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**ABOUT THE  
EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
WORKFORCE**

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 **EVERY DAY, IN HOMES AND CENTERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY,** approximately two million adults, mostly women, are paid to care for and educate<sup>16</sup> approximately 10 million children between birth and age five.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of setting or role, this workforce is responsible for safeguarding and facilitating the development and learning of our nation's youngest children. Yet, across almost all settings in the country, early educators are in economic distress, and extant data suggest that this financial insecurity falls disproportionately on women of color, who comprise about 40 percent of this workforce, and on those working with infants and/or toddlers.<sup>18,19</sup> Concerned stakeholders seek comprehensive, reliable, and current data to better understand these circumstances in order to inform sound policy and investments. Nonetheless, painting a detailed portrait of those who are paid to provide early care and education and outlining the differences among the members of this workforce remains an exceedingly difficult endeavor.

For the ECE workforce, there is no equivalent at the national level to the federally supported K-12 School and Staffing Survey (SASS), a series of regularly updated questionnaires that provide data about the K-12 workforce and the public, private, and charter schools in which they work.<sup>20</sup> The 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) is the most recent comprehensive source of national data that differentiate the early childhood workforce by job role and setting.<sup>21</sup> The NSECE gathers 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.

The 2016 *Index* included a national snapshot of these 2 million early educators represented in the NSECE with regard to age, race and ethnicity, educational background, and income. While this snapshot is a useful introduction to the workforce, it is critical to further examine differences among those working with children of varied ages and in different settings and to identify specific needs and circumstances experienced by particular groups of early educators.

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## Defining the ECE Workforce

Sixty-five percent of children under the age of six in the United States have all available parents in the labor force, and most of these children spend time in the care of someone other than a parent.<sup>22</sup> But unlike elementary education, where all children are guaranteed access to a public-school setting, early care and education has yet to be recognized and supported as a public good. Thus, the cost burden of services is borne primarily by families who must make choices that are constrained by what they have access to or what they can afford.

Children may routinely be cared for in regulated center- or home-based programs, by individual providers like other family members, neighbors or nannies, or in a combination of these arrangements. The majority of children from birth through age five, but not yet in kindergarten, who participate in some form of early care and education attend a regulated program. Nearly 50 percent (6.98 million) of these children attend a center-based program.<sup>23,24</sup> Another 20 percent of these children receive services from a paid home-based provider, though a lack of data and differing state regulations make it difficult to determine which of these are individual arrangements and which are group settings. The remaining 30 percent of children from birth through age five receive care from an unpaid provider, often referred to as a family, friend, or neighbor (FFN) provider.

Discussions about the workforce are complicated because terms like “child care provider” have historically been applied to anyone providing care and education to young children, from parents and grandparents to those working in preschool settings, without regard to distinctions between familial relationships and intentional programming in formal, structured settings. Furthermore, the varied options used by families, coupled with the disparate regulations set by states regarding qualifications for service providers and boundaries of what constitutes licensed and/or group early care and education makes it difficult to answer questions such as: Who comprises the early educator workforce? What are the characteristics of members of the workforce? When considering qualification requirements and other workforce policies, to whom do these policies apply?

Yet, for the purposes of policymaking, these distinctions are important. It is unreasonable, for example, to suggest that a parent or grandparent be required to hold a bachelor’s degree to care for a child — just as we would not suggest the parent of a second-grader have a teaching credential. But when that child is in a formal group setting for a portion of their day, as with public school teachers, it is reasonable to expect that their teacher be well-versed in the science of early learning and development and capable of implementing

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research-based practices to facilitate the development and learning of each individual child in their charge.

In this report, when we speak to policies, programs, and financing for the early childhood workforce, we align our boundaries of the workforce with those articulated by the International Labor Office and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and define early educators as those:

- Working in programs that “are usually school-based or otherwise institutionalized for a group of children (for example, center-, community-, or home-based), excluding purely private family-based arrangements that may be purposeful but are not organized in a program (for example, care and informal learning provided by parents, relatives, friends, or domestic workers)” and
- Who are “responsible for learning, education, and care activities of young children.”<sup>25</sup>

## Diversity, Equity, & Stratification

▶ **THE ECE SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES** is not immune to issues of structural inequality based on gender, class, linguistic and cultural diversity, and race that are woven throughout our nation’s institutions and culture. It is critical to acknowledge that the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the workforce has not translated into equity with regard to access to education or job roles. In addition, despite what the science reveals about the complexity of nurturing the development and learning of young children, perceptions persist that the younger the child, the less skilled the work. Combined, these barriers and perceptions have translated into multiple points of stratification with real consequences for the opportunities and earnings of the workforce. As policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders seek to improve ECE workforce policies and investments as a whole, it is imperative that such inequities be identified, particularly at the state and local level, to inform strategies to break down systemic barriers, disrupt stratification, and maintain or expand the diversity of the workforce.

While the ECE sector suffers from a workforce data deficit that hampers our ability to fully illuminate inequities and stratification,<sup>26</sup> the NSECE does provide the ability to examine some points of stratification at the national level, as well as the state level for a small number of states with large populations, for a single point in time (2012). To shine a spotlight on points of stratification that require attention, we identify areas of differentiation among the workforce from a national perspective and provide illustrations of how these vary across states.

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The NSECE distinguishes between listed and unlisted home-based providers. 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. 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 have varied criteria determining which providers are required to be regulated or licensed and which are exempt.

Unless otherwise noted, the following data snapshots reflect CSCCE analysis of the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.<sup>27</sup>

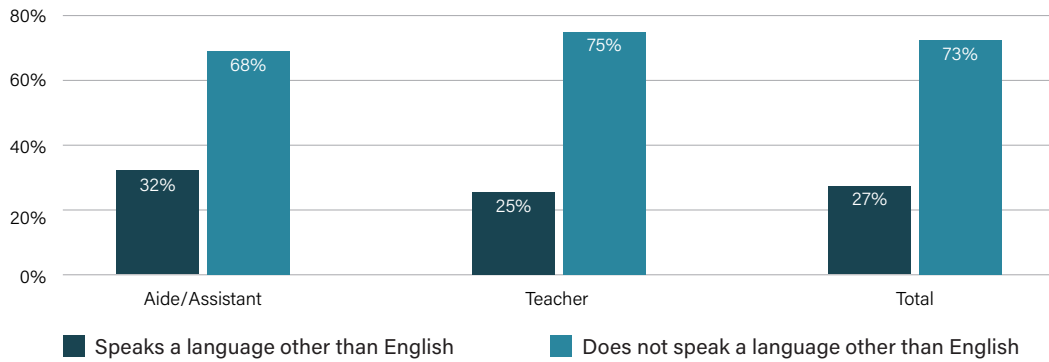
It is important to examine state and local data when considering early childhood workforce policy. As examples, we highlight certain aspects of the workforce employed in California, Illinois, and New York. These states were selected because NSECE state sample sizes were large enough to allow for public reporting across several variables.

# Languages Spoken

**NATIONALLY, THE CENTER-BASED EARLY** childhood workforce appears to be more linguistically diverse than the U.S. adult population as a whole.<sup>28</sup> Within the ECE workforce, assistant teachers are more likely than teachers to report the ability to speak a language other than English. Linguistic diversity varies by state and is reflected in the proportion of the center-based early childhood workforce that speaks a language other than English. However, across states, assistant teachers are more likely than teachers to speak a language other than English. Comparable data on the home-based population are not available.

**FIGURE 2.1**

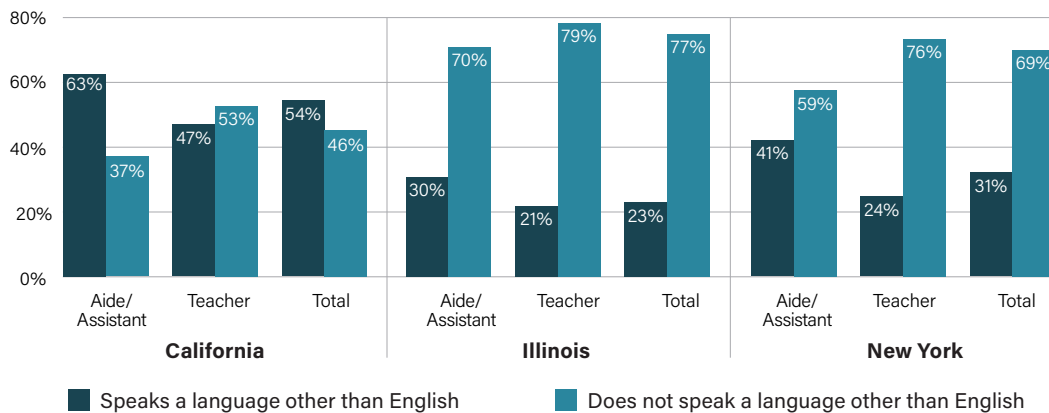
## Languages Spoken by Center-Based Staff by Job Role: National



*Note: The NSECE asked center-based teaching staff, "Do you speak a language other than English?"; thus, from the available data, we cannot distinguish those who speak English and another language from those who only speak a language other than English.*

**FIGURE 2.2**

## Languages Spoken by Center-Based Staff by Job Role: State Examples

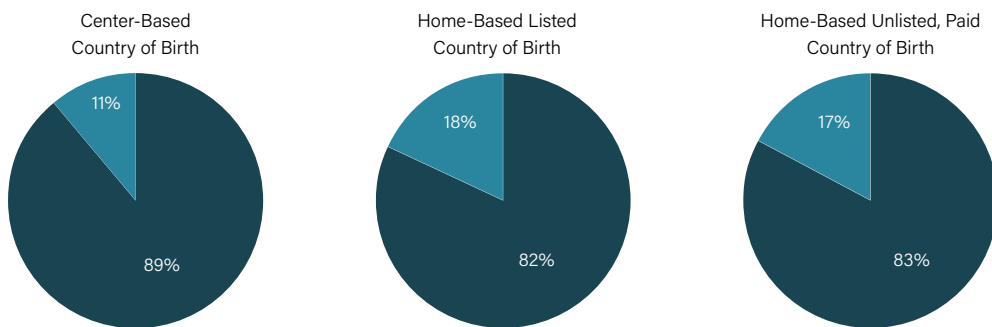


## Country of Birth

**ACROSS ECE SETTINGS, THE PERCENTAGE OF EARLY EDUCATORS** who are immigrants to the United States roughly mirrors that of the total U.S. adult population (16 percent)<sup>29</sup> but is higher than the K-12 teaching workforce (8 percent).<sup>30</sup> Nationally, compared with center-based settings, the listed and unlisted home-based workforce most closely resemble each other; however, this pattern varies by state. More nuanced data are needed to understand the diversity among immigrants, to clarify how this diversity varies at the state and local levels, and to identify challenges that immigrants may face in engaging in workforce development. Such information can be helpful for considering resources (e.g., language supports and foreign transcript evaluation) that may be necessary to engage with and support early educators who are immigrants.<sup>31</sup>

**FIGURE 2.3**

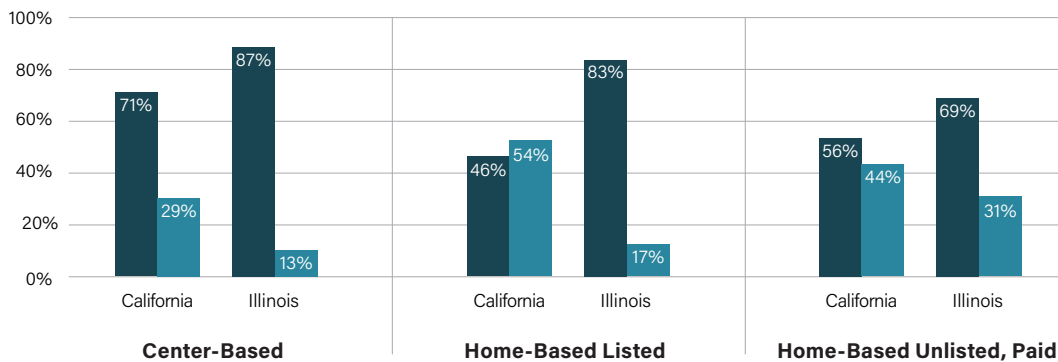
### Country of Birth by Setting: National



*Note: The 258 different country options other than the United States listed in the NSECE have been collapsed in order to compare national with state-level data.*

**FIGURE 2.4**

### Country of Birth by Setting: State Examples



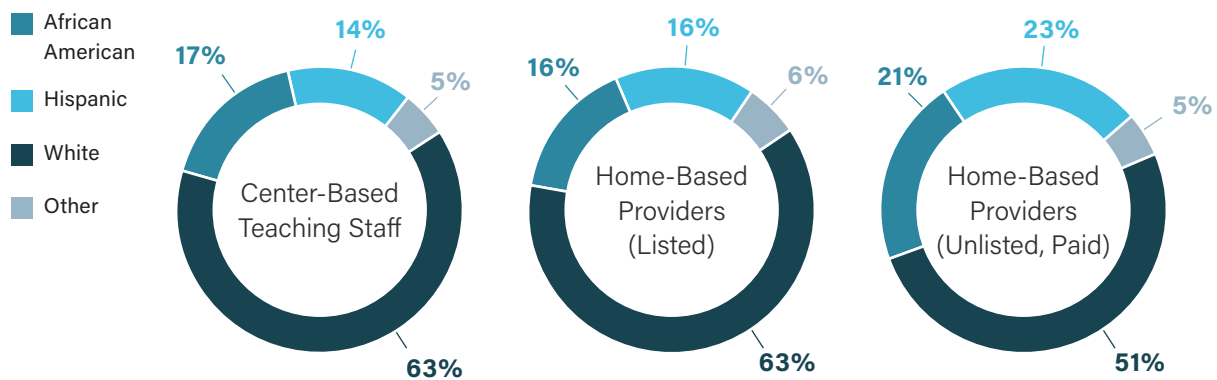
*Note: The 258 different country options other than the United States listed in the NSECE have been collapsed due to limited state-level sample sizes.*

## Race/Ethnicity

**AS RECORDED IN THE 2016 INDEX, THE NATIONAL** racial and ethnic composition of the early childhood workforce varies depending on setting. The majority of the early childhood workforce across settings identify as white. Among the center and home-based population, about 40 percent are people of color, as are nearly half of home-based unlisted providers. This composition stands in stark contrast to the K-12 teaching workforce, in which more than 80 percent of teachers are white.<sup>32</sup>

FIGURE 2.5

### Race/Ethnicity by Setting: National





## Job Roles & Race/Ethnicity

At the national level, Hispanic workers are underrepresented in the role of teacher and overrepresented in aide/assistant teacher roles, while African American and white/Caucasian early educators closely match the ECE workforce as a whole. However, the ability to distinguish patterns of stratification at the state and local levels is important, as this stratification may differ from national averages. In New York, for example, both Hispanic and African American early educators are overrepresented in aide/assistant teacher roles, compared to their population in the ECE workforce, and white/Caucasian workers are underrepresented as aides/assistant teachers.

FIGURE 2.6

### Job Role of Center-Based Staff by Race/Ethnicity: National

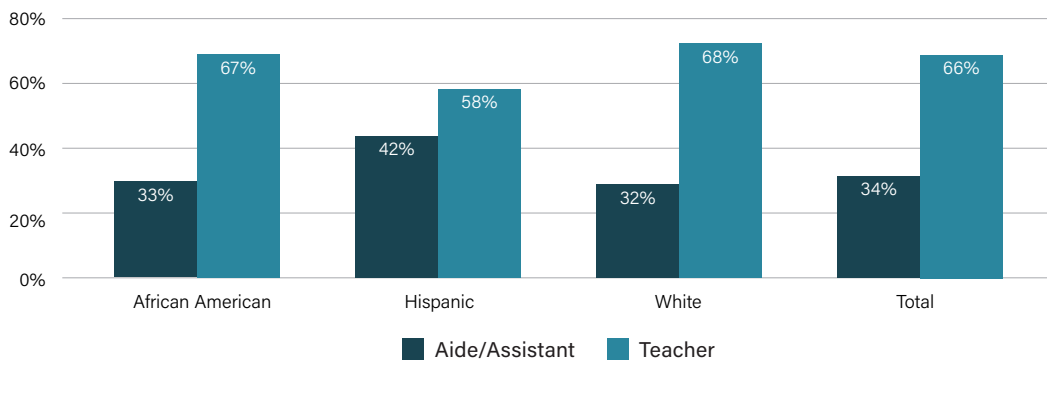
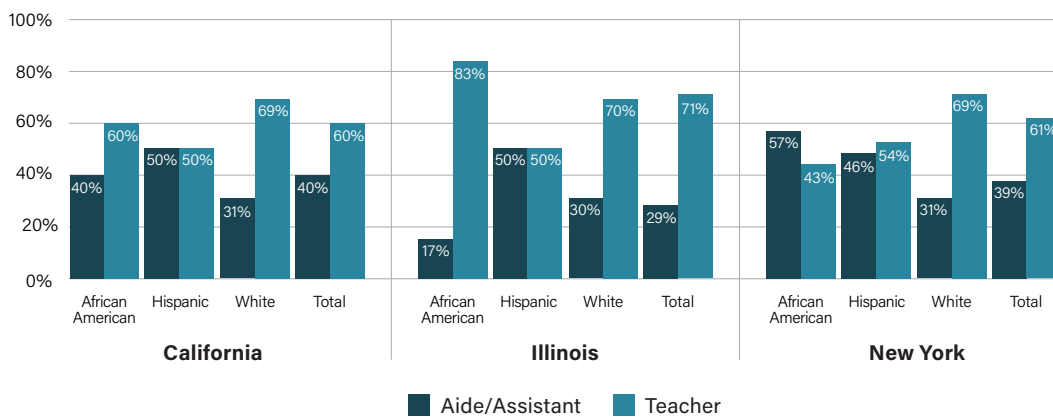


FIGURE 2.7

### Job Role of Center-Based Staff by Race/Ethnicity: State Examples

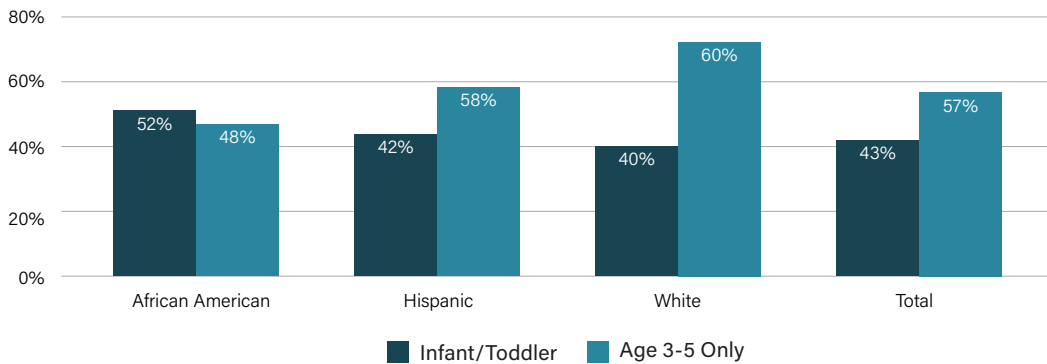


## Age of Children Served & Race/Ethnicity of Educators

Understanding the age of children with whom early educators work is important, since we have documented that the younger the child, the lower the pay (see [Earnings, p. 29](#)). Nationally, African American early educators are disproportionately represented among the ECE workforce who teach infants and/or toddlers, while Hispanic and white/Caucasian early educators closely match the overall breakdown of the ECE workforce as a whole. However, this pattern of stratification by age of children taught looks different across states. In New York, for example, African Americans are overrepresented among those who teach only preschool-age children, while Hispanics are more likely to teach infants and/or toddlers, compared to teachers from other racial/ethnic groups.

**FIGURE 2.8**

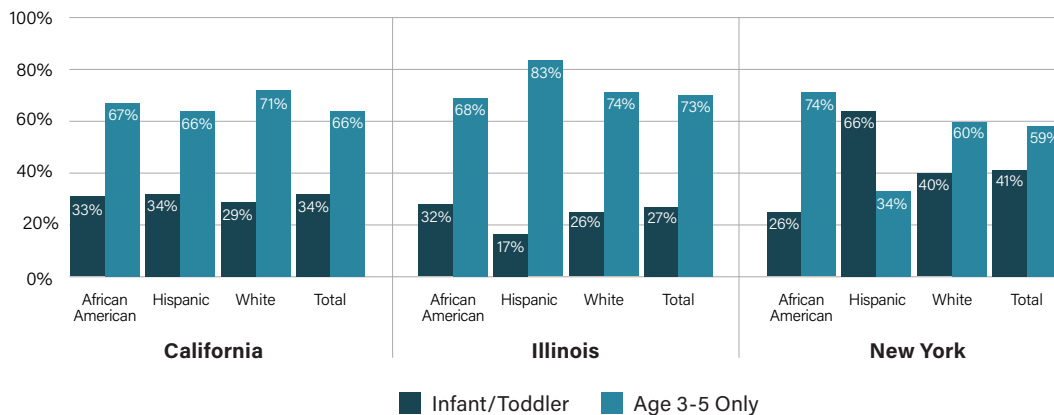
### Age of Children Served by Race/Ethnicity of Center-Based Staff: National



*Note: Early educators in the "Infant/Toddler" category either work exclusively with infants and/or toddlers, or with both infants and/or toddlers as well as preschool-age children. Those in the "Age 3-5 Only" category work exclusively with preschool-age children.*

**FIGURE 2.9**

### Age of Children Served by Race/Ethnicity of Center-Based Staff: State Examples



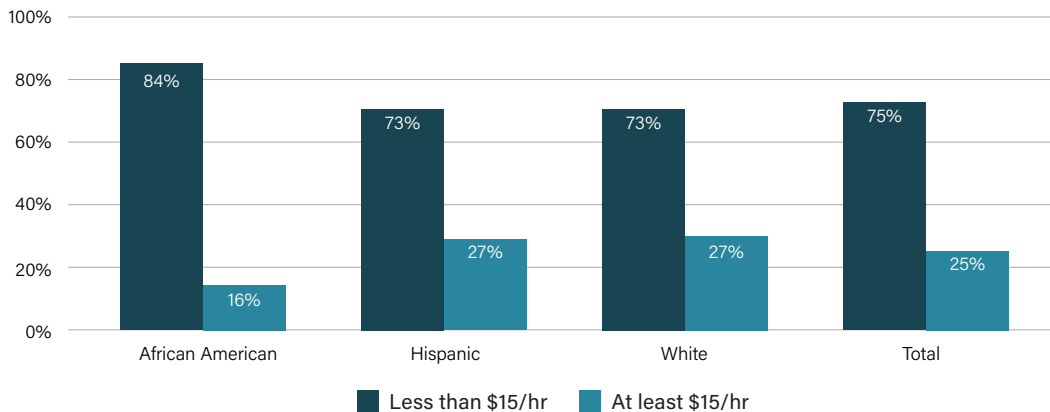
## Income & Race/Ethnicity

Across almost all ECE settings in the country, early educators are in economic distress due to the persistently low wages they earn (see [Earnings, p. 29](#)). This reality falls disproportionately on early educators of color, in part because they are also more likely to work as assistants and to work with the youngest children, but also because the racial inequities that are woven through U.S. culture are also present in early care and education.

In particular, center-based African American early educators are more likely to earn less than \$15 per hour than all other racial/ethnic groups in the early education workforce nationwide. Even after controlling for educational attainment, African American workers still earn lower wages than white workers (\$0.78 less per hour, or \$1,622.40 less per year, for a full-time, full-year worker).<sup>33,34</sup> State and local data to contextualize wage levels and gaps are critical in order to confront and disrupt patterns of stratification. In the three state examples below, the overall racial/ethnic patterns remain consistent, but the percentage of early educators earning below \$15 an hour in California is substantially lower than the national average; this finding likely reflects the higher cost of living and, therefore, higher wages in the state.

FIGURE 2.10

### Wages of Center-Based Staff by Race/Ethnicity: National

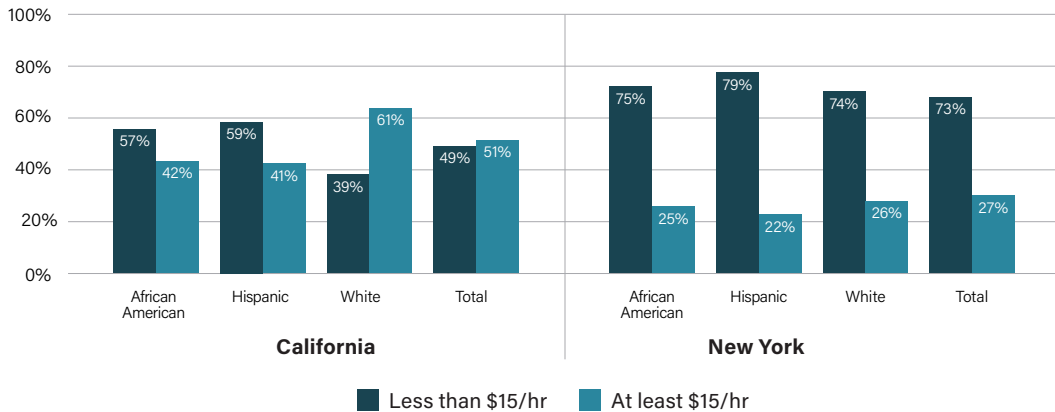


Among listed home-based providers, across racial and ethnic groups, more than half (59 percent) lived in households with incomes that were less than the national median income of \$50,502 in 2011; for African Americans, this figure was 75 percent.<sup>35</sup>

These data snapshots illustrate multiple ways in which the workforce is diverse, as well as inequities that are prevalent, though varied, across states. While some states have current, detailed workforce data that can identify evidence of stratification, many states do not routinely collect sufficient data that allow for this type of analysis (see [Workforce Data, p. 108](#)). Given that national data reflect the country as a whole and, furthermore, are not routinely collected, this information is insufficient to inform state and local policy and planning. Likewise, the inability to identify the many ways in which inequities emerge limits the ability of advocates and policymakers to design intentional strategies for change and monitor progress over time. In the remainder of this report, we draw attention to disparities woven throughout the early care and education system.

**FIGURE 2.11**

**Wages of Center-Based Staff by Race/Ethnicity: State Examples**



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# Endnotes

## 2. About the Early Childhood Workforce

- 16 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.
- 17 The 2016 *Index* reported 12 million children based on numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation. The 10 million estimate comes from the National Survey of Early Care and Education and has been used in the 2018 *Index* to increase consistency across data sources with the rest of the analysis.
- 18 Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L.J.E. (2016). *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2016*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://csce.berkeley.edu/files/2016/Early-Childhood-Workforce-Index-2016.pdf>.
- 19 McKelvey, L., Forsman, A., Morrison-Ward, J. (2018). *Arkansas Workforce Study: Instructional Staff in Child Care & Early Childhood Education, 2017*. Little Rock, AR: University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Retrieved from [https://familymedicine.uams.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2018/04/Staff-Workforce-Study-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://familymedicine.uams.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2018/04/Staff-Workforce-Study-Report_FINAL.pdf); Schaack, D.D., & Le, V.N. (2017). *At the Heart of the Matter: The Compensation of Colorado's Early Educator Workforce*. Denver, CO: Early Milestones Colorado. Retrieved from [http://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Brief\\_3\\_CO\\_EC\\_Workforce\\_Survey.pdf](http://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Brief_3_CO_EC_Workforce_Survey.pdf); Whitebook, M., King, E., Philipp, G., & Sakai, L. (2016). *Teachers' Voices: Work Environment Conditions That Impact Teacher Practice and Program Quality*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://csce.berkeley.edu/files/2016/2016-Alameda-SEQUAL-Report-FINAL-for-Dissemination-v2.pdf>.
- 20 National Center for Education Statistics. Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>.
- 21 Additional information about the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>.
- 22 Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2016 American Community Survey. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data>.
- 23 National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2014). *Characteristics of Center-based Early Care and Education Programs: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2014-73a, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/28740/pdf>.
- 24 The common combinations of types of care can be found here: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nsece\\_usage\\_and\\_cost\\_tabulations\\_081216\\_toopre\\_b508\\_2.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nsece_usage_and_cost_tabulations_081216_toopre_b508_2.pdf).
- 25 International Labour Office, Sectorial Activities Department (2014). *Meeting of Experts on Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Office. Retrieved from [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---sector/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms\\_236528.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_236528.pdf).
- 26 Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L.J.E. (2018). *The Workforce Data Deficit: Who it Harms and How it Can Be Overcome*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://csce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/04/The-Workforce-Data-Deficit.pdf>.
- 27 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>.
- 28 While 27 percent of the center-based early childhood workforce speaks a language other than English (as documented in the NSECE), the U.S. Census reports that 14 percent of the U.S. adult population spoke a language other than English at home during the year that the NSECE was conducted. While these numbers are not directly comparable, they do suggest that the ECE workforce is more linguistically diverse than the overall U.S. adult population.
- 29 U.S. Census Bureau. *2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*. Retrieved from [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_5YR\\_S0501&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_S0501&prodType=table).
- 30 Startz, D. (2017). *Immigrant Teachers Play a Critical Role in American Schools*. Washington, DC: Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/03/16/immigrant-teachers-play-a-critical-role-in-american-schools/>.
- 31 Park, M., Zong, J., & Batalova, J. (2018). *Growing Superdiversity Among Young U.S. Dual Language Learners and Its Implications*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/growing-superdiversity-among-young-us-dual-language-learners-and-its-implications>.

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- 32 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service (2016). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>.
- 33 The difference between the hourly wage of African American educators and white/Caucasian educators after controlling for educational attainment is statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ).
- 34 This figure (\$1,622.40) is CSCCE's calculation based on working 40 hours per week and 52 weeks per year.
- 35 The most recent data on home-based providers' household income is from 2011. However, the 2019 NSECE will report 2018 household incomes and should be available in the fall of 2020.



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