RUTGERS CHILDCARE RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

# Center-Based Child Care Lead Teachers in New Jersey

## Full Report

AUTHORED BY
Christina Stephens, Allison Friedman-Krauss, Milagros Nores, and Andrea Kent
National Institute for Early Education Research

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RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK Center for Women and Work School of Management and Labor Relations
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## ABOUT THE

## RUTGERS CHILD CARE RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

With funding and support from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, the Center for Women and Work, the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and the National Institute of Early Education Research have joined together to form the Rutgers Child Care Research Collaborative for the purpose of conducting research and facilitating community conversations that develop a broad and comprehensive understanding of New Jersey's child care landscape. Our research aims to increase understanding about the needs and interests of parents in New Jersey, the supply and motivations of the child care workforce, and the capacity of the child care sector to meet demand for child care today and into to future within our diverse state.

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## INTRODUCTION

Child care lead teachers in New Jersey play a central role in shaping the quality of early childhood education (ECE) for children ages 0- to 5-years-old. More knowledge is needed about the child care workforce in the state to identify program resources, professional development initiatives, and policies that support lead teachers and improve children's access to high-quality ECE opportunities. This report provides a description of the center-based lead teacher child care workforce in New Jersey (NJ) using a survey of teachers conducted between November 2023 and September 2024 by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). This effort is part of a multi-center collaborative project with the Center for Women and Work and the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, with support and collaboration from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF). This report offers a comprehensive description of participating lead teachers' demographic characteristics, qualifications, experiences, and working conditions. Additionally, statistical comparisons were conducted to consider the extent to which lead teachers who served preschool-age children varied from those that served infant- and toddler-age children. These findings offer insights into the child care lead teacher workforce in NJ that can be used to strengthen this critical sector of the workforce.

### ▲ Key Findings

- Child care lead teachers in New Jersey that served preschool-age children were nearly twice as likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher relative to those that serve infant- and toddler-age children.
- 1 in 4 lead teachers received assistance with direct costs and release time to participate in activities to advance their professional skillset.
- Almost half of lead teachers reported that they plan classroom activities during their personal time when they are not at work.
- Responding lead teachers earned an average of $22.19 per hour; infant and toddler teachers ($19.25) earned slightly less compared to preschool teachers ($23.51).

- 1 in 4 lead teachers received at least one form of government financial assistance and/or support (e.g., food stamps, housing assistance, etc.). A larger share of infant and toddler teachers received at least one form of assistance and/or support in comparison to preschool teachers.
- Nearly 1 in 4 lead teachers reported looking for a new and/or additional job in the last three months. The most prevalent reason for their job search was to find a job that pays more.
- 17% of teachers were considered at risk for clinical depression, which is higher than national estimates suggesting an overall prevalence of depression at 8% of all adults (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021)
- 40% of teachers reported experiencing at least one non-work-related stressor on a regular basis. Notably, a larger share of infant and toddler teachers than preschool teachers reported experiencing non-work-related stressors.
- On average, child care lead teachers reported they experienced a positive or very positive work environment.

## BACKGROUND

Child care lead teachers[1] play a critical role in facilitating children's early development by providing high-quality educational experiences and classroom interactions (Greenberg et al., 2018; Hamre et al., 2014). Key components of ECE quality that have been linked to children's learning outcomes include teacher characteristics, qualifications, experiences, participation in professional development, well-being, and working conditions (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2023). In response, many states, including NJ, have implemented ECE quality standards such as minimum education level, specialized certifications, and class size, with the goal of improving the quality of ECE services; and these efforts have been effective. For example, NJ's Abbott Preschool and Tulsa Oklahoma's Universal Pre-K programs both set high requirements for teacher qualifications and quality, which were also paired with competitive compensation and benefits, and resulted in large positive impacts on child outcomes (Barnett & Jung, 2021; Barnett et al, 2018; Gormley, 2024). It is also notable that most of these policies have focused on preschool-age classrooms and teachers in state-funded preschool programs, with less attention to child care programs and teachers of infant- and toddler-age children or multiple age groups (Learning Policy Institute, 2021). Generally, child care licensing requirements regarding these elements of "quality" are less stringent than standards set for state-funded preschool, and this is the case in NJ. For example, lead preschool teachers in NJ are required to have at least a bachelor's degree and state certification in ECE while child care teachers could have only an associate's degree or Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. However, there are efforts, such as the Grow NJ Kids quality rating and improvement system, that support universal

[1] Child care lead teachers typically refer to experienced individuals who are responsible for developing and implementing educational programming, managing a classroom, supervising other staff, and communicating with children's families. Lead teachers were identified by their center director and asked to indicate their title on the survey. Respondents who indicated they were a director and teacher, program coordinator, assistant teacher/instructor, or aide were excluded from the sample.

standards of quality for all child care and education programs in the state (i.e., Head Start, Child Care, Preschool, etc.).

In recent years there have also been significant investments and policy efforts aimed toward improving the ECE landscape by expanding children's access to high-quality educational opportunities, including increases in state-funded preschool, changes in child care subsidies and the expectations set by quality ratings systems. As a result, teachers have experienced shifts in their professional roles, requirements, and expectations for working with children from birth through age five. These changes have contributed to the extant challenges in child care that, compounded with the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to worse well-being and working conditions, increased turnover, and limited workforce retention (NASEM, 2018; Schaack et al., 2020).

As scholarly work continues to highlight the struggles early childhood teachers face navigating their ECE profession and workplace in terms of low pay, limited benefits, limited supports, and increasing expectations for supporting children's school readiness (NASEM, 2018) – it is important to more closely examine lead teachers in center-based child care in NJ, a state with historically high-quality ECE programs (Hodges, 2021). Such work is needed to identify workplace supports and policies that can strengthen the early childhood workforce more broadly (NASEM, 2018). Reports find an annual turnover rate of approximately 30% for all ECE teachers (Bassok, Doromal et al., 2021; Bryant et al., 2023), with the vast majority of turnover being attributed to teachers leaving the field altogether. The challenges noted earlier, and the likeliness of turnover are particularly pronounced among teachers from historically marginalized backgrounds and/or those who serve infant- and toddler-age children (Banghart et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2021).

To identify ways that policies and programs can support and sustain the lead teacher workforce and help facilitate their critical work with our nation's youngest children–more information is needed about teachers' experiences, qualifications, and working conditions. This report is a step towards this, specifically for NJ's center-based child care workforce. Information in this report can inform decisions about how to improve retention, working conditions, and compensation for NJ's child care workforce.

## CHILD CARE LEAD TEACHER SURVEY

### ▲ Study Methods

#### Measures and Procedures

The survey results reported here come from a larger study that investigates the child care landscape in New Jersey. A survey was distributed to all center-based child care providers in the state and directors were asked to provide a list of all teaching and administrative staff in their program. From this information, NIEER identified lead teachers of children ages 0- to 5-years-old (not yet in kindergarten) and randomly selected between one and three lead teachers per center to invite them to complete the survey. Lead teachers were identified by the center director as the staff member in a classroom with primary responsibility for the classroom. Invitations to participate in the survey were mailed to the center and addressed to the selected lead teachers. Survey invitations were also emailed to the center

director who was asked to pass along the survey (as NIEER did not have access to teachers' email addresses). The survey was fielded via Qualtrics' online platform from November 2023 to September 2024 and asked for active teacher consent before teachers were able to access the survey. All participating teachers who submitted completed surveys were given an incentive of $50 to thank them for their time. The research was approved by the Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey's IRB and NJ DCF's Research Review Committee.

## Sample

There were 1,074 unique records of individuals who indicated they were in a lead teacher role, had a complete, or mostly complete survey, and reported serving children ages 0 to 5 years old (Table A.1). A majority identified as female (97%) and were on average 44 years old. The largest share of teachers identified as non-Hispanic White (49%), with 14% indicating they were non-Hispanic Black, 29% Hispanic, and 8% "other" race/ethnicity. Additionally, 40% of responding lead teachers indicated they speak a language other than English, with the largest share of non-English speakers being proficient in Spanish (62%). These demographic characteristics of teachers are somewhat consistent with national estimates of the early childhood education workforce of lead and assistant teachers from 2019, which finds that 97% identified as female, were on average 39 years old, and 26% had non-English language skills (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2023). The race/ethnicity of the national child care workforce varied slightly from the NJ workforce survey estimates, with 58% non-Hispanic White, 17% non-Hispanic Black, 17% Hispanic, and 9% other race/ethnicity (Park & Datta, 2023). Responding teachers came from across the state of New Jersey, with 32% located in the Northern region, 29% from the Central region, 22% from the Northeast region, and 18% from the Southern region (Table A.2). These proportions were similar to the distribution of licensed child care centers across the state.

We provide descriptive results for the overall sample and disaggregated by teachers that reported serving infant-/toddler-age children and preschool-age children. Most teachers (73%) served preschool-age children (30-60 months), and 33% served infant- and toddler-age children (0-30 months) (see Figure 1). Nine percent reported serving both infants and toddlers and preschoolers. Notably, 8% of responding teachers indicated they also serve some school-age children.[2]

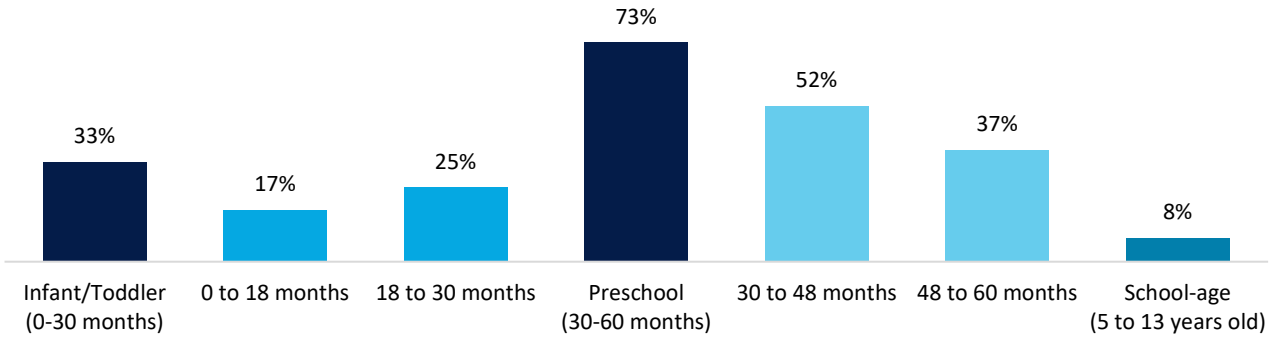
Lead teachers who responded to this survey worked in 429 licensed child care centers across the state. Records from DCF indicated that there were 3,269 licensed center-based ECE providers in the state as of November 2024 that serve children ages 0 to 5 years old. This suggests that we received responses from teachers in 13% of center-based providers in the state, though there were an additional 81 lead teachers who participated in the survey who could not be matched with a license identifier to know what center they worked in. This sample of teachers who participated in the survey appears to be representative of the center-based teacher workforce across NJ. The share of responding teachers were similarly dispersed

[2] Teachers who reported they serve children considered to be school age may still be in a preschool classroom, but some children may have just turned 5 years old by the time they completed the survey.

across regions of the state, as compared to DCF's list[3] of licensed providers that serve children ages 0 to 5.

Statistical comparisons were also conducted using mean comparison tests and Chi squared ($x^2$) analyses to consider the extent to which lead teachers who served preschool-age children differed from those that served infant- and toddler-age children. Notably, a small share (9%; n = 93) of teachers reported they serve both infants/toddlers and preschool children. We report comparisons for teachers that served *any* infant- and toddler-age children (n = 359) versus those that serve *only* preschool-age children (n = 715), but note instances where tests of significant differences varied when comparing teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children (n = 287) versus those that serve any preschool-age children (n = 787) in Appendix A.

**Figure 1.** Ages of Children Served in NJ Lead Teachers' Classrooms




**Note.** Categories are not mutually exclusive. Lead Teachers often serve multiple age groups of children and therefore, percentages are not intended to add up to 100%.

## RESULTS

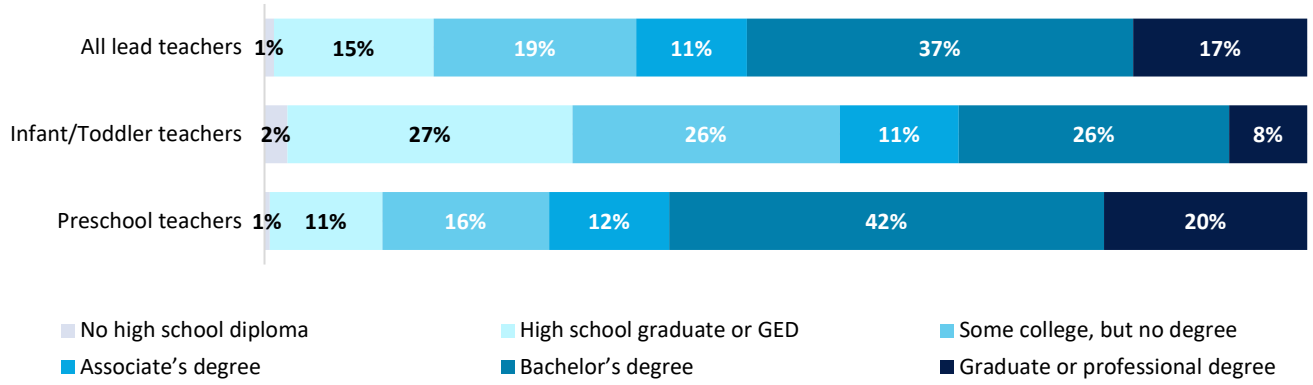
### Lead Teacher Education and Experience

Child care lead teachers in New Jersey reported an average of 12 years of experience in the ECE field and had an average of 7 years of experience working at their current center (Table A.3). In terms of education level, the largest share of teachers had earned a bachelor's degree (37%; See Figure 2). More than half of lead teachers (54%) had earned either bachelor's degree or higher but notably, a smaller share of infant/toddler teachers held a bachelor's degree or higher (e.g., graduate degree; 34%) relative to preschool teachers (62%). These percentages exceed national ones, as only 35% of lead child care teachers across the country have a bachelor's degree or higher (Datta & Zapata-Gietl, 2023). Among teachers who had earned an associate's degree or higher, the most common area of specialization was early childhood education (51%). Another 28% of teachers had earned their degree in a related field (e.g., elementary education, psychology), and 22% had a different area of specialization unrelated to

[3] DCF's list of licensed centers (N = 3,269) indicated that 32% of centers were in the Northern region of NJ, 27% were in the Central region, 24% were in the Northeastern region, and 18% were in the Southern region.

ECE (e.g., nursing, health sciences, business administration). Teachers were also asked whether they were currently enrolled in a degree program at a college or university. Most teachers were not currently enrolled (86%), in part because 64% had already earned an associate's degree or higher. However, of the 14% enrolled in a program, 2% of teachers were working towards an associate's degree, 7% were working towards a bachelor's degree, and 5% were working towards a graduate or professional degree. Half of the teachers working toward a higher degree were working on a degree in early childhood education (51%), with 32% working on a degree in a related field, and 29% working on an area of specialization unrelated to ECE.

**Figure 2. Education Level of Lead Teachers in NJ**




Lead teachers were also asked about whether they had earned a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and/or state certification or endorsement. Eleven percent of teachers had earned an infant/toddler CDA, 21% had a preschool CDA, and 4% had earned a CDA for both age groups (29% had earned a CDA for one or both age groups). Additionally, 12% of teachers reported they were currently working towards a CDA, with 5% working towards an infant/toddler CDA and 7% working towards a preschool CDA. Lastly, among the responding lead teachers, 28% had a state certification or endorsement to work with children from preschool age through third grade and 8% were certified to work with children nursery-age through eighth grade.[4] Notably, 43% of teachers had not received any state certifications or endorsements; this was more prevalent among infant/toddler teachers (60%) relative to preschool-age teachers (39%).

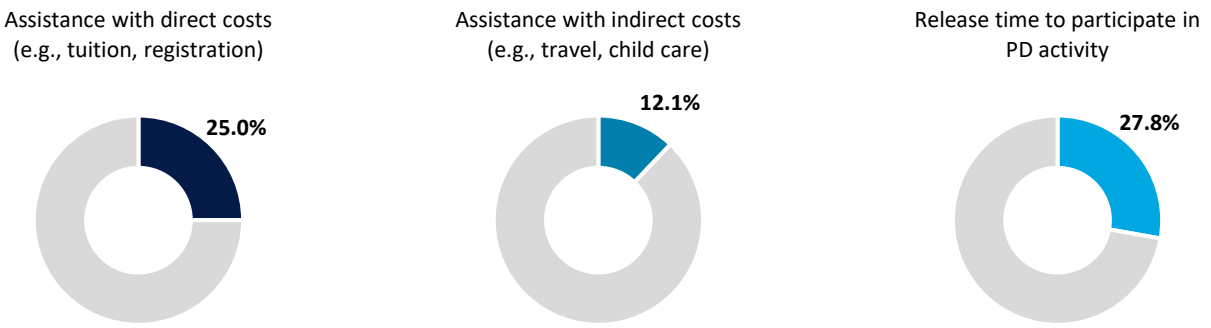
## Professional Development

Child care lead teachers in New Jersey were asked several questions about their participation in professional development activities (Table A.4). Teachers first indicated how many hours in the past 12 months they had participated in various activities to improve their skillset or gain new skills for working with young children. On average, lead teachers spent 16 hours attending workshops offered by professional associations or resource and referral networks, and 7 hours working with a coach, mentor, or ongoing consultation. Additionally, teachers attended an average of 4 hours of meetings held by a

[4]The nursery-age through eighth grade (N-8) credential was the previously used certificate of eligibility issued to teachers in NJ.

professional organization and 8 hours enrolled in a course at a community or 4-year college or university relevant to their work with children 5 years and under. Notably, there was a share of lead teachers that did not participate in any hours of professional development activities (47% overall), and this was higher among infant and toddler teachers (54%) than preschool teachers (45%). Teachers were also asked about supports they received to participate in activities to advance their professional skillset either from their employer, local or state agency, college, or university. As shown in Figure 3, about 1 in 4 of all lead teachers reported they received assistance with direct costs (e.g., tuition, registration; 25%) and/or release time from their program (28%) to attend professional development activities. Additionally, 12% of teachers reported they received assistance with indirect costs (e.g., travel and child care expenses); which was more common among preschool teachers (15%) than infant and toddler teachers (12%).

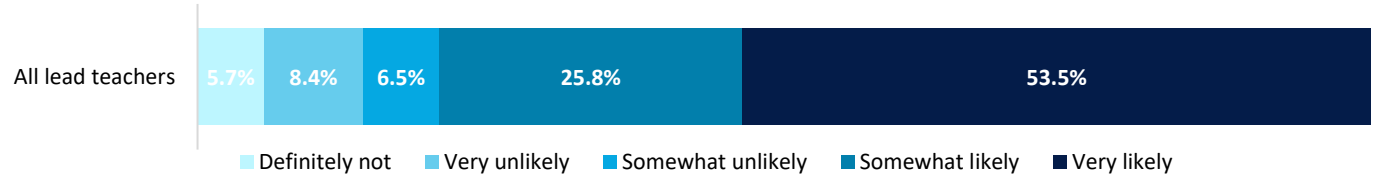
**Figure 3.** Lead Teacher Receipt of Supports for Advancing Their Professional Skillset




Lead teachers were also asked about their interest in a scholarship program that would help them complete a bachelor's degree with an ECE certification, which would qualify them to teach in NJ's state-funded preschool and receive the same pay as public school teachers. Notably, 19% of all responding lead teachers indicated this program would not be applicable to them because they had already earned a bachelor's degree with an ECE certification – though this varied between infant and toddler teachers (6%) and preschool teachers (23%).

As shown in Figure 4, among those responding teachers who would be eligible, nearly 80% indicated that they would be somewhat likely or very likely to participate in such a scholarship program (79.3%). Less than 6% of lead teachers reported they would definitely not participate. Additionally, when asked what supports would increase their likelihood of participating in a scholarship program, nearly half of teachers indicated that funding for travel costs to attend classes (46%), and a "hotline" advisor to support them in selecting an education program, enrolling in classes, and completing a program in the shortest time possible (45%) would help. Additionally, 28% of teachers indicated that funding for child care while they attended classes would also increase their likeliness in participating (Table A.4).

**Figure 4.** Likelihood of Lead Teachers' Participation in a Scholarship Program to Obtain BA Degree & ECE Certification




**Note.** Percentages on the likelihood teachers would participate in a scholarship program do not include the share of teachers who indicated this program would not be applicable for them (19% of sample).

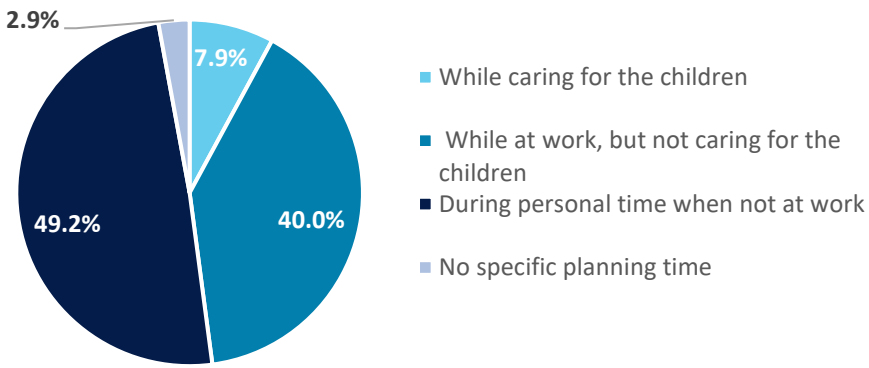
## Work Schedule and Work with Young Children

Lead teachers responded to questions about their work schedule and their work with young children (Table A.5). On average, responding teachers worked 34 hours per week. Those that served infant- and toddler-age children on average worked slightly more weekly hours (36) than preschool teachers (33). Overall, 80% of lead teachers reported they worked full time hours (i.e., 30 or more hours per week), with a larger share of infant and toddler teachers working full time (88%) relative to preschool teachers (77%). Notably, the prevalence of lead teachers working full time is larger than the broader teacher workforce. Estimates using NJ state administrative data suggest that overall, two-thirds (66%) of the ECE workforce (i.e., lead teachers, assistant teachers, aides, and support staff) who were employed throughout 2023 worked full time hours (Hetling et al., 2025). Additionally, the majority (90%) of lead teachers worked 5 days per week, and 82% worked 9 or more months per year (52% worked 12 months per year). Lead teachers also worked in an average of 2 classrooms per week (63% had 1 classroom, 21% had 2 classrooms, and 16% had more than 2 classrooms). Teachers reported missing an average of 4 days over the last 12 months due to sickness, and 3 days to care for their children or others.

In New Jersey, child care lead teachers had an average of 13 children in their classroom, with those that served preschool-age children having more children (14) relative to those that served infant-age children (0 to 18 months; 10) and toddler-age children (19 to 30 months; 12). There were on average 2 adults per classroom, with 3 adults in infant and toddler classrooms and 2 adults in preschool classrooms. On average, the adult-to-child ratio in lead teachers' classrooms was one adult per six children (1:6), with a smaller ratio for infant teachers (1:4), and toddler teachers (1:5), and a larger ratio for preschool teachers (1:7). These class sizes and ratios are within NJ's child care licensing requirements (NJ Department of Children and Families, 2023).

Teachers were also asked about when they typically plan classroom activities (Figure 5). Almost half of lead teachers reported that they plan classroom activities during their personal time when they are not at work (49%). Another large share of teachers reported they plan classroom activities while at work but not while they are caring for the children (40%). Additionally, a small share of teachers reported they plan classroom activities while at work and while caring for the children (8%), and this was more prevalent among infant and toddler teachers (12%) relative to preschool teachers (7%).

**Figure 5.** When Do Lead Teachers Typically Plan Their Classroom's Daily Activities?

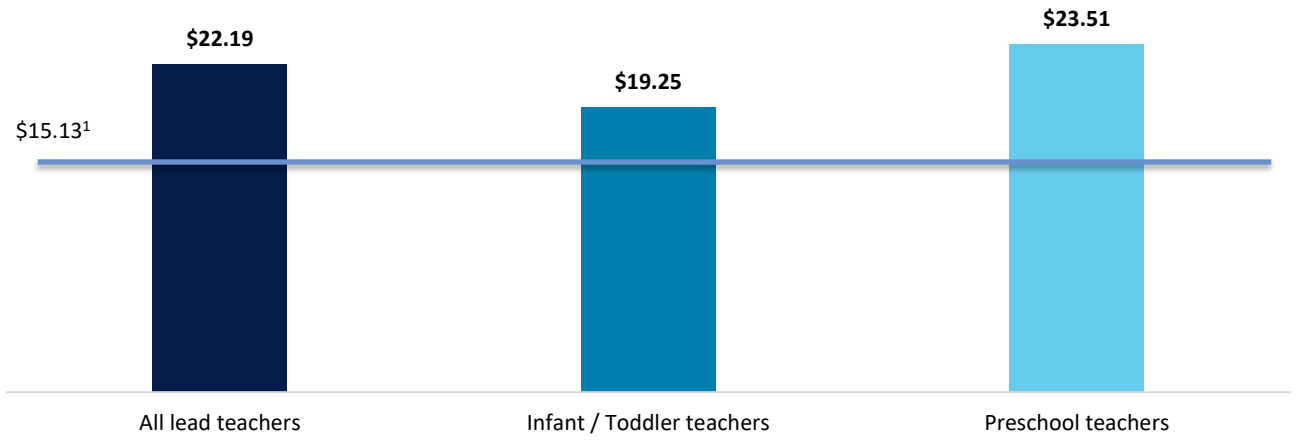



## Compensation and Benefits

Teachers responded to several questions about their work compensation and benefits (Table A.6). The average calculated hourly wage for child care lead teachers who responded to our survey was $22.19 (median: $19.23). As shown in Figure 6, lead teachers that served infants and toddlers were paid on average several dollars less per hour than preschool teachers ($19.25 compared to $23.51). This is similar to estimates from the Bureau of Labor statistics (2020) that indicated lead preschool teachers in NJ made an average hourly wage of $22.69. Teachers' annual pay was also calculated using this information on hourly wage combined with the hours they reported working each week.[5] The mean annual income teachers received was roughly $44,500, with those who served infants and toddlers earning $40,000, and preschool teachers earning $46,600. A large share of teachers reported they receive paid vacation or paid time off (52%) and/or paid sick leave (62%), with fewer reporting they receive retirement benefits (23%) or another type of work benefit (4%). Notably, a larger share of infant and toddler teachers received paid vacation or sick leave as compared to preschool teachers.

[5] Teachers annual pay from child care work was estimated from their calculated hourly wage and number of hours they worked per week. However, we did not re-calculate an annual pay for teachers who had initially reported an annual amount for the pay they received from child care work and used the value they had reported.

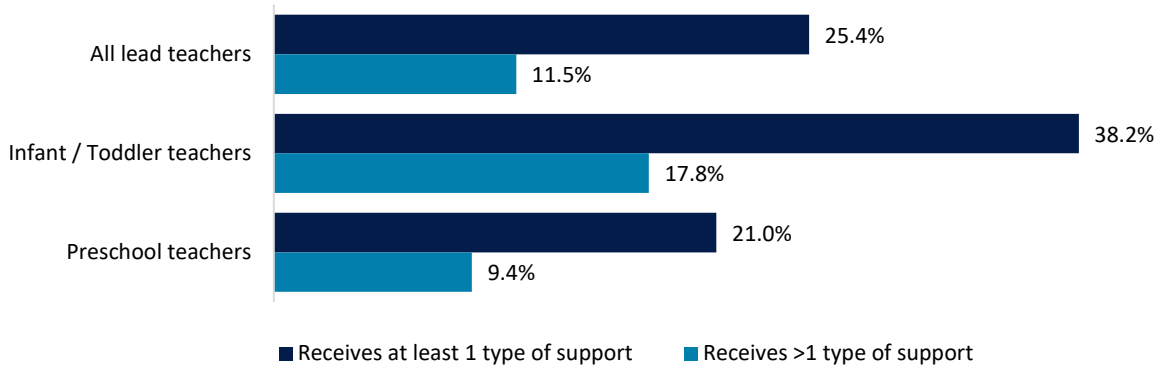
**Figure 6.** Child Care Lead Teacher-Reported Mean Hourly Wage




**Note.** [1]Indicates minimum wage for New Jersey in 2024 of $15.13 (NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2025). Wages calculated from combining pay information teachers reported on the amount they were paid and the metric of how often they were paid along with hours they reported working per week. In some cases (9%), we made adjustments to address instances of extremely low and high values of pay reported.

Lead teachers in New Jersey also reported on whether they received any government financial assistance and/or supports, and their health insurance type. As shown in Figure 7, 1 in 4 teachers overall (25%) received at least one type of government financial assistance support, and 12% received more than one form of support. Notably, a larger share of infant and toddler teachers (38%) received at least one form of support, as compared to preschool teachers (21%). The most common type of support (Table A.6) was Medicaid/New Jersey Cares for Kids (17%), followed by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; food stamps) (8%). The prevalence of these supports among lead teachers is similar to state estimates that about 19% of NJ residents are enrolled in Medicaid, and 9% receive SNAP benefits (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2025; KFF, 2023).

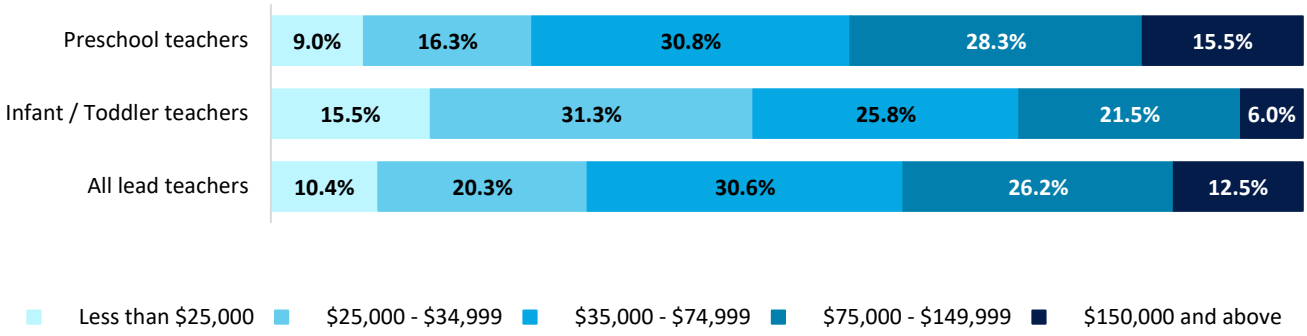
**Figure 7.** Lead Teacher Receipt of Government Financial Assistance and/or Supports



The most common type of health insurance coverage for child care teachers was from their spouse's, partner's, or parent's employment (31%), though 14% of teachers reported having no health insurance (Table A.6). Additionally, 23% of responding teachers reported they receive health insurance from their employer or workplace, with a larger share of preschool teachers receiving insurance from their workplace (25%), relative to infant and toddler teachers (16%). Similarly, a larger share of infant and toddler teachers reported they have Medicaid or state health insurance (26%) relative to preschool teachers (14%).

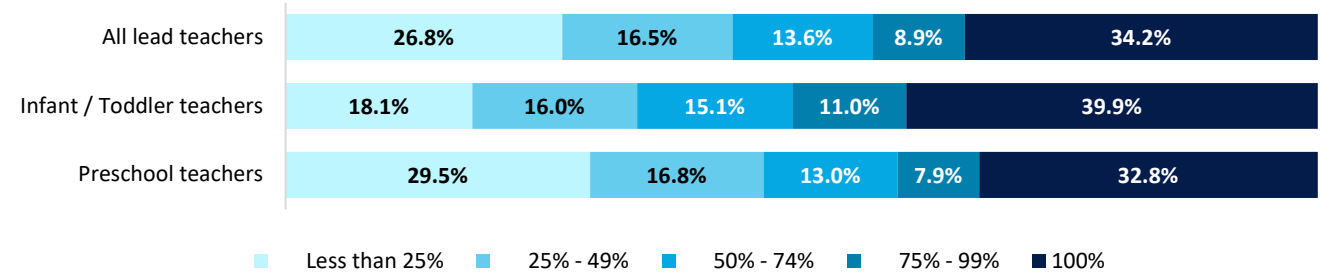
Teachers also reported on their total annual household income in 2022, the year prior to the survey. As shown in Figure 8 (and Table A.6), household incomes varied widely, and there were differences between teachers who served infant-toddler and preschool-age children. Nearly half (47%) of infant and toddler teachers had an annual household income of less than $35,000, which was larger than the share of preschool teachers (31%). Notably, only 16% of all responding lead teachers reported an annual household income of more than $150,000, much lower than the 2023 Census estimates of all households in NJ where on average, 40% of families earned more than $150,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

**Figure 8.** Child Care Lead Teachers' Total Household Annual Income




Additionally, teachers were asked how much of their household income came from their work with young children (Figure 9 and Table A.6). Overall, 34% of lead teachers reported that 100% of their household's income came from ECE work. One in 4 lead teachers (27%) reported their ECE work makes up less than 25% of their household's income, which was more prevalent among preschool teachers (30%) than infant and toddler teachers (18%). Lastly, 13% of lead teachers reported they worked at a second job for an average of 10 hours per week, which was more common among preschool teachers (14%) relative to infant and toddler teachers (10%).

**Figure 9.** Percent of Lead Teachers' Household Income that Came from Child Care Work

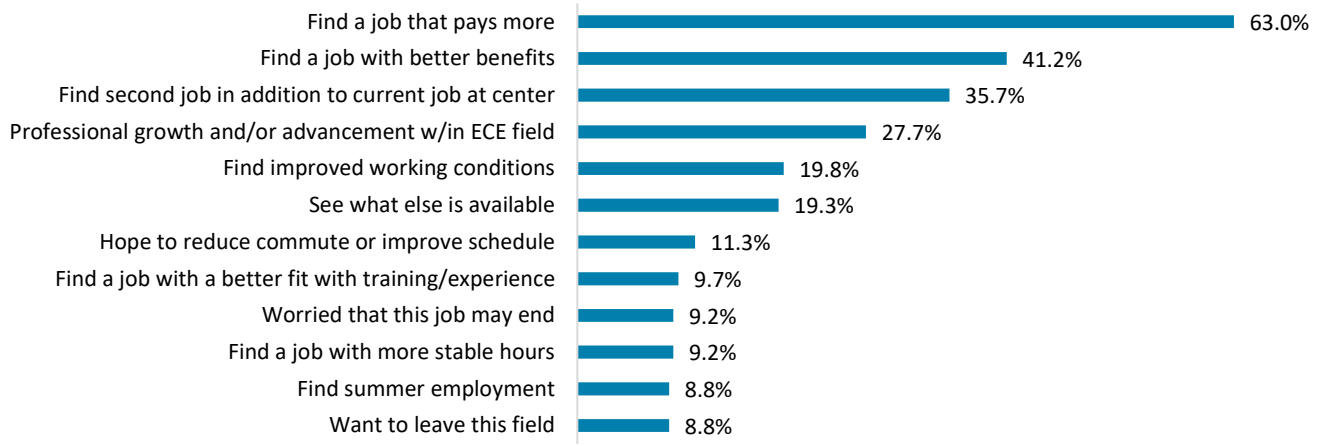



## Commitment to Early Childhood Education

Child care lead teachers were asked several questions about the reasons they work with young children and stay in the ECE field, as well as whether they have recently looked for a job or if they intend to leave their current job in ECE within the next year or five years (Table A.7). Nearly half (49%) of teachers reported that the main reason they work with children was because it is their chosen career or profession. The next most prevalent reason was because it is a way to help young children (36%).

Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) of lead teachers reported looking for a new or additional job in the last three months, with the most prevalent reasons for their search being to find a job that pays more (63%), and to find a job with benefits (41%). Thirty-six percent of responding teachers indicated that they were looking for a second job in addition to their current job at the center (Figure 10). Notably, teachers wanting to leave the ECE field was among the least common reasons they looked for a job (9%).

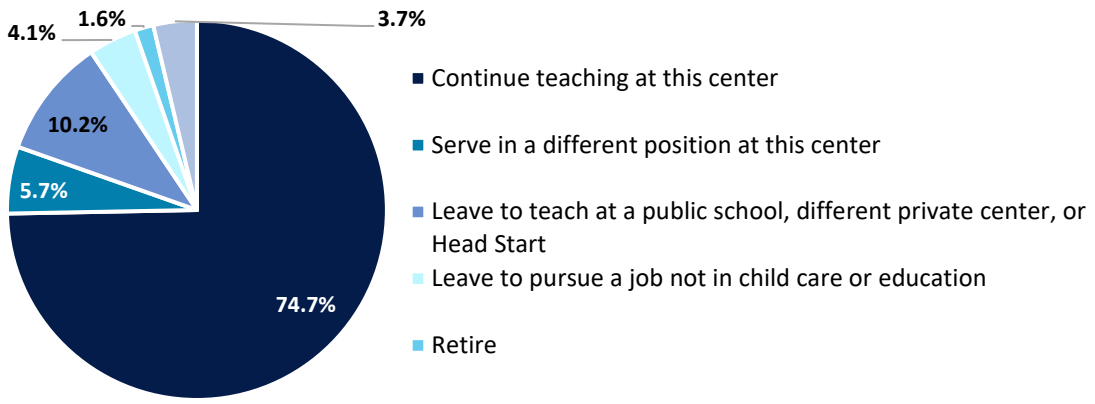
**Figure 10.** Reasons why teachers looked for a new or additional job in the last three months




**Note.** Only lead teachers who indicated that they searched for a job were asked about the reasons for this (n = 238). Responses are not mutually exclusive, and teachers could select more than one of the reasons.

Teachers were also asked about their intentions regarding work 1 year from the survey, and their likelihood of leaving the ECE field within the next 5 years. As shown in Figure 11, 75% of lead teachers indicated they intend to continue teaching at their center for at least the next year, with a larger share of preschool teachers intending to stay (75%) relative to infant and toddler teachers (71%). Of those that responded, 10% of teachers indicated they intend to leave their center to work at a public school (8%) or a different private center or Head Start program (2%). Notably, among the 10% of teachers who reported an intent to leave their program to work at another center, 2 out of 3 had a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, less than 2% of lead teachers reported an intent to retire within the next year.

**Figure 11.** Lead Teachers' Intention Regarding Work One Year After Survey




Twenty-eight percent of respondents indicated they were somewhat or extremely likely to leave the field in the next five years. Notably, a larger share of preschool teachers reported they were either extremely likely or somewhat likely to leave in field in the next five years (30%), compared to infant and toddler teachers (24%) (Table A.7). Additionally, 20% of teachers indicated they were neither likely or unlikely to leave, and 52% indicated they were somewhat unlikely or extremely unlikely to leave.

Lastly, lead teachers were asked about reasons that are keeping them in the ECE field. Teachers could select multiple reasons, and the three that were most prevalent among those who responded (97%) were because they loved their job (75%), they love seeing their children's growth (72%), and because they are making a difference for children and families (70%) (Table A.7).

## ▲ Symptoms of Depression and Stress

Lead teachers also answered questions about their symptoms of depression and economic stressors (Table A.8). These questions were included based on previous research that has highlighted how ECE teachers face high expectations and constraints in their ECE profession that can be taxing on their mental health (e.g., Johnson et al., 2020; Schaack et al., 2020). Additionally, poor ECE teacher mental health has been linked to lower quality classroom interactions with children, increased turnover, and limited workforce retention (e.g., Bryant et al., 2023; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kwon et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2025). National estimates have suggested an overall prevalence of depression at 8% of all adults, and 10% among women (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021). National estimates of

depression among the ECE teacher workforce in 2019 were at a similar prevalence of 8%; though more recent estimates from 2022 in the wake of the pandemic indicated that more than 1 out of 4 teachers reported symptoms above the threshold considered to be at a clinical level of depression (Park & Datta, 2023). In terms of economic stressors, ECE teachers have fared worse than those in the K-8 system because they are paid less and are less likely to receive benefits, with rates of poverty being nearly 8 times higher (McLean et al., 2021).

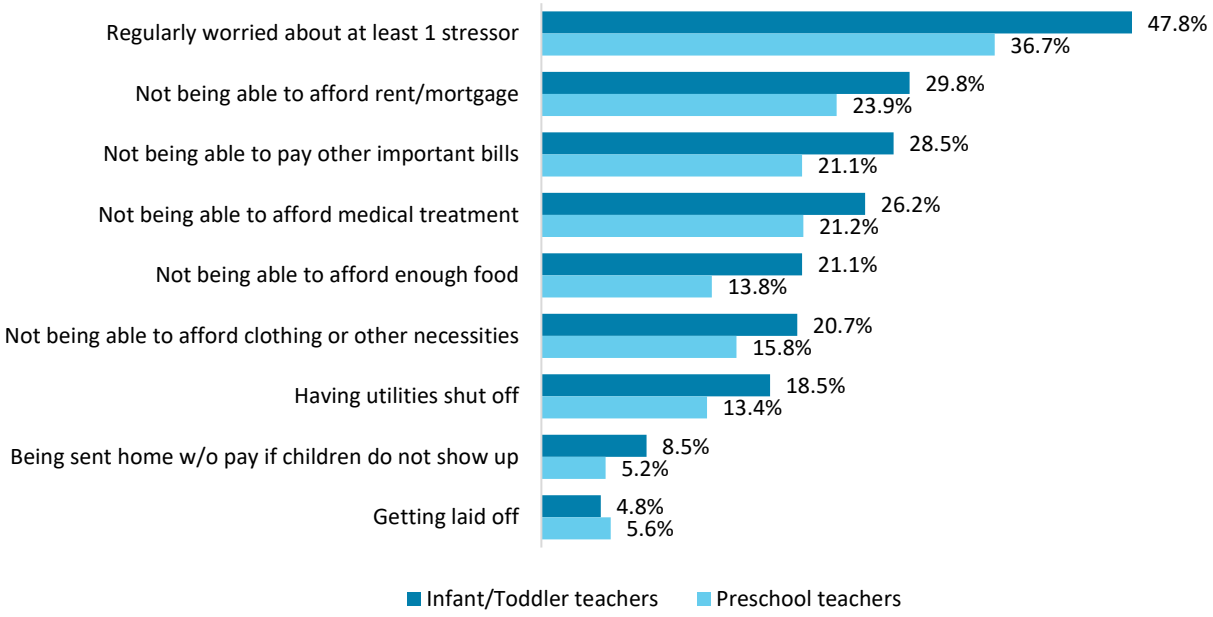
For this study, the Center of Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) scale was used to measure teachers' self-reported depressive symptoms (Andresen et al., 1994). The CES-D is a multi-item survey that asked teachers 10 questions about their overall depressive and mental health symptoms. Examples of items include how often they felt the following over the course of the last week - "*I felt depressed*" or "*I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing,*" with response options ranging from 0 (*Rarely or none of the time*) to 3 (*All of the time*). Teachers' responses to the 10 items were summed to obtain a total score ranging from 0 (no depressive symptoms) to 30 (severe depressive symptoms). Consistent with recommendations for interpreting this measure, a cutoff of 10 or higher was used to identify individuals that may be at risk for clinical depression.[6] Among the sample of responding lead teachers (95% of the sample), their average score on depressive symptoms was a 5.7, with a standard deviation of 4.1 with 17% of teachers having CES-D scores above the cutoff and considered at risk for clinical depression. There were no notable differences in symptoms of depression between infant and toddler teachers and preschool teachers.

Teachers were also asked questions about how often they worry about a set of eight economic stressors. Examples of items included "*Having utilities shut off*" or "*Not being able to afford clothing or other necessities,*" with respond options ranging from 1 (*Rarely or never*) to 5 (*All the time*). These survey questions were developed by the NIEER team and have been used in previous studies of teachers, and similar items have been used in related research as indicators of financial strain (e.g., Feeding America, 2013; Social Interventions Research & Evaluation Network, 2025). Though not an empirically validated scale, reliability among the 8 items for this study's sample was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$). As shown in Figure 12 (and Table A.8), 40% of lead teachers experienced at least one economic stressor on a regular basis,[7] and the share of teachers reporting at least one regular economic stressor was higher among those that work with infant- and toddler-age children (48%), relative to preschool-age children (37%). The three most common economic stressors among lead teachers were not being able to afford rent/mortgage (30%), not being able to afford other important bills (29%), or not being able to afford medical treatment (26%). The fraction of teachers reporting at least two stressors as 27% and the fraction reporting three or more was 20%.

[6] CESD scores rely on teachers *self-reported* depressive symptoms, rather than the existence of a clinical diagnosis of depression. Therefore, teachers that score above the CESD cutoff were considered to have reported higher levels of depressive symptoms that *might* be consistent with a clinical level of depression (Hamre & Pianta, 2004).

[7] Responses were recoded to identify teachers who worried about each item on a regular basis, most of the time, or all of the time.

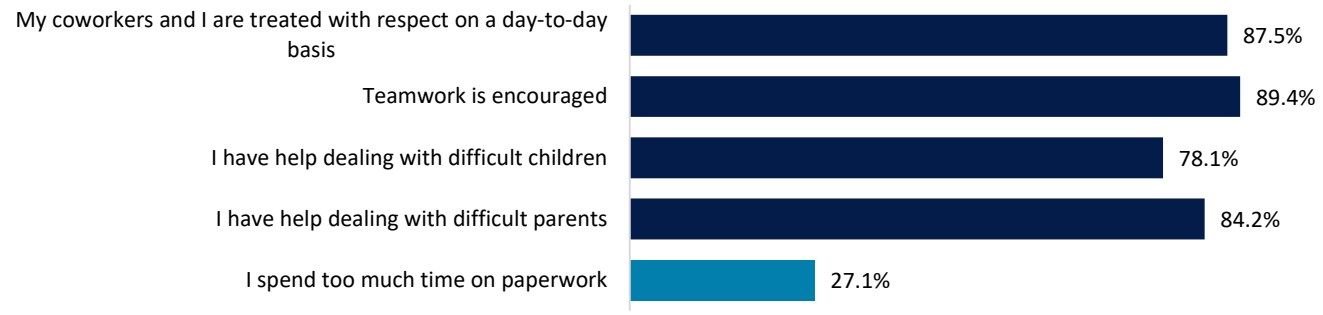
**Figure 12.** Lead Teacher Report of Economic Stressors they Experience on at Least a Regular Basis




## Child Care Work Environment

Child care lead teachers in New Jersey also answered questions about their work environment (Table A.9). Most teachers (83%) reported they receive a formal review and feedback on their performance at least once a year. Teachers were asked five questions about the extent to which they agreed on statements about their working climate, with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). As shown in Figure 13, the majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed on several items indicating they have a positive working climate (between 78%-88%). Additionally, 1 in 4 teachers reported spending too much time on paperwork and this was higher for preschool teachers (30%) than infant and toddler teachers (21%).

**Figure 13.** Share of Lead Teachers that Indicated Agreement on Aspects of Working in Their Program



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This report summarizes findings from a survey of lead teachers in center-based child care programs in New Jersey who teach children 0- to 5-years-old. The results point to both strengths of this workforce (with high commitment and many years of experience) that NJ can build on to further improve teachers' and children's experiences, as well as areas where more support for teachers is needed to strengthen this crucial workforce. It is also important to recognize that the results reported here focus on lead teachers, which is the least fragile segment of the child care workforce. The recommendations provided below could be adapted to support the child care assistant teacher and aide workforce, who are likely to have lower levels of education and ECE credentials, fewer professional development opportunities, more variable hours, and even lower salaries relative to lead teachers (Weisenfeld et al., 2022).

### Education opportunities:

First, more supports and incentives are necessary to help child care lead teachers access opportunities to advance their professional skillset. This can include additional degrees and certifications as well as professional development activities related to teaching young children. Nearly half of teachers did not have a bachelor's degree and even fewer had a certification for teaching young children. Programs and incentives to help child care teachers earn a bachelor's degree and/or ECE credentials, particularly for teachers that serve infants and toddlers, would ensure a more qualified workforce that would be better prepared to teach the state's youngest learners (NASEM, 2018; Sandstrom et al., 2023). This may also attract additional candidates to the ECE field. Among lead teachers without a bachelor's degree and/or ECE certification, many reported being interested in participating in a scholarship program that would support them in earning these qualifications. Additionally, teachers indicated they would be more likely to engage in these programs if they had supports for travel, an advisor hotline, and/or funding for their own child care.

New Jersey does have a track record of supporting child care teachers to obtain a bachelor's degree and ECE certification as it did when the state's Abbott preschool program began (Barnett & Frede, 2017). The state needed to build a qualified early childhood workforce quickly to support rapid preschool expansion and developed programs to support existing ECE teachers in obtaining their credentials, *and* to increase their pay once they obtained those credentials. Results from this survey suggest that many lead child care teachers, serving infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, would take up such an opportunity if adequately supported. As the state continues to expand state-funded preschool using a mixed-delivery model, as well as invest in child care at large, current child care teachers can be supported in obtaining higher degrees to meet the qualifications needed for preschool and to more effectively work with the youngest children. Grow New Jersey Kids (GNJK), the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), is an existing state resource that provides training and incentives across the state to child care and state-funded preschool programs to support quality improvements. As such, GNJKs is an existing platform that can be leveraged to disburse incentives and other supports to teachers to improve their education and training related to early childhood education.

*RECOMMENDATION 1:* Provide financial supports and mentoring to help teachers improve their credentials. Research points to the need for teachers with training in early childhood education and child development and a bachelor's degree to provide quality ECE experiences for children (Sandstrom et al. 2023). Supporting teachers' attainment of additional education in programs serving infants and toddlers, as well as preschoolers, can help sustain and stabilize the workforce serving both age groups. GNJK is one key mechanism that can help accomplish this goal.

### Professional Development:

Findings in this report also highlight the importance of facilitating teachers' opportunities for professional development to advance their skillset. Nearly half of responding teachers indicated not having any hours of professional development, and only a quarter of teachers reported receiving assistance with direct costs and release time to participate in professional development activities. These efforts are necessary for improving the qualifications and professionalism of the ECE workforce and ensuring that all teachers can acquire knowledge and skills for working with young children under the age of 5 (Schachter, 2015). A robust professional development system is also necessary to be able to continuously adapt to emerging challenges in child development (e.g., due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic or increasing access to emerging technologies).

*RECOMMENDATION 2:* Provide all child care teachers with annual professional development (beyond only health and safety) on topics related to early childhood education, child development, and curriculum. Teachers should be strongly supported in accessing and paying for professional development and should receive coverage if this occurs during work hours. Participation in GNJKs can also help centers connect teachers with professional development resources

### Compensation:

To ensure ECE system efforts toward increasing the qualifications and professionalism of the workforce are effective, state policies must support child care programs to also provide teachers with competitive pay and benefits (Doromal et al., 2025; Phillips et al., 2016). Improving compensation improves wellness and reduces turnover (or improves retention). On average, teachers who responded to this survey earned $22.19 an hour, which was estimated to be approximately $45,000 per year. This annual income for a family of four household members in 2024 is estimated at 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL), which is not far from the poverty line (100% FPL) and below the threshold considered to be low-income in 2024 (<200% FPL; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). In addition, these levels are low for New Jersey, where the median income for households is over $100,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). This raises concern for the economic well-being of the lead teacher workforce in NJ, especially given that more than 1 in 3 lead teachers who responded to this survey indicated that 100% of their households' income comes from child care work, and nearly 2 out of 3 indicated that 50% or more of their households' income comes from child care work. Additionally, infant and toddler lead teachers earned significantly less for their ECE work than preschool teachers despite, on average, working more hours. Workplace benefits such as retirement, paid time off, and sick leave were not consistently available for lead child care teachers. According to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 98% of other jobs pay higher wages than the ECE sector (Dade & McLean, 2023). This underscores the need for policies and efforts to increase and enhance compensation among child care teachers in NJ.

There is mounting evidence that initiatives aimed at increasing or enhancing teacher wages can effectively support the workforce and reduce turnover–particularly in the District of Columbia and Virginia (e.g., Bassok, Doromal et al., 2021; Nikolopoulos et al., 2025). Thus, providing teacher pay incentives and/or increased pay for teachers in licensed providers can be an effective way to reduce turnover and improve workforce well-being, mental health, retention, and recruitment. Given that 1 in 4 responding lead teachers reported having searched for new or additional work, largely to find a job that pays more, it is critical that efforts to support the NJ workforce ensure adequate and competitive compensation. Many lead teachers reported experiencing economic stressors on a regular basis. This suggests that increasing compensation could improve retention while also reducing stress and improving mental health (17% of teachers had high levels of depressive symptoms).

Additionally, a large share of the child care lead teachers in New Jersey were covered by Medicaid, underscoring this program as a critical support to the ECE workforce (Georgetown University, McCourt School of public Policy, 2025). For this reason, possible cuts to Medicaid funding would threaten the ability of a large segment of the lead teacher workforce to obtain affordable health insurance, as our estimates show that only 23% of lead teachers received coverage from their employer.

***RECOMMENDATION 3:*** Explore ways to support increased wages and greater access to benefits for child care teachers, without raising costs for parents. Doing so can improve retention, reduce turnover, and also support teachers' mental health. Programs in New Mexico, Virginia, and Washington DC can serve as models.

### Working Conditions:

In addition, lead teachers deserve working conditions that support their role in providing young children with learning opportunities that facilitate positive early development. These job characteristics are critical for retaining the teaching workforce and addressing issues related to well-being (e.g., Grant et al. 2010). Most teachers in this study reported that they felt intrinsically motivated to work in the ECE field and had a true passion for their profession and for supporting development of young children. Fortunately, most lead teachers who responded to this survey also indicated positive ratings about their working climate in terms of their colleagues as well as the children and families they serve.

However, a large share of teachers reported spending more time than they would like on paperwork. In addition, nearly half of lead teachers also reported planning classroom activities during their personal time outside of work hours. With 80% of lead teachers working full-time, planning classroom activities during their off-hours represents a significant burden. This unpaid effort further highlights the misalignment between the demands placed on child care lead teachers and the already low compensation they receive.

Though lead teachers' personal motivations for their ECE work can be a strong driver for retention, it is important to recognize that elements of their working climate can have implications for workforce well-being and the risk of turnover (McLean et al., 2021; Phillips et al., 2016). Notably, 17% of lead teachers in the current study were considered at risk of having a clinical level of depression, and a large share (40%) also reported experiencing at least one economic stressor on a regular basis. These are important to consider in the context of teachers' working climate and intentions to remain at their program and in

the ECE field – as results from this survey found that nearly 25% of teachers reported looking for a new job. Furthermore, the prevalence of economic stressors emphasizes the need to provide teachers with competitive compensation. These components of teachers' working climate and well-being have been linked to components of classroom and/or overall program quality, which can impact children's early learning outcomes (Ansari et al., 2022; Schaack et al., 2020) as well as directly to child outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019; Siegel, Friedman-Krauss, & Nores, 2025).

*RECOMMENDATION 4:* Reduce paperwork and ensure lead teachers have access to paid planning time during their work day and time to collaborate and plan with coworkers. The latter would require programs to provide adequate classroom coverage. Additionally, programs may establish a working climate that provides adequate time during teachers' work day to plan classroom activities, which may include regular collaborative sessions and workshops on planning/time management techniques. To ensure that ECE systems support child care quality, it is also important to include initiatives that also monitor and improve teacher well-being.

The findings reported here highlight several areas for policies and early childhood systems to address the needs of the center-based child care lead teacher workforce in New Jersey. The above recommendations can help to ensure that children from birth through age five have equitable access to high quality early learning opportunities by supporting lead teachers in improving their qualifications, improving their access to effective professional development opportunities related to ECE, increasing adequate compensation, and improving working conditions. While expensive, state investments in quality child care are needed to support not just the ECE workforce but also children, families, and the state's workforce and economy (Coffey, 2024). NJ has existing ECE programs including state-funded preschool and GNJKs that set high standards for the ECE workforce and on which improvements to supporting NJ's child care workforce can be built.

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Correspondence regarding this report should be addressed to Christina Stephens at the National Institute for Early Education Research. Email: cstephens@nieer.org



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# Appendices

## ▲ Appendix A. Descriptive Statistics of Child Care Lead Teachers in New Jersey

Table A.1. Lead Teacher Sample Characteristics

| Demographics | Sample | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| **TOTAL** | **1074** | **100%** |
| **Gender is female** | 1,009 | 96.6 |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | | |
| Non-Hispanic White | 506 | 49.1 |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 142 | 13.8 |
| Hispanic | 312 | 29.1 |
| Other | 85 | 8.1 |
| **Age** *(standard deviation/mean)* | 13.08 | 43.9 |
| **Region**[2] | | |
| Central | 302 | 28.6 |
| North | 337 | 31.9 |
| Northeast | 230 | 21.8 |
| South | 188 | 17.8 |
| **Fluency in non-English languages** | | |
| English Only | 632 | 60.2 |
| Has non-English skills | 418 | 39.9 |
| Has Spanish skills | 260 | 62.5 |
| **Primary age of children in their classroom**[1] | | |
| Infant-/toddler-age (0-30 months) | 359 | 33.4 |
| Children 0 to 18 months | 182 | 17.3 |
| Children 18 to 30 months | 262 | 24.9 |
| Preschool-age (30-60 months) | 787 | 73.3 |
| Children 30 to 48 months | 549 | 52.1 |
| Children 48 to 60 months | 392 | 37.3 |
| School-age children (5 to 13 years old) | 84 | 8.0 |

**Note.** [1]Not mutually exclusive categories. [2]DCF's list of licensed centers that serve children ages 0-5 (N = 3,269) indicated that 32% of centers were in the Northern region of NJ, 27% were in the Central region, 24% were in the Northeastern region, and 18% were in the Southern region.

Table A.2. Regions

| Region | Counties |
|---|---|
| Central | Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Somerset |
| North | Bergen, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Union, Warren |
| Northeast | Essex, Hudson |
| South | Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem |

Table A.3. Education and Experience for Lead Teachers

| Education and Experiences | | All lead teachers | | Infant/Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *p-value* |
| **Experience** | Avg. years of experience in center (*mean/standard deviation reported)* | 7.3 | 6.6 | 6.2 | 5.5 | 7.7 | 6.9 | <.001 |
| | Avg. years of experience in ECE (*mean/standard deviation reported)* | 12.3 | 8.9 | 10.4 | 8.2 | 12.9 | 9.1 | <.001 |
| **Education level** | No high school diploma | 10 | 0.9 | 8 | 2.2 | 4 | 0.5 | <.001 |
| | High school graduate or GED/equivalent degree | 164 | 15.3 | 98 | 27.3 | 85 | 10.8 | |
| | Some college, but no degree | 208 | 19.4 | 92 | 25.6 | 126 | 16.0 | |
| | Associate's degree | 114 | 10.6 | 41 | 11.4 | 90 | 11.5 | |
| | Bachelor's degree | 397 | 37.0 | 93 | 25.9 | 328 | 41.7 | |
| | Graduate or professional degree | 179 | 16.7 | 27 | 7.5 | 153 | 19.5 | |
| **Area of degree earned[2]** | Early childhood education | 326 | 50.5 | 63 | 43.5 | 281 | 51.8 | 0.92[1] |
| | Elementary or special education | 90 | 13.9 | 20 | 13.8 | 78 | 14.4 | |
| | Psychology, child development or family studies | 87 | 13.5 | 22 | 15.2 | 75 | 13.8 | |
| | Other specialization | 143 | 22.1 | 40 | 27.6 | 109 | 20.1 | |
| **Currently enrolled in degree program at a college or university** | Not currently enrolled | 925 | 86.3 | 305 | 85.0 | 673 | 85.6 | 0.10 |
| | No high school degree | 10 | 1.1 | 8 | 2.6 | 4 | 0.6 | |
| | Has high school degree | 151 | 16.3 | 90 | 29.7 | 75 | 11.1 | |
| | Has some college but no degree | 166 | 18.0 | 75 | 24.5 | 99 | 14.7 | |
| | Has Associate's degree | 82 | 8.9 | 29 | 9.5 | 62 | 9.2 | |
| | Has Bachelor's degree | 354 | 38.3 | 79 | 25.8 | 294 | 43.7 | |
| | Has graduate or professional degree | 162 | 17.5 | 24 | 7.8 | 139 | 20.7 | |
| | Enrolled in Associate's degree program | 26 | 2.4 | 12 | 3.3 | 19 | 2.4 | |
| | Enrolled in Bachelor's degree program | 73 | 6.8 | 27 | 7.5 | 57 | 7.3 | |
| | Enrolled in Graduate degree program | 28 | 2.6 | 5 | 1.4 | 22 | 2.8 | |
| | Enrolled in other program | 20 | 1.9 | 10 | 2.8 | 15 | 1.9 | |
| **Area of degree in progress[3]** | Early childhood education | 74 | 50.7 | 24 | 45.3 | 58 | 51.8 | 0.46 |
| | Elementary or special education | 26 | 17.8 | 12 | 22.6 | 21 | 18.8 | |
| | Psychology, child development or family studies | 20 | 13.7 | 9 | 17.0 | 12 | 10.7 | |
| | Other specialization | 26 | 17.8 | 8 | 15.1 | 21 | 18.8 | |
| **Child Development Associate credential (CDA)** | Has CDA | 309 | 28.8 | 122 | 34.0 | 217 | 27.6 | 0.01[1] |
| | Has infant/toddler CDA | 113 | 10.5 | 86 | 24.0 | 50 | 6.4 | <.001 |
| | Has preschool CDA | 227 | 21.1 | 58 | 16.2 | 190 | 24.2 | 0.01 |
| | Has infant/toddler *and* preschool CDA | 31 | 3.9 | 22 | 8.5 | 23 | 3.9 | <.001[1] |
| | CDA in progress | 123 | 11.5 | 69 | 19.2 | 71 | 9.0 | <.001 |
| | Infant/toddler CDA in progress | 58 | 5.4 | 52 | 14.5 | 17 | 2.2 | <.001 |
| | Preschool CDA in progress | 70 | 6.5 | 22 | 6.1 | 57 | 7.2 | 0.71 |
| **State certifications or endorsements[4]** | No certification or endorsements | 293 | 43.3 | 93 | 60.4 | 221 | 39.2 | <.001 |
| | Pre-K – 3rd grade | 189 | 27.9 | 16 | 10.4 | 174 | 30.9 | |
| | Nursery – 8th grade | 52 | 7.7 | 19 | 12.3 | 44 | 7.8 | |
| | Elementary education (K-8) or Special education | 89 | 13.2 | 14 | 9.1 | 79 | 14.0 | |
| | Other certification or endorsement | 54 | 8.0 | 12 | 7.8 | 46 | 8.2 | |

**Note.** P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less. [1] Denotes instances where the statistical significance level of result varied when analyses were run as teachers that serve any infant- and toddler-age children versus only preschool-age children. [2]32% of teachers overall reported having earned more than 1 degree earned specialization (infant/toddler teachers = 26%; preschool teachers = 34%). [3]23% of teachers overall reported having more than one area of degree specialization in progress (infant/toddler teachers = 26%; preschool teachers = 23%). [4]31% of teachers overall reported having more than one state certification or endorsement (infant/toddler teachers = 36%; preschool teachers = 33%).

Table A.4. Participation in Professional Development for Lead Teachers

| Professional Development | | All lead teachers | | Infant/Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *p-value* |
| **Hours of professional development activities *(std dev. / mean)*** | Workshops *(mean/standard deviation [sd] reported)* | 15.9 | 13.0 | 13.6 | 12.7 | 16.6 | 13.4 | 0.12[1] |
| | Coaching, mentoring, consultation with a specialist *(mean/sd reported)* | 7.0 | 11.6 | 5.2 | 10.1 | 7.7 | 12.3 | 0.17 |
| | Attended meeting held by a professional org. *(mean/sd reported)* | 3.8 | 5.9 | 4.1 | 6.3 | 3.7 | 5.7 | 0.82 |
| | Enrolled in higher ed. course relevant to work with children ages 0 to 5 *(mean/sd reported)* | 7.7 | 26.8 | 5.4 | 19.5 | 9.0 | 29.7 | 0.28 |
| | Had 0 hours of workshop | 58 | 8.1 | 28 | 13.0 | 36 | 6.5 | 0.002 |
| | Had 0 hours of coaching | 201 | 45.2 | 77 | 51.3 | 144 | 43.2 | 0.06 |
| | Had 0 hours of attending meeting | 231 | 51.7 | 77 | 51.3 | 144 | 43.2 | 0.41 |
| | Had 0 hours of higher ed. course enrollment | 85 | 79.0 | 113 | 79.6 | 232 | 77.1 | 0.82 |
| | Had 0 hours of any activity | 344 | 46.7 | 121 | 53.5 | 252 | 45.3 | 0.01 |
| **Receipt of assistance for professional development** | Assistance with direct costs (e.g., tuition, registration) | 262 | 25.0 | 90 | 25.6 | 194 | 25.2 | 0.74 |
| | Assistance with indirect costs (e.g., travel, child care) | 124 | 12.1 | 53 | 15.2 | 88 | 11.7 | 0.03[1] |
| | Release time to participate in activity | 290 | 27.8 | 104 | 29.6 | 213 | 27.8 | 0.38 |
| | Any of the above | 422 | 40.4 | 152 | 43.3 | 305 | 39.8 | 0.18 |
| **Likeliness of participation in scholarship program[2]** | N/A, already has a Bachelor's degree & ECE certification | 197 | 18.5 | 20 | 5.6 | 179 | 22.8 | 0.70 |
| | Definitely not | 50 | 5.7 | 16 | 4.7 | 35 | 5.8 | |
| | Very unlikely | 73 | 8.4 | 25 | 7.4 | 50 | 8.3 | |
| | Somewhat unlikely | 57 | 6.5 | 21 | 6.2 | 40 | 6.6 | |
| | Somewhat likely | 225 | 25.8 | 91 | 26.8 | 155 | 25.6 | |
| | Very likely | 466 | 53.5 | 186 | 54.9 | 326 | 53.8 | |
| **What would increase likeliness of scholarship program participation[3]** | Funding for child care while attending classes | 245 | 28.1 | 119 | 35.1 | 160 | 26.4 | <.001[1] |
| | Funding for travel costs to attend classes | 398 | 45.7 | 170 | 50.2 | 273 | 45.1 | 0.04 |
| | "Hotline" advisor to help select a program, enroll in classes, & complete in shortest time possible | 393 | 45.1 | 161 | 47.5 | 269 | 44.4 | 0.26 |
| | None of the above | 247 | 28.4 | 81 | 23.9 | 178 | 29.4 | 0.02[1] |

**Note.** P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less. [1] Denotes instances where the statistical significance level of result varied when analyses were run as teachers that serve any infant- and toddler-age children versus only preschool-age children. [2]Percentages on the likeliness teachers would participate in a scholarship program do not include the share of teachers who indicated this program would not be applicable for them. [3]Not mutually exclusive categories, teachers were not asked these questions if they already earned a Bachelor's degree and ECE certification.

Table A.5. Work Schedules of Lead Teachers

| Work with Children and Schedules | | All lead teachers | | Infant/Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *p-value* |
| **Work Schedule *(std dev. / mean)*** | Hours per week worked *(mean/standard deviation [sd])* | 34.3 | 11.5 | 36.2 | 10.9 | 33.4 | 11.9 | <.001 |
| | Works full time (≥30 hours) | 851 | 80.4 | 311 | 87.9 | 606 | 77.4 | <.001 |
| | Days per week worked *(mean/sd)* | 4.9 | 0.5 | 4.9 | 0.4 | 4.9 | 0.6 | 0.08 |
| | Worked 5 days per week | 947 | 89.6 | 327 | 92.6 | 691 | 88.4 | |
| | Months per year worked *(mean/sd* | 10.5 | 2.2 | 10.8 | 2.3 | 10.4 | 2.2 | <.001 |
| | Number of classrooms served per week | 1.8 | 1.4 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 1.7 | 1.4 | 0.004[1] |
| | 1 classroom | 661 | 63.3 | 198 | 57.4 | 491 | 63.6 | |
| | 2 classrooms | 217 | 21.0 | 71 | 20.6 | 166 | 21.5 | |
| | More than 2 classrooms | 161 | 15.7 | 76 | 22.0 | 115 | 14.8 | |
| | Days missed work due to sickness over last year *(mean/sd)* | 4.0 | 4.8 | 4.4 | 5.0 | 3.9 | 4.7 | 0.07[1] |
| | Days missed work due to caring for children/ others over last year *(mean/sd)* | 2.9 | 6.5 | 3.5 | 10.0 | 2.6 | 3.7 | 0.03 |
| **Work with Children** | Number of children in classroom *(mean/sd)* | 12.7 | 5.0 | 10.6 | 4.8 | 13.7 | 5.0 | <.001 |
| | Number of adults in classroom *(mean/sd)* | 2.2 | 1.6 | 2.5 | 1.6 | 2.1 | 1.5 | <.001 |
| | Adult: Child ratio *(mean/sd)* | 6.4 | 3.3 | 4.7 | 2.6 | 7.2 | 3.4 | <.001 |
| | When teacher plans classroom activities | | | | | | | |
| | While caring for the children | 83 | 7.9 | 43 | 12.1 | 51 | 6.5 | |
| | While at work, but not caring for the children | 420 | 40.0 | 142 | 39.9 | 318 | 40.6 | <.001 |
| | During personal time when not at work | 516 | 49.2 | 151 | 42.4 | 400 | 51.1 | |
| | No specific planning time | 30 | 2.9 | 20 | 5.6 | 14 | 1.8 | |

**Note.** P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less. [1] Denotes instances where the statistical significance level of result varied when analyses were run as teachers that serve any infant- and toddler-age children versus only preschool-age children.

Table A.6. Lead Teacher Compensation and Benefits

| Compensation and Benefits | | All lead teachers | | Infant/Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Mean $* | *sd* | *Mean $* | *sd* | *Mean $* | *sd* | *p-value* |
| **Pay from ECE work** | Average hourly wage[2] | 22.19 | 8.8 | 19.25 | 6.0 | 23.50 | 9.6 | |
| | Hourly wage quartiles | | | | | | | |
| | 25th percentile | 16.67 | | 16.00 | | 17.00 | | <.001 |
| | 50th percentile (median) | 19.23 | | 18.00 | | 20.00 | | |
| | 75th percentile | 24.61 | | 20.00 | | 27.88 | | |
| | Annual pay[3] *(sd/mean)* | 44,469 | 17,012 | 40,012 | 12,760 | 46,643 | 18,655 | |
| | Annual pay quartiles | | | | | | | |
| | 25th percentile | 33,800 | | 33,280 | | 34,320 | | <.001 |
| | 50th percentile (median) | 39,529 | | 37,440 | | 41,600 | | |
| | 75th percentile | 50,000 | | 41,600 | | 55,000 | | |
| | | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *p-value* |
| **Benefits[4]** | Retirement | 249 | 23.2 | 90 | 25.1 | 174 | 22.1 | 0.30 |
| | Paid vacation or time off | 562 | 52.3 | 224 | 62.4 | 391 | 49.7 | <.001 |
| | Paid sick leave | 670 | 62.4 | 238 | 66.3 | 493 | 62.6 | 0.06[1] |
| | Other benefit | 38 | 3.7 | 12 | 3.4 | 30 | 3.9 | 0.80 |
| **Receipt of financial assistance supports[4]** | Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/WorkFirst NJ | 25 | 2.5 | 13 | 3.8 | 17 | 2.3 | 0.05[1] |
| | Cash assistance for disabilities | 12 | 1.2 | 4 | 1.2 | 9 | 1.2 | 0.98 |
| | Housing assistance | 37 | 3.6 | 19 | 5.5 | 24 | 3.2 | 0.02[1] |
| | Food stamps | 83 | 8.1 | 49 | 14.3 | 50 | 6.6 | <.001 |
| | Child care subsidy/New Jersey Cares for Kids (NJCK) | 60 | 5.9 | 34 | 9.9 | 38 | 5.0 | <.001 |
| | Food Bank | 32 | 3.2 | 16 | 4.7 | 21 | 2.8 | 0.05[1] |
| | WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) | 38 | 3.8 | 18 | 5.3 | 24 | 3.2 | 0.07[1] |
| | Medicaid (e.g., NJ Family Care) | 178 | 17.0 | 91 | 25.6 | 108 | 13.9 | <.001 |
| | Other | 9 | 1.1 | 2 | 0.7 | 7 | 1.2 | 0.45 |
| | *Receives at least 1 type of support* | 253 | 25.4 | 129 | 38.2 | 156 | 21.0 | <.001 |
| | *Receives >1 type of support* | 101 | 11.5 | 60 | 17.8 | 70 | 9.4 | <.001 |
| **Health Insurance** | No health insurance | 149 | 14.3 | 54 | 15.2 | 110 | 14.1 | |
| | Insurance from employer or workplace | 236 | 22.6 | 56 | 15.7 | 196 | 25.2 | |
| | Insurance through spouse's, partner's, or parent's employment | 324 | 31.0 | 94 | 26.4 | 251 | 32.2 | |
| | Purchased private insurance | 85 | 8.1 | 31 | 8.7 | 63 | 8.1 | <.001 |
| | Medicaid (e.g., NJ Family Care) | 178 | 17.0 | 91 | 25.6 | 108 | 13.9 | |
| | Medicare | 45 | 4.3 | 19 | 5.3 | 33 | 4.2 | |
| | Military Health Care/VA or Campus/Tricare/Champ-VA | 7 | 0.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 0.9 | |
| | Other health insurance | 21 | 2.0 | 11 | 3.1 | 11 | 1.4 | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Household income** | Household income | | | | | | | |
| | Less than $25,000 | 72 | 10.4 | 36 | 15.5 | 46 | 9.0 | |
| | $25,000 - $34,999 | 140 | 20.3 | 73 | 31.3 | 83 | 16.3 | |
| | $35,000 - $74,999 | 211 | 30.6 | 60 | 25.8 | 157 | 30.8 | <.001 |
| | $75,000 - $149,999 | 181 | 26.2 | 50 | 21.5 | 144 | 28.3 | |
| | $150,000 and above | 86 | 12.5 | 14 | 6.0 | 79 | 15.5 | |
| | Share of household income that comes from ECE work | | | | | | | |
| | Less than 25% | 267 | 26.8 | 61 | 18.1 | 220 | 29.5 | |
| | 25% - 49% | 164 | 16.5 | 54 | 16.0 | 125 | 16.8 | |
| | 50% - 74% | 136 | 13.6 | 51 | 15.1 | 97 | 13.0 | <.001 |
| | 75% - 99% | 89 | 8.9 | 37 | 11.0 | 59 | 7.9 | |
| | 100% | 341 | 34.2 | 135 | 39.9 | 245 | 32.8 | |
| **Works a second job** | Has a second job | 131 | 12.8 | 34 | 9.8 | 108 | 14.1 | 0.04 |
| | Hours per week worked at second job *(mean/sd)* | 13.7 | 9.7 | 18.1 | 9.3 | 12.9 | 9.6 | 0.004 |

**Note.** P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less. Standard deviation = sd. [1] Denotes instances where the statistical significance level of result varied when analyses were run as teachers that serve any infant- and toddler-age children versus only preschool-age children. [2]Calculated from combining pay information teachers reported on the amount they were paid and metric of how often along with hours they reported working per week. In some cases (9%), we made adjustments to address instances of extremely low and high values of pay reported. [3]Teachers annual pay from child care work was calculated from their calculated hourly wage and number of hours they worked per week. However, we did not re-calculate the annual pay for teachers who had initially reported an annual amount for the pay they received from child care work. [4]Not mutually exclusive categories, teachers could select more than one response option.

Table A.7. Lead Teacher Commitment to Early Childhood Education

| Commitment to Early Childhood Education | | All lead teachers | | Infant /Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *p-value* |
| **Main reason teacher works with young children** | It is their career or profession | 513 | 49.0 | 153 | 43.1 | 393 | 50.3 | |
| | It is a way to help children | 372 | 35.5 | 133 | 37.5 | 268 | 34.3 | |
| | It is a step towards a related career | 66 | 6.3 | 29 | 8.2 | 46 | 5.9 | |
| | It is work they can do while own children are young | 56 | 5.4 | 21 | 5.9 | 44 | 5.6 | 0.04[1] |
| | It is a job with a paycheck | 25 | 2.4 | 10 | 2.8 | 20 | 2.6 | |
| | It is a way to help parents | 7 | 0.7 | 5 | 1.4 | 5 | 0.6 | |
| | Other reason | 8 | 0.8 | 4 | 1.1 | 5 | 0.6 | |
| **Looked for a new or additional job in past 3 months[2]** | Yes | 238 | 22.7 | 85 | 23.8 | 174 | 22.2 | 0.52 |
| **Among teachers the looked for work - main reason teacher looked for new/additional job[3]** | Find a job that pays more | 150 | 63.0 | 53 | 62.4 | 110 | 63.2 | 0.87 |
| | Find a job with better benefits | 98 | 41.2 | 37 | 43.5 | 73 | 42.0 | 0.58 |
| | Find second job in addition to current job at center | 85 | 35.7 | 27 | 31.8 | 66 | 37.9 | 0.34 |
| | Professional growth and/or advancement w/in ECE field | 66 | 27.7 | 21 | 24.7 | 55 | 31.6 | 0.44 |
| | Find improved working conditions | 47 | 19.8 | 20 | 23.5 | 32 | 18.4 | 0.28 |
| | See what else is available | 46 | 19.3 | 16 | 18.8 | 35 | 20.1 | 0.88 |
| | Hope to reduce commute or improve schedule | 27 | 11.3 | 11 | 12.9 | 22 | 12.6 | 0.56 |
| | Find a job with a better fit with training/experience | 23 | 9.7 | 7 | 8.2 | 20 | 11.5 | 0.58 |
| | Worried that this job may end | 22 | 9.2 | 5 | 5.9 | 20 | 11.5 | 0.18[1] |
| | Find a job with more stable hours | 22 | 9.2 | 10 | 11.8 | 15 | 8.6 | 0.32 |
| | Find summer employment | 21 | 8.8 | 2 | 2.4 | 21 | 12.1 | 0.01 |
| | Want to leave this field | 21 | 8.8 | 4 | 4.7 | 17 | 9.8 | 0.10[1] |
| | Other | 11 | 4.6 | 4 | 4.7 | 8 | 4.6 | 0.96 |
| **Teachers' intention regarding work 1 year from survey** | Continue teaching at this center | 778 | 74.7 | 250 | 70.6 | 585 | 75.2 | |
| | Serve in a different position at this center | 59 | 5.7 | 35 | 9.9 | 33 | 4.2 | |
| | Leave to teach at a different private center or Head Start | 22 | 2.1 | 12 | 3.4 | 20 | 2.6 | |
| | Leave to work at a public school | 84 | 8.1 | 21 | 5.9 | 68 | 8.7 | <.001 |
| | Leave to pursue a job not in child care or education | 43 | 4.1 | 15 | 4.2 | 31 | 4.0 | |
| | Retire | 17 | 1.6 | 8 | 2.3 | 12 | 1.5 | |
| | Other | 39 | 3.7 | 13 | 3.7 | 29 | 3.7 | |
| **Teacher-reported likeliness of leaving the ECE field within next 5 years** | Extremely likely | 102 | 9.8 | 23 | 6.5 | 87 | 11.2 | |
| | Somewhat likely | 189 | 18.1 | 61 | 17.1 | 145 | 18.7 | |
| | Neither likely nor unlikely | 212 | 20.3 | 79 | 22.2 | 150 | 19.3 | |
| | Somewhat unlikely | 197 | 18.9 | 78 | 22.0 | 131 | 16.9 | 0.04 |
| | Extremely unlikely | 343 | 32.9 | 115 | 32.3 | 264 | 34.0 | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **What is keeping teacher in ECE field[3]** | I love my job | 787 | 75.2 | 269 | 75.4 | 584 | 75.0 | 0.95 |
| | I love seeing my children's growth | 747 | 71.5 | 241 | 67.7 | 567 | 72.8 | 0.05[1] |
| | I am making a difference for children and families | 737 | 70.4 | 246 | 69.1 | 548 | 70.2 | 0.51 |
| | I like my team/coworkers | 557 | 53.3 | 173 | 48.6 | 423 | 54.3 | 0.03[1] |
| | My job is emotionally rewarding | 539 | 51.6 | 186 | 52.3 | 399 | 51.2 | 0.76 |
| | I like the school/program I work for | 524 | 50.1 | 168 | 47.2 | 393 | 50.5 | 0.17 |
| | I like the flexibility of the hours | 320 | 30.7 | 103 | 28.9 | 249 | 23.1 | 0.38 |
| | This is the job/field I am qualified for | 272 | 26.0 | 88 | 24.7 | 209 | 26.8 | 0.49 |
| | My job is financially rewarding | 91 | 8.7 | 34 | 9.6 | 69 | 8.9 | 0.50 |
| | I need the money and do not know if I could find another job | 69 | 6.6 | 18 | 5.1 | 58 | 7.5 | 0.15 |
| | I am working towards retirement | 64 | 6.1 | 17 | 4.8 | 49 | 6.3 | 0.19 |
| | I need the benefits | 59 | 5.7 | 22 | 6.2 | 41 | 5.3 | 0.60 |
| | Other | 16 | 1.5 | 9 | 2.5 | 8 | 1.0 | 0.06[1] |

**Note** P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less. [1] Denotes instances where the statistical significance level of result varied when analyses were run as teachers that serve any infant- and toddler-age children versus only preschool-age children. [2]Only lead teachers who indicated that they searched for a job were asked about the reasons they had looked (n = 238). [3]Responses are not mutually exclusive, and teachers could select more than one reason.

Table A.8. Lead Teacher Symptoms of Depression and Stress

| Depression and Stress | | All lead teachers | | Infant /Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | p-value |
| Depressive symptoms[2] | Total score (range of 0-30) *(mean/sd)* | 5.7 | 4.1 | 6.0 | 4.1 | 5.7 | 4.1 | 0.19 |
| | At risk of clinical depression (above cutoff score of 10 or higher) | 172 | 16.8 | 61 | 17.6 | 132 | 17.2 | 0.61 |
| Stressors that teachers worried about on a regular basis | Getting laid off | 53 | 5.1 | 17 | 4.8 | 44 | 5.6 | 0.79 |
| | Being sent home without pay if children do not show up | 63 | 6.1 | 30 | 8.5 | 40 | 5.2 | 0.02 |
| | Not being able to afford rent/mortgage | 262 | 25.2 | 105 | 29.8 | 186 | 23.9 | 0.01[1] |
| | Having utilities shut off | 149 | 14.4 | 65 | 18.5 | 103 | 13.4 | 0.01[1] |
| | Not being able to afford medical treatment | 232 | 22.4 | 92 | 26.2 | 164 | 21.2 | 0.04[1] |
| | Not being able to afford enough food | 161 | 15.7 | 74 | 21.1 | 106 | 13.8 | <.001 |
| | Not being able to pay other important bills | 237 | 22.9 | 100 | 28.5 | 163 | 21.1 | 0.001 |
| | Not being able to afford clothing or other necessities | 170 | 16.5 | 72 | 20.7 | 122 | 15.8 | 0.01[1] |
| | *Worried about at least 1 of above stressors* | *401* | *39.2* | *166* | *47.8* | *281* | *36.7* | *<.001* |
| | *Average total number of regular stressors (mean/sd)* | *1.3* | *2.1* | *1.6* | *2.2* | *1.2* | *2.0* | *<.001* |

**Note**. P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less. Standard deviation = sd.
[1]Denotes instances where the statistical significance level of result varied when analyses were run as teachers that serve any infant- and toddler-age children versus only preschool-age children. 2Depressive symptoms were measured using the Center of Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) scale.

Table A.9. Lead Teacher Work Environment

| Work Environment | | All lead teachers | | Infant /Toddler teachers | | Preschool teachers | | Comparison test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* | *p-value* |
| Teacher receives formal review and feedback on performance at least once per year | Yes | 861 | 82.6 | 289 | 81.9 | 644 | 82.7 | 0.64 |
| Share of teachers that agreed with has aspects of working in their program | My coworkers and I are treated with respect on a day-to-day basis | 911 | 87.5 | 303 | 86.1 | 680 | 87.4 | 0.32 |
| | Teamwork is encouraged | 923 | 89.4 | 311 | 88.6 | 682 | 88.6 | 0.53 |
| | I have help dealing with difficult children | 811 | 78.1 | 275 | 78.4 | 597 | 76.8 | 0.87 |
| | I have help dealing with difficult parents | 870 | 84.2 | 294 | 83.8 | 642 | 83.3 | 0.77 |
| | I spend too much time on paperwork | 280 | 27.1 | 75 | 21.4 | 232 | 30.0 | 0.003 |

**Note.** P-values are reported from Chi-squared ($x^2$) and mean comparison tests between lead teachers that served only infant- and toddler-age children versus any preschool-age children, with statistically significant differences having a p-value of 0.05 or less.