



# 2 About the Early Childhood Workforce

## Data Challenges

Painting a detailed portrait of those who fulfill teaching and caregiving roles is exceedingly difficult. Depending on the data source used, estimates of the size and scope of the early childhood workforce vary widely. In part, these variations can be attributed to whether researchers gather information provided by parents, by members of the early childhood workforce, or by their employers.



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When parents are asked about the arrangements they use for their children's care and education, data sources often include information about the paid early care and education workforce as well as the larger caregiving population, which encompasses those who do not receive payment for their services. Thus, depending on whether they receive payment, family members, friends, or neighbors may be classified as paid providers or as part of the wider unpaid caregiving population.<sup>7</sup> The most recent comprehensive national study of this type is the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) conducted in 2012. It details demographic and occupational characteristics of the paid workforce, in both center- and home-based settings, as well as more limited information about the larger unpaid caregiving population.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DoL) and the U.S. Census Bureau, two additional sources of workforce data, rely on individual workers and their employers to provide profiles of the early childhood workforce. The DoL gathers information from business establishments employing workers across all occupations in the country, including those defined as child care and preschool workers. The Bureau of the Census gathers information from individual wage earners who self-select into specific occupations, such as child care worker, preschool teacher, and prekindergarten or kindergarten teacher, as well as from self-employed individuals in the child care field. The DoL and Census sources provide aggregate data for the nation as a whole as well as state-level and some limited regional data.

The national snapshot of the early childhood workforce presented here draws on CSCCE's analysis of the 2012 NSECE data, which permits the most detailed examination of the characteristics of those who care for and educate young children in different settings compared to other national-level data sources. However, since state-level analysis is not possible for all states in the NSECE, we relied on data from the DoL and Census in the sections of the *Index* that report the size and earnings of the early childhood workforce by state.

## A National Snapshot

Every day, in homes and centers across the country, approximately two million adults are paid<sup>8</sup> to care for and educate more than 12 million<sup>9</sup> children between birth and age five. Regardless of setting or role, this almost exclusively female workforce is responsible for safeguarding and facilitating development and learning of our nation's youngest children. Nonetheless, professional expectations and compensation for the role of early educator vary greatly based on setting and program type, resulting in identifiable differences related to demographic characteristics, educational attainment, and income, which are highlighted in this section.

The 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) is the most recent comprehensive source of national data that differentiates the early childhood workforce by job role and setting. The NSECE includes information about approximately one million teaching staff employed in center-based programs, including programs sponsored by public school districts or funded with Head Start dollars. The NSECE also contains information about approximately one million paid home-based providers, distinguishing

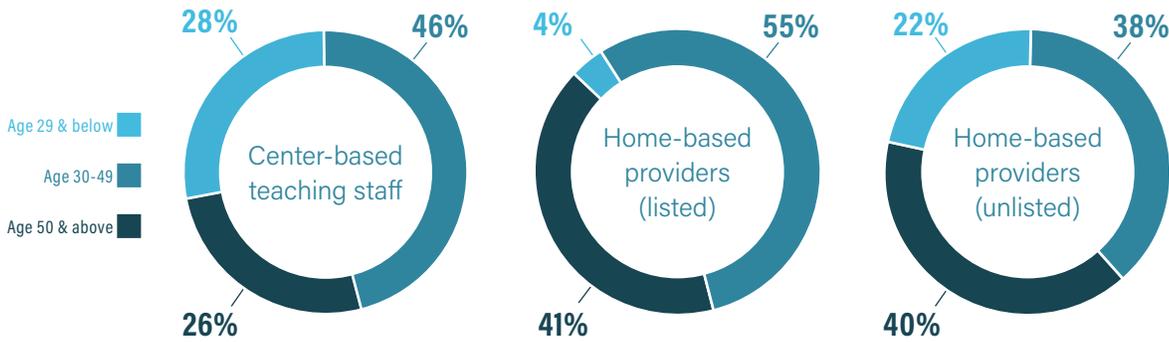
**“Every day, in homes and centers across the country, approximately two million adults are paid<sup>8</sup> to care for and educate more than 12 million<sup>9</sup> children between birth and age five.**

between “home based listed” and “home based unlisted” paid providers.<sup>10</sup> The “listed” providers are defined as individuals appearing on state or national lists of early care and education services, such as licensed, regulated, license-exempt, or registered home-based providers. “Unlisted paid” individuals receive payment for the care of at least one child but do not appear on state or national lists.

The information that follows about the one million teaching staff employed in center-based programs and approximately the same number of paid individuals working in home-based settings is based on CSCCE calculations using NSECE data (see Figure 2.1). We draw distinctions between teachers and assistant teachers/aides, when notable.<sup>11</sup> The latter group constitutes about one-third (34 percent) of the center-based workforce. We also distinguish between listed and unlisted paid providers.<sup>12</sup>

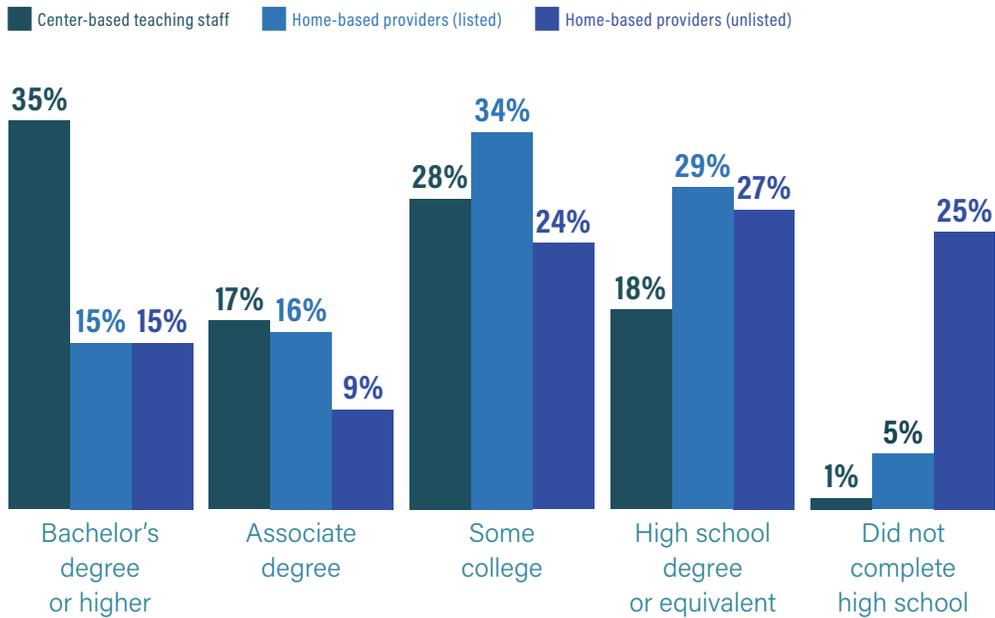
**Figure 2.1** Characteristics of the Early Childhood Workforce in the United States, 2012

**AGE:** The early childhood workforce spans a wide age range, with home-based providers notably older than those working in centers.

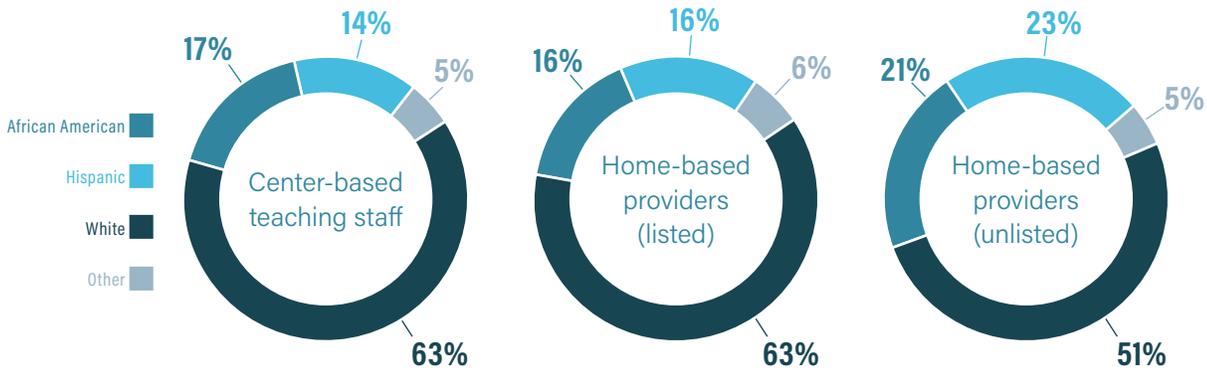


**EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:** Educational backgrounds vary widely among the early childhood workforce, from bachelor's or higher degrees to limited formal schooling.

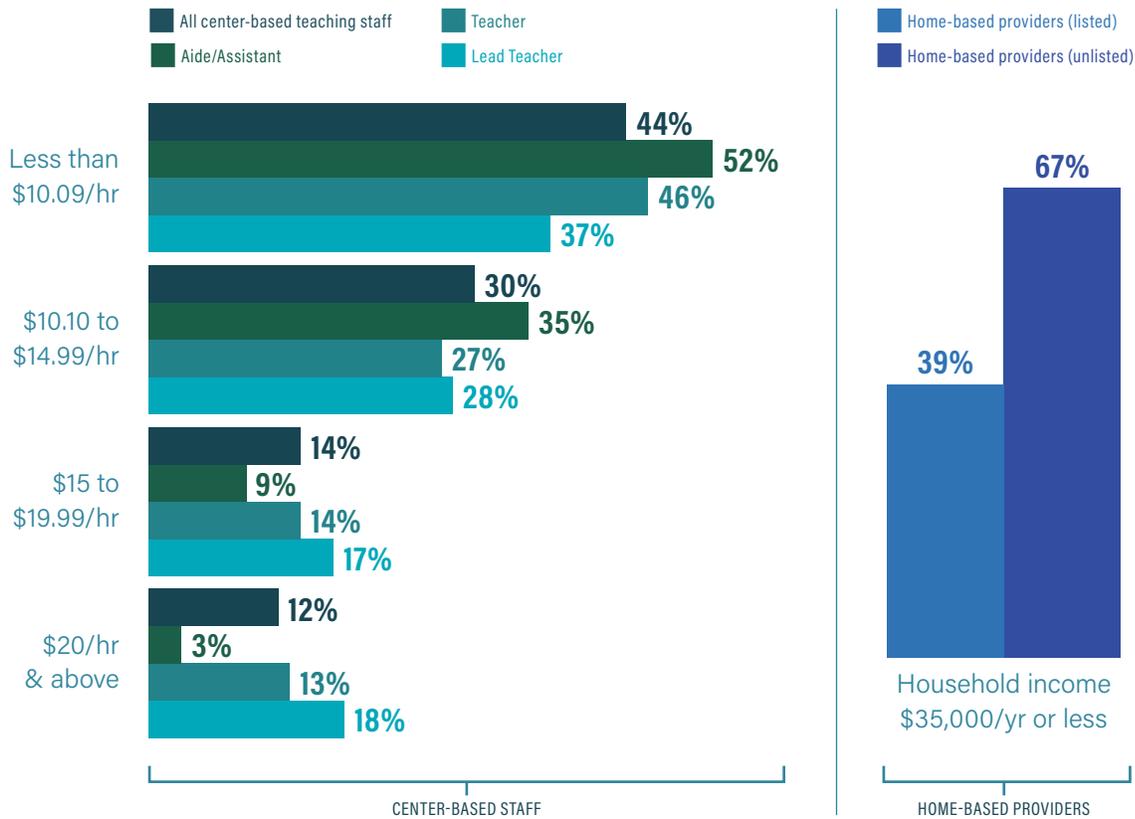
Center-based teaching staff reported higher levels of educational attainment compared to home-based providers, with listed home-based providers being more likely than unlisted paid providers to have graduated from high school, attended college, and/or earned two-year degrees.



**RACE/ETHNICITY:** The racial and ethnic profile of the early childhood workforce varies depending on setting and within setting by role (e.g., assistant teachers/aides versus teachers).



**INCOME:** Low earnings characterize paid work caring for and educating young children across all settings and roles.



Source: CSCCE analysis of the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education.  
 Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

## Endnotes

- 7 Burton et al. (2002). *Estimating the Size and Components of the U.S. Child Care Workforce and Caregiving Population: Key Findings from the Child Care Workforce Estimate*. Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce.
- 8 The NSECE estimates that an additional 2.7 million *unpaid* home-based teachers and caregivers are regularly responsible for young children not their own for at least five hours each week. We have not included unlisted unpaid providers in this snapshot, focusing only on those who are paid to care for and educate young children, as explained above. We recognize, however, that unpaid individuals fulfill an important role in the lives of children and families and provide an essential service to our nation.
- 9 U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). *How Do We Know? Child Care: An Important Part of American Life*. Retrieved from [https://www.census.gov/how/pdf/child\\_care.pdf](https://www.census.gov/how/pdf/child_care.pdf)
- 10 According to the NSECE methodology, listed paid providers constitute approximately 10 percent of the home-based provider population. However, it is somewhat difficult to assess the difference between listed and unlisted paid providers because states not only define family child care differently, but also have varied criteria determining which providers are required to be regulated or licensed and which are exempt. For more information, see Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. (2015). *Research Brief #2: Trends in Family Child Care Home Licensing Regulations and Policies for 2014*. Retrieved from <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/research-brief-2-trends-family-child-care-home-licensing-regulations-and-policies-2014>; Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. (2015). *Research Brief #3: Trends in Group Child Care Home Licensing Regulations and Policies for 2014*. Retrieved from <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/research-brief-3-trends-group-child-care-home-licensing-regulations-and-policies-2014>
- 11 The NSECE 2013 OPRE brief reported worker roles in four categories, leaving aides and assistant teachers separate. See National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2013). *Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education (ECE) Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings, National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2013-38. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/26496/pdf>. The categories of Aide and Assistant Teacher listed on the survey have been combined in the *SECW Index* due to a lack of clear distinction between them. Also, please note that this variable captures the role of the worker as reported by the center-based provider, not the worker's reported role for him/herself.
- 12 We use the term "unlisted paid" to distinguish these providers from unpaid unlisted providers included in the NSECE data set.