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**EMPLOYMENT**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY**  
**BEFORE THE ILLINOIS JOINT EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMITTEE**

**On**

**“Early Childhood Workforce: Compensation, Benefits, Pipeline, and Retention”**

**April 27, 2023**

Good morning. My name is Lea Austin, and I am the Executive Director of the [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](https://cscce.berkeley.edu) at the University of California, Berkeley.

Thank you, Chairperson Pacione-Zayas and Chairperson Mason for the opportunity to speak with you today about the early care and education workforce and the importance of investing in them directly. Illinois has been a participant in our first [Bold on Compensation Learning Community](#) cohort, selected because of the state’s [clear vision](#) for the workforce, and previous efforts on compensation initiatives including stipends to educators and the development of a wage scale as part of work in the state to transform financing, access, and quality of the early care and education system, and now of course Smart Start.<sup>1</sup>

Before saying more, I want to start my comments by briefly reminding us who early educators are. They are our community members, they are often parents themselves, they are among our children’s earliest caregivers, nurturers, and teachers. Nearly all are women.

They are a highly experienced workforce. Nationally:

- more than half of home-based providers and one-third of lead teachers in child care centers have 16 or more years of experience;

- They are highly knowledgeable about their craft. About three-quarters of the current ECE workforce have participated in college.
  - Among center-based teaching staff, the majority have earned a college degree, among home-based providers, about 40% have a college degree
    - Among center teachers, 30% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, and 18% an associate degree.
    - Among FCC providers, nearly 20% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher and 20% have earned an associate degree.<sup>2</sup>

A survey conducted by the Illinois Department of Human Services confirms similar patterns in the state of educational attainment and tenure.

Yet median wages in the state hover just under \$15 an hour; well below a middle class wage in the state and below the recommended wage scale identified in the Illinois Cost Model for ECE Services. For additional context, the median ECE teacher wage is more than \$3 below the living wage in the state for one adult with no children (\$18.10 an hour).

For many, it's not that they can somehow "afford" to do this work - economic insecurity and poverty are high. In 2020, we reported that 17.8% of early educators in Illinois were experiencing poverty - that's eight times as high as the poverty rate of K-8 teachers and more than double that of all workers in the state.

The consequences of these conditions can be especially harsh for women of color and immigrant women, who are frequently paid unequal wages for equal work.

- The National Survey of Early Care and Education offers perspective of change over time for the ECE workforce overall, and reveals that, between 2012 and 2019, median wages decreased for Black and Latine educators. For full-time work, this leaves Black educators being paid nearly \$5,700 less and Latine educators about \$2,000 less per year than their White peers. Among center-based teachers working full-time exclusively with infants and toddlers, they are paid nearly \$5,000 less per year than those who work with preschool-age children.<sup>3</sup>
- Black educators in the workforce are disproportionately affected by this wage penalty for teaching younger children as they are more likely to work with infants and toddlers than their peers.<sup>4</sup>

These current national patterns are similar to those we have found with previous data when we've examined the workforce in Illinois.

These conditions fuel a staffing crisis in which providers can't compete with businesses like retail and food service that pay entry wages closer to the living wage and offer benefits, and for those with a college degree, the options for better pay are even greater. Child care employment today, for example, has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels, while employment overall, across occupations, has surpassed these levels.

At the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, we have been conducting research with early educators for more than 20 years, and from this work, we've learned what early educators need to do their jobs well and ensure their own well-being. And, whether working in school, center, or home-based programs, it's pretty straightforward:

**Educators need access and the conditions to engage in good preparation, training, and ongoing learning;**

**Educators need safe, supportive working environments, including paid time to do all the things they need to do besides teach (plan curriculum, administration and paperwork, etc)**

**And they need appropriate compensation, including wages and benefits - think middle class jobs - so that they can support themselves and their own families without worrying about how to pay their bills or put food on the table.**

There is no single ingredient - rather each of these are needed to support effective teaching and caregiving practices. If someone gets excellent education and training, but then goes into a workplace where they are not supported to implement all that they've learned or in which they are paid such low wages they are worrying about how to get food on the table that night, this undermines them. Administrators and directors of programs tell us as much as well. It's important to have a desire to do this work - but desire or love for this work doesn't pay the bills, and it's not enough to retain a skilled and stable workforce.

Illinois is well situated to make meaningful change, to be bold in its investments in early educators. Parents cannot afford the true costs of early care and education, while early educators cannot afford to stay and subsidize the system with the low wages paid to them - it will take public funding to deliver on the promise that quality early care and education holds for children, their families, and our communities - and early educators are central this.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee. I look forward to answering questions you may have. Thank you.

## Endnotes

1. Main, C. & Yarbrough, K.W. (2018). *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce: A Call to Action for the State of Illinois*. Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.  
<https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/transforming-the-early-childhood-workforce-il-report.pdf>
2. CSCCE analysis of the National Survey of Early Care and Education, 2019.
3. Coffey, M. (2022). *Still Underpaid and Unequal*. Center for American Progress.  
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/still-underpaid-and-unequal/>
4. Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.  
<http://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/>

## Biography

Dr. Lea J.E. Austin is an expert on the U.S. early care and education system and its workforce. As Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, she leads the Center's research and policy agenda aimed at securing the well-being of our nation's early educators. She has extensive experience in the areas of workforce compensation, preparation, working conditions, and racial equity, and most recently the effects of COVID-19 on the child care workforce. She is a co-author of numerous papers focused on the preparation, working conditions, and compensation of educators, including the *Early Childhood Workforce Index*, *Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment*, and numerous policy statements and recommendations. Her interest in ECE workforce research, policy, and activism was spurred by her first job in the sector working with early educators at First 5 Alameda County and later Mills College, where she developed leadership programs in higher education and community settings, and implemented professional development and advocacy initiatives. Dr. Austin earned her Bachelor's degree in Sociology from UC Berkeley, a master's degree in Public Administration from California State University, Hayward, and a master's degree and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Mills College.