

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 02, 2022

CONTACT: nieer@berlinrosen.com

Unworthy Wages: Preschool Teacher Compensation Low and Unequal

Teachers in state-funded preschool programs receive lower pay and fewer benefits than their K-12 peers

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ – While many state-funded preschool programs require lead teachers to have the same credentials as kindergarten teachers, few provide preschool teachers with pay and benefits comparable that of kindergarten teachers, according to new research released today by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

Unworthy wages: State-funded preschool teacher salaries and benefits compares teacher compensation in state-funded pre-K programs, based on data collected for the [2021 State of Preschool Yearbook](#). This report, by NIEER’s Alex Kilander, Karin Garver, and W. Steven Barnett focuses on lead teachers in public pre-K programs serving about 1.4 million children during the pandemic-impacted 2020-21 school year. Our report does not cover private programs that are not part of state-funded preschool programs.

NIEER’s report details qualifications requirements, pay, and benefit parity with K-12 for preschool teachers state-by-state. Twenty states have no compensation parity policies for teachers in state-funded preschool programs, and just four states require pay parity for all preschool teachers. Preschool teachers can expect to earn \$13,645 less per year than colleagues teaching older children even when they work in the same school building. Preschool teachers in private providers of state-funded preschool education were the most poorly paid; across states their annual salaries averaged 75 percent of those of their preschool counterparts in public schools and just 60 percent of K-12 teacher pay. Download the [report](#)

Preschool teachers were equally unlikely to be provided parity with K-12 for such important fringe benefits as retirement, health insurance, and paid time off. Although 22 states provide K-12 benefit parity to all preschool teachers in public schools, the others do not. Just one state requires benefit parity for preschool teachers not employed by the public schools. As nearly all states use private providers as well as public schools to deliver state funded preschool programs lack of benefit parity is widespread.

These large gaps in pay and benefits persisted through a pandemic that has made teaching preschool even more difficult. A recent [survey](#) found teacher shortages to be ubiquitous across public and private early childhood programs, with low pay overwhelmingly reported as the explanation for recruitment and retention problems. “State funded preschool programs can expect shortages of qualified teachers unless inadequate compensation and lack of parity with kindergarten and the primary grades is addressed,” according to one of the report’s authors, [Dr. Barnett](#).

The 2021 State of Preschool Yearbook survey was supported with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The National Institute for Early Education Research at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ, improves the learning and development of young children by producing and communicating knowledge that transforms policy and practice.