

# THE STATE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN ILLINOIS

Early childhood educators serve children in their most critical developmental years and lay the foundation for future learning and success. To ensure all children and families have access to the early care and education services they need, Illinois must have a robust and thriving workforce in place across all early childhood settings.

## Who Is the Early Childhood Workforce?

Broadly speaking, the early childhood workforce is made up of different types of professionals that provide an array of services for children prenatal to age eight. The professions range from child care providers to developmental therapists and home visitors, among others. For the purposes of this report, we are talking specifically about those working in child care (centers and home-based settings) and preschool programs, providing direct care and educational services.

Administrative data from the Gateways database indicates that in 2020, there were nearly 90,000 individuals working across licensed and license-exempt child care settings (centers and homes) and school-based settings. The majority of staff in licensed child care settings are women (96 percent). The workforce is racially diverse, with 47 percent of teaching staff in licensed child care settings being people of color.

Despite its many strengths—such as boasting an early childhood teacher workforce that is more highly educated than the national average and more racially diverse than K-12 grade levels—Illinois' early care and education system has faced persistent, systemic barriers to building and sustaining a qualified workforce. Those barriers include poor wages, lack of benefits, limited access to higher education, and lack of support to complete post-secondary degrees. These challenges have led to high rates of turnover and vacancies in early childhood settings. In Fiscal Year 2019, licensed child care centers saw statewide turnover rates of 32 percent for early childhood teachers and 46 percent for assistant teachers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The above two tables on demographics and education were reproduced from data tables in INCCRRA's workforce report: Whitehead, J. (2021). *Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report*. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA.

<sup>2</sup> Illinois Salary & Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities: FY2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=125472>

## Demographics of the Illinois Early Childhood Workforce<sup>1</sup>

	Licensed Center		Licensed Family Child Care
	Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Assistant
<b>Gender</b>	<b>N=23,367</b>	<b>N=19,674</b>	<b>N=4,230</b>
Female	98.0%	97.5%	79.1%
Male	2.0%	2.5%	20.9%
<b>Age</b>	<b>N=23,878</b>	<b>N=19,598</b>	<b>N=4,158</b>
Mean	37	33	40
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	<b>N=23,187</b>	<b>N=18,628</b>	<b>N=4,211</b>
White	58.1%	47.1%	36.1%
Black	20.0%	22.0%	31.2%
Hispanic/Latinx	14.4%	22.7%	28.6%
Asian	4.0%	3.9%	1.4%
Multi-racial	1.5%	2.5%	1.5%
Other	1.9%	1.9%	1.2%
<b>Primary Language</b>	<b>N=23,877</b>	<b>N=19,674</b>	<b>N=3,734</b>
English	90.3%	88.3%	79.3%
Spanish	5.5%	7.5%	18.8%
Other	4.2%	4.2%	1.9%

Note: INCCRRA's 2020 workforce report, from which these data were pulled, did not include data on staff working in license exempt child care centers or license-exempt family child care providers.

## Educational Attainment of the Illinois Early Childhood Workforce

	Licensed Center		Licensed Family Child Care
	Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Family child care owner/provider
	<b>N=22,918</b>	<b>N=18,335</b>	<b>N=6,767</b>
High school diploma/GED	26.8%	69.0%	57.9%
Community college certificate	5.1%	4.3%	6.9%
Associate degree	24.9%	11.2%	17.1%
Bachelor's degree	34.7%	13.0%	13.8%
Graduate degree	8.6%	2.5%	4.3%

### Compensation Challenges

Child care is considered essential work and has been at the forefront of recent policy discussions about its position in rebuilding the economy. However, low compensation of early childhood educators does not adequately reflect the value of this field. Child care workers are some of the lowest paid workers in the country and earn less than other early childhood educators, such as preschool and kindergarten teachers.<sup>3</sup> With chronic low pay, many teachers are leaving the field to work in retail stores like Walmart and Amazon.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, attaining higher education degrees and credentials is not appealing or financially beneficial if wages do not increase after earning a degree.

### Compensation does not reflect the critical and complex nature of the work.

In 2020, teachers in Illinois licensed child care centers earned an average hourly wage of \$13.85, and assistant teachers earned \$11. Pay varies, however, depending on factors such as the age of children and the teacher's level of education.<sup>5</sup>

- Preschool-age teachers earned \$15.55 per hour, while infant/toddler teachers earned \$13.99 per hour.
- A licensed center teacher with a bachelor's degree made \$15.00 per hour compared to \$12.50 for a teacher with a high school diploma or GED.

As for licensed home child care providers, a survey found that 75 percent reported net earnings below \$22,000 in fiscal year 2019 and, on average, home providers earned \$8.81 an hour (the minimum wage in Illinois was \$8.25 per hour).<sup>6</sup> Neither is a livable wage in most states.

Illinois early childhood educators with a bachelors degree earn 30.1% less than teachers in the K-8 school system. The poverty rate for early childhood educators in Illinois is 17.8%, more than twice as high as for Illinois workers overall (8.3%).<sup>7</sup> Only 52 percent of early childhood employers report offering health insurance, and less than half offer retirement, dental, and life insurance.<sup>11</sup> During the pandemic, 32% of Illinois early childhood educators surveyed said they were fearful of not qualifying for public assistance programs if they were to receive a temporary pay increase to their salary.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/>

<sup>4</sup> Funding Priorities of Child Care Providers: where would increased investment go? Illinois Action for Children. Retrieved from: <https://www.actforchildren.org/champion/join-movement>

<sup>5</sup> Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA.

<sup>6</sup> Illinois Salary & Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities: FY2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=125472>

<sup>7</sup> Gould, E., Whitebook, M., Mokhiber, Z., & Austin, L. (2020). Financing Early Educator Quality: A Values- Based Budget for Every State. A series of state-by-state reports produced by the Economic Policy Institute and University of California Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/financing-early-educator-quality-a-values-based-budget-for-every-state/>.

<sup>8</sup> State Survey Data: Child Care at a Time of Progress and Peril. September 2021. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from: [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/naeyc\\_survey\\_statedatawithquotes\\_sep2021.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/naeyc_survey_statedatawithquotes_sep2021.pdf)



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