

# California Early Educator Engagement and Empowerment (E4) Toolkit



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# 1. The Purpose of the California E4 Toolkit

Early educators are the best spokespeople about their working conditions and what they need to thrive. Policy leaders have much to gain by actively engaging educators in identifying workable solutions to the child care crisis. At the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), we believe educators have the right to exercise power in their profession and should be able to organize and participate in the public discourse, free from interference.

Through our work and engagement with early educators over the past 23 years, we've learned that early educators need:

- The conditions to successfully engage in further education and professional development;
- Access to ongoing learning;
- Safe and supportive work environments; and
- Appropriate compensation, including a livable wage and benefits.



Early educators have suggested using the California E4 Toolkit in many ways, for example:

- When meeting with educators or educator-led organizations;
- In college classrooms with students of early childhood education;
- During conference presentations on early education; and
- At public meetings with legislators and policymakers.



We developed the solutions detailed in the California Early Educator Engagement and Empowerment (E4) Toolkit based on the research we have conducted and the experiences early educators have shared. We created this toolkit to support early educators in their advocacy, power building, and engagement with stakeholders.

Throughout this toolkit, when we refer to early educators, teachers, or the ECE workforce, we mean all those who work in home, center, school-based settings who provide group care and early learning to children prior to kindergarten.





## 2. California Context

California is one of the largest and most diverse states in the nation ([65% of the population identify as people of color](#)).<sup>1</sup> Throughout the state, more than 120,000 early educators,<sup>2</sup> most of whom are women, are the backbone of our communities. They quite literally help brains develop and contribute to lifelong outcomes. California's diversity is clearly reflected in the population of [children of color birth to age four \(76%\)](#)<sup>3</sup> and of [educators of color](#) working as center-based teaching staff (66%) or family child care providers (71%).<sup>4</sup>





The work of caring for and educating young children is rewarding, but it is also intellectually, physically, and emotionally challenging. Early educators are central to families, their communities, and the economy: their efforts allow many parents to participate in the workforce. Yet, the historical and pervasive undervaluing of labor performed by women and people of color in California and elsewhere in the United States has made early educators one of the most underpaid workforces in the country. The current organization and funding of early care and education (ECE) and the lack of a robust, publicly funded system contributes to early educators' low pay and risks to their well-being. The ECE system, as it is currently set up, also reinforces disparities among educators and is at the root of the state's child care shortage.

The ECE landscape in California has changed significantly over the past several decades, sometimes moving forward with supportive policies and programs for the ECE workforce and at other times retreating to policies and programs that foster inequities. Notably, many policies and programs that directly support educators have been designed or driven by current and former educators.

The [California Early Childhood Mentor Program \(CECMP\)](https://cecmp.org) (cecmp.org) was created by the Child Care Employee Project and piloted at Chabot College by former early educators. The program develops center- and home-based educators in a mix of private and public programs. Experienced early educators are trained as mentors and matched with students of early childhood education who need to complete practicum courses in their local communities. CECMP provides stipends to mentors and a range of opportunities to develop their own leadership in early care and education. The program now partners with 88 community colleges throughout California and is fully funded by public dollars, receiving more than \$6 million a year.



The [California CARES \(Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability\) initiative](#) was designed in 1997 by advocates, including former educators, to provide stipends for financial relief and to support retention and ongoing development for all early educators. Assembly Bill 212 passed in 2000 with an annual funding level of \$15 million but was limited to staff working in programs that received public funding and required local counties to provide matching funds. With the creation of First 5 California and county-level First 5 commissions, new public funding spread CARES to nearly every county in the early 2000s. Throughout California, stipends ranged from \$500 to \$6,000 and were available to all early educators, regardless of whether they worked in publicly or privately funded home-, center-, or school-based programs. First 5 California changed focus in 2005, reflecting a shift in policy at the state level away from addressing compensation. CARES became “Comprehensive Approaches for Raising Educational Standards” and emphasized education, training, and assessment until sunset in 2016 to prioritize funding the new quality rating system. The AB 212 funding, now called Child Development Staff Retention Funds, continues to funnel \$15 million a year to early educators in publicly funded programs only.<sup>5</sup>

In 2021, [Child Care Providers United \(CCPU\)](#) ([childcareprovidersunited.org](http://childcareprovidersunited.org)), a union that represents home-based family child care providers in California, entered into a bargaining agreement with the State of California. Thousands of CCPU members across the state have advocated for and won significant investments from the state, including a healthcare reimbursement fund, more than \$2 billion in increases to child care payments, and the first retirement fund for family child care providers in the country.



These examples of innovative educator-led policies and programs also reveal that while some educators are impacted in positive ways, others remain challenged because their workplaces do not benefit from one of these initiatives. The resources available to early educators in California, including pay, depend more on the type of program in which they work (transitional kindergarten, California State Preschool, Head Start, private center, or family child care) and how it is funded (federal or state funded contract, child care subsidy, parent fees) than on the early educators' experience, qualifications, or the nature of the work.

Comprehensive reforms that impact the ECE sector and workforce as a whole have mostly been absent. As of January 2024, [child care employment numbers in California](#) continued to lag behind the pre-pandemic figures of February 2020 and behind the nation as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Recovery continues to be challenging as wages remain low and poverty rates high among this essential workforce. These conditions fuel a staffing crisis in which providers struggle to compete for employees with businesses like retail and food service, which are now paying entry wages of \$15 per hour or more and offering benefits. For workers with a college degree, the options are even greater.

It's not too late for California to be a leader in ECE policy. If policymakers need inspiration, there are a growing number of other states that are utilizing public funds to restructure the way they support the ECE workforce. For example, in Illinois, policy leaders recognized the need for stable, consistent funding and intentionally [expanded use of contracts](#) to increase compensation across the ECE sector.<sup>7</sup> New Mexico went even further to permanently establish annual funding for early childhood education from the state's [Land Grant Permanent Fund](#).<sup>8</sup>



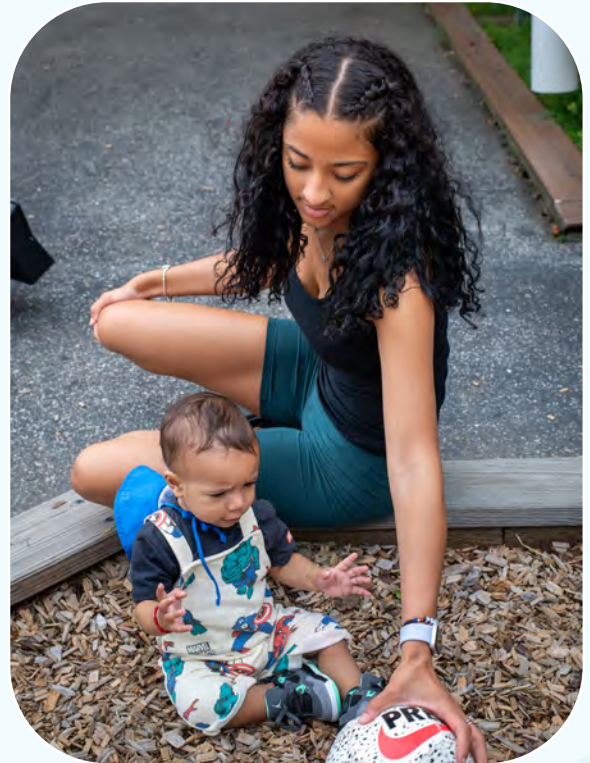
### 3. About California's Early Care and Education Workforce

Early educators provide critical services to our community. They are brain builders, providing care and education that support children's learning and development during the period when human brain development is most sensitive. Their service allows other workers to do their jobs. Yet, the labor, knowledge, and abilities of this very experienced and skilled workforce have been devalued for far too long. Early educators are essential to children's development and provide key support for working families and the economy, but they are asked to sacrifice their own economic security to do this work.



### Family Child Care (FCC) Providers

- There are almost 25,000 FCC providers in California, and 98% of them are women.
- 71% of FCC providers are people of color, with 52% of these home-based providers speaking languages other than English.
  - 87% of FCC providers speak English, 37% speak Spanish, and 39% speak two or more languages.
- Most FCC providers have a wealth of experience; almost three quarters (73%) of FCC providers have taught young children for more than 10 years.
- Income for these home-based providers varies based on multiple factors, including location and licensed capacity. Small FCC providers, enrolling up to 6 or 8 children, earn \$16,200 to \$30,000 per year statewide and large FCC providers, enrolling up to 12 to 14 children, earn \$40,000 to \$56,400 per year statewide.
  - FCC providers with a bachelor's degree earn between \$27,800 and \$39,500 annually.<sup>9</sup>
  - One third of FCC providers worry that their earnings are not enough to support their families.
- Because FCC providers are small business owners, they lack access to employer-provided benefits.
  - Most FCC providers have health insurance (87%), but 38% of FCC providers rely on coverage through a spouse or family member.<sup>10</sup>
  - Less than one quarter (21%) of FCC providers have any type of retirement savings.<sup>11</sup>





### Child Care Center Teaching Staff

- Nearly 84,000 lead teachers and assistant teachers/aides work in California’s child care centers; 98% of them are women.
- 66% of center-based teaching staff are people of color, and 48% of center-based teachers speak languages other than (or in addition to) English.
  - 98% of lead teachers speak English, 34% speak Spanish, and 44% speak two or more languages.
- Center-based teachers in California have vast experience in the field; 42% of assistant teachers/aides and 60% of lead teachers have more than 10 years of teaching experience in early care and education.
- The median hourly wage statewide in 2020 was \$16 for assistant teachers/aides and \$19 for lead teachers.
  - At 40 hours per week, the median salaries would be \$33,300 for an assistant teacher/aide and \$39,500 for a lead teacher.
    - 45% of assistant teachers/aides are scheduled to work less than 35 hours per week, which means that many assistant teachers/aides earn less than this annual salary.
  - Lead teachers with bachelor’s degrees working in child centers earn \$42,600 annually.
  - Two thirds of center teaching staff worry about covering their family’s bills based on their earnings.
- 93% of lead teachers and 91% of assistant teachers are enrolled in health insurance.
  - 7 out of 10 child care centers offer health benefits to lead teachers, and 5 out of 10 centers offer health benefits to assistant teachers/aides.
  - Nearly one quarter of assistant teachers/aides (22%) and lead teachers (23%) receive health coverage from a spouse or family member.<sup>12</sup>
- 50% of lead teachers and 39% of assistant teachers/aides have some type of retirement savings.<sup>13</sup>



### Child Care Center Directors

- California has more than 9,500 child care centers, and all of them are run by a director, site supervisor, or other administrator; 97% of all child care center directors are women.
- 45% of center directors are people of color, and 31% of center directors speak languages other than English.
- Like the rest of the ECE workforce in California, center directors have deep experience in early education, with 86% of directors working in the field for more than 10 years.
- Statewide, directors earned \$26 per hour in 2020 or \$54,100 per year.
  - 49% of directors worry about having enough money to pay their family's bills.
- 93% of directors have health insurance, with 55% of them enrolling through their employer.
  - 27% of directors rely on their spouse or a family member for health coverage.<sup>14</sup>
- Slightly more than one half (53%) of center directors have any type of retirement savings.<sup>15</sup>



### Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Lead Teachers

- There were an estimated 4,100 TK lead teachers in California during the 2019-2020 school year.<sup>16</sup>
- Based on data from the 2020 California Workforce Study, approximately 29% of TK lead teachers are people of color, 100% of TK teachers speak English, 16% speak Spanish, and 22% speak two or more languages.<sup>17</sup>
- California TK lead teachers earn \$84,700 annually.<sup>18</sup>
- 98% of TK lead teachers have health insurance, with 87% of them receiving employer benefits.
  - 17% of TK lead teachers rely on their spouse or a family member for health coverage.<sup>19</sup>

**Get specific data about wages, poverty rates,  
and more from CSCCE's 2020 Early Childhood  
Workforce Study.<sup>20</sup>**



## 4. Education and Training

Early educators are also lifelong learners. They routinely participate in formal and informal learning and spend a tremendous amount of energy and resources participating in education and training. They also hone their skills in the course of their daily work with children. Early educators are often defined as “nontraditional,” since many are first-generation college students, parents, full-time employees or small business owners, and/or dual language learners.



- The majority of early educators in California have higher education degrees in addition to their wealth of experience.
  - Among FCC providers, 30% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 23% have an associate degree.
  - Among center teaching staff, 56% of lead teachers and 25% of assistant teachers/aides have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 24% of lead teachers and 35% of assistant teachers/aides have an associate degree.
  - Among center directors, 73% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 16% have an associate degree.<sup>21</sup>
- When early educators have access to resources and are given adequate time, they can be even more successful in earning college degrees than “traditional” students, yet higher education systems are often not designed to help the ECE workforce be successful.
  - Faculty do not reflect the racial, ethnic, and professional diversity of the ECE workforce.
  - The cost of higher education is out of reach, especially given early educators' low pay, or saddles them with student debt.
- Early childhood higher education programs need resources and strategies to diversify faculty by recruiting faculty members of color and those with experience as early educators in centers and FCC settings as well as with infants and toddlers.





## Solutions

- Additional resources and conditions proven to support early educators' success in education and training are needed:
  - Financial resources/scholarships;
  - Alternative class schedules and arrangements (programs offered in multiple languages, online class options, courses in community-based locations);
  - Academic counseling and tutoring specific to early educators;
  - Cohort models in which a group progresses together;
  - Adequate time, not arbitrary deadlines, to meet new and increased qualifications;
  - Training and classes that address the range of roles and settings, such as business training for FCC providers; and
  - Professional development that translates into college credits, especially when training is required by local, state, and/or federal agencies.
- As California changes the requirements for teaching young children, it's important that these requirements reflect cultural and developmental competence. Creation of multiple options will allow early educators to maintain their employment and have their practical experience and training recognized. Options may include:
  - Creating a methodology to account for experience and multiple forms of education and training already completed; and
  - Developing different requirements for existing early educators that are separate from the requirements for those who join the workforce after the establishment of new rules.

Multiple examples of programs that employ these types of positive interventions to support the ECE workforce already exist throughout California:

- The [Learning Together study](#) is an example of a successful undergraduate-degree completion program that includes several of the solutions listed above.<sup>22</sup> Various First 5 organizations across the state invested in Learning Together.
- [Early Care and Education Pathways to Success \(ECEPTS\)](#) ([ecepts.org](http://ecepts.org)) provides training and technical assistance to ECE programs and higher education institutions to support the design, development, and implementation of apprenticeship programs throughout California and the United States. Apprenticeship programs are learning and credentialing programs that uniquely address the professional development needs of the ECE workforce by integrating on-the-job training, coaching, no-cost college coursework, cohort learning, and increased compensation.
- [EDvance](#) supports partner organizations that offer access to education and career pathways to their members and their families focused exclusively on higher education.





## 5. Well-Being and Working Conditions

The [work environments](#) of early educators matter.<sup>23</sup> Children depend on educators who are not only skilled, but who also have their own well-being and needs supported. Like any other professional, early educators need paid planning time, benefits that include paid sick leave and vacation, and adequate resources and staffing levels to do their jobs. Yet, the current ECE system undermines educators' humanity and dignity by preventing them from accessing these basic necessities. Low pay and poor work environment have long plagued [the ECE industry](#) as key drivers of chronic high turnover rates and teacher staffing shortages.<sup>24</sup>



- Most programs are severely under-resourced. A survey of the ECE workforce in Marin County showed that too many educators face insufficient teaching support, which impacts program quality and hinders their ability to apply their practice. For example:
  - 35% of center teaching staff surveyed reported that they did not have dedicated time (aside from nap or playground time) to discuss work issues with other teachers.
  - 73% of center teaching staff felt that the practice of hiring new staff in the event of turnover was unreliable.
  - More than one half (51%) of center teaching staff surveyed reported that there were not enough staff available to give children individual attention, and 29% did not agree that there are trained substitutes or floaters available to help.<sup>25</sup>
- Well-being is a complex concept that involves an understanding of a person's economic situation, their physical and mental health, and their professional life. Early educators are often tasked with putting the well-being of others before their own. Educator well-being has become the focus of more recent research, and the findings are striking:
  - Many early educators have elevated levels of stress, with 65% of center teaching staff, 59% of center directors, 53% of TK teachers, and 48% of FCC providers surveyed experiencing high stress levels.
    - More than one third (39%) of center-based teaching staff showed evidence of significant depressive symptoms.



- Lack of sleep among educators ranges from 42% of TK teachers to 54% of center teaching staff,<sup>26</sup> occurring at a rate that far exceeds that of the U.S. adult population (33%).<sup>27</sup>
- Early educators surveyed also reported physical health issues: 69% of center teaching staff, 67% of center directors, 64% of TK teachers, and 59% of FCC providers struggled with at least one chronic condition (pain, obesity, cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, diabetes, cancer, etc.).
  - About one quarter of all early educators have dealt with three or more such conditions.<sup>28</sup>
- Protected planning time is a crucial support for early educators, yet many educators do not have much access to this important resource: only 35% of TK lead teachers and 14% of center lead teachers reported that they have five or more hours of planning time per week, and 17% of TK lead teachers and 5% of center lead teachers reported having no weekly planning time at all.<sup>29</sup>
  - 46% of FCC providers reported that they've had challenges accessing planning time since the onset of the COVID pandemic; 15% of FCC providers reported that they faced this challenge pre-pandemic.<sup>30</sup>



## Solutions

- More than two decades ago, early educators in center- and home-based programs led an effort to articulate standards for their work environments to support their teaching practice. These [Model Work Standards](#) have recently been updated and continue to provide a vision for ensuring the needs of educators are met.<sup>31</sup>
- Research and initiatives to address educator well-being and working conditions should center educators' voices and their views on well-being as it relates to their teaching practice and their lives. Valuing the physical, emotional, and intellectual labor of the ECE workforce needs to drive systemic changes that seek to improve educator well-being.
- Early educators need policymakers to fund and make available evidence-based, comprehensive workplace well-being strategies that promote access to emotional support, preventative care, and self-care practices for the ECE workforce.
- Educators' well-being should not be seen as primarily their own responsibility, but rather a direct consequence of the work environment and system-level conditions. Well-being should also be recognized as an issue in its own right, rather than solely as a vehicle for delivering high-quality services.
- Quality must be understood in the context of equity. Policies and investments in quality must be based on the premise that quality is not achievable without equity for children, families AND educators.
- Workplace standards should be established in definitions of quality—such as guidance on appropriate levels of paid planning time, sufficient staffing, and materials and resources for staff—and included in funding formulas and quality improvement funding.

**[For more on the physical, emotional, and economic well-being of early educators in California, check out our Early Educator Well-Being Series.](#)**<sup>32</sup>



## 6. Public Funding

Early care and education services are a public good, but they are delivered mostly in a private market in which parents are expected to pay the full cost of services. Imagine if parents had to pay individually for second grade or if second grade teachers' wages were determined by what parents could manage to pay. That's how most early care and education operates in the United States, and it has failed children, their families, and early educators. Most programs are unable to charge for the [true costs of services](#) and have to rely on what parents can afford. The ECE workforce ends up subsidizing the system with their low wages, and as a result, 98% of other occupations in this country are paid more than early educators.<sup>33</sup>



- During the 2021-2022 school year, California K-12 spending (including state, local, and federal contributions) was \$18,152 per student, while state spending per child was \$13,585 (including federal recovery funds) for the California State Preschool Program and \$10,822 for the TK program.<sup>34</sup>
- A comparison of the annual per child cost of quality care to the current annual maximum regional market rate (RMR) that providers can receive and the [Title 5](#) payment rates reveals major gaps in public funding.<sup>35</sup>
  - Among **licensed child care centers**:
    - The annual cost of quality care for infants (0 to 24 months) ranges from \$26,416 to \$42,762 per child, while the annual RMR that providers can receive per infant ranges from \$15,860 to \$22,444.
    - The annual cost of quality care for toddlers (18 to 30 months) ranges from \$22,708 to \$36,669 per child, while the annual RMR that providers can receive per toddler ranges from \$15,860 to \$22,444.
    - The annual cost of quality care for preschoolers (age two to five) ranges from \$17,225 to \$27,658 per child, while the annual RMR that providers can receive per preschooler ranges from \$10,610 to \$16,917.
  - Among **Title 5 child care centers**:
    - The annual cost of quality care for infants ranges from \$35,812 to \$57,799 per child, while the annual Title 5 payment rate is \$31,446 per infant.
    - The annual cost of quality care for toddlers ranges from \$31,766 to \$51,149 per child, while the annual Title 5 payment rate is \$23,198 per toddler.
    - The annual cost of quality care for children ages three to four ranges from \$23,383 to \$37,374 per child, while the annual Title 5 payment rate is \$12,968 per three- to four-year-old.
  - Among **licensed family child care providers**:
    - The annual cost of quality care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers ranges from \$33,088 to \$54,773 per child at small FCC providers and \$28,611 to \$44,491 per child at large FCC providers, while the annual RMR that providers can receive per infant, toddler, or preschooler ranges from \$9,361 to \$15,513, depending on the age of the child.
  - Among **Title 5 family child care providers**:
    - The annual cost of quality care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers ranges from \$34,264 to \$53,448 per child at small FCC providers and \$29,764 to \$46,155 per child at large FCC providers, while the annual Title 5 payment rate that providers can receive per infant, toddler, or preschooler ranges from \$12,968 to \$31,446, depending on the age of the child.<sup>36</sup>

- An emphasis on one part of the mixed-delivery system can significantly affect the other parts of the system. In the wake of the recent TK expansion in California, 46% of FCC providers and 61% of center directors reported they were serving fewer four-year-olds.
- Enrollment patterns suggest that ECE providers are not necessarily increasing their care for three-year-olds, though some have added infants and toddlers. Total enrollment for FCC programs is about the same as the start of 2020, and total enrollment for centers was much lower in 2023 compared to the start of 2020.<sup>37</sup>





## Solutions

- The public should be informed about the [real costs](#) of operating ECE programs and why parents pay so much while early educators earn low wages.<sup>38</sup>
- States and localities have the power to create policies and revenue sources to adequately fund ECE services as a public good. Parents cannot afford to pay more, and educators cannot afford to work under the current conditions. San Francisco's [Proposition C](#), passed in 2018, provides a model for the public funding of early care and education that the state should consider.<sup>39</sup>
- Economic dignity for FCC providers and center-based early educators starts with funding wage and benefit standards that: set a wage floor at the locally assessed living wage; account for job role, experience, and education levels; and reach parity with similarly qualified elementary school teachers.
- Stable contract-based funding arrangements for center- and home-based programs can ensure a base funding amount for a specific number of publicly funded spots, rather than using volatile enrollment or attendance levels.
- California must remain committed to implementing the recommendations outlined in the [Quality and Rate Reform Working Group Report](#), with a high priority given to establishing an alternative methodology strategy for determining rates in the child care subsidy system. The current effort to set new child care subsidy payment rates that are informed by and responsive to the cost of care is a massive first step in state-level reform of the ECE system. Rate-setting models must include significantly higher benchmarks for educator compensation and account for the resources and supports needed to facilitate ongoing professional development, good working conditions, and educator well-being.<sup>40</sup>
- After rates are revised, public funding must be expanded, moving towards a truly universal ECE system in which all children, families, and providers have the opportunity to participate.
- To address historical inequities, state investment in the ECE system should:
  - Take a [Targeted Universalism](#) approach to implementing changes to California's reimbursement rate and program quality systems.
  - Expand retirement and health coverage benefits already offered to FCC providers to include all ECE providers in the subsidy system.

**To understand the true cost of child care in California, see the [P-5 Fiscal Strategies cost model report](#).<sup>41</sup>**

## 7. Disparities Within the California ECE Workforce

The labor force in California is racially diverse, and this diversity is also seen in the state's early educator workforce. However, educators of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are not distributed equitably across roles within the field. Women of color are overrepresented in the lowest-paying jobs, underrepresented in leadership positions, and frequently paid unequal wages for equal work.



- While the ECE workforce is poorly paid as a whole, racial and ethnic wage gaps disproportionately harm Black and Latina educators.
  - In terms of annual earnings, Latina directors are paid \$7,700 less and Black directors \$3,600 less than Asian or White directors.
    - In other words, Latina directors make 87 cents and Black directors 94 cents for every dollar earned by White or Asian directors.
  - Annualized racial wage gaps are more than \$6,000 less for Black lead teachers, \$3,900 less for Latina lead teachers, and \$2,800 less for White lead teachers, when compared to their Asian counterparts.
    - In other words, Black lead teachers make 86 cents, Latina educators make 91 cents, and White educators make 94 cents for every dollar paid to Asian lead teachers.
- White educators do not have higher levels of educational attainment than early educators from other racial and ethnic groups, yet they tend to be overrepresented in leadership roles. White early educators hold more than one half (54%) of all leadership positions in the ECE sector, yet they only make up about one third (35%) of the overall ECE workforce.
  - Across nearly every role, Asian and Black educators are more likely than educators of other races or ethnicities in the same position to hold a bachelor's degree or higher.
  - Black educators in lead teacher roles were just as likely as White lead teachers and more likely than Latina lead teachers to hold a bachelor's degree or higher (56%, 55%, and 48%, respectively), but their hourly wages were the lowest among all the racial and ethnic groups.
  - Black center directors were more likely than White center directors to hold a bachelor's degree or higher (82% and 72%, respectively), but they earn lower hourly wages than White directors (\$27.00, compared to \$28.70).



- When comparing median wages among educators with a bachelor's degree or higher (i.e., controlling for education), White early educators consistently earned higher wages than most all other racial and ethnic groups.
- Latina educators are the least likely among all racial and ethnic groups to hold a bachelor's degree, perhaps reflecting structural barriers and lack of support for this population in the higher education system.
- Pay premiums for education are not applied equitably across racial and ethnic groups: Black lead teachers are not rewarded with pay increases for obtaining higher degrees; and Asian lead teachers and directors are “punished” with lower pay for holding a higher degree.<sup>42</sup>



## Solutions

Facilitating racial justice must be a key component of any ECE policy. Targeted funding and structural change are needed to end the racial and ethnic disparities experienced by the workforce.

- Any program that receives public funding to provide ECE services should be required and funded to adhere to wage standards.
- Policymakers and state and local administrators need data to understand and respond to information about who is benefiting from and who is excluded or harmed by specific policies.
  - Collecting data from all, not just some, members and parts of the ECE system is essential. Data collection would help policymakers and other stakeholders understand the conditions of early educators and the impact of policies.
  - When inequities are identified, important questions to answer include: “How are decision-making processes centering the experiences of those most oppressed?” and “Is the group most impacted by a policy missing from the space where decisions are being made?”
- It is essential that we build a body of current data about racial and ethnic communities that are underrepresented in ECE workforce datasets, including Asian and Native American educators. These datasets should be broken down by ethnicity and tribal affiliation.
- The stories of early educators are an important source of data. By collecting these experiences and reflections, we recognize that people are far more than their demographics.

## 8. Workforce Data System

The absence of a good ECE data system allows anecdote and bias to drive policy decisions. Lack of a consistent and high-quality data system for the ECE sector is indicative of the devaluing of this workforce. The development of a well-funded, robust workforce data system is an important step to identify and remedy the disparities and inequities faced by early educators.

- A good workforce data system requires a comprehensive plan and adequate funding to:
  - Include all members of the ECE workforce employed in schools and center- and home-based child care settings;
  - Collect quantitative and qualitative data from early educators;
  - Be comprehensive enough to identify disparities in such areas as compensation and educational attainment;
  - Analyze and disseminate data and reports on the economic status and well-being of the ECE workforce; and
  - Assess the impact of policy and funding decisions on early educators.

**The California Early Care and Education Workforce Study provides an example of a workforce data system that addresses many of these concerns.**<sup>43</sup>





## 9. Teacher Power

Early educators are influential when they use their collective power to advance public policies that support their professional well-being and effectiveness.

- Early educators have a rich [history](#) of organizing and building collective power.<sup>44</sup> One great example is the [Worthy Wage Campaign](#), a grassroots effort to empower and mobilize educators to reverse the child care staffing crisis in the 1990s.<sup>45</sup> It was organized around the following [three objectives](#):<sup>46</sup>
  - To create a unified voice for the concerns of the ECE workforce at the national, state, and local levels;
  - To increase the value and respect for those who provide early care and education through improving their wages, benefits, working conditions, and training opportunities; and
  - To promote the accessibility and affordability of high-quality ECE options that meet the diverse needs of children and families.



- The legacy of teacher power continues today.
- In 2023, [Child Care Providers United](https://childcareprovidersunited.org) (CCPU) ([childcareprovidersunited.org](https://childcareprovidersunited.org)), a union of family child care providers in California, [negotiated a union contract](#) that was passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor. The contract secured an additional \$2.8 billion in payment enhancements over a two-year period, established an \$80-million annual investment in an FCC provider retirement fund (the only one in the nation), and extended the practice of reimbursing providers based on enrollment rather than attendance.<sup>47</sup>
  - In 2023, [Black Californians United for ECE](https://blackece.org) ([blackece.org](https://blackece.org)), a coalition of ECE professionals, advocates, nonprofit leaders, and university faculty, launched [Lift Every Voice](#), in which nearly 40 Black child care educators came together for a weekend of “joy, restoration, and strategizing.”<sup>48</sup>

## Solutions

These examples of activism demonstrate the influence and importance of early educators coming together to advocate on their own behalf. To facilitate organizing and the building of collective power, early educators need:

- Supportive, safe spaces to share their experiences, collaborate, and build alliances with one another;
- [Creative ways to support their collective bargaining](#), especially for center teachers who face challenges unionizing due to labor laws;<sup>49</sup>
- Resources in the form of data about the ECE sector and guidance on advocacy and organizing;
- Access to policymaking spaces to ensure that their perspectives are prioritized in decisions that impact the ECE sector and workforce; and
- Compensation for their contributions to and participation in activities like trainings and working groups.

**Explore the [ECHOES website \(cscce.berkeley.edu/projects/echoes\)](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/projects/echoes), a CSCCE project that connects early care and education today with its history and activism.**



## 10. Next Steps

Early educators themselves are central to helping policy leaders and stakeholders understand the problems of the ECE system and identify workable solutions. There is a pressing need to center the ECE workforce in discussions on policy responses to the child care crisis that is happening now at all levels of government. The information shared in this toolkit could be used in a variety of ways, including in:

- Group settings of early educators as a way to build shared understanding and alliances;
- Conversations with advocacy organizations to identify the needs and desires of the ECE workforce; and
- Policymaking spaces—like local child care planning councils (for example, the [Early Childhood Policy Council \(ECPC\)](#)<sup>50</sup>) or state working groups (for example, the [Rate Reform and Quality workgroup](#)<sup>51</sup>)—to share personal narratives and anecdotal experiences in the hope of pushing for systemic solutions in early care and education as well as social justice for early educators.





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The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) has been the national leader in early care and education workforce research and policy since 1999. 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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