



Examining Center-Based ECE Workforce in the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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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 for 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 the future within our diverse state.



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INTRODUCTION

This brief describes the center-based early childhood care and education (ECE) workforce in New Jersey and compares it to national workforce data using the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE). The NSECE workforce survey, conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, provides insight into the characteristics of New Jersey (NJ) center-based ECE workforce and their experiences related to entering and exiting the early childhood field. The current descriptive analyses use restricted-access NSECE data specific to the ECE workforce in NJ (including those working in private center-based care, public preschool, and Head Start) and the national NSECE data to address the following two research questions:

1. Who cares for children aged 0-5 in NJ?
2. What motivates staff to enter and leave the early childhood education field in NJ?

Additionally, estimates of the NJ center-based ECE workforce are compared to national estimates throughout this brief.

▲ Key Highlights

- The center-based ECE workforce in New Jersey reported higher educational attainment compared to national estimates from the NSECE.
- The NJ center-based ECE workforce also reported higher rates of helping children and families as a reason for working in ECE compared to national estimates.
- NJ shows higher stability in its workforce, with a smaller percentage of the workforce looking for an additional job. Among child care staff looking for employment, most were looking for a second job, aligned with national estimates.

- Only a small percentage of NJ estimates fall within the confidence intervals of the national estimates, suggesting NJ surveys of the ECE workforce with larger samples are necessary to accurately understand state trends and inform policy.

DATA

The 2019 [NSECE](#) includes four nationally representative surveys of households, home-based early care and education (ECE) providers, center-based ECE providers, and the center-based ECE workforce. The present snapshot uses data from the 2019 NSECE Center-Based Workforce Survey.¹ The sample includes one or two randomly selected instructional staff per center or school who were working with children birth through age five, not yet enrolled in kindergarten. Instructional staff were aggregated into the following categories: (1) teacher, instructor, or lead teacher, (2) aide or assistant teacher, or (3) other/undetermined. The national estimates from the 2019 survey use data from approximately 5,192 ECE workers nationally, which is intended to be nationally representative of the approximately 1.36 million individuals in the center-based ECE workforce in 2019. More than 200 center-based ECE workers in New Jersey are included in the NJ sample, which is intended to be representative of about 33,700 center-based ECE workers in the state. National data included in this brief are derived from Datta & Zapata-Gietl (2023) and our own calculations using the NSECE public-use data files.² All NJ estimates apply survey weights to correct for the survey's sampling design.

RESULTS

▲ Characteristics of ECE Staff

The NSECE center-based ECE staff included two groups: (1) teachers or lead teachers, who are the individuals in the classroom in charge of the children's daily experiences and learning, and (2) aides or assistant teachers who support the teachers. In the NJ sample, 55.1% were teachers or lead teachers and 44.9% of the center-based ECE staff were aides or assistant teachers. Nationally, 62.7% were teachers or lead teachers and 37.3% of the survey sample were aides or assistant teachers. Compared to the national sample, the NJ sample had an underrepresentation of teachers and lead teachers and an overrepresentation of aides or assistant teachers.

The 2019 NSECE survey shows similarities as well as differences between the NJ sample of center-based ECE staff and the national sample (see Table 1). Nationally and in NJ, nearly the entire center-based ECE workforce was female. The distribution of age groups in the NJ sample skewed to more older teachers (e.g., more teachers over 45 years of age) compared to the national sample. Nearly half of the NJ workforce (47.6%) was older than 45 compared to only one-third (31.1%) of the center-based ECE workforce nationally. A slightly higher percentage of the NJ workforce (31.1%) spoke a language other

¹ New Jersey data are from the level 2 restricted files while national estimates come from the public use files.

² A R Datta, C Zapata-Gietl (2023). Workers in Center-based Early Care and Education Classrooms in 2012 and 2019: Counts and Characteristics. OPRE Report No. 2023-193, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://acf.gov/opre/report/workers-center-based-early-care-and-education-classrooms-2012-and-2019-counts-and>

than English compared to nationally (26.1%). NJ has a large and growing population of children who speak a language other than English, which makes having a workforce that can communicate effectively with families crucial.³ Surprisingly, NJ's center-based ECE workforce was less racially/ethnically diverse than the national sample: 85.8% of NJ's sample was White compared to 74% nationally. While the percentage of the workforce who was Hispanic was similar in NJ (16.4%) and nationally (17.2%), there was a larger difference in the percentage of the ECE workforce that was Black: 7.5% in NJ compared to 18.5% nationally. This finding is surprising given the diversity of the population in NJ: 52% of the population of NJ is White, non-Hispanic, 23% is Hispanic, 16% is Black, non-Hispanic, and 11% is Asian.⁴

The data suggests educational attainment may be an important difference between the NJ ECE workforce and the national ECE workforce. Specifically, 48.1% of teachers and lead teachers in NJ compared to 34.8% nationally had a bachelor's degree or higher. One possible driver for this difference is the bachelor's degree requirement for lead teachers in NJ's state-funded preschool program and requirements for salary parity with K-12 for those teachers even when working in a child care center within state pre-K.⁵ Notably, there was a higher percentage of aides and assistant teachers with a bachelor's degree in NJ (29.1%) compared to nationally (21.6%). This difference was smaller than for the teachers and lead teachers. Additionally, a separate survey of lead teachers in licensed center-based child care programs in NJ between 2023 and 2024 also found that 54% had a bachelor's degree or higher (see Stephens et al, 2025) complementing the NJ NSECE's findings.

³ Giang, I. T. N., & Park, M. (2022). New Jersey's Dual Language Learners. Migration Policy Institute: National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-nciip_dll-fact-sheet2022_nj-final.pdf

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts New Jersey." *Data Visualization*. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/faq/NJ/PSTo45224>

⁵ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2024>

TABLE 1. Selected characteristics of NJ and national ECE workforce

	New Jersey (%)	National (%)
Workforce Size		
Number of Aides & Assistant Teachers	19,300 (44.9%)	507,000 (37.3%)
Number of Teachers & Lead Teachers	23,700 (55.1%)	853,000 (62.7%)
Education & Training:		
Education: Teachers & Lead Teachers BA+	48.1	34.8
Education: Aides & Assistants BA+	29.1	21.6
CDA or certification: Teachers & Lead Teachers	67.6	56.3
CDA or certification: Aides & Assistants	31.9	36.3
Age		
18-29	26.4	33.1
30-45	26.0	35.7
45+	47.6	31.1
Speaks a language other than English	31.1	26.1
Female	99.1	97.9
Race for Lead & Assistant Teachers		
White	85.8	74.0
Black	7.5	18.5
Asian	3.1	2.8
Other	3.6	4.7
Ethnicity – Hispanic	16.4	17.2

Source: Author calculations based on NSECE 2019 restricted data. Note: Workforce race and ethnicity are captured using two separate questions: WF9_CHAR_RACE categorizes race as White, Black, or Asian and WF9_CHAR_HISP asks respondents to identify as Hispanic/Latino or Not Hispanic/Latino. All estimates use the recommended weights from the NSECE Project Team to account for aspects of the NSECE sampling design.

▲ Entering & Leaving the ECE Workforce

The center-based ECE workforce in NJ and nationally reported similar reasons for working in the early childhood field. Table 2 reports instructional staff's top five reasons for working in ECE. NJ ECE classroom staff were more likely to report wanting to help children and families (31.7%) compared to the national sample (22.3%).

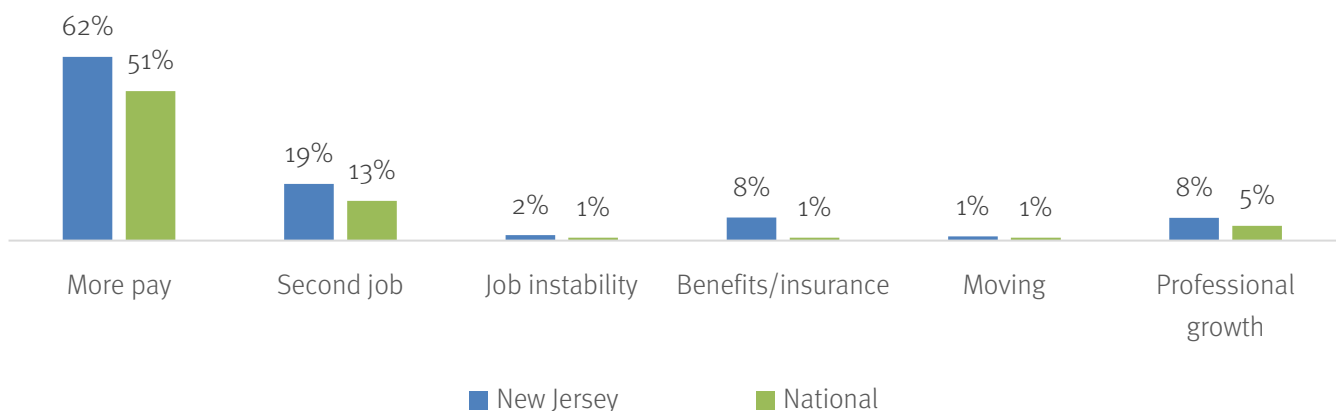
In NJ, 16% of ECE classroom staff reported fewer than five years of experience caring for children under age 13, which is lower than 32% nationally. Seven percent of ECE classroom staff in NJ reported more than 25 years of experience caring for children under age 13, compared to 11% nationally.

TABLE 2. NJ and National Workforce Years of Experience & Main Purpose for ECE work

	New Jersey	National
Reasons for Working in ECE		
Career-related purpose	26.5	27.9
To help children and families	31.7	22.3
Personal calling	41.2	41.1
Earn money	0.0	2.7
Convenience	0.0	4.6
None of these reasons	0.0	1.4
Years of Experience		
Less than 5	15.6	31.9
More than 25	6.9	10.9

Source: Author calculations based on NSECE 2019 restricted data. Note: All estimates use the recommended weights from the NSECE Project Team to account for aspects of the NSECE sampling design.

In New Jersey, approximately 13% of the workforce reported looking for a new or additional job in the past three months compared to 30% nationally. This suggests a higher level of stability in the New Jersey ECE workforce relative to national trends. Of those looking for a new or additional job, respondents were most often looking for a second job (19%) as part of the job search, with 8% seeking new employment for professional growth, and 8% looking for jobs with benefits and health insurance. Among those looking for a new or additional jobs, New Jersey and national rates were comparable for reasons related to job instability, moving, and professional growth. However, a larger share of the New Jersey workforce reported searching for more pay, a second job, and benefits/insurance.

FIGURE 1. ECE Workforce's Main Reason Looking for Work

NEW JERSEY ANALYSES USING NSECE

We also aimed to understand the extent to which the national NSECE can be used to inform our understanding of the ECE workforce in NJ. If national surveys generally capture similar trends as in NJ, then the national surveys can be used to guide policy and programmatic decisions and minimize the need for state-level survey efforts. We compared 24 NSECE NJ point estimates for workforce characteristics, including demographic information, years of experience, career search, and professional development opportunities to the national confidence intervals.

We found only 12.5% of NJ estimates fall within the confidence intervals around the national estimates, suggesting little overlap between the national and NJ samples. Table 3 below shows these estimates for staff certification, supports received, and annual performance feedback, which fall within the national confidence intervals. However, other measures of personal characteristics such as years of experience in ECE, number of years working in the program, as well as assistance with costs or release time for professional development (not shown), fall outside these national confidence intervals. Therefore, state surveys of the ECE workforce with larger samples are likely necessary to understand the characteristics of the ECE workforce in New Jersey and should be preferred over national surveys. Future efforts to coordinate and expand data collection efforts using the robust structure and foundation from the NSECE can be used to augment and expand data collection in NJ.

TABLE 3. Workforce characteristics with compatibility between NJ and National NSECE Samples

	NJ N	NJ Mean	National NSECE Survey Confidence Interval		Within Confidence Interval?
			Low	High	
Staff member has state certification	80	40.1	32.8	40.5	Yes
Staff member receives specialist coaching, mentoring, and consultation	80	35.9	31.0	38.4	Yes
Staff member receives annual performance feedback	80	73.2	72.4	78.4	Yes

Note: Sample sizes are suppressed due to NSECE Level 2 restricted data requirements. Only NJ variables falling within the national confidence interval are shown.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We utilized the 2019 restricted NSECE NJ data to examine the characteristics of the ECE workforce at center-based ECE programs. We found both similarities and differences in the characteristics of the center-based ECE workforce in NJ compared to nationally. Most notably, teachers and lead teachers in NJ were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher than nationally, and the NJ sample was less diverse than the national sample. A smaller percentage of the NJ ECE workforce reported looking for a new or additional job compared to the national sample. We also find high levels of experience and higher commitment to children and families in the NJ sample. However, nearly one-fifth of the NJ workforce reported looking for a second job.

These results should be interpreted with caution: while the NSECE is designed to be nationally representative, specific state samples may not be representative of that state. Additionally, given sample size limits,⁶ this report also could not examine how characteristics of the center-based ECE workforce in NJ differ by auspice (e.g., child care, public school, Head Start). The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) offered states the opportunity to augment the existing state samples to increase sample sizes and improve analytic power. However, only Minnesota committed funds to supplement the federal data collection work.⁷ New Jersey could consider this type of supplement for future data collection efforts to utilize the data in more meaningful and reliable ways.

Given these limitations, complementary work by NIEER, including a recent survey of lead center-based child care teachers is a more reliable source of data about the current center-based child care lead teacher workforce in NJ.⁸ While it does not include assistant teachers or aides, subsequent workforce surveys in NJ could be expanded to do so. The forthcoming 2024 NSECE will also provide additional national data to support policy decisions as the ECE workforce recovers from COVID-19 and provide an opportunity to examine the role of pandemic-era child care relief funds.

⁶ There are limits set in sample size by the NSECE Project Time on reporting for small sub-groups that must be strictly followed for reporting with restricted files.

⁷ National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2022). 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education Data Collection and Sampling Methodology Report. OPRE Report 2022-118, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁸ See Stephens, C., Friedman-Krauss, A., Nores, M., & Kent, A. (2025). Child Care Lead Teachers in New Jersey: Full Report. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://nieer.org/rutgers-child-care-research-collaborative>

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ABOUT NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts and disseminates independent research and analysis to inform early childhood education policy.

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