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Early Educator Voices in Florida: Flagler and Volusia Counties

Work Environment Conditions That Impact Early Educator Practice and Program Quality

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Introduction

Early educators are the key to quality early care and education (ECE) services. There is broad consensus that high-quality care and learning environments for young children depend on educators who are skilled at nurturing children's development and learning. Nonetheless, inadequate working conditions and low pay routinely hamper educators in their efforts to apply effective teaching and caregiving practices (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council [IOM & NRC], 2015; McLean et al., 2021). Likewise, assessments of work environments have routinely been overlooked in quality improvement efforts. For example, being able to depend on paid leave when sick, paid non-child-contact time to complete professional responsibilities, and opportunities for input regarding decisions that influence teaching practice or programs have been shown to impact educators' well-being and practice in the classroom (Whitebook et al., 2016).

Early educators are rarely offered, and thus rarely receive, holistically supportive working conditions, nor are workplace supports typically the focus of strategies and policies to improve the quality of ECE services (Whitebook et al., 2018). Instead, the emphasis on quality improvement as it relates to the workforce has relied on strategies and metrics tied to professional development and education levels, without considering the context of working conditions. Furthermore, early education is one of the lowest-paid occupations in the United States, with a median hourly wage of $13.22, which is only $27,498 a year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). These low wages, coupled with insufficient working conditions, have long fueled turnover and teaching shortages in the sector, circumstances that have been severely compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment [CSCCE], 2022).

These long-standing inadequacies reflect, in part, a lack of inclusion of early educators' expertise and perspectives in policy and quality improvement initiatives. Educators' views on their work environments are essential and should be central to shaping policy and practice recommendations to improve program quality, child outcomes, and early educators' own well-being. Whether they are working in center- or home-based programs, and regardless of funding source or ages of children with whom they work, early educators require adequate resources and conditions in order to deliver on the promise of high-quality ECE services. Prioritizing workforce supports leads to a system that is equitable, efficient, and effective for children, their families, and educators.

Persistently poor working conditions and pay have contributed to a crisis in early care and education in which a severe workforce shortage has led to a shortage in available child care spaces. As of this writing, there are 5 percent fewer U.S. child care jobs than in February 2020 (CSCCE, 2023), while employment across other occupations has returned to near pre-pandemic levels. Similar to other states throughout the nation, Florida, including Flagler and Volusia Counties, is facing a child care crisis: a workforce shortage resulting in inadequate staffing and a lack of options for families.

Between October 2022 and March 2023, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) had the opportunity to survey early educators employed in center-based programs in one of the first CSCCE projects to look at working conditions after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report examines the results of the SEQUAL survey of Flagler and Volusia County early educators in programs that receive School Readiness and/or Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program funding. The study was commissioned by the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties (ELCFV) in order to inform their quality improvement efforts.

> *"It is a tough, low-paying job, but there is so much joy in teaching young children. I enjoy what I do on the daily, and there is nothing better in the world than knowing how you made a difference in someone's future!"*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

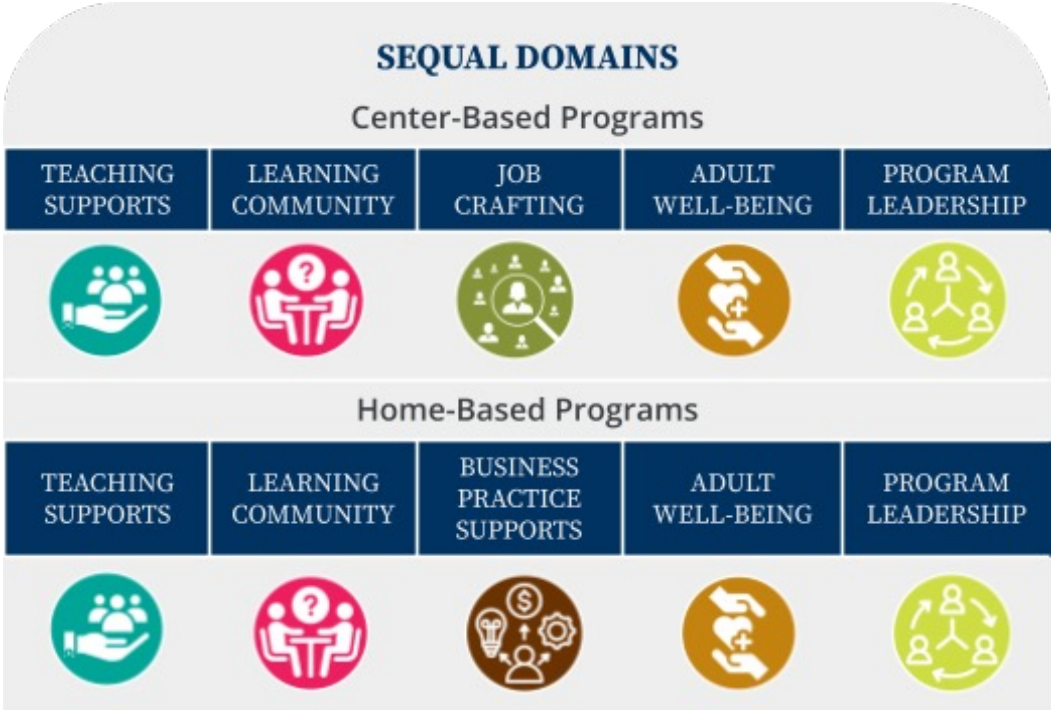
> *"If your sole purpose is to help children, this field can be very rewarding, however, you will not make much money. This can also be a very stressful job, too, with increasing demands from the public and limited, if any, financial support or reward."*
>
> *— Program Leader*

SEQUAL Overview

To capture early educators' assessments of their work environments and to support the inclusion of educators' perspectives into quality improvement strategies, CSCCE developed the Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning tool, or SEQUAL. There are two versions of the tool: SEQUAL for center-based teaching staff and SEQUAL for family child care (FCC) providers.

While both survey types assess similar components of the early childhood work environment, they vary to reflect differences in the features, roles, and responsibilities that exist within each setting. In addition, a companion survey for program leaders captures program information to contextualize the teaching staff responses. This study utilized the SEQUAL survey for center-based teaching staff, the SEQUAL survey for family child care providers, and the companion survey for program leaders. Due to the low numbers of FCC providers throughout the two counties and the corresponding low number of responses, this report does not include the results of that survey.

SEQUAL for center-based teaching staff is a validated measure used in ECE workforce studies throughout the country. This survey addresses five critical areas of teachers' learning environments: Teaching Supports, Learning Community, Job Crafting, Adult Well-Being, and Program Leadership.



The ECE Landscape in Flagler and Volusia Counties, Florida

Florida is home to more than 59,000 early educators serving the state's 1.3 million children under the age of six (McLean et al., 2021). According to data from First Five Years Fund, in 2022, almost two thirds (65 percent) of Florida children under the age of six had all parents engaged in the workforce (First Five Years Fund, 2022). However, First Five Years Fund (2022) also reported that the cost of care in Florida is high, with the average annual tuition at around 9 percent of the state median income. Nationally, Florida ranks 19th for least-affordable center-based infant care and 29th for least-affordable center-based toddler care (Child Care Aware of America, 2023). Thus, tuition costs are a hurdle for many families, especially for high-quality programs.

Early Care and Education Programs in Florida

The Florida Department of Education's Division of Early Learning (DEL) offers two major programs throughout Florida: School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten Education. To deliver these programs, the DEL partners with 30 Early Learning Coalitions across the state, including the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties (ELCFV).

School Readiness: This program constitutes Florida's child care subsidy program funded by the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). School Readiness provides financial assistance for child care services to families whose gross income is at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level for family size. To further qualify, parents must work or participate in work-related training or an education program for at least 20 hours per week. Children deemed "at risk"* for not being ready for kindergarten by the Florida Department of Children and Families (or one of their contracted or designated entities) are also eligible for this funding, with contracts renewed annually. ECE programs receiving School Readiness funds include licensed center-based care, private or public schools, and family child care providers. In addition to assisting with tuition payments, School Readiness also offers resources and professional development for caregivers. There were 209,801 children enrolled across the 6,760 School Readiness providers throughout the state in 2020-2021.

Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK): One of the country's first universal public pre-K programs, VPK has served 2.6 million children throughout the state since 2005. VPK is currently available throughout the state for all four-year-olds as both a school-year and summer program, regardless of family income. VPK is a mixed-delivery system, where parents choose the setting they desire for the care of their child, including private child care centers, public schools, and specialized instructional service providers.** In addition to the financial assistance offered to families, VPK also offers resources and professional development opportunities to VPK providers and educators.

In August 2022, the DEL issued a memorandum indicating that certified VPK providers could choose to provide a $15/hour minimum wage to their VPK personnel (including the VPK Lead, Assistant, and Substitute Teachers, along with VPK Directors and Principals). VPK providers who opted in received a per child rate increase for the 2022-2023 program year. **This initiative was not continued for the 2023-24 program year.**

*The definition of "at risk" includes children who reside in economically disadvantaged families, have special needs, are at risk of abuse or neglect, or have parents who are migrant or farm workers, homeless, or victims of domestic violence.

**Children identified with a disability become eligible for specialized instructional services, and the Florida Department of Education maintains a list of approved providers.

Source: This box summarizes information provided by the Division of Early Learning, Florida Department of Education. (2022). *School Readiness*. https://www.fldoe.org/schools/early-learning/parents/school-readiness.stml; Division of Early Learning, Florida Department of Education. (2022). *Voluntary Prekindergarten*. https://www.fldoe.org/schools/early-learning/parents/vpk-parents.stml.

Yet Florida's child care crisis goes beyond issues of affordability for parents: the state also has a child care shortage. Throughout Florida, 38 percent of residents live in a "child care desert," with higher percentages for families living in rural areas of the state and for Hispanic/Latine families (First Five Years Fund, 2022). Insufficient staffing affects classroom availability and providers' ability to remain open, which may further compound the lack of available child care.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the ECE field turned to ensuring that providers could remain open or re-open safely. During this time, more than 40 percent of Florida providers stayed open to serve their families and communities (ELCFV, 2021). Program operations continued thanks to a combination of mini-grants that supported infrastructure, cleaning, and supply needs, plus the first two of four phases of CARES Act funds to providers (Division of Early Learning, 2022b). Despite these efforts, Florida's child care deserts persist, and according to data from March 2022, some 92,000 households across Florida reported that at least one parent left their job due to child care constraints (United Way Suncoast, 2023).

Inadequate compensation of the ECE workforce is a contributing factor to Florida's staffing crisis. According to the 2020 *Early Childhood Workforce Index*, child care workers in Florida had an average hourly wage of $10.87 and center directors, $20.65. Furthermore, the poverty rate for early educators in Florida was almost six times higher among early educators than K-8 teachers (McLean et al., 2021).

More recently, Florida did not enroll in Medicaid expansion, further impacting household expenditures for families and the ECE workforce. According to the Florida Policy Institute, Florida is second only to Texas in terms of its strict eligibility requirements for Medicaid (Monet Li, 2023). During the public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicaid requirements had been loosened, so that in September of 2021, nearly 5 million Floridians were covered by this program. As of April 1, 2023, Florida began disenrolling individuals who are no longer eligible for Medicaid, leading to 1.7 million Florida residents losing their health care coverage (Allen, 2023), an estimated 415,000 of whom will have no access to health care coverage (Norris, 2023).

Gold Seal Quality Care

Florida does not have a statewide quality improvement system (QIS), but counties can develop and implement their own plans, such as the QIS in Miami-Dade County. Instead, Florida has a state accreditation program called Gold Seal Quality Care.

The Gold Seal program recognizes both center- and home-based programs that go beyond the minimum licensing requirements to become accredited by recognized agencies whose standards reflect quality care. If a program receives a Gold Seal, then they are eligible for a variety of benefits, including higher reimbursement rates for School Readiness funds and eligibility for Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) funding.

Flagler and Volusia Counties do not have a QIS, but instead utilize Gold Seal, and the ELCFV collects the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) data annually. School Readiness-funded programs also receive a separate quality-related annual program assessment, as do VPK-funded programs. So, a program receiving both School Readiness and VPK funding would have two separate quality assessments performed annually, in addition to any assessments required for Gold Seal accreditation.

Source: This box summarizes information provided by the Florida Division of Early Learning, (2022). *About the Gold Seal quality care program*. https://www.fldoe.org/schools/early-learning/providers/gold-seal.stml

In November 2022, the DEL indicated plans for spending their remaining COVID relief funds: $83.7 million would be allocated specifically to strengthening the ECE workforce, and $11.1 million would be spent for recruitment and retention efforts, including cash bonuses for new hires, with a target of training and hiring an additional 7,500 early educators. Other COVID relief funds would be directed to upskilling 2,500 directors, cash rewards for educators who completed DEL-approved professional development, and other local needs (The Children's Movement Florida, 2022).

Additionally, Florida participates in the T.E.A.C.H.© program, offering scholarships that cover up to 90 percent of the cost of tuition and books, plus a per-semester stipend that covers certain school-related costs, for current ECE educators interested in furthering their training and education. More than 34,000 early educators throughout Florida have received scholarships since the program began in 1998 (Children's Forum Inc., 2023).

Training and professional development are also offered regularly through the Florida Department of Children and Families. After meeting the initial training requirements for health and safety within the first 30 days of employment, early educators must ensure they have the background knowledge necessary to work with children, including further health and safety training and opportunities for age specialization (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2023). The Florida DEL emphasizes the importance of early literacy: early educators must complete at least five hours of training on early literacy within the first year of employment. In addition to these required trainings, the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties offers a variety of professional development oppportunities, both online and in person, for educators to complete their required 10 hours of professional development each year (ELCFV, 2019).

Florida's Early Learning Coalitions

Although the Florida Department of Education's Division of Early Learning (DEL) oversees daily operations of statewide ECE programs and administers state and local child care funds, the DEL partners with 30 Early Learning Coalitions across the state to deliver School Readiness, Voluntary Prekindergarten, and Child Care and Resource Referral programs at the local level.

These coalitions are non-profit organizations that are charged with executing a comprehensive plan, developed by the DEL, to enhance children's development and achieve certain performance standards and outcomes. In addition to distributing public funding to achieve these goals, coalitions also leverage local private and public partnerships.

The Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties (ELCFV) administers the School Readiness and VPK programs throughout the two counties. The mission of the ELCFV is to break down barriers to quality care for families and support providers and programs to improve quality.

Source: This box summarizes information from the Florida Division of Early Learning website, https://www.floridaearlylearning.com.

Flagler and Volusia Counties are located on Florida's northeastern coast. According to the U.S. Census, the population throughout these two counties was an estimated 706,497 residents in 2022 (see **Table 1**).

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR FLAGLER AND VOLUSIA COUNTIES

County Information	Counties	
	Flagler	Volusia
Total residents	126,705	579,192
Percentage under 5 years old	4%	5%
Race and/or ethnicity of residents		
White (non-Latine)	74%	69%
Black	11%	12%
Latine	11%	16%
Other*	4%	3%
Median household income	$62,305	$56,786

*Other includes Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and two or more races/ethnicities.
Source: This box summarizes information from the U.S. Census Bureau website, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/flaglercountyflorida,flaglerbeachcityflorida,volusiacountyflorida/P ST045222.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

According to the ELCFV's annual report for 2020-2021, an average of 4,168 children were enrolled in care programs throughout the two counties, the majority of whom (n=3,741) were enrolled in 156 licensed private centers (ELCFV, 2022). While the majority of centers offered both School Readiness and VPK funding (n=105), few of the other provider types offered both. Of the 21 licensed family child care homes, 20 offered School Readiness funding only, and the 29 public school-based programs offered VPK funding only (ELCFV, 2022).

Current Study Context

The anticipated launch of data collection for this study was delayed by Hurricane Ian, which made landfall on the west coast of Florida on September 28, 2022, and then slowly moved across the peninsula into Flagler and Volusia Counties, dumping rain and pounding the area with hurricane-force winds (NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, 2023). We launched our initial data collection nearly a month later on October 26. On November 10, two weeks into data collection, Hurricane Nicole made landfall in Flagler and Volusia Counties, and another state of emergency was declared for the area.

These emergencies, along with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, undoubtedly contributed to a lower-than-anticipated response rate and to the characteristics of the responses themselves. The enduring impact of these multiple traumatic events are evident in what we heard from educators as they persevered to provide children with high-quality education and care, while their lives continued to be disrupted and challenged.

Study Methodology

Between October 2022 and March 2023, researchers from CSCCE implemented a SEQUAL study in Flagler and Volusia Counties in the state of Florida to examine how early educators employed in center- and home-based ECE programs that received School Readiness and/or VPK funding assessed their work environments and their experiences working since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Center-based teaching staff[1] (lead teachers and assistant teachers) and home-based educators (providers and assistants) were invited to complete the online survey to capture information about their demographic background, educational preparation, and work experience, including their current job role, job tenure, and compensation.

In addition, program leaders (e.g., center directors, assistant directors, supervisors, teacher-directors) completed an online survey to provide contextual information about their centers: the SEQUAL for Program Leaders. The information collected in this survey includes descriptions of the teaching staff working in their program, children served, and program characteristics. Program leaders also answered questions about their own demographic and professional backgrounds and current job role. To capture the ongoing influences of the pandemic and resulting program or policy changes on early educators, all surveys also included questions related to the impacts of COVID-19.

1 Throughout the remainder of the report, the terms "teaching staff" and "classroom educators" will be used interchangeably. "Early educators" will refer to both teaching staff and program leaders.

At the time of the study, Flagler and Volusia Counties had 140 center-based and 30 home-based programs in operation. A census design was utilized, inviting all programs receiving School Readiness and/or VPK funding to participate in the study. However, due to the low sample size for home-based programs, only findings for center-based programs are included in this report. Within each center, one program leader and all teaching staff members working directly with young children were invited to participate.

The final sample of respondents included in this report consisted of 53 program leaders and 187 center-based teaching staff members. For a more detailed description of the study methodology, study instruments, sampling frame and selection, population and sample, response rates, and analysis plan, please see **Appendix A**.

Findings: Center Characteristics

Program leaders were asked about their center characteristics, program sustainability, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted program operations.

Center Funding

We asked program leaders to identify their center's sources of funding and how these sources cover their operating costs. Among centers whose program leaders participated in the survey, almost all relied on parent tuition and fees (96 percent), VPK funding (92 percent), and School Readiness funding (86 percent). Of those receiving VPK and/or School Readiness funding, a majority (77 percent) received both forms of funding, 13 percent received only VPK funding, and 10 percent received only School Readiness funding.[2] Slightly more than one fifth (21 percent) also accepted vouchers, and 6 percent reported Head Start, Title 1 (or other federal funding), or Early Intervention funding.

Program leaders were asked whether the various funds they receive cover their program operating costs. One third of program leaders indicated that there was a consistent gap between operating expenses and revenue. To cover this gap, many centers had to apply for additional funding and/or increase fees for families (see **Figure 1**).

FIGURE 1. SOURCE OF FUNDS TO COVER GAPS BETWEEN OPERATING EXPENSES AND REVENUE

Program Leader N=46
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

2 This information was provided by program leaders about their center's source(s) of funding. Not every teaching staff member who participated in the study had a program leader who also filled out a survey for their center, and the administrative data provided for teaching staff was at the classroom level. Among teaching staff in the sample, a majority (69 percent) received School Readiness funding only, 18 percent received VPK along with School Readiness, 9 percent VPK only, and 3 percent Head Start along with School Readiness wrap.

Classroom Ratios

> *"I also believe ratios are too high for the type of adverse behaviors that we as child care providers are seeing in children. If the ratios were lower, it would allow for more quality time spent with children in our care."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

The state of Florida has licensing standards that guide staff:child ratios. For example, a single teacher may care for up to six one-year-olds or up to 15 three-year-olds (Florida Department of Education, 2018). Florida has some of the highest staff:child ratios in the country, particularly for children preschool age and older, which are more than double the recommended limits (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.).

However, programs that are Gold Seal accredited may choose to follow other standards when determining ratios. A vast majority (83 percent) of program leaders reported that their centers used state licensing standards when setting classroom ratios. Other standards reported by multiple programs were the National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (6 percent) and the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (4 percent).

Program Sustainability

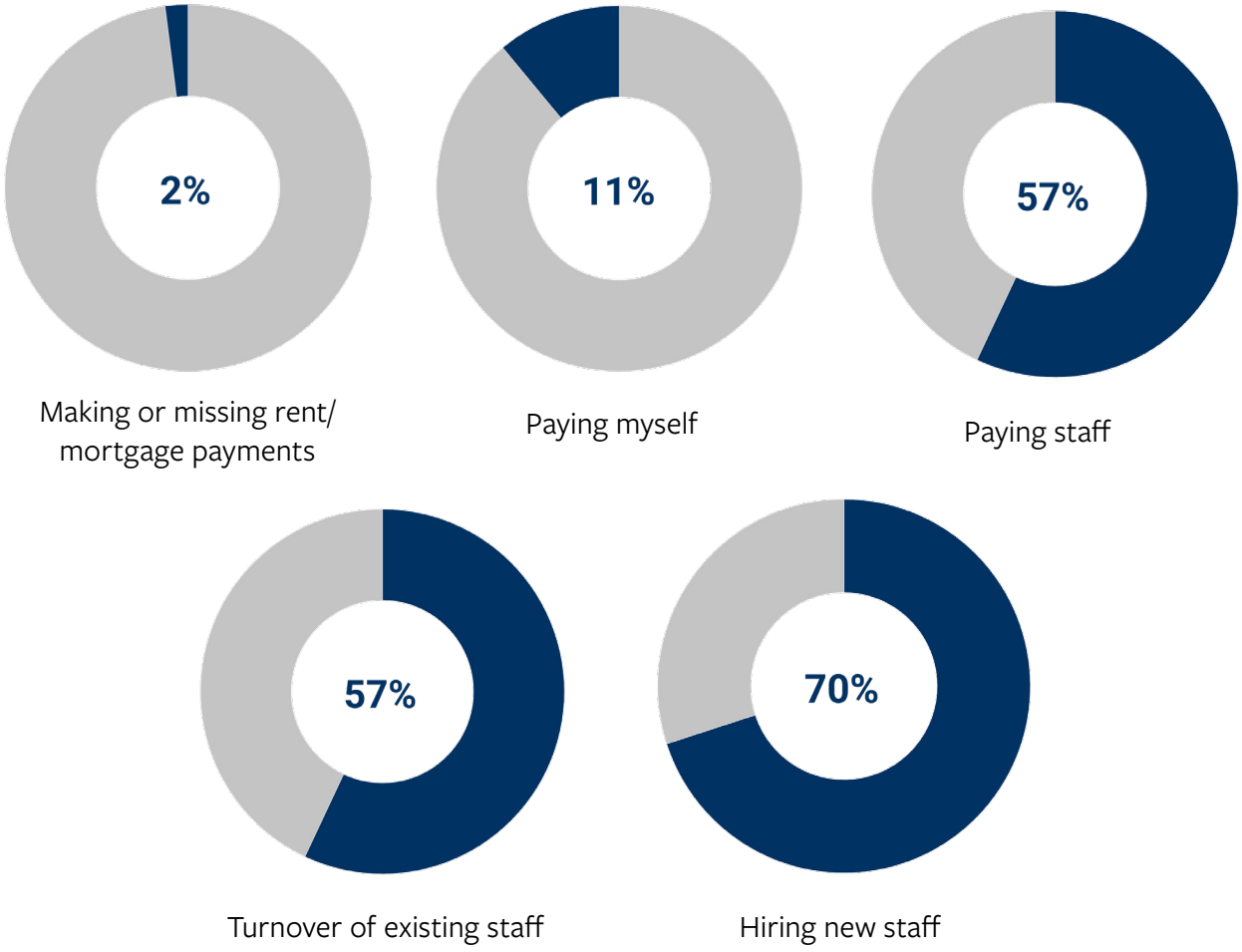
Programs throughout the country were struggling even before the COVID-19 pandemic. They were already operating on razor-thin margins and grappling with staff turnover. However, the pandemic greatly exacerbated these struggles.

For many centers and family child care programs, complete shutdown during COVID-19 was not an option because they were already on the brink of financial collapse pre-pandemic (Schulman, 2020; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020a). ECE programs also remained open to serve essential workers or reopened quickly out of financial necessity. When data for this study was collected—two years after the onset of the pandemic—programs continued to struggle, especially with staff turnover.

> *"It is not for the faint of heart. After COVID, we have seen the challenges in staffing (hiring and retaining), lack of quality of work, and more challenging behaviors in children."*
>
> *— Program Leader*

The topics of insufficient staffing levels and turnover permeated the responses from early educators. The top three worries among program leaders were hiring, turnover of existing staff, and paying their staff, which further highlights the precarious situation that many programs currently face (see **Figure 2**).

FIGURE 2. PROGRAM LEADER WORRY ABOUT PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY



Program Leader N=46

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Financial Supports

Program leaders reported on the financial supports their programs have received since the onset of the pandemic and how they utilized these supports (see **Table 2**). More than one half (57 percent) received the Phase V Grant from the Office of Early Learning, and 49 percent of programs received the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Around one quarter also reported receiving financial support from the state government in the form of Florida State Child Care stabilization stipends for licensed providers/licensed child care facility stabilization stipends (28 percent), Florida State Child Care stabilization stipends for state-subsidized care providers/subsidized child care stipends (26 percent), or the Florida State Child Care subsidies for children of essential workers (25 percent).

TABLE 2 . USAGE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORTS, BY TYPE

Program Elements Impacted by Financial Supports	Percentage	Number of Programs
Paid staff salaries	74%	39
Deep cleaning and/or cleaning supplies	62%	33
Replacement of materials and supplies	60%	32
Increased staff salaries	59%	31
Made mortgage or rent payment for the program	59%	31
Staff retention bonuses	45%	23
Hazard pay or bonuses for staff	23%	12
Expanded or provided staff benefits	17%	9

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Staffing

Overwhelmingly, responses from early educators pointed to the challenges around insufficient staffing and turnover. Program leaders reported on their current staffing situation at the time of the survey. A majority (60 percent) reported that staff members were leaving due to (low) wages and benefits and that they also had to close classrooms because they were not able to hire/retain enough teachers to staff them (53 percent).

Given turnover and the need to attract new staff to fill these vacant positions, program leaders also shared their challenges with finding and hiring qualified staff. Educators echoed these sentiments. Only about one third (32 percent) of teaching staff felt that new staff at their center were hired quickly, in the event of turnover (for more information on teaching staff assessments of staffing, see page 39, in the section on the Teaching Supports domain).

> *"At my center, the staff are underpaid and overworked and are facing burnout most days."*
>
> *— Assistant Teacher*

To understand retention and turnover concerns, teaching staff were asked to report on their professional three-year plans. Less than one half (46 percent) of teaching staff indicated that they would still be working in their current program. The others presented a mixture of vocational aspirations, some elsewhere in the ECE field (e.g., moving to a new center or working outside of a teaching role but in support of children and families) and others outside the ECE field entirely. Almost one quarter (23 percent) of educators indicated that they weren't sure of their professional plans.

Findings: Educator Characteristics

Personal Characteristics

We asked educators to provide details about their personal characteristics, including their gender, age, country of origin, and family characteristics (see **Table 3**), race and/or ethnicity (see **Table 4**), and languages spoken (see **Table 5**).

TABLE 3. DEMOGRAPHICS OF EARLY EDUCATORS, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Total
Age	N=53	N=148	N=39	N=240
29 years or younger	0%	27%	33%	30%
30 to 49 years	45%	51%	46%	47%
50 years or older	55%	22%	21%	33%
Gender*	N=52	N=142	N=39	N=233
Female	100%	99%	100%	99%
Male	0%	1%	0%	1%
Country of birth	N=53	N=146	N=48	N=247
United States	92%	87%	84%	88%
Another country	3%	13%	16%	12%
Marital status	N=50	N=140	N=37	N=227
Married/Partnered	74%	56%	49%	59%
Unmarried/Single	26%	44%	51%	41%
Children under the age of five in household	N=53	N=134	N=34	N=221
None	83%	66%	71%	73%
One	13%	23%	21%	19%
Two or more	4%	11%	8%	23%

*Respondents were asked to self-identify their gender. While the early care and education workforce is overwhelmingly composed of women, we gratefully acknowledge the participation of early educators who identify as men, non-binary, or other gender identities.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Gender and Age

Almost all educators in our sample identified as female (99 percent). The average age of program leaders was 51 years old, while the average age among teaching staff was 39. While a majority of early educators were age 30 or older, there were variations by job role. One third (33 percent) of teaching staff were under the age of 30, while more than one half (55 percent) of program leaders were 50 or older.

Country of Origin

Twelve percent of early educators were born outside of the United States. Country of origin varied by job role. A larger proportion of assistant teachers (16 percent) were born outside the United States, compared to lead teachers (13 percent) and program leaders (3 percent).

Family Characteristics and Marital Status

The majority of early educators (59 percent) reported their relationship status as married or living with a partner. Among center-based teaching staff, a majority of program leaders and lead teachers (74 percent and 56 percent, respectively) and almost one half (49 percent) of assistant teachers reported being married or partnered. One third (33 percent) of teaching staff have at least one child under the age of five currently living in their household.

Race and/or Ethnicity

Of the educators in the sample, the majority (62 percent) identified as White, and almost one fifth identified as Latina[3] (18 percent) or Black (16 percent) (see **Table 4**). Generally, classroom educators' race and/or ethnicity were representative of the overall population in Flagler and Volusia Counties (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). A higher proportion of lead teachers identified as Latina (25 percent) or Black (17 percent), compared to assistant teachers and program leaders.

3 Because the early care and education workforce is overwhelmingly composed of women, we will use the gender-specific term "Latina" to describe members of the ECE workforce who identify as part of the Latin American diaspora. At the same time, we gratefully acknowledge the participation of early educators who identify as men, non-binary, or other gender identities.

TABLE 4. RACE AND/OR ETHNICITY OF EARLY EDUCATORS, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Total
Race and/or ethnicity	N=53	N=139	N=38	N=231
Black	21%	17%	11%	16%
Latina	10%	25%	18%	18%
More than one race and/or ethnicity	6%	*	*	*
White	62%	56%	68%	62%

*less than 5%

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Languages Spoken

Almost one in five early educators (19 percent) reported speaking a language in addition to English. Teaching staff were more likely to speak multiple languages, compared to program leaders (see **Table 5**). However, while one quarter (25 percent) of teaching staff speak another language, three out of five classroom educators (61 percent) reported that children in their classroom speak another language. More than one half (55 percent) of these educators reported that children in their classroom speak Spanish, and 20 percent reported a variety of languages.[4] While teaching staff and children speak many languages, there appears to be little overlap among languages. For example teaching staff reported children speaking Korean and Italian, while none of the teacher staff spoke these languages. A lack of overlap among languages spoken in the classroom might contribute to students and families feeling unsupported, and educators feeling at a loss to support them. To this end, teaching staff indicated that they did not have sufficient training to support children who are dual language learners, further emphasizing the importance of training and supports (see page 38, in the section on the Teaching Supports domain).

4 Additional languages spoken by children in the classroom: American Sign Language, Chinese, Cambodian, French Creole, Haitian, Hindi, Italian, Indian, Korean, Jamaican, Portuguese, and Vietnamese.

TABLE 5. LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY EARLY EDUCATORS, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Total
Languages spoken	N=52	N=148	N=39	N=239
English only	92%	74%	77%	81%
Multilingual	8%	26%	23%	19%
Language fluency*	N=53	N=148	N=39	N=239
English	100%	97%	97%	98%
Spanish	6%	23%	18%	16%
Other*	4%	1%	11%	5%

Note: Respondents were asked to check all that apply, so percentages may not add up to 100%.
*Other languages reported by early educators include American Sign Language, French Creole, Hungarian, Latvian, Russian, and Ukrainian.

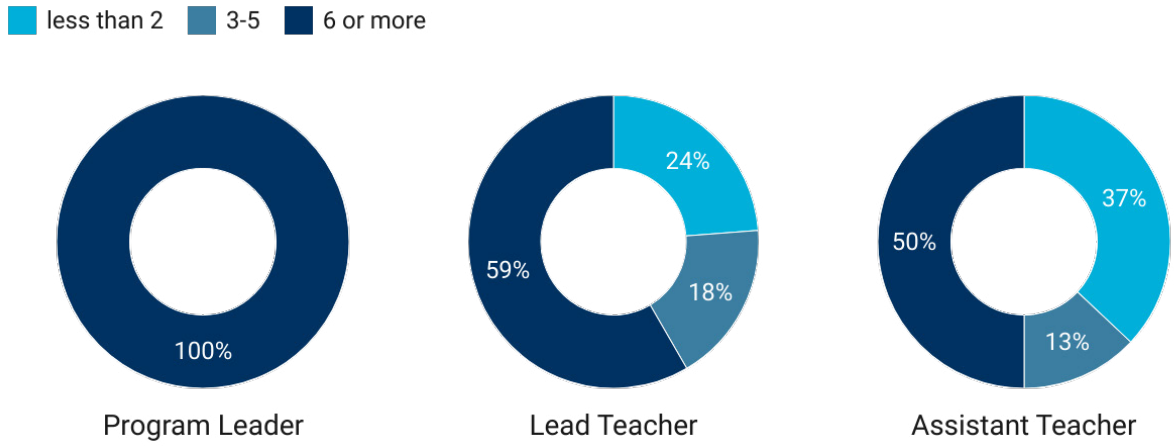
Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Professional Background

Tenure

Overall, the early educators in our sample reported a wide range of experience, from those who are new to the profession to others with many years as teachers and/or program leaders (see **Figures 3, 4, 5**). Across the sample, early educators had many years of experience in the field but less at their current place of employment. For example, program leaders had 22 years of experience in the field on average but eight years in their current position at their center, and teaching staff had eight years of experience in the field but only two years of experience in their current position at their center, suggesting a high turnover within the field.

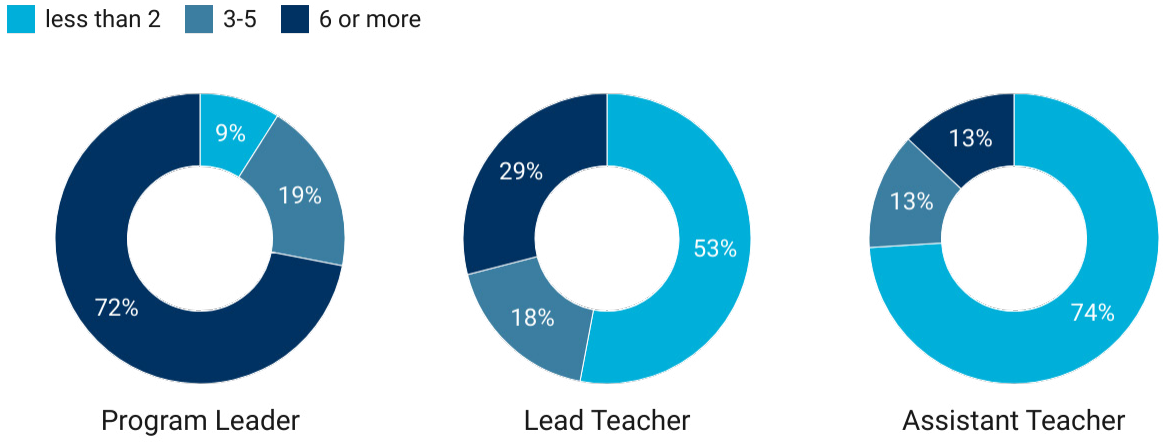
FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE FIELD, BY JOB ROLE



Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=147
Assistant Teacher N=38

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

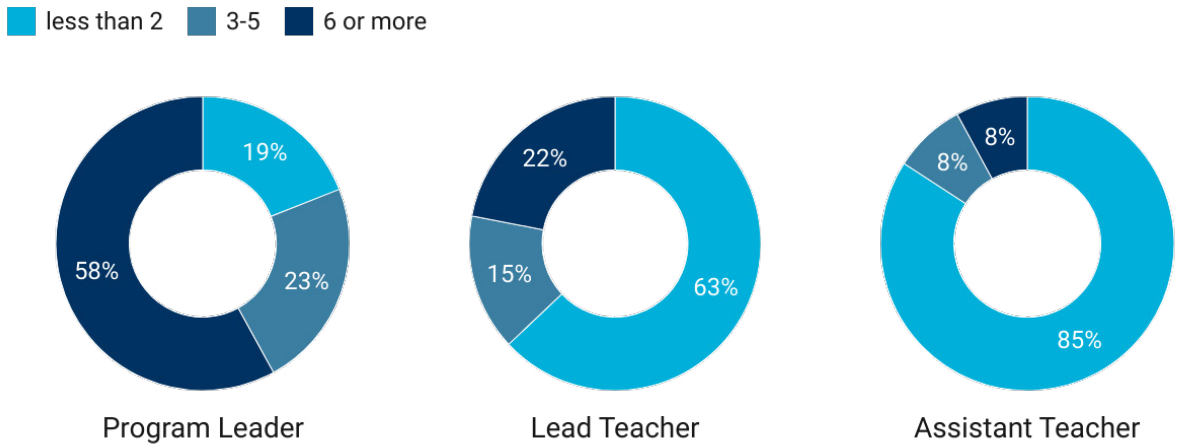
FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF YEARS AT CENTER, BY JOB ROLE



Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=148
Assistant Teacher N=39

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION AT CENTER, BY JOB ROLE



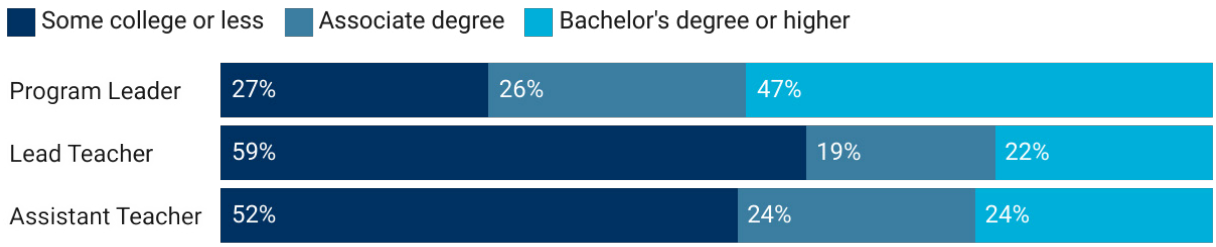
Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=147
Assistant Teacher N=39

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Education

Among early educators, more than one half (58 percent) held a post-secondary degree. Program leaders were more likely than teaching staff to hold degrees, and degree attainment was similar across assistant teachers and lead teachers (see **Figure 6**). Almost one half (47 percent) of program leaders held a bachelor's or graduate degree, compared to slightly less than one quarter (23 percent) of teaching staff.

FIGURE 6. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF EARLY EDUCATORS, BY JOB ROLE



Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=145
Assistant Teacher N=38

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

While more than one half of teaching staff did not have a post-secondary degree (i.e., an associate degree or higher), nearly one quarter (23 percent) indicated that they were interested in obtaining an initial or additional degree (see the box on **Higher Education for Early Educators**, page 27).

At the time of the SEQUAL study, 9 percent of teaching staff and 4 percent of program leaders were enrolled in a higher education degree program. All program leaders currently enrolled in a degree program were pursuing graduate degrees (either a master's or doctorate), while members of the teaching staff were enrolled in associate, bachelor's, and master's degree programs. Among currently enrolled students, the most common degree programs were Early Childhood Education, Education, or a related field (e.g., Special Education).

Higher Education for Early Educators

To capture early educators' plans around advancing and continuing their education, we asked if they were interested in earning an initial or additional degree. Slightly more than one quarter (26 percent) were interested in continuing their education, which varied by job role. Thirty percent of program leaders and 22 percent of teaching staff reported that they were interested in obtaining another degree. In addition, 32 percent of assistant teachers and 20 percent of lead teachers noted that they might be interested in pursuing additional education.

Challenges for Accessing Higher Education

Early educators were also asked about challenges they have experienced in higher education. The top challenges cited were balancing school, job responsibilities, and their personal/family responsibilities, as well as the affordability of tuition and fees.

While ECE programs may not be able to influence or offset the cost of higher education, they could help to relieve some of the challenges educators face in pursuing advanced degrees. For example, programs could provide early educators with reliable Internet to complete coursework or adequate spaces in which to study. We did not ask educators whether they accessed T.E.A.C.H.© funds to defray any of these costs.

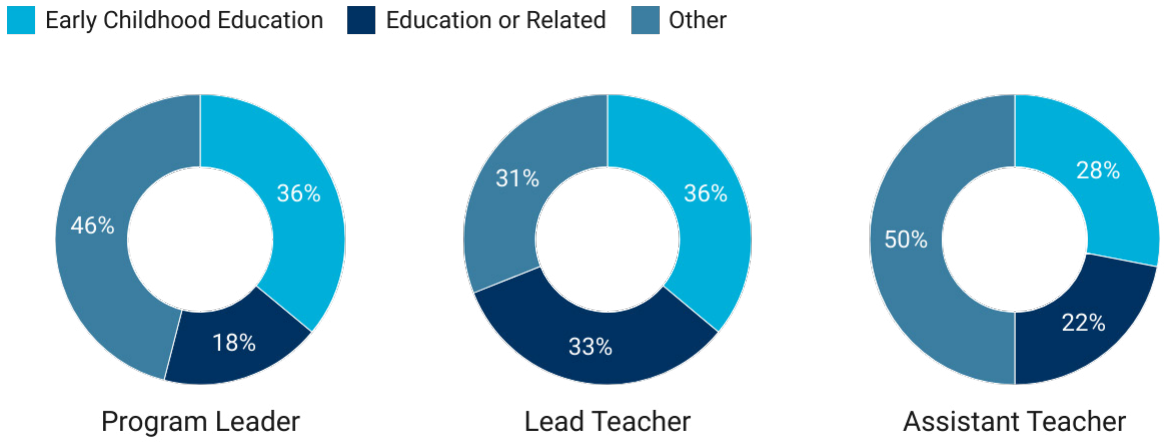
Student Loan Debt

Early educators often accrue debt while pursuing their educational careers. A majority (69 percent) of program leaders and close to one half (43 percent) of teaching staff left their degree programs with student loan debt. One quarter (25 percent) of classroom educators had debt in excess of $25,000 when leaving their program, and 38 percent of classroom educators currently have debt in excess of $25,000, indicating that educators may struggle to repay their student loans without incurring further debt. This finding also speaks to the challenges that early educators noted around tuition and fees being unaffordable.

Nonetheless, the increase in wages for teaching staff with a degree is modest for the time, effort, and cost associated with pursuing higher education. Among all teaching staff, those with an associate degree earned 75 cents more per hour than those without a degree, and those with a bachelor's degree made only $1.00 more per hour than those with an associate degree.

Early educators reported having pursued degrees primarily in early childhood education or a related field (e.g., elementary education, special education, child development). However, a large proportion of educators had studied a variety of different fields, including administration, social science, and health sciences (see **Figure 7**). A higher percentage of program leaders and lead teachers (36 percent) majored in Early Childhood Education, compared to 28 percent of assistant teachers.

FIGURE 7. MAJOR FOR HIGHEST DEGREE STUDIED FOR OR EARNED, BY JOB ROLE



Program Leader N=39
Lead Teacher N=58
Assistant Teacher N=18

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Findings: Compensation

Wages of Center-Based Teaching Staff

The median hourly wage of center-based teaching staff in this study was $13.75, which amounts to $28,600 annually. Examining compensation by job role, the median hourly wage was $13.00 for assistant teachers, $14.00 for lead teachers, and $19.81 for program leaders (see **Figure 8**).

FIGURE 8. EARLY EDUCATOR MEDIAN HOURLY WAGE, BY JOB ROLE

Program Leader N=46
Lead Teacher N=134
Assistant Teacher N=35

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

The median hourly wage for center-based teaching staff with at least a bachelor's degree was $15.00, reflecting an hourly wage gap of $17.31 with similarly qualified kindergarten teachers in the state. For assistant teachers, the wage bump associated with earning an associate degree was 40 cents per hour, and for moving from an associate to a bachelor's degree, the increase was $1.87 per hour. For lead teachers, moving from some college to an associate degree and from an associate to a bachelor's degree only yielded a wage increase of $1.00 per hour with each degree (see **Figure 9**).

A vast majority (87 percent) of center-based teaching staff reported a total annual household income of less than $50,000, which is lower than the median household income for both Flagler and Volusia Counties ($62,305 and $56,786, respectively). More than one half (57 percent) of teaching staff reported that at least half of their income comes from their work with children. We asked early educators about their pension and retirement plans, and four out of five (79 percent) did not have any savings specifically for retirement.

FIGURE 9. TEACHING STAFF MEDIAN HOURLY WAGE, BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Lead Teacher N=141
Assistant Teacher N=34

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Benefits

Health Care

Among Florida's 18- to 64-year-old population, 18 percent were uninsured in 2021 (KKF, 2021). While the majority of early educators surveyed reported one or more sources of coverage for health care, 8 percent of program leaders and slightly more than one in five classroom educators (22 percent) reported not having any source of health insurance coverage. Notably, teaching staff's lack of healthcare coverage is higher than the state average.

1 in 5
classroom educators have no source of health insurance coverage

The most common types of insurance plans reported were being covered under the policy of a parent or spouse (21 percent), Medicaid (19 percent), and purchasing their own health insurance policy from the Affordable Care Act Marketplace (12 percent). Very few teaching staff members or program leaders were covered through their employers (14 percent and 13 percent, respectively). These percentages are not surprising given that less than one third of program leaders and teaching staff reported that their centers offered health insurance (see **Figure 10**).

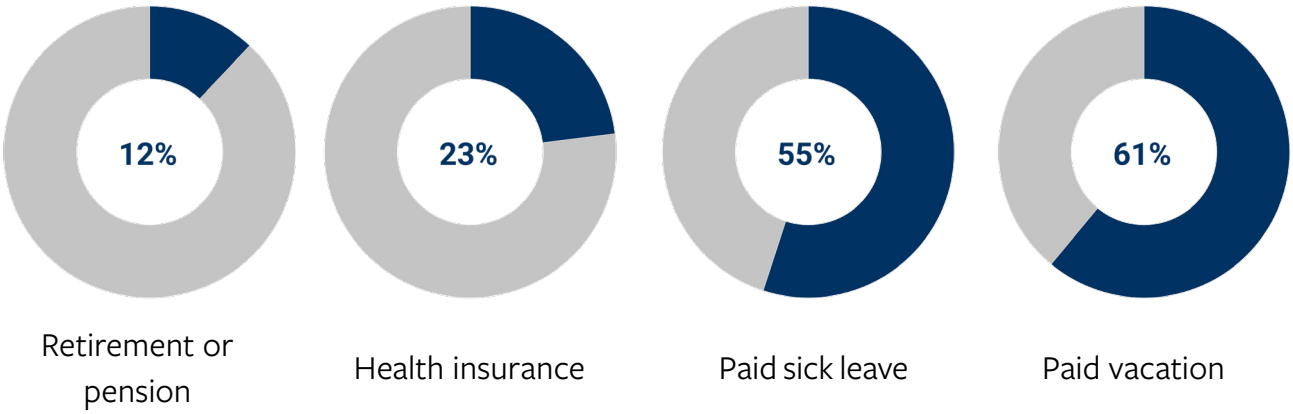
Furthermore, almost one half of early educators (46 percent of program leaders and 44 percent of teaching staff) reported that they had gone without medical treatment in the past year because of the cost, which is especially troubling during a pandemic and speaks to the danger of not having insurance or being underinsured.

Paid Leave

Teaching staff reported on the types of benefits that were offered to them, including paid leave (see **Figure 10**). Almost one in five (16 percent) reported that their employers do not offer any benefits. The most common benefits reported were paid holidays (67 percent), paid vacation (61 percent), and paid sick leave (55 percent). Fewer teachers reported that their centers offered health insurance (23 percent), emergency paid time off due to COVID exposure or illness (18 percent), a pension or retirement plan (12 percent), or hazard pay (6 percent).

Program leaders also reported on the types of benefits that their center offers to full- and part-time teaching staff. More than one quarter (27 percent) of centers surveyed did not offer any benefits to full-time teaching staff. Mirroring teaching staff responses above, the most common benefits offered were paid vacation (81 percent) and paid sick time (73 percent) as well as a recruitment bonus (57 percent). Similarly, less common benefits offered were health insurance (32 percent), a pension or retirement plan (28 percent), and hazard pay (7 percent).

FIGURE 10. ACCESS TO BENEFITS REPORTED BY TEACHING STAFF



Teaching Staff N=163

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Public Support Programs

We asked early educators if they utilized any public support programs in the past year, such as the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Medicaid, Medicaid for Children, SNAP/food stamps, or TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). The most common forms of income support among early educators related to public support programs for food and medical insurance (see **Table 6**). More than one half of early educators (51 percent) worried about having enough food for their families (see page 58, educator worry in the Adult Well-Being domain).

A majority of program leaders (71 percent) and teaching staff (61 percent) utilized at least one type of public support. One quarter (25 percent) of teaching staff and 11 percent of program leaders utilized three or more public support programs.

Early educators' use of public safety net programs is a reflection of the low compensation and economic insecurity they experience, even with degrees and credentials. More than one half (53 percent) of center-based teaching staff with a bachelor's degree resided in families that utilized at least one form of public support.

TABLE 6. USAGE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Total
	N=38	N=143	N=35	N=216
Medicaid or subsidized health insurance (for children)	19%	26%	11%	18%
Medicaid or Medicare (for educator)	10%	25%	29%	21%
SNAP/Food Stamps	11%	30%	23%	21%
WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children)	2%	10%	14%	9%
Free or reduced lunches for children	19%	29%	20%	23%
Food pantry	9%	10%	14%	11%
TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)	4%	1%	3%	3%
Subsidized housing (Section 8, public housing)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Childcare subsidies or vouchers (not ERDC)	2%	5%	3%	3%
None of the above	28%	36%	43%	36%

Note: Respondents were asked to check all that apply, so percentages may not add up to 100%.
Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Findings: Work Environments

The data that follow are organized by SEQUAL domains and by dimensions within each domain. Each of the following sections begins with a description of the domain and its importance to educator practice and development, followed by a brief discussion of the overall domain mean score across program setting and job role.

Items on SEQUAL are measured on a six-point scale, with one (1) being "strongly disagree" and six (6) being "strongly agree." Unless otherwise noted, higher scores indicate a stronger agreement with the item and a more supportive work environment (for example, a mean score of 4.5 on Teaching Supports indicates that the educator feels they are relatively well supported in their work environment). A few items are dichotomous (yes/no), for example, whether educators participated in certain professional development opportunities.

In our analysis, we present themes that emerged among the classroom educators surveyed. Variations by educator characteristics (e.g., tenure, educational attainment, race and/or ethnicity) and program characteristics (e.g., Gold Seal accreditation, funding source) are described when there are significant differences.

For a more detailed explanation of how to interpret the findings, see **Appendix A.**

Domain 1: Teaching Supports

Domain Score: 4.50

The Teaching Supports domain includes questions about a range of workplace tools and essential conditions that enable classroom educators to apply their knowledge and skills and provide high-quality early learning. Items in this domain examine how an individual might be supported in their daily teaching routine (e.g., through access to substitutes or regular breaks, curriculum materials, resources and training for working with children and families) and how they are professionally supported (e.g., opportunities for reflection, access to professional development). When such supports are missing or unreliable, their absence undermines efforts to improve or sustain program quality and places additional burdens on the complex and demanding work of teaching, which includes meeting the varied needs of individual children in the classroom environment.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

O	Observation
M	Materials
S1	Support
S2	Staffing

The Teaching Supports domain measures the availability and sufficiency of resources in the classroom to support classroom educators' teaching practice and children's learning. The survey items in this domain are organized into five dimensions: 1) use of observation and assessment; 2) availability and quality of materials; 3) supports and resources for children and families; 4) staffing; and 5) professional responsibilities. These dimensions cover elements of support across the classroom and program settings, such as the regular use of observation to document children's learning and assess their strengths and needs, having access to resources to help address challenging behaviors or their work with children and families, and having qualified substitutes available when needed.

An examination of mean score for the Teaching Supports domain allows us to understand to what extent educators feel well resourced. Teaching staff in this study recorded a mean score of 4.50 out of 6.

To understand the overall mean score, we examined classroom educators' responses to different dimensions and items within the domain. Overall, teaching staff felt supported by their co-workers and supervisors in their work with children and families. However, they felt that they had insufficient training or support in certain areas, such as working with children who are dual language learners, working with children with challenging behaviors, and talking with families about children's assessments. Additionally, educators reported experiencing insufficient staffing in their programs.

Implementing Observation and Assessments

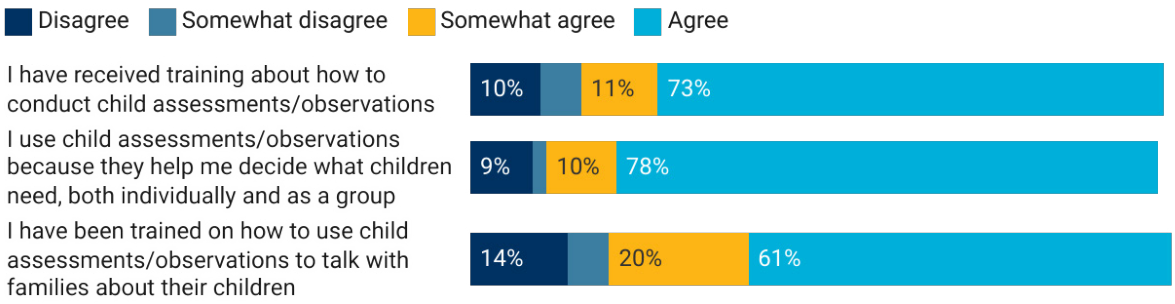
> *"It helps me know and understand the different levels the children are on. It also helps me understand what they need to further challenge them week to week."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Almost all of the teaching staff reported regularly observing and assessing children and agreed that these tools are useful supports for their teaching practice. However, they also identified challenges around training on or implementation of assessments. More than one quarter (27 percent) indicated insufficient training in how to conduct assessments, and 39 percent reported not having sufficient training in how to use these assessments to communicate with families about their children (see **Figure 11**).

> *"My program easily has assessments readily available for children, but does not really do anything to help after the assessments and does not really talk to families about certain children with behaviors/learning disabilities."*
>
> *— Assistant Teacher*

Observations and assessments provide valuable information about children's development. When educators are not sufficiently trained or are inconsistent in assessing children's learning using available tools, assessments may be working against effective teaching instead of providing support.

FIGURE 11. TEACHING STAFF EXPERIENCE WITH OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT



Teaching Staff N=162-166
Note: "Agree" combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, and "disagree" combines "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

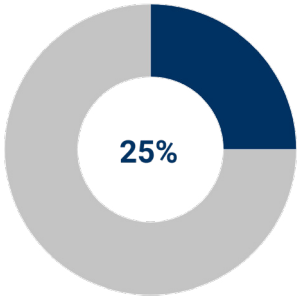
Supports for Children and Families

Because classroom educators take a "whole child" approach to their provision of care and education, they work with families and the communities in which they are embedded to ensure that all aspects of childhood are supported. In this regard, classroom educators need training, support, and access to outside resources to effectively meet the needs of children and families. While teaching staff surveyed felt that they could rely on their co-workers or supervisors, they also reported that outside resources were not consistently available and that additional training would enhance their work with children and families.

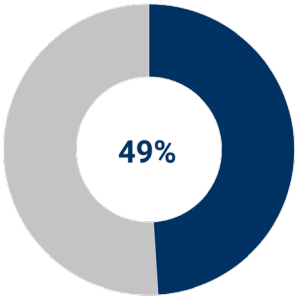
In particular, teaching staff reported lack of training and supports for working with dual language learners. While one quarter of teaching staff spoke another language, they also reported that more than one half (55 percent) of children in their classroom spoke Spanish, and 20 percent reported caring for children who spoke a language other than English or Spanish (see **Figure 12**). However, less than one half (49 percent) of teaching staff felt that they had sufficient training in working with dual language learners, and more than one quarter (28 percent) reported that if they encountered a challenge communicating with children or families due to a language barrier, there were not always sufficient resources available to assist them.

> *"My only concern has more to do with language differences. Translations are not always offered. We bring up these differences mainly on holidays, but not on a daily basis, where I feel it is more important to do my best and learn at least some of the most important vocabulary."*
>
> *— Assistant Teacher*

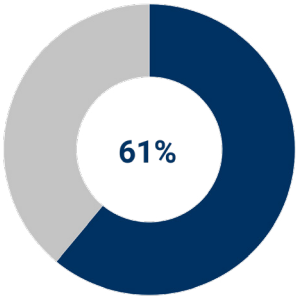
FIGURE 12. LANGUAGES IN THE CLASSROOM



Percentage of teaching staff who speak another language



Percentage of teaching staff who report having received sufficient training in working with DLLs



Percentage of teaching staff with children in their classroom who speak another language

Teaching Staff N=179-186
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, CSCCE

In addition to a need for more support and training for working with children who are dual language learners and their families, more than one third (39 percent) of teaching staff reported that there was not enough training available for addressing children's challenging behaviors. This finding was echoed in the open-ended responses, as educators shared that they needed more support with managing challenging behaviors and that this issue was also very personally challenging, both for their well-being and their teaching practice.

> *"Although it is a rewarding job and you have the ability to be creative, I feel that behavior issues have increased significantly and it causes teacher burnout."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

> *"There is little-to-no help out there with children and behavior issues [...] and this is making my decision to continue teaching sometimes difficult."*
>
> *— Program Leader*

In order to provide support for the whole child, teaching staff in Flagler and Volusia Counties need access to additional resources to strengthen their skills in supporting the needs of children in their care.

Sufficient Staffing Supports

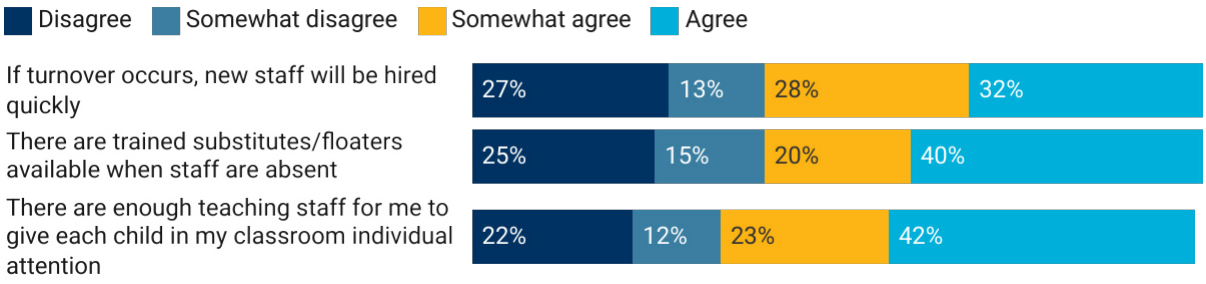
Regardless of job role, classroom educators reported staffing challenges (e.g., access to qualified substitutes, sufficient staff coverage to provide children with individualized attention, staff hired in the event of turnover). While the staffing crisis in the ECE field is longstanding, the pandemic greatly exacerbated these issues.

> *"Staffing is a huge issue at my center. Although the VPK teachers are strongly committed to helping each child maximize their potential, the lack of support secondary mainly to staffing issues and cost make this a very frustrating and exhausting endeavor."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

> *"Constant new hires make it hard for stability."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Teaching staff reported that they could not rely on trained floaters or substitutes to cover when staff are absent. They also reported inadequate staffing levels for providing children with individual attention (see **Figure 13**). While a majority (62 percent) of teaching staff agreed that if turnover occurs in their program, everything possible is done to hire qualified new staff, only 32 percent agreed that new staff will be hired quickly, reflecting the difficulty of recruitment and hiring. The challenges of insufficient staffing and turnover were a consistent theme across teaching staff roles and also permeated the open-ended responses.

FIGURE 13. STAFFING SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO TEACHING STAFF



Teaching Staff N=179-185
Note: "Agree" combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, and "disagree" combines "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

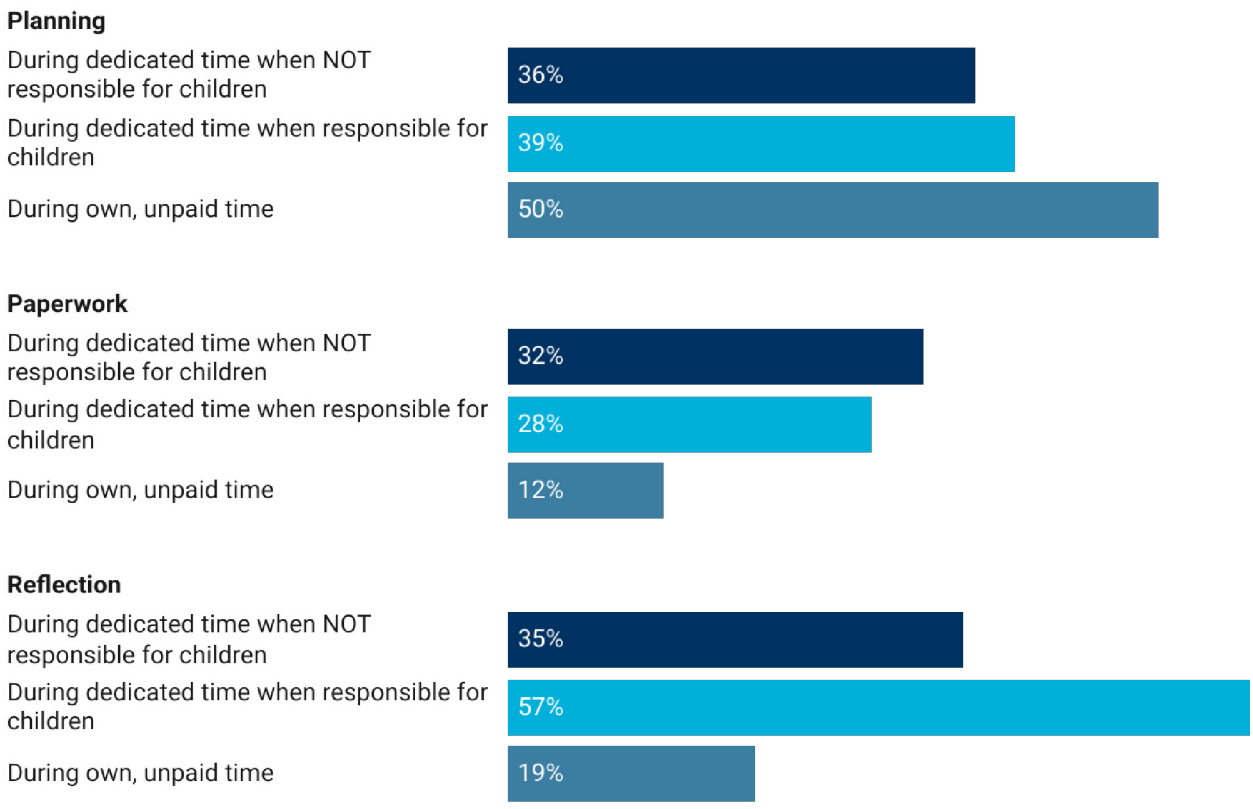
When asked about their center's staffing situation, program leaders noted that a majority (60 percent) of teaching staff at their centers were leaving due to low wages and few benefits. Leaders have had to close classrooms because they are not able to hire or retain staff (53 percent). When there are not enough teachers to meet teacher:child ratios and provide responsive care, classroom educators may struggle to attend to individual children's needs and provide a stable and nurturing learning environment for all the children in their care. Unreliable staffing also has the potential to lead to burnout among the teaching staff who remain.

> *"I am underpaid and expected to work outside of paid hours. Staff retention is low for that reason."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Time for Professional Responsibilities

Staffing also impacts the amount of time that classroom educators have to work on completing their professional responsibilities, such as planning curriculum and assessing children. Teaching staff indicated that they often use their unpaid time or time when they are working in the classroom with young children to complete professional responsibilities such as planning, paperwork, and reflecting with other teaching staff on classroom practice (see **Figure 14**).

FIGURE 14. TIME FOR TEACHING STAFF TO ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES



Teaching Staff N=177-186

Note: Respondents were asked to check all that apply, so percentages may not add up to 100%.

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

> *"Educators don't stop when they leave the classroom. They are spending a lot of their unpaid time completing work for the classroom/school."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

> *"The biggest challenge I have is not enough time without the responsibility of the children to document all the observations."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Among teaching staff surveyed, one half indicated that they did their planning during their own unpaid time, and more than one third did so when they were also responsible for children (see **Figure 14**). Furthermore, teaching staff reported that they did not have the opportunity to meet with other teaching staff to reflect on classroom practice during the past week.

Classroom educators need **dedicated non-child-contact** time to develop lesson plans, conduct observations and assessments, engage in reflection with colleagues, and complete required paperwork.

> *"The staff have only one hour of naptime to plan or prepare activities, unless, of course, they are busy cleaning up from lunch, making cots, sweeping floors, changing diapers, or there is an emergency to deal with, a sick child, a sick teacher, a dirty floor, or restocking diapers and supplies. Hard to plan when you never know what the day will bring. And so of course, they quit, and then we start over."*
>
> *— Assistant Teacher*

Variations in Teaching Supports: Supports Matter for Training and Retention

There were variations in SEQUAL scores in the Teaching Supports domain based on educator tenure at the center. Teaching staff who had been at their center for two years or less had significantly lower mean scores on the Observation and Assessment dimension (M=4.50), compared to teaching staff with three to five years (M= 5.09) or six or more years (M=5.00).[5] Among teaching staff who have been at their center for two years or less, 45 percent also reported being new to the field (two years or less in the field). Therefore, those teachers with less tenure at their center may also be newer to the field, so they may not have as much experience with conducting observations and assessments and may need additional training and support in this area.

5 $F(2,165) = 3.08$, $p = .048$

Supported Teachers Want to Stay

Teaching staff whose three-year plans included staying at their center had higher mean scores on both the overall Teaching Supports domain and the Staffing dimension. Those who planned to stay at their current center had significantly higher mean scores on the Teaching Supports domain, compared to those who wanted to leave the ECE field (M=4.78 and M=4.13, respectively).[6] Additionally, on the Staffing dimension, teaching staff who planned to stay at their center had statistically higher mean scores (M=4.45) than those who planned to move centers but stay in the field (M=3.58), those were unsure of their plans (M=3.81), and those who planned leave the field (M=3.34). Thus, teaching staff who feel more supported in terms of staffing, training, and professional development report an intention to continue working in their current program.

For additional mean scores on the Teaching Supports domain by select educator and center characteristics, please see **Appendix D: Domain Mean Scores**.

6 F(3,163)=3.88, p=.013

Domain 2: Learning Community

Domain Score: 4.29

The Learning Community domain addresses conditions that strengthen and refine teaching practice. A professional learning community encompasses elements of program policies, practices, and relationships that lead to a supportive climate of learning and applying new strategies and approaches. A strong learning community involves opportunities to participate in relevant trainings, occasion to practice developing skills, and encouragement for testing new strategies and ideas. Effective learning and implementation of new approaches to teaching requires engagement among colleagues across all roles within the organization. When learning opportunities fail to address classroom challenges, allow for opportunities to practice and reflect, or engage all members of the team, adult learning and organizational improvement may be stalled and less likely to be sustained.

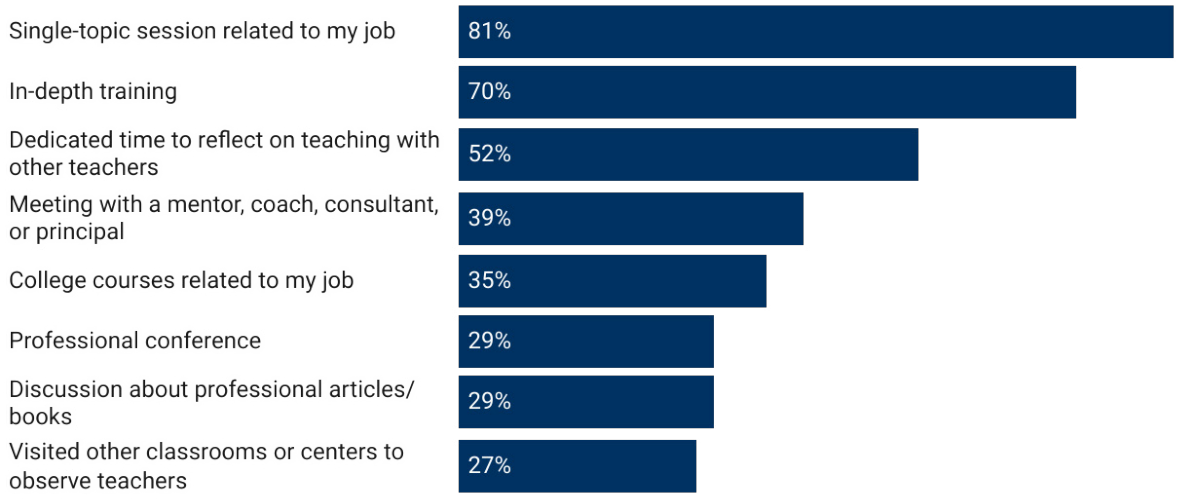
PD Professional Development
AL Applying Learning

The SEQUAL Learning Community domain consists of questions categorized in two dimensions: 1) opportunities for professional development; and 2) opportunities to apply learning and develop teaching practice and skills with other educators in a variety of educational contexts. Teaching staff reported a mean score of 4.29 out of 6.

Professional Development

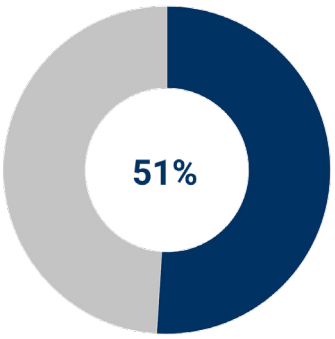
Overall, teaching staff participated in a variety of professional development opportunities (see **Figure 15**). The Florida Department of Children and Families has training requirements for all staff in licensed centers, and the ELCFV also offers optional professional development opportunities. The most frequent professional development opportunity among teaching staff surveyed was participation in a single-topic session related to their job (81 percent). In addition to these one-time opportunities, 70 percent of teaching staff indicated that they participated in more in-depth training that spanned multiple sessions.

FIGURE 15. TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE PAST SIX MONTHS



Teaching Staff N=187
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

However, a smaller proportion of teaching staff indicated they had opportunities in the past six months to engage in more relational forms of professional development, such as meeting with a coach or mentor (39 percent), attending a professional conference (29 percent), or visiting other classrooms or centers as observers (27 percent). Professional development opportunities such as these allow educators to engage with the material in a way that is more personal and applied, crafting the information to fit their own classroom practice or seeing how it plays out in other classrooms.



of teaching staff agreed that they would be paid for any required professional development

Additionally, almost one half (48 percent) of educators did not have sufficient time dedicated to reflect on their teaching practice with other teachers. Reflection encourages classroom educators to engage in critical thinking about their teaching skills and strategies, as well as the practice of other educators. These types of professional development opportunities are crucial to high-quality teaching and positive developmental outcomes for children.

> *"My co-workers and boss help me by giving me ideas to help me with what I learned and support me in my way of teaching. Some challenges I face are having low staff and no funds to get the things I need to further my learning."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Pandemic restrictions may have contributed to low participation in these relational opportunities, since many conferences were canceled or relegated to online platforms. Due to physical distancing restrictions, educators were often unable to meet in groups to have discussions. In addition, having sufficient staff to cover absences when educators attend in-person professional development and having funds to allow staff attend courses and workshops may also present a serious challenge for program leaders.

> *"It is very difficult trying to be all things to everyone including children. The topic of burnout has not been discussed. Just more demands on education. Fatigue is never addressed."*
>
> *— Program Leader*

While the survey for program leaders does not include questions specifically about their work environments, program leaders were asked about their recent participation in professional development. Almost all (98 percent) reported that in the past 12 months they had participated in professional development or training on working with young children. While the majority (66 percent) had received training specific to their administrative role, one third of program leaders noted they did **not** have specific training to prepare and support them in their administrative duties.

In their responses to open-ended questions about challenges, many directors and supervisors expressed their struggles related to their many responsibilities supporting educators, children, and families at their center.

> *"As a director of a program, your job is to support your staff, helping them grow, helping with their emotional and medical needs, on top of running a school, staying within the rules and regulations, supporting children and their families, and the behavioral needs of these children. Burnout is high. I feel like I am in an endless loop and slowly dropping all my balls. I am constantly tired, but I know as a leader, I cannot show it."*
>
> *— Program Leader*

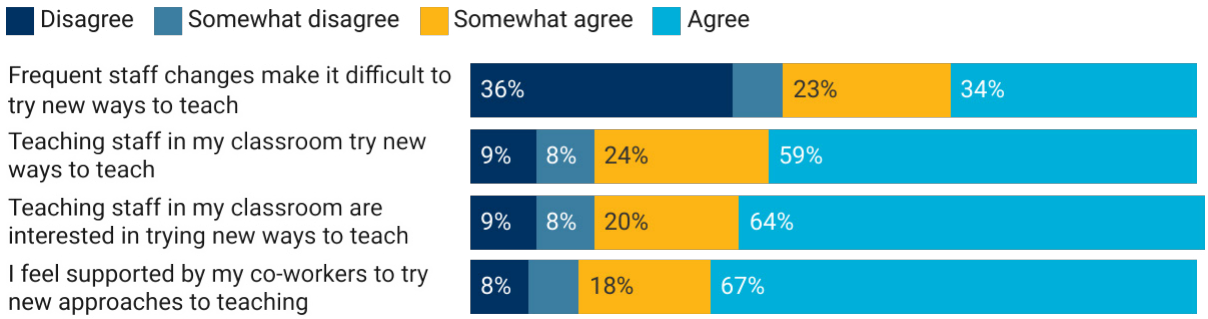
Applying Learning

The other aspect of the Learning Community domain is the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained in professional development to strengthen teaching practice. Teaching staff surveyed felt that their co-workers supported them to some degree in trying new approaches, that the professional development they engage with helps them improve their practice, and that their co-workers were also engaged in trying new ways to teach. Nonetheless, they also reported barriers to applying their practice, like insufficient staffing.

> *"There isn't always enough consistent staff to be able to try new methods of teaching. Our directors do their best to support us, but with the staff turnover in some of the classrooms, integrating new things isn't always possible."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

As seen in **Figure 16**, around two thirds of teaching staff surveyed agreed that they felt supported by their co-workers to try new ways to teach (67 percent) and that educators in their classroom are likewise interested in trying new teaching methods (64 percent). However, as a result of insufficient staffing patterns, one third (34 percent) said that frequent staffing changes made it difficult for them to do so, highlighting the impact that turnover has on educators' practice. Having opportunities to experiment with new approaches and feeling trusted in this regard helps educators grow and improve (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003). Thus, these results point to the importance of consistent support from colleagues as a part of a learning community.

FIGURE 16. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR APPLYING LEARNING



Teaching Staff N=171-183

Note: "Agree" combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, and "disagree" combines "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Variations in Learning Community Mean Scores: The Importance of Opportunities for Collegial Discourse

There were variations in SEQUAL scores by Gold Seal accreditation. Teaching staff who did not work at centers with Gold Seal accreditation had significantly higher mean scores, compared to those whose programs were accredited, on the Professional Development dimension (M=4.31 and M=3.87, respectively),[7] the Applying Learning dimension (M=4.48 and M=4.16, respectively),[8] and the overall Learning Community domain (M=4.40 and M=4.01, respectively).[9] There is a significant finding on the Learning Community domain and the Applying Learning dimension for those who wanted to stay at their center, it may be the case that the accreditation assessments do not capture aspects of the work environment that support educators' experiences with professional development (e.g., having a choice in the trainings they attend) or their ability to apply what they are learning in these trainings.

Supported Teachers Want to Stay

Among teaching staff, those who responded that they would be working at the same program in three years had a significantly higher mean score on the Learning Community domain (M=4.53) than those who saw themselves leaving the center but remaining in the field (M=3.92) or leaving the ECE field (M=3.95).[10] Furthermore, those who planned to stay at their center also had a statistically higher mean score on the Applying Learning dimension (M=4.66), compared to those who saw themselves leaving the center but remaining in the field (M=4.01) or leaving the field (M=4.11).[11] Thus, the opportunities for professional development, collaboration, and reflection appear to contribute to an educator's desire to remain in early care and education.

For additional mean scores on the Learning Community domain by select educator and center characteristics, please see **Appendix D: Domain Mean Scores.**

7 $t(183)=1.976$ $p=.05$
8 $t(185)=1.994$, $p=.048$
9 $t(185)=2.338$, $p=.02$
10 $F(3,163)=3.775$, $p=.012$
11 $F(3,163)=4.429$, $p=.005$

Domain 3: Job Crafting

Domain Score: 4.59

The Job Crafting domain focuses on workplace practices and relationships that support the autonomy of educators to express their perspectives and to impact decisions that affect their classrooms and the larger organization. When educators consider themselves a part of a team whose perspectives are respected and considered, they are more able to engage in the reflection, creative problem-solving, and innovation necessary for continuous quality improvement. Furthermore, morale and performance improve in workplaces where employees feel well informed about program policies and changes and can identify a clear process for giving input into organization-wide decisions that impact their day-to-day jobs. When teamwork and avenues for input are lacking or educator input is not seriously considered, morale and engagement decrease, and turnover increases.

T	Teamwork
DM	Decision Making
I	Input

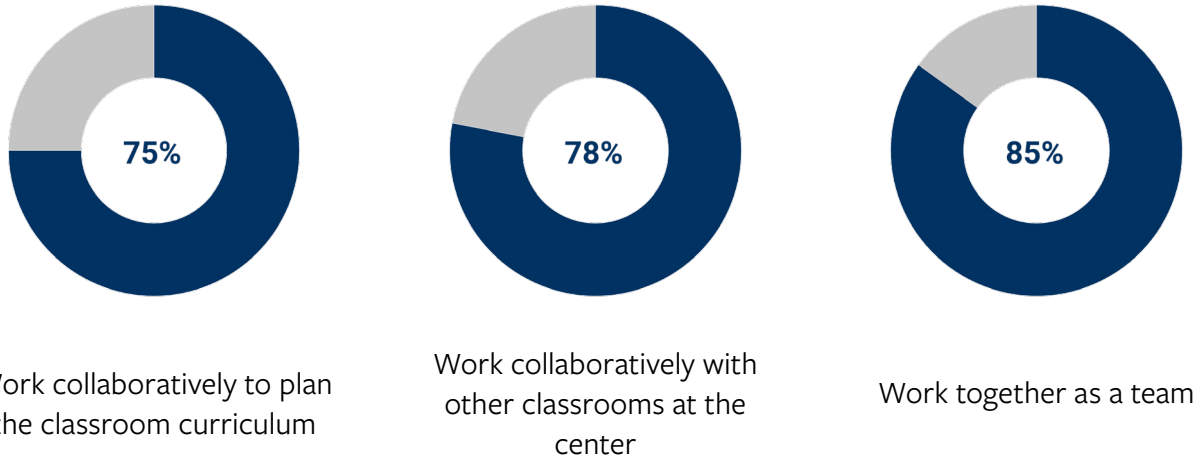
The Job Crafting domain includes dimensions that assess: 1) how educators work together as a team in their educational setting; 2) how much input they feel they have; and 3) their perceived decision-making power. Educators surveyed had a mean score of 4.59 out of 6 on the Job Crafting domain.

Teamwork

> *"I've now changed classrooms and my ideas are being implemented. I feel more included and needed. It's important to feel a part of something."*
>
> *— Assistant Teacher*

An effective, high-quality classroom begins with a teaching team that respects one another's approaches and teaching styles and works together to meet the needs of children and families. Educators surveyed reported high levels of teamwork with their co-workers. The majority of educators indicated that they work together in the classroom as a team, work collaboratively to plan the classroom curriculum, and work collaboratively with other classrooms in the center (see **Figure 17**). These assessments indicate a culture of collaboration among the educators in many of the centers. While aspects of the centers' organizational structures may contribute, these findings might also be attributed to feelings of solidarity with regard to center challenges identified by educators, such as insufficient staffing, economic insecurity, and children's challenging behaviors.

FIGURE 17. TEACHING STAFF ASSESSMENTS OF TEAMWORK



Teaching Staff N=173-175
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Decision Making and Input

> *"I should have more input in the children who are put in my classroom."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

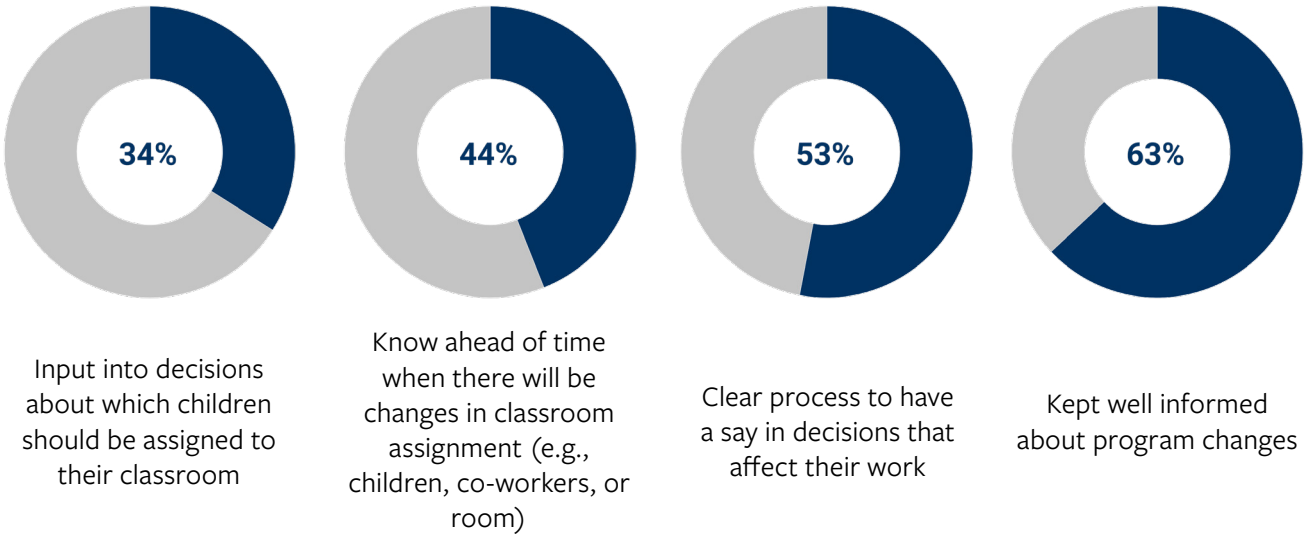
Opportunities to make decisions provide teaching staff with a needed level of control over their classrooms and the learning environments they create. Lack of agency can impact staff morale and can lead to decreased job satisfaction and an increase in staff turnover. A lack of agency and opportunities for input permeated the SEQUAL scores and open-ended responses within this dimension.

Classroom educators agreed that they have a certain level of autonomy regarding what takes place in their classroom (for example, making plans or changes in their classroom activities) and their classroom choice (see **Figure 18**). However, overall they reported they did not have a voice in many classroom or programmatic decisions; for example, at the classroom level, only 27 percent of teaching staff surveyed agreed that they can decide when outside visitors can observe their classroom, and 34 percent agreed they have input into which children should be in their classroom. Based on their direct knowledge and experience, teaching staff are a valuable resource in determining the appropriate classroom for children. Furthermore, less than one half (44 percent) agreed that they are informed of any changes to their classroom assignment (e.g., children, co-workers, or room).

> *"The teachers should be able to plan the curriculum in the way they think is best for their class.... The teachers ultimately are the boots on the ground, dealing with kids and parents daily. Working together with directors/supervisors would be beneficial in being proactive to be a better support for the parents."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

While a majority are kept informed about program policies (73 percent) or program changes (63 percent), only one half of the educators surveyed indicated that they feel invited to offer input into policies and programs (55 percent), that there is a clear process for offering input (53 percent), that their input is taken seriously (55 percent), or that there is a clear process for offering input (53 percent). Thus, even though teaching staff are well informed about policies at their programs, they do not feel they have much input as to what those policies actually are or that they have a voice in programmatic decisions that impact everyone.

FIGURE 18. TEACHING STAFF ASSESSMENTS OF INPUT



Teaching Staff N=174-185
Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Variations in Job Crafting: Opportunities for Input and Decision-making

There were variations for SEQUAL scores on the Job Crafting domain based on the educator's job role and future plans, as well as the Gold Seal accreditation of their center. Assistant teachers had significantly lower mean scores on the Decision-Making dimension (M=4.03) than lead teachers (M=4.48).[12] As assistant teachers work in support of lead teachers in the classroom, these findings may reflect this power difference, with assistants believing they do not have as much agency or input into decisions that impact their classroom and their work. Programs should find ways to support the innovations and ideas of assistant teachers and incorporate their voice more intentionally.

12 $t(176) = -2.14$, $p = .034$

Teaching staff working in programs with Gold Seal accreditation had statistically lower scores compared to those without accreditation on the Input dimension (M=3.98 and M=4.49, respectively)[13] and on the overall Job Crafting domain (M=4.30 and M=4.70, respectively).[14] The standards for accreditation that lead to a Gold Seal status may be limiting educators' ability to innovate in their classrooms or impact center-wide policy, as centers must adhere to the standards in order to maintain their status.

Supported Teachers Want to Stay

Teaching staff members who planned to stay at their center had significantly higher scores on the Teamwork dimension (M=5.27)[15] and the overall Job Crafting domain (M=4.48)[16] in comparison to those who want to leave the field (M=4.45 and M=4.08 for the dimension and domain, respectively). Educators who planned to stay at their center also had significantly higher mean scores on the Input dimension (M=4.66), compared to those who planned to leave the field (M=4.00) or leave their center but remain in the field (M=3.97).[17] These results appear to indicate that it is essential for center-based programs to foster job crafting, honoring and incorporating the voices and ideas of **all** their educators in order to retain staff and increase their performance.

For additional mean scores on the Job Crafting domain by select educator and center characteristics, please see **Appendix D: Domain Mean Scores**.

13 $t(185)=2.797$, $p=.006$
14 $t(185)=2.797$, $p=.006$
15 $F(3,157)=3.788$, $p=.012$
16 $F(3,163)=4.485$, $p=.005$
17 $F(3,163)=3.816$, $p=.011$

Domain 4: Adult Well-Being

Domain Score: 4.40

The Adult Well-Being domain encompasses the economic security and wellness of classroom educators, along with their interactions with co-workers. Low pay and inadequate benefits are common to most early childhood jobs and contribute to financial worry and insecurity among many classroom educators. Poor compensation is often exacerbated by unpaid work, working when ill, undependable breaks/schedules, and the absence of financial reward for professional advancement. Teaching young children is physically demanding work that includes continual exposure to illness. Educators require appropriate training to protect their health and assurances of appropriate ergonomic equipment, as well as adequate sick leave and vacation time.

Another important contributor to educator well-being is the tenor of relationships among colleagues at a program. In a climate of respect and fairness, well-being can protect against or even alleviate stress, but dynamics such as favoritism and unresolved conflict can exacerbate stress and negatively impact well-being. In addition, children's well-being and learning are directly influenced by the emotional and physical well-being experienced by the adults responsible for their education and care. When educators experience high levels of stress, there is a greater likelihood that they will be unable to engage children in developmentally supportive interactions that contribute to their learning.

EWB Economic Well-Being
WS Wellness Supports
QWL Quality of Work Life

The Adult Well-Being domain measures how programs support classroom educators' economic, physical, and emotional well-being. Dimensions within this domain include: 1) Economic Well-Being, which comprises the dependability of workplace policies (e.g., pay and benefits) and the degree to which educators worry about financial security; 2) Physical Wellness and Safety, which examines the conditions educators report that ensure their health and security; and 3) Quality of Work Life, which examines how well teaching staff are supported and treated by other adults in their work environment.

> *"The pay is ridiculous. I have to have three other part-time jobs to help pay our bills at home."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

> *"Early educators serve [...] an important role for children and their future. And because of this role, they deserve better pay and benefits."*
>
> *— Program Leader*

The domain mean score across all educators was 4.40 out of 6. An examination of the dimension scores indicates that more positive ratings were concentrated in measures of Physical Wellness and Safety and Quality of Work Life (i.e., relationship with co-workers), while educators' responses within the dimension of Economic Well-Being indicate substantial concerns about their economic security.

Economic Well-Being

Lack of Dependable Compensation Policies

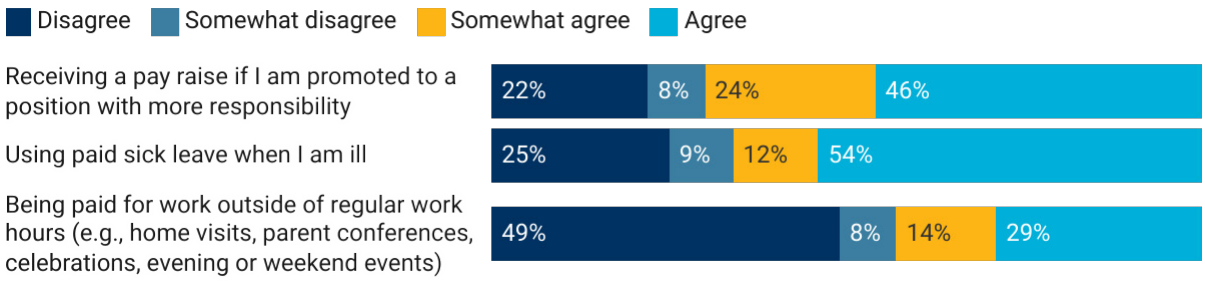
> *"I am underpaid and expected to work outside of paid hours. Staff retention is low for that reason."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Teaching staff reported on the dependability of economic compensation policies to support their well-being and teaching practice. While a majority (71 percent) of center-based teaching staff agreed that they could depend on being paid for attending all-staff meetings at their center, they also reported that they could **not** depend on being paid for:

- additional work-related responsibilities, such as work done outside of regular business hours;
- being able to use their benefits, such as paid sick leave when ill (which is especially problematic while working during a pandemic); or
- being promoted to a position with more responsibility (see **Figure 19**).

Ensuring that educator time is valued and compensated and that educators can depend on utilizing their benefits is essential to fostering economic and physical well-being in the workforce. Likewise, the absence of financial reward for professional advancement can serve as an additional stressor and drive turnover. To generate feelings of respect and foster a positive work environment, everyone should be assured of a raise if they are promoted.

FIGURE 19. RELIABILITY OF COMPENSATION POLICIES FOR TEACHING STAFF



Teaching Staff N=167-181
Note: "Agree" combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, and "disagree" combines "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Furthermore, in addition to the lack of dependable compensation policies, many educators reported that access to breaks was undependable. Regular breaks are a basic requirement mandated by state and federal law. More than one third (36 percent) of teaching staff reported that they could not depend on getting paid breaks during the workday. In addition to the legal ramifications and the impact on educators' economic well-being, this finding has clear implications for children—in order to be alert and responsive to children, classroom educators need to have breaks.

Economic Insecurity

> *"There are hardly any days off. We're working hard and never have time for our families. Trainings come out of pockets when the pay is already low. No health care and no protection from getting ill from parents and children."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Research indicates that low wages and a lack of dependable compensation policies contribute to economic insecurity of the workforce and drive turnover (Hur et al., 2023). All early educators surveyed for this report, regardless of job role, indicated high levels of worry about their financial security (see **Table 7**; also, for more detailed information on educators' wages and benefits, please see page 29). For example, across job roles, around three quarters (76 percent) of early educators worried about paying their family's monthly bills and routine healthcare costs.

Despite the skilled nature of this essential work, the wages that these early educators reported do not appear to support their basic needs and well-being. In addition to early educators reporting their concern about paying routine household and daily living expenses, more than one half (60 percent) of teaching staff worried they would not receive a raise. These economic concerns can undermine their well-being and cause significant stress.

TABLE 7. EARLY EDUCATORS' ECONOMIC WORRY, BY JOB ROLE

I worry about...	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Total
Paying my family's monthly bills	72%	75%	81%	76%
Paying housing costs	66%	72%	57%	65%
Having enough food for my family	50%	56%	46%	51%
Paying routine healthcare costs	79%	75%	73%	76%

Program Leader N=38
Lead Teacher N=144-146
Assistant Teacher N=37
Note: Above, "Worry" combines "strongly agree," "agree," and "somewhat agree" responses.

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

> *"¡Considero que mi bienestar tanto económico, social o emocional jamás deberá afectar mi enseñanza ni mi interacción con mis niños en el aula! ¡Claro que me afecta y me preocupa personalmente un salario de $12 la hora en el estado de la Florida y dos hijos* [...] *pero no permito que esto afecte mi desempeño con mis niñosi"*
>
> *"I believe that my economic, social, and emotional well-being should never affect my teaching or my interaction with my children in the classroom! Of course it affects me, and I am personally concerned, having a salary of $12 an hour in the state of Florida and two children* [...] *but I don't let this affect my work with my children!"*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Physical Wellness and Safety

Teaching staff surveyed were also asked about how their work environments are designed to ensure their safety, security, and physical health. Their responses indicate that programs are making some provisions for educators' personal safety and security. For example, a vast majority agreed their center provides personal protective equipment (88 percent), security measures to ensure safety and well-being (83 percent), and adult-sized equipment (81 percent).

However, teaching staff also reported insufficiencies in meeting all of the physical and mental demands of their work. For example, more than one third (38 percent) agreed that their program provides training on managing their stress and healthy practices, while less than one half (41 percent) of educators surveyed indicated their program did not provide comfortable places to sit with children.

Providing physical and mental wellness supports for educators can better enable their engagement with children in the classroom. Furthermore, given the level of continued stress and worry reported by educators since the pandemic, it is imperative that their mental and physical needs be met so that they might be able to meet those of the children.

> *"I am always stressed if I get sick. They offer PTO, but you only 'earn' four hours each pay period. So often times, you either never have enough PTO for a sick day or* [*the hours*] *only get used for sick days, and you never get to have any actual vacation or family time. The hourly rate is poor, in my opinion, for the level of difficulty of students we have here, as well. It can be hard making $14.50 to $15.00 an hour getting physically hit and kicked, when you see almost every fast food restaurant paying more for a lot less work."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

The Enduring Impact of COVID 19 and Environmental Disasters

At the onset of the study, early educators in Flagler and Volusia Counties were dealing with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both counties were also still being impacted by the effects of Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. Since the onset of the pandemic, 71 percent of program leaders had either been hospitalized or had someone close to them hospitalized with COVID, and 55 percent knew or were close to someone who had died. Furthermore, 72 percent of program leaders said that someone affiliated with the center (e.g., a child or family member of a child attending the program) had been hospitalized, and 28 percent reported that someone affiliated with their center had died from COVID-19. The impact of these crises on the well-being of educators and program leaders in Flagler and Volusia Counties were evident in the responses of educators and directors.

Educators expressed high levels of worry about their safety and the safety of those around them at their programs. A majority of program leaders and teaching staff were anxious about getting ill from COVID (66 percent and 63 percent, respectively), worried about possibly infecting families (73 percent and 68 percent, respectively), and concerned about a family member or close friend getting COVID (79 percent and 77 percent, respectively). These results, combined with the finding that nearly one half (46 percent) of teaching staff reported that they could not depend on using paid sick leave if they were ill, contribute to compounding and persistent worry. Concern about becoming ill is combined with concern about infecting others and complicated by the educator's inability to afford or have the provision to take sick leave.

In addition to their concerns about their own risk of infection, early educators reported changes to their physical and emotional well-being within the past year. Most program leaders and teaching staff reported changes in their sleep (90 percent and 78 percent, respectively) and their eating habits (73 percent and 61 percent, respectively). Furthermore, a large number of program leaders and classroom educators also reported difficulty concentrating (73 percent and 60 percent, respectively) and feeling negative and/or anxious about the future (53 percent and 60 percent, respectively).

Policymakers and county leadership need to be aware of and make provisions for the ongoing effects of trauma and stress from disasters within their communities.

Quality of Work Life

Positive climates in child care centers foster good relationships, along with feelings of trust, respect, and safety, and can contribute to positive educational and workforce outcomes. A vast majority of respondents agreed that their co-workers treat them with respect (85 percent), that their co-workers share their values regarding the teaching of young children (84 percent), and that their co-workers support them when they have a personal issue (74 percent). However, fewer classroom educators agreed that they felt confident that their complaints (52 percent) or complaints from any staff (62 percent) would be heard and handled fairly and appropriately by program leaders. Thus, while the majority of educators feel they are respected and treated fairly on a personal level by their co-workers, many do not feel they will be treated fairly when a professional issue arises that needs to be managed by a program leader.

> *"Sometimes, I feel like our directors only listen to themselves and do not hear us out on what we have to say. Sometimes, I feel like what we say to our management is brushed to the side."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Variations in Adult Well-Being: Supporting Economic and Emotional Well-Being

There were variations in adult well-being by tenure at the center and future plans. Teaching staff who worked two years or less at their center had significantly lower mean scores in the Adult Well-Being domain (M=4.24) and in the dimensions of Economic Well-Being (M=3.48) and Quality of Work Life (M=4.63), compared to those with six or more years at the center (M=4.71, M= 4.14, and M=5.06, respectively).[18] Teachers with less tenure are often not paid as much as their more senior counterparts, nor have they developed deep relationships with their colleagues or a nuanced understanding of the school climate.

18 Economic Well-Being, $F(2,184)=6.358$, $p=.002$; Quality of Work Life, $F(2,183)=3.718$, $p=.026$; and Adult Well-Being, $F(2,183)= 5.464$, $p=.005$

Supported Teachers Want to Stay

Teaching staff who planned to stay at their center had significantly higher mean scores on the Adult Well-Being domain and its contributing dimensions.[19] Teaching staff who planned to stay at their center had higher Economic Well-Being mean scores (M=3.97), compared to those who wanted to leave their center but remain in the ECE field (M=3.26) and those who were unsure of their future plans (M=3.39). Similarly, on the Quality of Work Life and Wellness dimensions, those who planned to stay at their center had higher mean scores (M=5.12 and M=4.95, respectively), compared to those who wanted to leave their center but remain in the field (M=4.42 and M=4.49, respectively). On the overall Adult Well-Being domain, those who planned to stay at their center had statistically higher mean scores (M=4.68) than those who planned to leave their center but remain in the field (M=4.06). These results suggest that classroom educators whose financial, physical, and emotional needs are met may be less likely to want to leave early care and education all together.

For additional mean scores on the Adult Well-Being domain by select educator and center characteristics, please see **Appendix D**: **Domain Mean Scores**.

19 Economic Well-Being, $F(3,163)=4.334$, $p=.006$; Wellness, $F(3,163)=3.645$, $p=.014$; Quality of Work Life, $F(3,162)=4.165$, $p=.007$; and Adult Well-Being, $F(3,163)=5.698$, $p=.001$

Domain 5: Program Leadership

Domain Score: 4.86

The Program Management and Leadership domain focuses on classroom educators' assessments of the staff members who fulfill leadership functions by providing support and guidance to their teaching practice. In center-based ECE programs, leaders fulfill multiple functions. Here, we focus on supervision of teaching staff and oversight for daily operations of the site, which may be functions fulfilled by more than one person in a given site. Leaders create a workplace climate that supports staff morale and encourages innovation when they are: knowledgeable about child development and pedagogy; engaged in learning themselves; considered to be accessible and fair; and committed to listening and responding to staff concerns. When leaders are assessed as inaccessible, insensitive, or unfamiliar with the daily experiences of teaching staff, confidence in their authority and in the organization is undermined.

The Leadership domain consists of items assessing the support and guidance of supervisors and leaders to teaching staff. Because an educator's direct supervisor may be a different individual than the overall program leader or director, we asked educators to indicate whether their supervisor is also the program leader at their center. Teaching staff surveyed had a mean score of 4.86. Overall, teaching staff had favorable assessments of their supervisors and leaders, recognizing them as knowledgeable and supportive. While they assessed them favorably, educators indicated they did not always have enough time to engage with their supervisor about their practice or to discuss the challenges they are experiencing in the classroom (see **Figure 20**).

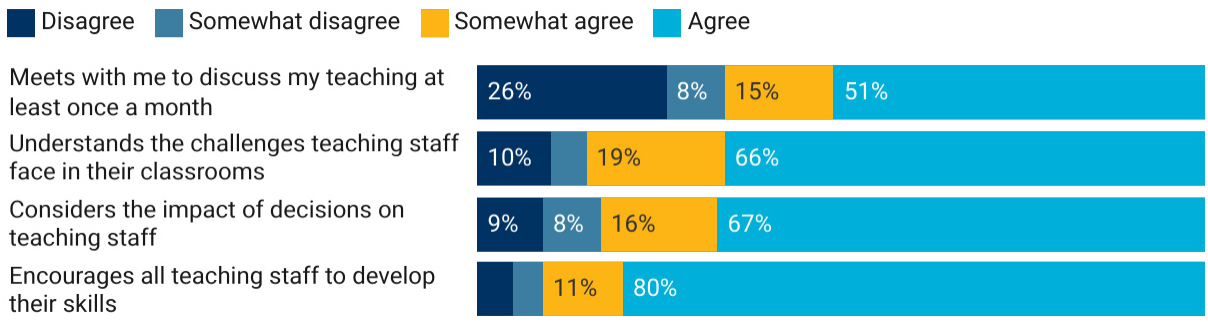
> *"Leadership helps me be a better teacher, with constant ideas for my classroom and curriculum."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

Assessments of Leadership

A vast majority of teaching staff (91 percent) agreed that their supervisor is knowledgeable about early childhood curriculum and working with young children, and 77 percent agreed their supervisor is actively engaged in learning. Furthermore, a majority (80 percent) of educators agreed that their supervisor knows how they teach, and 82 percent agree that their supervisor encourages them to take initiative to solve problems.

> *"I understand that the needs in the VPK classroom are just one of the many issues that the director deals with on a daily basis. But that being said, the director, who is overworked herself, could be more supportive of classroom concerns raised by teachers."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

FIGURE 20. TEACHING STAFF ASSESSMENTS OF LEADERSHIP



Teaching Staff N=176-184

Note: "Agree" combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, and "disagree" combines "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

While supervisors are seen as knowledgeable and encouraging for the most part, one third of teaching staff felt their supervisors did not always: understand the challenges they experienced in the classroom (34 percent); consider teaching staff input about classroom and program policies (33 percent); or treat all teaching staff fairly (32 percent). Furthermore, they also reported a lack of opportunities to meet routinely with their supervisor to review their teaching practice; only 51 percent reported that their supervisor meets with them at least once a month to discuss their teaching.

It is important for leaders and supervisors to provide reflective supervision, gathering information on staff through observation, feedback from other staff, and input from the staff members themselves. From this information, leaders should develop and deliver individualized feedback on job performance. Skills like reflective supervision take time and training to develop, however, almost one third (34 percent) of program leaders reported that they did not have any professional development or training for their role as an administrator. Leaders may benefit in training tailored for their job in mentoring and guidance of teaching staff at their center.

> *"Having direct input from the director or having them to spend time in the classroom I think would make a difference."*
>
> *— Assistant Teacher*

Program Leadership Rated Consistently

There were no statistically significant variations in educator or center characteristics for the Leadership domain.

For additional mean scores on the Program Management and Leadership domain by select educator and center characteristics, please see **Appendix D: Domain Mean Scores**.

Findings: Turnover and Future Career Intentions

Staff turnover is a significant challenge for most ECE programs throughout the United States. National estimates of ECE staff turnover range from 20 to 40 percent annually, with 50 percent reported by program leaders in Flagler and Volusia Counties. Given the high prevalence of turnover in the field, an examination of the relationship between the future career intentions of educators and key characteristics of their work environment may aid in the development of policies and practices to retain early educators.

Our analyses of SEQUAL data indicated significant variations among nearly every domain and educators' reported intention to leave their current place of work (see pages 43, 49, 54, and 62). Given these findings, we further analyzed the data to obtain profiles of educator responses within and across domains, examining how these profiles were related to educators' intentions regarding their employment in early care and education. These profiles point more acutely to policies, practices, and program elements that programs and systems can improve in order to better retain their current workforce.

Methodology

To understand early educators' career intentions, SEQUAL includes an item asking where educators see themselves in the next three years. We coded these responses into four categories: 1) staying at their current center/program (stayers); 2) leaving their center but working in the ECE field in some capacity (movers); 3) leaving the ECE field altogether (leavers); and 4) unsure of their plans (unsure) (educators' responses are reported on page 19).[20] In addition, we estimated the annual center-level turnover rate by asking program leaders about the number of lead and assistant teachers currently employed at their center and how many had left within the past 12 months.

We used latent profile analysis (Spurk et al., 2020) to examine the confluence of different components of the work environment, identifying four profiles of educators based on their responses to the survey. These profiles then were related to educators' future plans, socio-demographic characteristics, and SEQUAL dimensions. Results from these analyses identify potential areas of improvement for the centers.

For more information on the Future Career Intention variable and the analysis plan, please see **Appendix E**.

20 For the purposes of analysis and reporting (particularly, tables in **Appendix E**), we refer to educators according to their intentions by the following profiles: stayer, mover, leaver, and unsure.

Findings

Early Educator Characteristics

Educator characteristics were examined to understand how career intentions varied across the sample. While there were notable variations in educators' future plans according to job role, age group served, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity that did not reach the level of statistical significance ($p<0.05$), an educator's tenure at their current center was significantly related to their career intentions.

Teachers who had been at the center for one year or less were less likely to report that they wanted to stay at the center, compared to more experienced teachers (38 percent and 53 percent, respectively). Newly hired teachers were also more likely to leave the center, be unsure, or leave the field. Such findings suggest that turnover rates in Flagler and Volusia Counties are partly driven by teachers who are new to their centers. See **Table E1** in **Appendix E** for a full list of educator characteristics and responses regarding their future plans.

Profile Analysis

Based on teaching staff assessments of their work environment, four profiles were revealed as being significantly associated with career intentions: highly dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, and highly satisfied. For mean scores across profiles on the SEQUAL dimensions, please see **Table E2** in **Appendix E**.

- **Highly dissatisfied (movers).** Teaching staff in this profile had low SEQUAL scores across all dimensions, indicating they were very dissatisfied with their work environment compared to the other profiles. In comparison to those who were somewhat dissatisfied, educators in this profile were very dissatisfied about features related to the **quality of relationships with co-workers** and the **guidance and supports they received from program leadership**. They were also dissatisfied with **program-level policies that impacted their economic well-being** as well as the **availability of teaching staff** at their center, similar to teaching staff who were somewhat dissatisfied.
- **Somewhat dissatisfied (leavers, unsure).** Teaching staff in this profile were dissatisfied with many components of their work environment related to the **stability of staffing at their program, their ability to offer input,** and **their ability to influence policies that ensure their financial security**. However, they offered more favorable assessments of features related to the quality of relationships with co-workers and program-level supports for ensuring their safety and well-being.

- **Somewhat satisfied (stayers).** Similar to educators classified as somewhat dissatisfied, teaching staff in this profile were also generally satisfied with components of their work environment related to relationship quality and supports for their safety and well-being. However, they were less satisfied with the **policies to ensure their economic well-being, staffing levels,** and **opportunities for trying new approaches to teaching.**
- **Highly satisfied (stayers).** Teaching staff in this profile had high SEQUAL scores across all components of their work environment, indicating that they were very satisfied with their work environment and felt supported. Their scores were particularly high in features related to the quality of relationships with co-workers, guidance and supports from their program leader, opportunities to provide input, and program supports for their well-being.

Delving into the responses of educators on survey items related to these dimensional differences, we identified specific features of the work environment that varied significantly between those who were satisfied (stayers) and those who were dissatisfied (leavers, movers). These differences were especially discernable on: items measuring well-being; items related to program climate, relationships, and leadership; and items measuring their experience of professional development and training to support their practice.

- **Program climate.** Teaching staff in the highly and somewhat satisfied profiles (stayers) had higher scores than those in the somewhat dissatisfied and dissatisfied profiles (movers, leavers, unsure) on survey items measuring how their programs supported their economic and emotional well-being. The largest differences on these survey items related to the quality of relationships with co-workers and opportunities to have input and feel valued: working as a team with co-workers to plan learning experiences; feeling respected by their co-workers; and perceiving a sense of fairness among staff. A positive relational climate was lacking for educators who intended to leave.
- **Leadership.** Program leaders play a crucial role in fostering a positive climate and work environment for their staff. Supervisors' encouragement and support of classroom and programmatic input, involvement of teaching staff in decision-making processes, and knowledge of and regular support of educators' teaching practices, as well as a perceived climate of fairness differed significantly between educators who were mostly dissatisfied (leavers, unsure) and those in the highly dissatisfied group (movers). The highly dissatisfied group had significantly lower scores on these leadership items, compared to those who were mostly dissatisfied. It may be that for some members of the teaching staff, leadership is the tipping point as to whether they stay in their current position or look elsewhere for employment.

- **Professional development and training.** Teaching staff in the highly and somewhat satisfied profiles (stayers) had higher scores on survey items that assessed their professional development opportunities, compared to those who were in the dissatisfied profiles (movers, leavers, unsure). Educators in the satisfied profiles were much more likely than their dissatisfied peers to participate in more in-depth or relationship-based professional development activities, such as visiting other classrooms or reflecting with other teaching staff. They were also more likely to report that there were sufficient training opportunities in several areas impacting their work with children (e.g., working with children displaying challenging behaviors, supporting families' needs).

Turnover

Center-level turnover was also examined to understand program characteristics associated with turnover. The average turnover rate was 50 percent, higher than national estimates by as much as 30 percentage points. A cut-off of 40 percent was used to identify centers with high turnover for analyses.

While all centers in the sample received at least some form of public funding, centers that relied on School Readiness funding to cover at least half of their operating budget had a greater proportion of high turnover compared to those with a larger proportion of revenue coming from parent tuition. It is worth noting that, while not significant, a higher percentage of programs that relied on School Readiness funding reported that they could not consistently fill the gap between reimbursement rates and program expenses, compared to those more reliant on parent fees (49 percent and 36 percent, respectively). Furthermore, centers that could not consistently meet this difference had a greater proportion of turnover. While the exact reasons are unclear, a variety of characteristics (such as features of the work environment, including compensation) may contribute to these findings and should be examined more closely.

Finally, program leaders were also asked about their future career intentions: a majority (65 percent) planned to stay at their center; 29 percent planned to leave their current position but remain in the field; and 6 percent planned to leave the ECE field entirely. Those wanting to leave were more likely to work in centers with a high turnover rate, which underscores the impact that high turnover can have on staff remaining at the center by contributing to work environments that foster dissatisfaction among teaching staff and their program leaders.

Reflections and Recommendations

> *"Hacemos un trabajo extremadamente importante para la sociedad pero es poco respetado y muy mal remunerado. Ojalá las personas entendieran la influencia que el educador tiene en la vida del niño debido a la cantidad de tiempo que pasa con él."*
>
> *"We do extremely important work for society, but it is little respected and very poorly paid. I wish people understood the influence that the educator has on a child's life due to the amount of time spent with them."*
>
> *— Lead Teacher*

The current early care and education system is complex. While such complexity can generate confusion, it also offers Flagler and Volusia Counties several opportunities to articulate and incorporate work environment standards and secure sufficient funding for providers to implement them. The State of Florida has made significant financial investments in improving the quality of ECE services through efforts such as School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten, along with provisions from COVID relief funding. While our findings indicate that many of the resources offered by these systemic investments are reaching some teaching staff, more needs to be done to improve the work environments of early educators throughout Flagler and Volusia Counties.

Early educators across Flagler and Volusia Counties reported grave concerns regarding sufficient staffing. Turnover is a long-standing issue in the ECE field, but the pandemic made this challenge much more serious. Program leaders surveyed in Flagler and Volusia worry about hiring new staff, turnover of existing staff, and their ability to keep classrooms open in light of these shortages. Teaching staff echoed these staffing challenges, noting that there was insufficient coverage for providing children with individualized attention or access to qualified substitutes when staff were absent. Furthermore, educators felt could not rely on their administration's ability to hire new staff in the event of turnover.

Recruitment and retention of staff are affected by the work environments of early educators: workplaces that meet the needs of and expand opportunities for early educators are more likely to be able to recruit and retain staff. Indeed, programs that do well in the areas measured by SEQUAL tend to have better staff retention. We found that educators in Flagler and Volusia Counties with higher mean scores across many SEQUAL domains and dimensions were more likely to indicate they would stay at their program.

Thus, we recommend that Flagler and Volusia Counties work with their programs to examine their work environments and develop plans of action to improve the working conditions of early educators overall. Specifically, given the experiences captured for the present study, we recommend: targeting training and support for working with children and their families; increasing opportunities for educator input; supporting educator economic well-being; addressing program climate; and recognizing and alleviating trauma due to ongoing public health and environmental crises.

Targeting Training and Support

Although the majority of educators who completed the survey noted having recently participated in professional development activities, they indicated significant gaps in the learning opportunities available to them. Although they work with a growing population of dual language learners, about one half of educators noted there wasn't enough training available for them to improve their knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with these children and their families. Similar findings arose around the preparation and support needed to address challenging behaviors exhibited by young children. Furthermore, while many of the educators indicated involvement in one-time or low-intensity professional development opportunities, they often lacked options for ongoing training or opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. Educators need a variety of professional development opportunities, as well as support in integrating what they have learned into their classroom practice. Opportunities for coaching and sustained dialogue with colleagues in the ECE field support the creation of learning systems, and peer support helps ensure the use and retention of professional development. Findings from the latent profile analysis point to the importance of these more relational and in-depth professional development opportunities: educators engaging in these opportunities were more likely to indicate they would still be at their center in the next three years.

Recommendation 1: Bolster Training and Support

- Provide more in-depth, on-going training on topics that are most relevant to educators' practice, such as working with dual language learners or children with challenging behaviors;
- Create more opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and professional development, where educators can learn from and support one another; furthermore, centers can support positive co-worker relationships through professional development, for example, offering time to reflect together, visiting each other's classrooms, and holding team-building exercises during staff meetings;
- Provide opportunities for staff to engage in ongoing learning and development, for example, through apprenticeship or other paid internship models;

- Provide opportunities for coaching and sustained dialogue with colleagues in the ECE field to ensure the use and retention of best practices and skills taught through professional development activities; and
- Develop and implement on-going training and resources for program leaders on how to support, manage, mentor, and supervise staff.

Increasing Opportunities for Input

Our findings indicate that teaching staff felt they did not have sufficient opportunities for offering input and exercising their autonomy within their classroom or their program overall. Furthermore, educators indicated that they felt their input, when offered, was not always considered or valued by leadership. Opportunities for input was a significant predictor of an educator's intention to remain in their program in the future. To strengthen the work environment, teaching staff should be consulted on decisions that impact their work at the center.

Recommendation 2: Increase Opportunities for Input

- Identify opportunities for staff to provide input into classroom decisions and program policies, for example, programs should provide clear information in their employee handbook on the specific areas in which teaching staff can offer input and the processes to do so, and these input opportunities should be discussed during onboarding and orientation for new staff;
- Encourage educators to identify and advocate for the conditions they need, utilizing resources such as the Early Educator Engagement Empowerment Toolkit as a starting point for conversations and action;
- Examine policies and procedures to ensure equity and diversity across roles and to incorporate educator voices in program operations; and
- Regularly collect data to assess how educators experience their working conditions and climate and use these findings to institute strategies that engage early educators in the process to better support their practice and work environment.

Supporting Economic Well-Being

Early educators surveyed in Flagler and Volusia Counties reported experiencing conditions that challenge their economic, emotional, and physical well-being. Many struggled to afford housing, health care, sufficient food, and other basic necessities for themselves and their families. One fifth of teaching staff did not have health insurance, and a majority of early educators relied on at least one form of public support. Furthermore, very few early educators reported that their programs offered health insurance or a retirement/pension plan.

In addition, teaching staff reported that they could not rely on compensation policies to support all of the work they do. Furthermore, we found only modest wage increases as educators gained additional degrees. Early educators also reported conditions that threaten their health and safety, most notably not being able to take breaks during the workday or not being able to take paid sick leave. These factors all undermine early educators' well-being and exacerbate stress and turnover. Indeed, economic well-being was a driver of career intentions in the analyses we conducted.

Recommendation 3: Support Economic Well-Being

- Explore wage initiatives like those in New Mexico, Illinois, and Washington, D.C., and utilize the knowledge gained to develop statewide or countywide wage initiatives;
- Create policies to ensure that early educators who attain higher levels of education or additional credentials receive an appropriate increase in compensation to further incentivize additional training and qualifications;
- Work to support centers overall by undertaking a comprehensive workforce study to assess the wages and benefits of early educators across programs, settings, and funding sources;
- Revisit the state's Child Care Cost of Quality Study (Aigner-Treworgy et al., 2022) and consider the costs of care from a sustainable and systemic perspective that integrates appropriate compensation and benefits for the workforce, along with workplace supports outlined in SEQUAL; and
- Ensure that public funds cover the true cost of care and work with programs to meet the difference between revenue and operating costs.

Addressing Program Climate

Feeling that one's input as a colleague is valued, having opportunities to collaborate and plan with colleagues, and feeling respected by co-workers all impacted the desire of Flagler and Volusia County educators to stay in their current center over the next three years. While educators often indicated that they had a strong sense of teamwork with their immediate colleagues (e.g., their classroom co-teacher or aide/assistant), this sense of teamwork did not extend to all co-workers and leadership within a program. Collegial relations with co-workers and support and mentorship from program leaders all contribute to program climate and retention of educators.

Recommendation 4: Nurture Positive Program Climate

- Develop and foster positive relationships among all center staff—across classrooms and child age groups—by offering activities and events that facilitate connection and trust;

- Identify and effectively address bullying and unfairness in the workplace by developing and implementing systems for staff to anonymously report bullying or other related behavior and establishing a clear process for programs to address these issues; and
- Encourage program leaders to schedule regular meetings with teaching staff and spend time in their classrooms to better understand educators' needs and develop supportive relationships.

Recognizing and Alleviating Trauma

While both the World Health Organization and U.S. national states of emergency have ended, results from this study suggest the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are enduring. The vast majority of educators and program leaders surveyed had been hospitalized themselves or knew individuals (from either inside or outside of their center) who had been hospitalized for COVID-19. Furthermore, a significant proportion of educators and program leaders knew individuals, from both within and outside their program, who had passed away due to the virus. These staggering numbers point to high levels of grief, pain, and trauma. Indeed, a large portion of educators indicated that they continue to fear becoming infected themselves and/or infecting others with the virus. Educator responses about their physical and emotional well-being within the past year include changes in their sleep and eating habits, as well as difficulty concentrating and feeling negative and/or anxious about the future. Policymakers and state and county leaders need to be aware of and make provisions for the ongoing effects of trauma and stress from public health and environmental crises in their communities.

Supported Staff Want to Stay

Examining elements of educators' work environments and seeking to identify areas most in need of improvement is an important step in addressing the needs of educators and creating the working conditions that will allow them to thrive. Early educators' work environments are holistic and encompass a broad range of policies, practices, and relationships. Results from this study suggest that centers that strive to meet the standards outlined in the SEQUAL domains may be more likely to retain staff, increasing the consistency and stability that is so important for children and families, and reducing the need for ongoing hiring and training of new staff.

Recommendation 5: Enhance Working Conditions

- Foster opportunities for center-based staff and administrators to utilize the Model Work Standards for Teaching Staff in Center-Based Child Care[21] to assess their work environments and identify areas of growth for the program;
- Develop and implement training programs that support program leaders, supervisors, and coaches in addressing work environment issues, as they require support and training on how to implement and sustain these types of changes;
- Provide funding for institutions of higher education and training programs to develop and offer classes and workshops related to work environment standards, rights of teaching staff on the job, and the critical importance of economic, emotional, and physical well-being among adults in the workplace;
- Embed work environment standards in quality improvement efforts to emphasize their importance, direct quality improvement resources toward improving conditions, and ensure that programs cannot achieve the highest ratings without addressing work environment standards;
- Include a provision to care for existing and ongoing educator trauma in the work environment standards, along with training in trauma-informed care, so that educators might both be supported and also be better able to support the children and families they serve; and
- Provide financial resources and other assistance specifically designed to enable programs and providers to address and improve work environment standards in a reasonable period of time.

While the field has focused on and funded educator training and professional development, these investments are lost as poverty-level wages and inadequate conditions push educators out of the field (CSCCE, 2020). Early educators, a vast majority of whom are women and many of them women of color, are the driving force behind high-quality care. To attract and retain this workforce, there is not one single ingredient, but rather multiple interacting pieces—including preparation, workplace supports, and compensation—that work together to support their practice and well-being, encouraging educators to remain and thrive in early care and education.

21 The current and prior versions of the Model Work Standards, as well as versions for Family Child Care Programs are available at https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/creating-better-child-care-jobs-model-work-standards/.

Appendix A: Study Design Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, the survey instrument and data collection procedures were approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of California, Berkeley.

In the fall of 2022, a letter announcing the study was sent via email to all licensed center- and home-based early care and education programs throughout Flagler and Volusia Counties. This letter introduced the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) and announced the upcoming study, indicating that a survey link to participate in the study would be following shortly. Within a week of the notification letter, staff at CSCCE sent an email to program leaders and teaching staff working in center-based programs. This email described the purpose of the survey and provided a personalized link to access the survey. The data collection period began in October 2022 and extended into early March 2023. CSCCE had also planned to survey home-based providers and their assistants, but there were too few respondents to include this group in the study.

Before launching the SEQUAL survey, the link brought the participant to the Informed Consent page, which detailed the purpose of the study, the procedures, any potential risks/discomforts, confidentiality of the data provided, contact information for our staff, a statement explaining that participation was completely voluntary, and finally, an online consent form where participants could agree to participate or decline. If the participant selected "agree," they were taken to the SEQUAL survey. If they selected "disagree," they were redirected to the CSCCE homepage and removed from our SEQUAL mailing list.

The survey could be accessed from any electronic device connected to the Internet. As the survey was sent through a personalized link, participants were able to take the survey in more than one sitting. A total of six reminder emails were sent to participants who had not completed the survey.

To thank participants for their time and participation, a $25 gift card was sent to each participant who completed the survey.

Survey Instruments

Three survey instruments—the SEQUAL Teaching Staff Survey, the SEQUAL Program Leader Survey, and the SEQUAL Family Child Care (FCC) survey—were employed to capture information on work environments and demographic and workforce characteristics. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related programmatic or policy changes that may have affected educators' work experiences, each survey also included a set of questions covering pandemic-related impacts on program operations and on the workforce.

Surveys were offered in English and Spanish for center-based teaching staff, FCC providers, and FCC assistants. The surveys were administered online by Qualtrics and took approximately 45 minutes to complete.

SEQUAL Teaching Staff Survey. The SEQUAL Teaching Staff Survey is a validated measure and includes two sections: 1) staff perceptions about workplace policies that affect their teaching practice; and 2) a profile of teacher education, experiences, and demographic information. For the section on staff perceptions of their work environment, teaching staff were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The items focused on each of the following five domains:

1. Teaching Supports – 27 items, including statements on the following dimensions: observations and assessments; materials; support services for children and families; and staffing and professional responsibilities;
2. Learning Community – 17 items, including statements on professional development opportunities and applying learning;
3. Job Crafting – 15 items, including statements on the following dimensions: making decisions in the workplace; teamwork; and input;
4. Adult Well-Being – 34 items, including statements on the following dimensions: economic well-being; quality of work life; and wellness supports; and
5. Leadership – 33 items, including perceptions of their supervisor and the leader of their program.

In the teaching staff profile, participants were asked to provide information on personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, race/ethnicity), level of education, and work characteristics (e.g., wages, tenure, ages of children in their classroom).

SEQUAL Administrator Survey. Program leaders in center-based programs also filled out a version of the survey. A program leader was identified as the person at the site who would have access to administrative information about workplace benefits and policies, as well as program and staff characteristics. The survey asked program leaders to provide program-level information on the center and characteristics of teaching staff employed and children served at the center, in addition to their own personal and professional characteristics.

SEQUAL FCC Survey. The SEQUAL FCC includes two sections: 1) perceptions about workplace policies that affect teaching practice; and 2) a profile of educator education, experiences, and demographic information. For the section on perceptions of their work environment, providers and assistants were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The items focused on each of the following five domains:

1. Teaching Supports – 20 items, including statements on curriculum; observations and assessments; materials; support services for children and families; training and continuing education;
2. Business Practice Supports – 18 items, including statements on professional responsibilities and what providers need to operate a successful business, including material needs and time;
3. Learning Community – 21 items, including statements on professional development opportunities and applying learning;
4. Adult Well-Being – 36 items, including statements on the dimensions of economic well-being and quality of work life; and
5. Program Management and Leadership – 33 items, including perceptions of their supervisor for FCC assistants and the management of the program and how they engage professionally with other adults.

U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form. Two items from the six-item version of the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module (U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2012), a widely used self-report measure for assessing food security, were completed by early educators.

Sampling Frame and Procedures

A census design was employed surveying all eligible center- and home-based early educators in Flagler and Volusia Counties employed in programs that received School Readiness and/or Voluntary Prekindergarten funding. Based on the low number of family child care programs in the counties, only center-based teaching staff and program leaders were included in the study. Due to inaccurate and outdated contact information, many emails to participants bounced or did not reach the intended participant, so it is unclear how many invited participants were actually reached.

Analysis Plan

Frequency Analyses. All SEQUAL items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). We used frequency analysis for SEQUAL items (e.g., the percentage of teaching staff who agreed or disagreed) as a measure of teaching staff assessment of workplace policies, practices, and relationships. These frequencies are reported as percentages or fractions for each of the items on the SEQUAL domains and dimensions. Crosstabs were also performed to examine educator characteristics (for example, job role by race and/or ethnicity or job role by educational attainment).

T-Tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs). T-tests and ANOVAs were used to examine differences between groups (e.g., by job role, tenure at the workplace). Depending on the number of groups, t-tests and ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in teaching staff perceptions of their work environment as captured by their SEQUAL scores. Since t-tests assume equal variances between groups, we used Welch's t-test to compare means when the equal variances assumption was not met.

Throughout this report, we denote differences in SEQUAL scores and other variables by pointing out where scores between two or more groups are **significantly different** from one another. This indicates that there is a statistical difference between group scores or a statistical relationship between variables at a rate greater than chance levels. All significant findings are reported at a p value of <.05. Findings slightly above a p value of <.05 are reported as marginally significant.

Appendix B: Population and Sample

TABLE B1. POPULATION AND SAMPLE ACROSS SETTINGS

Role	Invited to Participate	Participated	Response Rate
Program leader (N=53)	140	53	38%
Teaching staff (N=187)	1,280	187	15%
Centers (N=117)	140	108	77%

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Appendix C: Findings

Interpreting the Findings

Early educator assessments are reported separately by domains. For each domain, we begin with a description of the domain and why it is important to educator practice and development. We then present the findings by major themes that are consistent across the sample. The findings section reports on domain scores and main themes. Within main themes, the overall domain description and variations by educator and center characteristics are reported.

Domain Scores

Mean scores are provided for each SEQUAL domain; they represent an aggregate of educator responses. Results for each domain represent an aggregate of staff perceptions across programs, and therefore, the prevalence of issues identified will vary by program. Means are calculated according to a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Unless noted, higher scores reflect that a positive work environment condition is in place or can be reliably depended upon.

Variations by educator (e.g., tenure, educational attainment, language spoken) or center characteristics (e.g., Gold Star accreditation, funding source) for center-based teaching staff are based on domain mean scores. Only significant differences are reported.

Main Themes

Within each domain, major themes that emerged across early educator responses are identified. In these descriptions, data for the sample are reported by:

- The percentage of teaching staff who agree or disagree with individual items describing various workplace policies, practices, and relationships in a given dimension (see "Interpreting Agreement and Disagreement With SEQUAL Items," below); and
- Variations in scores by educator (e.g., tenure, educational attainment, intention to leave) or center characteristics (e.g., Gold Star accreditation, funding source).

Interpreting Agreement and Disagreement With SEQUAL Items

The SEQUAL survey presents statements, and early educators are asked to indicate agreement or disagreement. In almost all cases, educator agreement with an item signals that a positive work environment condition is in place or can be reliably depended upon, while disagreement indicates a lack of support for various work environment conditions necessary for educators to apply their knowledge and skills and continue to hone their practice. We note the few instances in which agreement signals a less-supportive environment.

All SEQUAL items are rated on a six-point scale, with designations of "strongly agree," "agree," "somewhat agree," "somewhat disagree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." Throughout the report, "agree" combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses. Likewise, "disagree" combines "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.

For certain items, when the percentage of "somewhat disagree" and "somewhat agree" responses warrants, they will be reported out to provide greater nuance to those findings. For example, these instances include when the selection of the "somewhat" options (whether "somewhat agree" or "somewhat disagree") suggests that a policy or practice may not be consistently in place, may not be routinely enforced, or is otherwise unreliable and undependable.

Education

TABLE C1. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF EARLY EDUCATORS, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher
Some college or less	27%	59%	53%
Associate degree	26%	19%	24%
Bachelor's degree or higher	47%	22%	24%

Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=145
Assistant Teacher N=38

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE C2. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF EARLY EDUCATORS, BY JOB ROLE AND RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND

	Some College or Less	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Program Leader			
White	33%	27%	39%
Latina	40%	20%	40%
Black	9%	36%	55%
Lead Teacher			
White	57%	23%	20%
Latina	51%	11%	37%
Black	70%	13%	17%
Assistant Teacher			
White	60%	20%	20%
Latina	29%	43%	29%
Black	50%	25%	25%

Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=135
Assistant Teacher N= 36
*Too few respondents identified as multiracial to report.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE C3. MAJOR FOR HIGHEST DEGREE STUDIED FOR OR EARNED, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher
Child Development	0%	7%	6%
Early Childhood Education	36%	34%	28%
Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education (combined major)	3%	2%	
Elementary Education	5%	10%	11%
Psychology	8%	9%	6%
Special Education	3%	5%	
Other*	46%	31%	50%

Program Leader N=39
Lead Teacher N=58
Assistant Teacher N= 18
*Other majors reported include Administration, Business Management, Chemistry, Criminal Justice, Economics, Educational Leadership, Finance, Fine Arts, General Education, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Social Science, Sociology, and Theology.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE C4. HEALTH INSURANCE, BY JOB ROLE

	Program Leader	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher
Not covered	8%	21%	23%
Covered through employer	13%	14%	14%
Purchased own policy directly from the insurance company	8%	2%	6%
Purchased own policy through the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare Marketplace	21%	18%	6%
Medicare	9%	4%	14%
Medicaid	6%	21%	17%
Covered through the policy of a parent or spouse	30%	18%	23%
Other*	9%	1%	6%

Program Leader N=53
Lead Teacher N=143
Assistant Teacher N=36
*Other includes free/low-cost community clinics and Military Care.
Note: Respondents were asked to check all that apply, so percentages may not add up to 100%.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Appendix D: Domain Mean Scores

TABLE D1. TEACHING SUPPORTS MEAN SCORES FOR TEACHING STAFF, BY DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTIC

Educator and Program Characteristics	Lead Teacher	N	Assistant Teacher	N
Educational attainment				
Some college or less	4.7	85	4.3	20
Associate degree	4.5	28	4.4	9
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.2	32	4.5	9
Race and/or ethnicity*				
White	4.5	78	4.1	26
Latina	4.7	35	4.9	7
Black	4.5	23	5.4	4
Tenure at center				
2 years or less	4.3	79	4.6	29
3-5 years	4.6	26	4.6	5
6 years or more	4.9	43	3.3	5
Career intentions				
Stay at center	4.8	64	4.6	13
Move (but remain in ECE field)	4.1	25	4.7	6
Leave	4.0	16	4.5	5
Unsure	4.4	26	4.1	12
Funding**				
SR only	4.4	106	4.4	18
VPK only	5.2	11	4.7	6
VPK with SR wrap	4.7	26	4.6	7
Gold Seal				
No	4.6	107	4.5	28
Yes	4.3	41	4.3	11

Lead Teacher N=131-148
Assistant Teacher N=36-39
*Note: There were too few respondents who identified as multiracial to report.
**School Readiness (SR): financial assistance for child care based on Florida Department of Children and Families criteria and/ or family income; Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK): universal program for all four-year-olds in the state.
Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE D2. LEARNING COMMUNITY MEAN SCORES FOR TEACHING STAFF

Educator and Program Characteristics	Lead Teacher	N	Assistant Teacher	N
Educational attainment				
Some college or less	4.4	85	4.3	20
Associate degree	4.1	28	4.2	9
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.1	32	4.3	9
Race and/or ethnicity*				
White	4.2	78	4.1	26
Latina	4.3	35	4.9	7
Black	4.5	23	4.7	4
Tenure at center				
2 years or less	4.1	79	4.5	29
3-5 years	4.3	26	4.5	5
6 years or more	4.6	43	3.2	5
Career intentions				
Stay at center	4.6	64	4.1	13
Move (but remain in ECE field)	3.8	25	4.4	6
Leave	3.9	16	4.0	5
Unsure	4.3	26	4.6	12
Funding**				
SR only	4.2	106	4.3	18
VPK only	5.0	11	4.4	6
VPK with SR wrap	4.4	26	4.8	7
Gold Seal				
Yes	4.0	41	3.9	11
No	4.4	107	4.4	28

Lead Teacher N=131-148
Assistant Teacher N=28-38
*Note: There were too few respondents who identified as multiracial to report.
**School Readiness (SR): financial assistance for child care based on Florida Department of Children and Families criteria and/ or family income; Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK): universal program for all four-year-olds in the state.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE D3. JOB CRAFTING MEAN SCORES FOR TEACHING STAFF

Educator and Program Characteristics	Lead Teacher	N	Assistant Teacher	N
Educational attainment				
Some college or less	4.7	85	4.5	20
Associate degree	4.4	28	4.6	9
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.7	32	4.4	9
Race and/or ethnicity*				
White	4.6	78	4.4	26
Latina	4.7	35	4.7	7
Black	4.8	23	5.0	4
Tenure at center				
2 years or less	4.5	79	4.6	29
3-5 years	4.7	26	4.4	5
6 years or more	4.7	43	3.9	5
Career intentions				
Stay at center	4.8	64	4.8	13
Move (but remain in ECE field)	4.4	25	4.4	6
Leave	4.2	16	3.6	5
Unsure	4.5	26	4.6	12
Funding**				
SR only	4.6	106	4.5	18
VPK only	5.1	11	4.4	6
VPK with SR wrap	4.6	26	4.7	7
Gold Seal				
No	4.7	107	4.6	28
Yes	4.3	41	4.3	11

Lead Teacher N=131-148
Assistant Teacher N=31-39
*Note: There were too few respondents who identified as multiracial to report.
**School Readiness (SR): financial assistance for child care based on Florida Department of Children and Families criteria and/ or family income; Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK): universal program for all four-year-olds in the state.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE D4. ADULT WELL-BEING MEAN SCORES FOR TEACHING STAFF

Educator and Program Characteristics	Lead Teacher	N	Assistant Teacher	N
Educational attainment				
Some college or less	4.4	85	4.4	20
Associate degree	4.3	28	4.5	9
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.3	32	4.6	9
Race and/or ethnicity*				
White	4.4	78	4.6	26
Latina	4.4	35	4.4	7
Black	4.4	23	4.4	4
Tenure at center				
2 years or less	4.1	79	4.7	29
3-5 years	4.6	26	4.0	5
6 years or more	4.8	43	4.2	5
Career intentions				
Stay at center	4.6	64	4.9	13
Move (but remain in ECE field)	4.0	25	4.5	6
Leave	4.1	16	4.6	5
Unsure	4.3	26	4.2	12
Funding**				
SR only	4.3	106	4.6	18
VPK only	4.7	11	4.6	6
VPK with SR wrap	4.5	26	4.3	7
Gold Seal				
No	4.3	107	4.5	28
Yes	4.4	41	4.6	11

Lead Teacher N=131-148
Assistant Teacher N=31-39
*Note: There were too few respondents who identified as multiracial to report.
**School Readiness (SR): financial assistance for child care based on Florida Department of Children and Families criteria and/ or family income; Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK): universal program for all four-year-olds in the state.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE D5. PROGRAM LEADERSHIP MEAN SCORES FOR TEACHING STAFF

Educator and Program Characteristics	Lead Teacher	N	Assistant Teacher	N
Educational attainment				
Some college or less	4.9	85	5.1	20
Associate degree	4.6	28	4.9	9
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.8	32	5.0	8
Race and/or ethnicity*				
White	4.8	78	4.9	26
Latina	4.9	35	5.2	6
Black	5.0	23	5.4	4
Tenure at center				
2 years or less	4.6	79	5.1	28
3-5 years	5.0	26	4.8	5
6 years or more	5.0	43	4.7	5
Career intentions				
Stay at center	5.1	64	5.2	12
Move (but remain in ECE field)	4.5	25	4.8	6
Leave	4.7	16	4.8	5
Unsure	4.8	26	5.0	12
Funding**				
SR only	4.7	106	4.9	17
VPK only	5.3	11	5.2	6
VPK with SR wrap	4.9	26	5.1	7
Gold Seal				
No	4.9	107	5.1	27
Yes	4.7	41	4.9	11

Lead Teacher N=131-148
Assistant Teacher N=30-38
*Note: There were too few respondents who identified as multiracial to report.
**School Readiness (SR): financial assistance for child care based on Florida Department of Children and Families criteria and/ or family income; Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK): universal program for all four-year-olds in the state.

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Appendix E: Measuring Turnover and Future Career Intentions

Methodology

Future Career Intention Variable

The survey included an item about early educators' future career plans. Participants were asked if in the next three years they were likely to still be working at their current center, working in another child care center, working in or operating a family child care program, working in support of children and families but not providing care, working as a public school teacher, working in a job outside of the child care field, retired, or if they didn't know their plans.

The responses were recoded into four future career intention categories: 1) staying at their current center (stayers); 2) leaving their center but remaining in the ECE field in some capacity (movers); 3) leaving the ECE field entirely (leavers); and 4) don't know their future plans (unsure). We removed the category of "retired" for the purposes of this analysis.

Calculating Center Turnover

To calculate center-level turnover, program leaders reported on the total number of teachers (assistant and lead teachers) at the center and then the total number of teachers who left the center in the past 12 months. From these two variables, we obtained the proportion of teachers who left the center in the past 12 months and identified centers with high turnover as those that were in the top two terciles of the distribution after excluding centers that did not report any turnover.

Analysis Plan

Chi-squares. Chi-squares were conducted to examine the relationships between educators' personal and workforce characteristics (mostly categorical variables) and their career intentions and to detect any potential covariates that could impact the subsequent analyses.

Analysis of variance (ANOVAs). ANOVAs were used to examine differences between educators' intentions (stay, move, leave, unsure) and their scores on the SEQUAL domains, SEQUAL dimensions, and the individual items comprising these domains and dimensions. The Šidák correction was used to adjust for multiple hypothesis testing.

Latent profile analysis. A latent profile analysis is a statistical technique that identifies "profiles" or groups of educators based on the similarity of responses across survey items. This method allows us to examine the confluence of the different components of the work environment (as defined by SEQUAL), rather than individual characteristics. We can then relate these components to an educator's future plans. Four educator profiles (highly dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, highly satisfied) were identified after considering several goodness-of-fit tests and theoretical considerations (see Spurk et al., 2020).

Findings

TABLE E1. FUTURE CAREER INTENTIONS, BY EDUCATOR CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics	Future Intentions Categories			
	Stayer	Mover	Leaver	Unsure
Age	N=77	N=31	N=21	N=38
29 years or younger	30%	35%	29%	34%
30 to 49 years	49%	55%	62%	50%
50 years or older	21%	10%	9%	16%
Race and ethnicity	N=73	N=29	N=19	N=35
Black	7%	27%	21%	17%
Latina	27%	21%	21%	20%
White	66%	52%	58%	63%
Job Role	N=77	N=31	N=21	N=38
Assistant teacher	36%	17%	14%	33%
Lead teacher	49%	19%	12%	20%
Age of children served	N=77	N=31	N=20	N=38
Infants and toddlers	26%	45%	30%	31%
Preschool age	52%	32%	45%	45%
Mixed-age groups	22%	23%	25%	24%

TABLE E1. FUTURE CAREER INTENTIONS, BY EDUCATOR CHARACTERISTICS, *CONTINUED*

Educational attainment	N=77	N=31	N=21	N=37
Some college or less	58%	52%	57%	65%
Associate degree	25%	22%	19%	8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	17%	26%	24%	27%
Tenure in field	N=77	N=31	N=21	N=36
2 years or less	30%	26%	24%	31%
3- 5 years	14%	13%	33%	22%
6 years or more	56%	61%	43%	47%
Tenure at center	N=77	N=31	N=21	N=38
1 year or less	35%	58%	33%	53%
More than 1 year	65%	42%	67%	47%
Wage (median hourly)	N=75	N=31	N=20	N=37
	$13.00	$14.00	$14.00	$13.00

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

TABLE E2. EDUCATOR PROFILES , BY SEQUAL DOMAIN AND DIMENSION SCORES

SEQUAL Domains and Dimensions	Profiles			
	Highly Satisfied (Stayer) (N=35)	Somewhat Satisfied (Stayer) (N=89)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (Leaver, Unsure) (N=55)	Highly Dissatisfied (Mover) (N=8)
Teaching Supports[22]	**5.7**	**5.0**	**3.8**	**2.5**
Observation and Assessments[23]	5.7	4.9	4.2	2.6
Materials[24]	5.4	4.9	4.0	3.1
Support Services for Children and Families[25]	5.2	4.7	4.4	3.6
Staffing[26]	5.4	4.4	2.8	2.0
Learning Community[27]	**5.4**	**4.4**	**3.7**	**2.2**
Professional Development[28]	5.4	4.3	3.5	2.4
Applying Learning[29]	5.4	4.6	3.8	2.0
Job Crafting[30]	**5.6**	**4.7**	**3.9**	**2.8**
Teamwork[31]	5.9	5.2	4.5	3.0
Decision-Making[32]	5.2	4.4	4.0	3.7
Input[33]	5.6	4.6	3.5	1.8

22 $F(7, 132)=65.9$, $p<0.001$
23 $F(7, 132)=15.2$, $p<0.001$
24 $F(7, 132)=17.8$, $p<0.001$
25 $F(7, 132)=6.8$, $p<0.001$
26 $F(7, 132)=87.6$, $p<0.001$
27 $F(7, 132)=22.9$, $p<0.001$
28 $F(7, 132)=22.1$, $p<0.001$
29 $F(7, 132)=72.7$, $p<0.001$
30 $F(7, 132)=80.6$, $p<0.001$
31 $F(7, 132)=37.7$, $p<0.001$
32 $F(7, 132)=10.3$, $p<0.001$
33 $F(7, 132)=106.1$, $p<0.001$

TABLE E2. EDUCATOR PROFILES , BY SEQUAL DOMAIN AND DIMENSION SCORES, *CONTINUED*

Adult Well-Being[34]	**5.4**	**4.5**	**3.9**	**2.3**
Economic Well-Being[35]	4.7	3.7	3.2	2.1
Wellness[36]	5.7	4.8	4.1	3.3
Quality of Work Life[37]	5.7	5.1	4.3	1.6
Leadership[38]	**5.7**	**5.1**	**4.2**	**2.4**

Table: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

34 F(7, 132)=109.1, p<0.001
35 F(7, 132)=28.7, p<0.001
36 F(7, 132)=54.5, p<0.001
37 F(7, 132)=105.4, p<0.001
38 F(7, 132)=68.2, p<0.001

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Early Educator Voices in Florida: Flagler and Volusia Counties

Work Environment Conditions That Impact Early Educator Practice and Program Quality

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The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), founded in 1999, is the national leader in early care and education workforce research and policy. CSCCE provides research and analysis on the preparation, working conditions, and compensation of the early care and education workforce. We develop policy solutions and create spaces for teaching, learning, and educator activism. Our vision is an effective public early care and education system that secures racial, gender, and economic justice for the women whose labor is the linchpin of stable, quality services.

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