow. Key informants from the CCPO, SEED, and Learn & Grow reported that there was great interest in following many of the recommendations to implement meaningful change. Where possible, they made significant progress.

However, soon after JHU’s C³ model was published, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Shifting priorities presented various obstacles for implementing many aspects of the model. In addition, the CCPO was tasked with distributing \$99 million in federal relief funding given to the State of Alaska to help alleviate the pandemic’s impact on the early childhood education sector. Therefore, the CCPO and thread were required to turn their attention to finding the most effective and efficient ways to provide relief to the system. Some of the COVID-19 relief funds were used to make partial or temporary progress toward the goals, including supporting research related to the needs of the workforce. For example, while the JHU Study recommended a tiered award system that provides financial awards to early childhood educators based on their retention and competency, the pandemic introduced a level of urgency that prompted the CCPO and SEED to forego the development of a tiered system and instead offer a lump sum award to each eligible early childhood educator.

In addition, investments in professional development, improvement of the Alaska SEED Registry, and updates to the Learn & Grow quality rating system are steps toward a stronger system. However, other sustainable efforts to address other recommendations have not yet begun.

The table below provides an overview of Alaska’s statewide progress toward implementing JHU’s C³ recommendations, with more detail on progress and shifting priorities addressed throughout the body of the report. For some of the recommendations, there has been local-level progress or temporary or pilot efforts that were dependent on one-time funding opportunities. However, the table focuses on statewide sustainable progress. In order to continue making progress, substantial investments of sustainable funding are necessary.

TABLE 6: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IDEALS INSTITUTE'S 2019 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR C3 ALASKA

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
Goal 1: Commitment to Compensation: Impact and Improve ECE Educators' Wage and Compensation	
Set a goal of accomplishing K-3 parity in minimum wage by 2025.	No progress
Support early childhood educators programs to establish their own pay scale that reflects experience years and education.	Some progress
Encourage ECE programs to provide transparent pay scale information, which will provide valid data for leadership.	Some progress
Award ECE educators' tenure for demonstrated competency based on years of experience in the field.	No progress
Convene a multi-sector task force to examine impact, barriers, and benefits of promoting more staff to full-time status.	No progress
Support ECE programs to develop, deliver, and document benefits packages for educators.	No progress
Establish partnerships to provide universal health insurance options and retirement plans.	No progress
Seek ways to address ECE educators' living expenses needs through innovative partnerships with public and private sectors.	No progress
Address wage and compensation issues of broader ECE community, including assistant teachers.	Some progress
Goal 2: Commitment to Competency: Strengthen Competency of ECE Educators (Further Research Recommendations for thread)	
Further examination of specific professional development needs related to content and delivery mechanisms for Alaskan ECE educators.	Significant progress
Improvement of the SEED Registry to provide seamless support for ECE educators and to increase their participation.	Significant progress
Exploration and consideration of the unique needs of the broader ECE community, including family child care.	Some progress
Offering mental health and leadership support to improve the quality of the workforce.	Some progress
Implementation of entry and exit surveys to understand ECE educators' job attitude and turnover intention.	No progress
Exploration of the possibility of providing a recruitment platform through the SEED Registry.	No progress

APPENDIX B:

Early Childhood Education Settings And Requirements In Alaska

Early childhood educators work in a wide variety of settings, from small in-home providers to large networks of Head Start grantee facilities. Below is a summary of the types of licensed and license-exempt early care and learning providers discussed in this report.

LICENSE-EXEMPT EARLY CARE AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

Not all early care and learning providers are required to be licensed through the State of Alaska, Child Care Program Office (CCPO) or the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Child Care Licensing (CCL). These other types of providers may offer year-round or part-time care, and the standards that apply to the workforce, as well as the programs' operations, are not regulated by the CCPO or MOA.

- **Head Start and Tribal Head Start:** A free, federally funded early learning program for children in low-income families. Head Start programs serve children aged three to five. In Alaska, Head Start programming is typically center-based and sometimes delivered in partnership with local school district pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs. Programs may be full-day or half-day and may operate year-round or on a school-year calendar.
- **Pre-elementary programs:** These programs are regulated by the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). They serve children ages three to five and are operated by either a school district (for example, pre-K) or a Head Start Agency at no cost to the families. In many school districts, these programs are for children who are enrolled in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B program, although some programs are integrated with students who are not enrolled in Part B.
- **Exempt care:** Early care and learning centers that operate on any of Alaska's military installations are exempt from licensing requirements. Additionally, anyone who provides care for fewer than four unrelated children is exempt from licensing.
- **Out-of-school time or after-school programs:** These can include before- and after-school care, school vacation programs, as well as summer camps, recreational centers, and other youth programs. Anyone providing before or after school care for more than four unrelated children is required to be licensed. Anyone caring for more than four unrelated children for more than five weeks a year - such as school breaks and summers is required to be licensed. Camps have to meet specific certification and background check requirement to be exempt from licensing.

LICENSED EARLY CARE AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

Licensed care in Alaska are those providers who are regulated by the CCPO or by the MOA CCL.

The types of licensed early care and learning providers are:

- **Licensed homes:** Homes require one caregiver (who is also the administrator) and may provide care for up to eight children, including their own. No more than three children may be under 30 months old, and no more than two may be non-ambulatory.
- **Licensed group homes:** Licensed group homes require at least two caregivers (one who is the administrator) and may provide care for nine to 12 children, including their own. In certain instances, only one caregiver is required, for example, if all enrolled children are school-aged. No more than five children may be under 30 months old, and no more than four may be non-ambulatory. Group homes are not allowed within the Municipality of Anchorage.

- **Licensed center:** Licensed centers can provide care for children according to caregiver-to-child ratios, including: infants (birth through 18 months) require a caregiver-to-child ratio of 1:5, toddlers of 1:6, preschoolers of 1:10, kindergartners of 1:14, and school-age children (7 to 12-year-olds) of 1:18. In Anchorage, licensed centers care for 9 or more children, and some ratios are smaller: infants up to 11 months require a ratio of 1:4, kindergartners of 1:10, and school-age children of 1:10. All other above ratios are identical in Anchorage as the rest of the state. Not all centers care for all age ranges.^{243, 244}
- **Early Head Start (birth to 3 years old):** Early Head Start serves infants and children up to the age of three. Early Head Start may be home-based or center-based, and not all Head Start programs have Early Head Start.

Within each type of early care and learning provider described above, there are a variety of licensing requirements and/or regulations for members of the workforce. The educational and professional development requirements for employees in each type of setting are as follows.

EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSED CENTERS

While State of Alaska regulations do not require all early childhood educators to hold a credential or degree, they do outline requirements for administrators and child care associates (CCAs) and requirements related to annual professional development for all employees.

Credentials for Administrators of Licensed Centers and Licensed Group Homes

According to Alaska Administrative Code 7AAC 57.300, an administrator of a center or a group home must be at least 21 years old and have one of the following:

- **At least 12 semester hours of college credits in early childhood development, child development, child psychology, or the equivalent; or**
- **A current Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition; or**
- **A Montessori certificate issued by a program accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Commission for Teacher Education.**

If an administrator does not have a bachelor's degree in early childhood development, child development, child psychology, or the equivalent, they must take courses to gain at least three relevant college credits every two years.

For every 30 children at a licensed center, there must be always at least one administrator or staff with a CCA designation present. To acquire a CCA designation, individuals must meet the same age requirements, educational qualifications, and continuing education requirements as the administrator.²⁴⁵

Annual Professional Development

Alaska Administrative Code 7AAC 57.300 further state that all full-time early childhood educators working in licensed early care and learning providers, including administrators, CCAs, teachers, and caregivers in a center, home, or group home must receive at least 24 hours of training relevant to child care and development each year.²⁴⁶ At least one hour of this training must be on health and safety. During an employee's first year, six hours of orientation and pre-service training can count toward their first year's professional development requirement. The mandatory 24 hours can be obtained through college courses (1 college credit counts for all 24 hours) or approved professional development training in child care and development. For part-time employees working 15 hours or less per week, only 12 hours of professional development training relevant to child care and development per year is required (in addition to CPR/first aid and the orientation and training specific to their program).

EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START FACILITIES

Head Start facilities in Alaska may elect to be licensed by the State, but employees must also adhere to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which outline qualifications and training requirements, as detailed below.²⁴⁷

Head Start and Early Head Start Teachers

Head Start and Early Head Start lead teachers must have either a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a bachelor's degree in a related field plus experience teaching preschool-age children. If a person meeting these qualifications is not available for each classroom, an educator with one of the following qualifications can be assigned to the classroom: an educator with an associate's degree in early childhood education; an educator with an associate's degree in a related field plus preschool teaching experience; or an educator with a bachelor's degree who is participating in the Teach for America program.²⁴⁸ Head Start assistant preschool teachers must have at least a CDA or be enrolled in a CDA program to be completed within two years of the time of hire.

Head Start Professional Development

Head Start and Early Head Start teachers must receive at least 15 hours of professional development each year. All Head Start programs must also have an evidence-based coaching system led by a credentialed coach. Many Head Start programs have their own internal coaches, while some may contract with people outside of Alaska to come up for specific trainings.

STATE OF ALASKA PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS TEACHER ENDORSEMENT REQUIREMENTS

In accordance with the Alaska Reads Act, to earn an endorsement as a READS Act early education lead teachers in Alaskan school district Pre-K programs must hold a teacher certificate and have completed at least six credit hours in early childhood education or have two or more years of experience teaching kindergarten or in an early education program.²⁴⁹ A bachelor's degree is required to earn a teacher certificate.²⁵⁰ Teachers must also complete a DEED-approved training that includes a summative assessment.

Para-professional teachers typically must have completed two years of college courses, earned an associate's degree, or achieved a threshold score on a para-professional assessment. However, if the para-professional's duties are primarily non-instructional (such as providing translation services or conducting parental involvement activities), a high school diploma (or equivalent) is adequate.

APPENDIX C:

Methodology

This report draws from a variety of primary and secondary methods and sources, including a survey, interviews, focus groups, and secondary data. Methodologies for each type of data are outlined below.

2023 Alaska Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey

An online survey was developed and fielded to early childhood and school-aged educators across Alaska from September 11, 2023, to September 25, 2023. The survey was distributed to a list of early childhood educators in Alaska provided by SEED. The list included all SEED Registry members plus all other early childhood educators who completed a training with thread but who may not be on the SEED Registry. Email invitations to complete the survey were sent to all valid email addresses on this list. Upon completing the survey, respondents were given the option to provide contact information to enter to win one of ten \$100 Amazon gift cards or one of three \$250 gift cards for their time and contributions.

RESPONSE RATE

Email invitations were sent to 3,301 unique email addresses. Of these, 155 emails were undeliverable, for 3,146 invitations sent and delivered (this does not include subsequent follow-up invitations). A total of 722 responses were received.

Twenty-three invalid responses were removed. Invalid responses included those from respondents who self-identified as currently living in a non-Alaskan zip code or sharing an incomplete or invalid zip code, not currently or formerly working in the field, or invalidating own responses (i.e., accidentally selecting “no longer work in field” and being redirected to a set of questions intended for those no longer in the field, then subsequently sharing that this option was mistakenly selected).

After removing invalid responses, 699 valid responses remained, for a response rate of 22% (calculated as 699 divided by 3,123, or the number of invitations delivered minus the 23 invalid responses). Not all respondents completed the full survey.

Table 8 below provides key demographic information about survey participants.

TABLE 7: DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Percent of respondents</i>
Gender (N=699)	
Female	93%
Male	5%
Nonbinary	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%
Race/ethnicity (N=699) *	
White	63%
American Indian or Alaska Native	16%
Hispanic or Latino origin	12%
Asian or Asian American	7%
Black or African American	5%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	4%
Prefer not to say	5%
Other	0%
Public Health Region (N=699)	
Anchorage	47%
Mat-Su	16%
Interior	15%
Southeast	12%
Gulf Coast	8%
Northern	1%
Southwest	1%
Type of Early Care and Learning Provider (N=557) **	
Licensed center	52%
Head Start/Early Head Start	25%
Licensed home	6%
Pre-K program (school district)	4%
School-age or out-of-school time program (not in a licensed center)	3%
Exempt (home, center or other)	3%
Licensed group home ***	3%
Exempt (military)	1%
Summer camp program (not in a licensed center)	0%
Other	4%

2023 Alaska Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey.

* When participants chose more than one race/ethnicity, they were counted in both race/ethnicity categories. Therefore, the total is more than 100%. ** Due to rounding, total equals 101%

ANALYSIS

Survey data was exported from Survey Monkey and imported into Microsoft Excel for analysis. In a small number of instances, open-ended comments mirrored language in a question's listed options closely enough to be a listed response. For example, if a question included a list of response options including "due to staffing challenges", and a respondent did not select this but wrote "not enough staff", this was considered equivalent to selecting the pre-listed option and was counted and analyzed as such.

When calculating survey wage data, respondents were able to provide an hourly wage, an annual salary, or both. During analysis, when both hourly wage and salary were provided, only hourly wage was included in calculations. In responses with only salary data, such data for full-time, year-round respondents was divided by 2,080 (40 hours x 52 weeks) and was included in calculations; part-time and non-year-round respondents' salary data was not included in calculations. In instances where a respondent shared hourly wage or annual salary as a defined range, the mean of this range was calculated and treated as their response. Undefined ranges (e.g., "\$20,000 or less") were removed from data. In survey language regarding full-time versus part-time status, 30 or more hours was given as an example of being considered full-time.

Zip codes were collected and used to identify respondents' location at a public health region level. Zip code 99755, which lies in both the Denali Borough and Mat-Su Borough, was classified here as Denali Borough.

One section of the survey was designed to elicit responses from owners of both licensed and exempt early care and learning providers operated out of their homes. Additional filtering was utilized in analysis to exclude some respondents from data surrounding this question, namely owners of centers and employees of Head Start/Early Head Start programs.

The question reading "Whether you currently receive benefits or not, how important are workplace benefits in motivating you to remain in your current position/role?" did not allow for both a close-ended response and an open-ended comment explaining one's close-ended choice. Therefore, 25 open-ended responses to this question were removed from data and this question's n was recalculated.

Some detailed survey analyses, such as when comparing responses among early care and learning provider types, resulted in small n's for some categories. For example, analyses detailing responses by employees of school-age or out-of-school time programs had n's as low as 13. Where appropriate, data for some categories is suppressed.

Educator and Administrator Interviews

Initially developed and conducted as a component of a distinct evaluation, interviews were conducted with ROOTS Awards recipients to supplement survey findings. Interviewees were recruited through the ROOTS survey with a question asking whether the survey participant would potentially be interested in an interview. Efforts were made to include representation in interviews of the following groups:

- *Residents of Anchorage, other urban areas, and rural or remote areas*
- *Respondents with different SEED levels*
- *Recipients of the 2021 award only, the 2022 award only, and both awards*
- *Respondents with differing views on preferred award distribution method*
- *Respondents with differing views on if award amounts should depend on number of hours worked*
- *Respondents with differing views on if a higher award amount would motivate them to pursue additional professional development and/or education*

Interviewees were compensated with a \$100 Amazon gift card for their time and contributions. Twenty-one interviews were initially conducted in March and April 2023. An additional four interviews were conducted in September 2023, as part of this study to increase the representation, for a total of 25 early childhood educators and administrator interviews. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded (with permission) for transcription purposes. Interview recordings were transcribed by Rev and analyzed in Dedoose.

Alaska Career Pathways And Pipeline Interviews

Thirteen interviews were conducted with educational and professional development key informants in Alaska, identified through a scan of existing pathways and pipelines in the state. Interviews were conducted between August and September 2023 via Zoom and were recorded (with permission). Recordings were transcribed in Rev and analyzed in Dedoose. Interviewees included:

- **Anne Shade, Head Start Director, Bristol Bay Native Association**
- **Becky Moren, Early Learning Administrator, State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development**
- **Blue Shibler, Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children**
- **Cassie Hulse, SEED manager, thread**
- **Janene Lovelace, Professional Development Manager, thread**
- **Jen Clark, Professional Development Director, thread**
- **Jennifer Edwards-Fahl, Professional Development Chair, Anchorage Association for the Education of Young Children**
- **Jenny Taylor, Director, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Community and Technical College, Bunnell House Early Childhood Lab School**
- **Veronica Plumb, Program Coordinator and Assistant Professor, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Child Development and Family Studies**
- **Molly Hayes, Instructor, King Tech High School, Early Childhood Education Program**
- **Supanika Ordóñez, Education Specialist II, State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development, Head Start Collaboration Office**
- **Dr. Teresa Barton, Adult Basic Education Coordinator, University of Alaska Anchorage, Prince William Sound College**
- **Dr. Tonia Dousay, Dean of School of Education, University of Alaska Anchorage**

Other States Interviews

An exploration of different state strategies was conducted to understand various approaches supporting the early education workforce. Both the JHU study and nationally recognized early childhood think tanks were initially used to identify strategies and the states in which they have been executed. Given the priorities identified in Alaska early childhood workforce data, strategies related to wages, benefits, and workplace supports were prioritized.

Thirteen interviews were conducted with 18 individuals representing 13 entities across nine states and several national programs, as identified during research of other states' models; email invites were sent to 21 potential interviewees. Among interviewees, nine of the twelve entities were public institutions. Six of the interviewees were embedded in state offices, three represented national early childhood institutions, four were direct service providers, and four were in a private company delivering early childhood administrative services across a combined 47 states.

Interviews were conducted between August and October 2023 via Zoom. These interviews were analyzed in conjunction with outcome data of named models, and publicly available data on state early childhood workforce strategies. Interviewees were:

- **Child Care Services Association**
 - Allison Miller, Vice President of Compensation Initiatives
 - Edith Locke, Senior Vice President of Professional Development Initiatives

- **County of Hawai‘i**
 - Angela Thomas, Early Childhood Resources Coordinator
- **Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children**
 - Lauren Linnenbrink, WAGE\$ Coordinator
- **Kentucky Youth Advocates**
 - Sarah Vanover, Policy and Research Director
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children**
 - Maria Estlund, State Policy Specialist
- **Neighborhood Villages**
 - Amaris Kinne, Director of Research
- **Nevada Children’s Cabinet**
 - Marty Elquist, Department Director Supporting Early Education & Development
- **State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Business Enterprise Program**
 - Kate Duder; Vocational Rehabilitation Manager; State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Mariah Krueger; Vocational Rehabilitation Manager; State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- **State of Hawai‘i**
 - Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke
- **State of Michigan, Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, Child Care Licensing Bureau**
 - Emily Laidlaw, Director
- **University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, College of Education, Hawai‘i ECE 3 Project**
 - Terry Lock, Ed. D.; Director
- **University of Nebraska-Lincoln, College of Education and Human Sciences**
 - Dr. Holly Hatton Bowers, Associate Professor and Early Childhood Extension Specialist
- **Wonderschool**
 - Chris Bennett, CEO & Co-Founder
 - Emily Robertson, Senior Account Executive
 - Katie Dunlap, Senior Account Executive, State Partnerships
 - Louis Piconi, Senior Vice President of Government and Employer Programs

Focus Groups

Focus groups with early childhood educators were conducted as part of the evaluation of the ROOTS Awards earlier in 2023. These focus groups were also conducted by the Stellar Group. With permission of thread, the transcripts were made available for use in this early childhood education workforce study.

Three focus groups were conducted: two focus groups with administrators, directors, and owners, and one focus group with Alaska SEED Registry members who received neither the 2021 nor the 2022 ROOTS award. Focus groups were conducted in March and April 2023 via Zoom and were recorded (with permission) for transcription purposes. There were a total of 17 focus group participants and each was compensated with a \$75 Amazon gift card for their time and contributions. Focus group recordings were transcribed by Rev and analyzed in Dedoose.

Secondary Data

In addition to primary data and published research, select secondary data was received via data request to state agencies and other organizations. Such data, their origins, and dates received include:

- **State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance, Child Care Program Office**
 - SFY2019-SFY2023 licensed and exempt early care and learning providers (August 2023)
- **State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development**
 - Historical and projected employment for early childhood education field and related occupations (August 2023)
- **The Council for Professional Recognition**
 - 2018-2023 total number of individuals in Alaska who currently hold or previously held a Childcare Development Associate (CDA), zip code locations, and type of valid CDA (October 2023)
- **thread Alaska**
 - Alaska SEED Registry membership data for current members (as of August 2023) and those whose registration expired no more than 12 months prior (August 2023)
- **University of Alaska, Data Analysis and Institutional Research**
 - SFY2017-SFY2023 enrollment and graduation numbers for early childhood education degree seeking pathways from all three University of Alaska institutions (September 2023)
 - SFY2024 preliminary enrollment numbers for early childhood education degree seeking pathways from all three University of Alaska institutions (October 2023)

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The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Alaska

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES



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