

The Professional Well-Being of Early Educators in California

Early Educator Well-Being Series

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Introduction

The learning environments of young children are also the work environments of the early care and education (ECE) workforce. To support a thriving environment for children, early educators require a sense of professional well-being, which includes rewarding work, autonomy, respect, and job satisfaction. These essential elements of professional well-being are strongly influenced by the context in which their work occurs: their work environment. Professional well-being can significantly impact ECE workers, just like low wages or mental health stressors (Whitebook et al., 2016; Zinsler et al., 2016).

The California Early Care and Education Workforce Study is an ongoing longitudinal study that provides comprehensive statewide and regional information on the center- and home-based ECE workforce. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) launched the current workforce study in 2020 to provide an update on the status of the workforce since the previous study conducted in 2006 (Whitebook et al., 2006). Phase 2 of the present study was conducted during 2023, collecting information predominantly from educators who participated in 2020.

This report focuses on the professional well-being of California’s ECE workforce. It is the second in a series on early educator well-being, highlighting findings from Phase 2 of the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.

This report leverages data gathered during the spring of 2023 from a survey of about 540 family child care (FCC) providers, 510 center directors, 445 center teaching staff (i.e., center teachers and assistants/aides), and 345 transitional kindergarten (TK) teachers. We weight FCC provider and center director data by region, FCC size, and center infant/toddler license size, using statewide data from the *California Resource & Referral Network 2021 Portfolio* (California Resource & Referral Network, 2023). We present state-level findings by educator role, program funding type, children served, educator country of birth, and educator race and ethnicity.

For program funding type, programs with a contract through either Head Start, Early Head Start, or Migrant Head Start or a contract to operate a state-subsidized (Title 5) program were categorized as “Head Start/Title 5.” Programs with other funding sources were categorized as “All other funding.”

Rewarding Work

Working with children is challenging, but it can also offer a tremendous sense of reward that can promote job satisfaction and mitigate some of the stress associated with ECE work. We use items from the job resources scale of the Child Care Worker Job Stress Inventory to examine educators’ sense of reward by exploring how educators view the impact of their profession (Curbow et al., 2000).

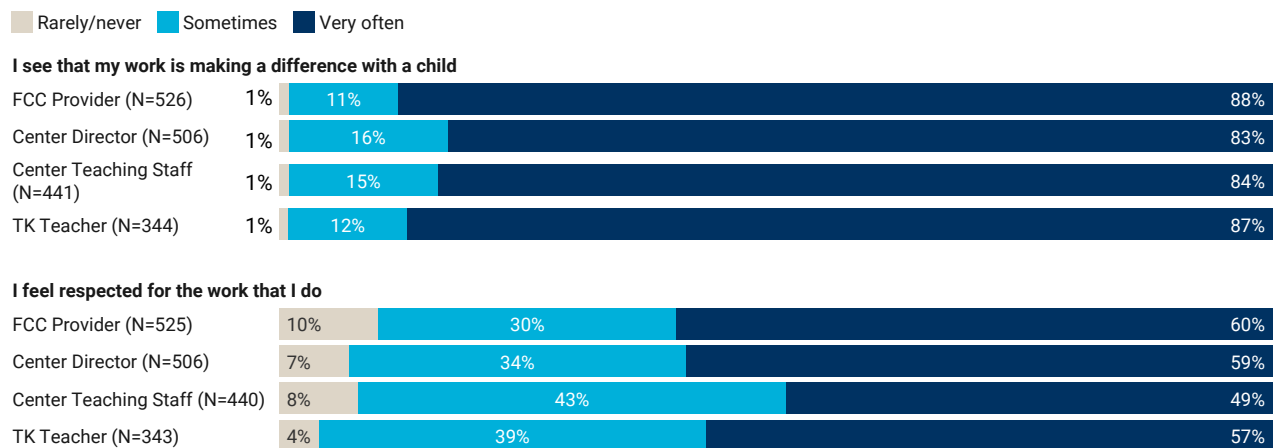
The survey asked all early educators to rate statements related to the impact of their work. The statements were rated on a four-point scale of “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.” Responses for “rarely” and “never” were combined for reporting. In this section, we examine their responses to the statements “I see that my work is making a difference with a child” and “I feel respected for the work that I do.”

Overwhelmingly, early educators find their work with children particularly impactful, yet a significant proportion do not feel respected for their efforts (Figure 1). Our data reveal that an overwhelming majority of educators (more than 80 percent) felt “very often” that they were “making a difference with a child,” with little variation across roles. However, educators do not feel respected as strongly. Only 50 to 60 percent of the early educators surveyed indicated that they “very often” felt respected for the work they do, and this sentiment was lowest among center teaching staff.

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FIGURE 1. EDUCATORS’ SENSE OF REWARD FOR THEIR WORK

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023



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

Note: Respondents rated the frequency of each statement on a four-point scale, with designations of “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.” Responses for “rarely” and “never” are combined for reporting.

To further explore their perceptions of reward and respect, we examined responses of educators who answered “very often” by race and ethnicity.

Across all educator roles, Black FCC providers expressed the strongest sense of positively impacting children, with an overwhelming 97 percent selecting “very often” (**Table 1**). However, this sentiment was least frequent among Black center directors (77 percent). Marked differences were also observed within specific educator groups. For example, among TK teachers, a greater proportion of Asian teachers felt that they were “very often” making a difference with a child (94 percent), while fewer Latina TK teachers shared this feeling (81 percent).

TABLE 1. EDUCATORS WHO REPORTED MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH A CHILD “VERY OFTEN”

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=514-526)	Center Director (N=460-506)	Center Teaching Staff (N=431-441)	TK Teacher (N=328-344)
All respondents	88%	83%	84%	88%
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	92%	88%*	79%*	94%*
Black	97%	77%*	80%*	**
Latina***	87%	80%	84%	81%
White	85%	84%	88%	89%
Multiethnic	92%*	84%*	82%*	89%*

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

Note: Respondents rated the frequency of each statement on a four-point scale, with designations of “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.” Only responses for “very often” are reported here.

*Interpret with caution due to small sample size (n<50).

**Data suppressed due to small sample size (n<10).

***Because the ECE workforce is overwhelmingly composed of individuals who identify as women, we use the gender-specific term “Latina” to describe members of the ECE workforce who identify as part of the Latin American diaspora. However, we know that data collection has not always accounted for gender diversity beyond a male/female binary. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of early educators who identify as men, nonbinary, or another gender identity and recognize that the gendered oppression of women in the ECE workforce is related to the gender-based oppression of nonbinary, trans, and genderqueer educators. “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.” Responses for “rarely” and “never” are combined for reporting.

Educators’ perceptions of being respected for their work also varied notably by race and ethnicity (**Table 2**). Across educator roles, Asian TK teachers were the most likely to feel respected for their work, with 82 percent selecting “very often.” Frequency of feeling respected was lowest among Latina center teaching staff: only 47 percent selected “very often.” Noteworthy differences were also evident within educator roles. For instance, among FCC providers, the feeling of being respected was highest among Asian providers (74 percent) and lowest among White providers (50 percent).

TABLE 2. EDUCATORS WHO REPORTED FEELING RESPECTED FOR THEIR WORK “VERY OFTEN”

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=514-525)	Center Director (N=460-506)	Center Teaching Staff (N=431-440)	TK Teacher (N=328-343)
All respondents	60%	59%	49%	57%
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	74%	58%*	44%*	82%*
Black	64%	56%*	64%*	**
Latina	63%	58%	47%	55%
White	50%	62%	49%	55%
Multiethnic	55%*	49%*	48%*	61%*

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

Note: Respondents rated the frequency of each statement on a four-point scale, with designations of “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.” Only responses for “very often” are reported.

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Job Satisfaction

Educators’ satisfaction with their work can impact their commitment to the profession. Our survey asked educators who typically work directly with children (FCC providers, center teaching staff, and TK teachers) to rate their level of agreement with statements about job satisfaction using a six-point scale of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree” (Zinsser et al., 2016). Center directors were not asked this question.

Here, we examine educators’ responses to the statements “I really enjoy my present job” and “If I started over, I would choose working with children.” All levels of “disagree” were grouped into a single category, since these options were rarely selected.

A great majority of early educators enjoy their job and would choose the same career if they were able to start over again (**Figure 2**). However, while educators generally agree with the statements affirming their enjoyment of their current job and their inclination to choose the same career again, this agreement was weaker than their belief in the impact they have on children. For both statements, less than 60 percent of educators selected “strongly agree.” Moreover, center-based teachers were less likely than FCC providers or TK teachers to voice strong agreement with indicators of job satisfaction.

FIGURE 2. EDUCATORS' RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS ABOUT JOB SATISFACTION

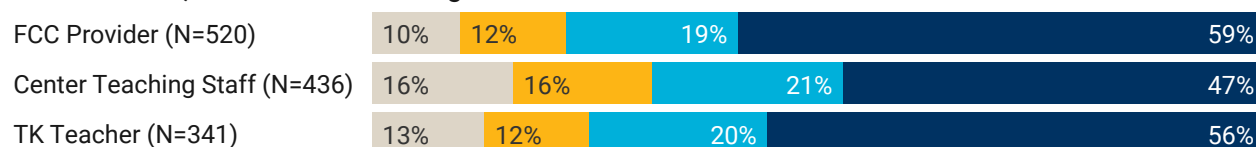
California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

I really enjoy my present job



If I started over, I would choose working with children



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

Note: The statements were rated on a six-point scale, with designations of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” All “disagree” variants are combined for reporting.

Autonomy and Relationships at Work

Having a say in decisions that impact one’s work and enjoying supportive workplace relationships can positively impact self-esteem and job satisfaction. Educators experience varying levels of autonomy and relationships with others at work. To evaluate autonomy, we look at choice in and opportunities for professional growth. To evaluate relationships with co-workers and supervisors, we take a closer look at center- and school-based work climates and examine discriminatory behavior and harassment.

Choice and Opportunities for Professional Growth

Participation in ongoing professional development activities that help improve teaching practice is important for all educators. When educators have input in their own professional development, their learning becomes more meaningful (Whitebook et al., 2016). Furthermore, opportunities to reflect, share, and learn with their peers allow educators to better integrate their learning into effective practice.

Our survey asked educators to rate their level of agreement with the two statements related to having a choice in professional development and having sufficient opportunities for networking (Whitebook et al., 2016). We report the percentage of educators who agreed with the statements:

- Over the past 12 months, I have had a choice in the professional development in which I participated.
- Over the past 12 months, I have had sufficient opportunities to meet with other early educators during paid hours as part of a professional association, support group, or other early childhood organization.

The majority of early educators agreed that they had a choice in their professional development, with some variation observed across educator roles (**Table 3**). Having a choice in professional development was most prevalent among center directors (82 percent) and lowest among TK teachers, with only 68 percent agreeing with the statement.

The ability to participate in professional development of one’s choosing also showed marked variation by program funding type, primary age of children served, and educator race and ethnicity. For both center directors and center teaching staff, choice in professional development was higher among educators in Head Start/Title 5 environments (88 percent and 81 percent, respectively), compared to their peers in other programs (79 percent and 71 percent, respectively). Furthermore, for both FCC providers and center teaching staff, educators working primarily with infants and toddlers were the least likely to indicate having choice about their professional development options (65 percent and 73 percent, respectively), compared to their counterparts working with preschool-age children (83 percent and 79 percent, respectively) or multiple age groups (77 percent and 75 percent, respectively).

TABLE 3. EDUCATORS WITH CHOICE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=452-482)	Center Director (N=448-492)	Center Teaching Staff (N=427-434)	TK Teacher (N=324-340)
All respondents	76%	82%	77%	68%
Program Funding Type				
Head Start/Title 5	-	88%	81%	-
All other funding	-	79%	71%	-
Primary Age Served				
Infant/toddler (under age 3)	65%	-	73%	-
Preschool (age 3 to 5)	83%*	-	79%	-
Multiple ages	77%	-	75%	-
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	77%*	90%*	81%*	76%*
Black	77%	78%*	60%*	**
Latina	79%	76%	81%	71%
White	74%	82%	77%	65%
Multiethnic	69%*	91%*	70%*	69%*

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

Note: Respondents rated their level of agreement on a six-point scale, with designations of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” All “agree” variants are combined for reporting.

*Interpret with caution due to small sample size (n<50).

**Data suppressed due to small sample size (n<10).

Choice in professional development also varied by educator race and ethnicity and showed more pronounced differences among center directors and center teaching staff. Among center directors, choice in professional development was highest among Asian and multiethnic directors (about 90 percent) and lowest among Latina directors (76 percent). Among center teaching staff, Asian and Latina educators were the most likely and Black educators the least likely to have a choice in professional development (81 percent, 81 percent, and 60 percent, respectively; **Table 3**).

A significant portion of educators do not have sufficient opportunities to network with their peers during paid hours (**Table 4**). This challenge was most prominent among FCC providers, who often work alone. Only 41 percent of FCC providers agreed that they had sufficient opportunities to meet with other educators during paid hours.

Having sufficient opportunities to meet with other educators during the paid workday showed notable variation by program funding type as well as educator race and ethnicity. Educators working in Head Start/Title 5 programs were more likely to report having sufficient networking opportunities compared to their peers in other programs. Additionally, with the exception of TK teachers, White educators were the least likely to feel they had access to other early educators.

TABLE 4. EDUCATORS WITH SUFFICIENT PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=465-499)	Center Director (N=449-492)	Center Teaching Staff (N=422-428)	TK Teacher (N=323-339)
All respondents	41%	57%	48%	54%
Program Funding Type				
Head Start/Title 5	-	65%	52%	-
All other funding	-	53%	41%	-
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	47%	64%*	51%*	65%*
Black	50%*	58%*	52%*	**
Latina	48%	60%	52%	58%
White	28%	54%	41%	52%
Multiethnic	28%*	70%*	44%*	50%*

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

Note: Respondents rated their level of agreement on a six-point scale, with designations of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” All “agree” variants are combined for reporting.

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Workplace Climate

Relationships at work—with supervisors and co-workers, as well as children and families—can influence how educators experience and perceive their jobs (Schlieber et al., 2022). Our study looked at workplace climate in centers and transitional kindergarten, asking how often respondents experienced negative workplace interactions or outcomes. We did not ask FCC providers or center directors this set of questions, since they generally have the authority to make decisions or assign tasks. In addition, many FCC providers work alone.

Discrimination and Harassment

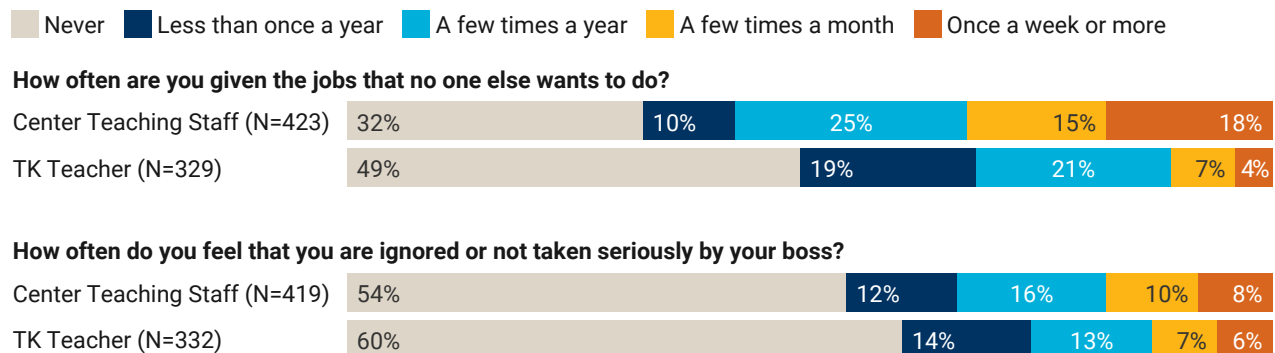
We used the 12-item measure of chronic discrimination and harassment at work to explore whether teaching staff feel valued and respected by their direct supervisor and their colleagues (Williams, 2012). Educators rated how often each statement occurs at work on a five-point scale, with designations of “never,” “less than once a year,” “a few times a year,” “a few times a month,” and “once a week or more.” In this section, we report on educators’ responses to selected statements.

First, we examine educators’ responses to the statements: “How often are you given the jobs that no one else wants?” and “How often do you feel you are ignored or not taken seriously by your boss?”

The majority of early educators feel they are sometimes given jobs that no one else wants (**Figure 3**). More than two thirds (68 percent) center teaching staff and about one half (51 percent) of TK teachers reported that they are often given jobs that no one else wants to do at some point during the year. Furthermore, center teaching staff were likely to have this negative workplace experience at a higher frequency compared to TK teachers; one in three (33 percent) center teaching staff reported that they were given jobs that no one else wants to do at least a few times a month, compared to one in ten (11 percent) TK teachers.

FIGURE 3. EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023



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

Note: Respondents rated statements on a five-point scale, with designations of “never,” “less than once a year,” “a few times a year,” “a few times a month,” and “once a week or more.”

Compared to their experience of being given jobs that no-one else wants, educators were more likely to feel they were taken seriously by their supervisors. More than one half of both center teaching staff and TK teachers indicated that they never felt ignored or not taken seriously by their boss (54 percent and 60 percent, respectively). Nonetheless, more center teaching staff than TK teachers felt they were ignored by their boss at least a few times a month (18 percent and 13 percent, respectively; **Figure 3**).

Next, we examined educators’ experience hearing racial slurs or jokes by their supervisors and co-workers. In general, experiences of racial or ethnic slurs are rare. Thus, all options other than “never” were combined to show the total proportion of educators impacted at any time. Typically, educators selected “less than once a year” or “a few times a year.”

In this section, we report on educators’ responses to the statements: “How often does your supervisor or boss direct racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at you?” and “How often do your coworkers direct racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at you?”

Overall, educators were more likely to experience a racial slur directed at them from co-workers than supervisors (**Table 5**). Nearly 10 percent of center teaching staff experienced racial slurs or ethnic slurs directed at them by their co-workers. Incidents of racial slurs directed at educators were higher among center teaching staff than TK teachers.

TABLE 5. EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCE OF HARASSMENT AT WORK

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	Center Teaching Staff (N=379-386)	TK Teacher (N=304-316)
Supervisor has directed racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at you		
All respondents	4%	1%
Asian	5%*	6%*
Black	4%*	**
Latina	6%	0%
White	1%	0%
Multiethnic	2%*	3%*
Co-workers have directed racial or ethnic slurs or jokes at you		
All respondents	8%	3%
Asian	9%*	6%*
Black	8%*	**
Latina	11%	4%
White	4%	3%
Multiethnic	2%*	0%*

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

Note: The table shows the proportion of respondents who selected an option other than “never” when asked about the frequency of experiences. “A few times a year” or “less than once a year” were the most common responses.

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**Data suppressed due to small sample size (n<10).

When examined by educator race and ethnicity, Latina center teaching staff were the most likely to experience slurs directed at them from either a supervisor or a co-worker (6 percent and 11 percent, respectively; **Table 5**). Among TK teachers, having racial slurs directed at them by supervisors or peers was most common for Asian teachers (6 percent for both).

Relationships and Fairness at Work

Respectful and fair treatment at work fosters a positive work climate. Workplace climate was further examined by assessing interactions with colleagues and supervisors. To explore this aspect, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements from the SEQUAL tool about respectful relationships with co-workers and fairness of interactions with supervisors at work (Schlieber et al., 2022). Statements were rated on a six-point scale, and for reporting, all levels of “disagree” are combined into one category.

First, we examine educators’ responses to statements about relationships with co-workers: “My co-workers treat me with respect”; “I feel supported by my co-workers when I have personal issues”; and “My beliefs about teaching children are valued by my co-workers.”

The majority of early educators reported experiencing respectful relationships with their co-workers (**Figure 4**). More than two thirds of educators agreed or strongly agreed that their co-workers treated them with respect, they were supported when they had personal issues, and their beliefs about teaching children were valued. In general, TK teachers noted stronger agreement with the statements compared to center teaching staff.

FIGURE 4. EDUCATORS’ RELATIONSHIPS WITH CO-WORKERS

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

Disagree Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

My co-workers treat me with respect



I feel supported by my co-workers when I have personal issues



My beliefs about teaching children are valued by my co-workers



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

Note: Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a six-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree,” to “somewhat disagree.” In the chart, all levels of “disagree” are combined into one category.

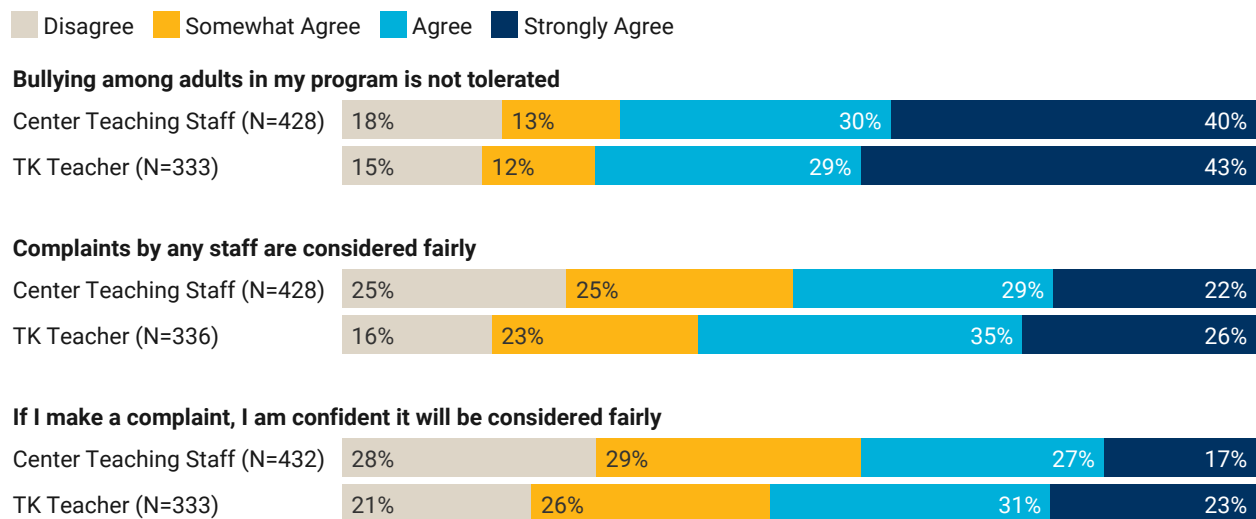
Fairness of interactions with supervisors at work was examined through educators’ responses to the following statements: “Bullying among adults in my program is not tolerated”; “Complaints by any staff are considered fairly”; and “If I make a complaint, I am confident it will be considered fairly.”

Educators experience interactions with leadership that are not always positive. Although the majority of educators believe bullying is not tolerated in their programs, a significant share of educators disagree. Nearly three quarters of educators agreed or strongly agreed that bullying among adults was not tolerated at their program (70 percent of center teaching staff and 72 percent of TK teachers; **Figure 5**). Nevertheless, almost 20 percent of center teaching staff and 15 percent of TK teachers disagreed, suggesting experiences of unpleasant working environments.

Many educators feel unheard by their supervisors. Less than 50 percent of center teaching staff and about 60 percent of TK teachers agreed or strongly agreed that complaints by staff were considered fairly (49 percent and 61 percent, respectively). Even fewer were confident their complaints would be considered fairly; 44 percent of center teaching staff, and 54 percent of TK teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In general, TK teachers were more likely than center teaching staff to agree with all statements regarding supervisors’ fairness.

FIGURE 5. EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTION OF FAIRNESS FROM SUPERVISORS

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023



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

Note: Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a six-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “somewhat disagree.” In the chart, all levels of “disagree” are combined.

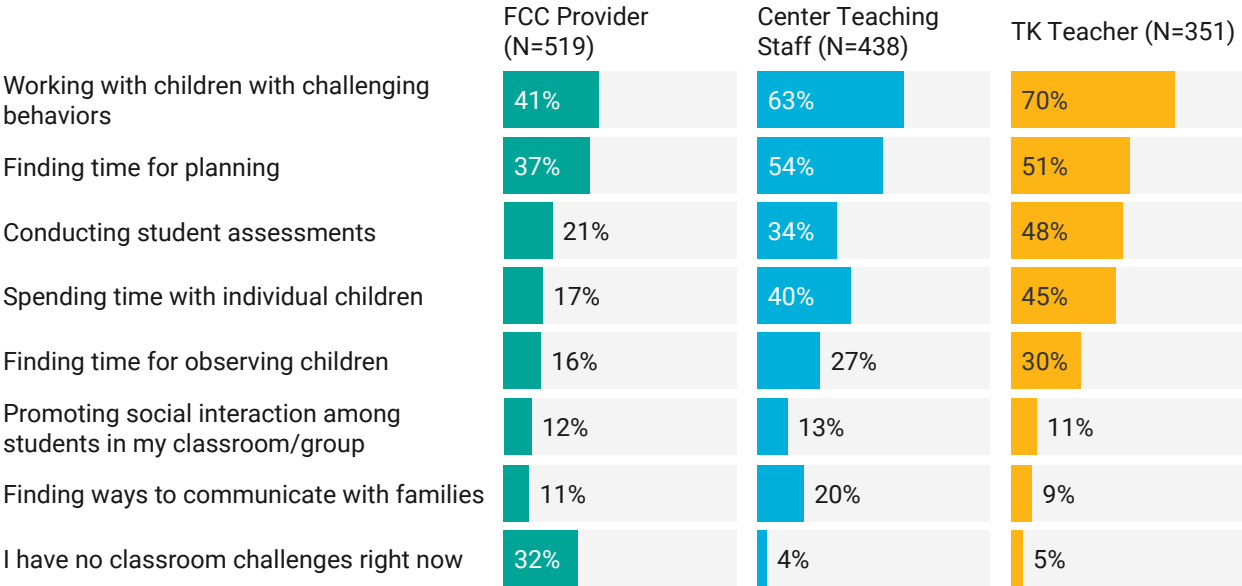
Classroom Challenges

Challenges in the classroom can interfere with teaching practice and may impact how early educators feel about their jobs. FCC providers, center teaching staff, and TK teachers were asked to select challenges they experienced as a teacher from a list provided. Respondents were able to select more than one challenge. We report the percentage of respondents who selected each challenge.

Across all educator groups, the most common challenge noted was “working with children with challenging behaviors” (Figure 6). Additionally, “finding time for planning” emerged as a significant challenge, acknowledged by 54 percent of center teaching staff and 51 percent of TK teachers, as well as 37 percent of FCC providers. Generally, FCC providers were less likely to identify teaching challenges, compared to both center teaching staff and TK teachers: nearly one third of FCC providers noted an absence of classroom challenges.

FIGURE 6. CLASSROOM CHALLENGES

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023



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

We looked more closely at educators who identified working with children exhibiting challenging behaviors as a challenge, examining responses by program funding type, primary age group of children served, and educator race and ethnicity.

Center teaching staff in Head Start/Title 5-funded programs were more likely to have difficulty working with children with challenging behaviors compared to educators in other programs (Table 6). Additionally, working with children with challenging behaviors was less commonly a challenge among educators who work with infants and toddlers than those who work with older age groups. For example, among center teaching staff, less than 50 percent of educators who work with infants and toddlers had difficulty working with children with challenging behaviors, compared to nearly 70 percent of those working with preschoolers or multiple age groups.

The proportions of educators working with children with challenging behaviors varied by educator race and ethnicity. Among FCC providers, multiethnic and White providers were the most likely to identify this difficulty (45 percent and 44 percent, respectively), while Asian and Black providers were the least likely (37 percent). On the other hand, among center teaching staff, Asian and Black educators were the most likely to identify working with children with challenging behaviors as a concern (73 percent and 72 percent, respectively), and multiethnic educators were the least likely (48 percent).

TABLE 6. CHALLENGES WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=484-533)	Center Teaching Staff (N=438-450)	TK Teacher (N=334-351)
All respondents	41%	63%	70%
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/Title 5	-	66%	-
All other funding	-	58%	-
Primary Age Served			
Infant/toddler (under age 3)	23%	46%	-
Preschool (age 3 to 5)	35%*	67%	-
Multiple ages	45%	68%	-
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian	37%	73%*	100%*
Black	37%	72%*	**
Latina	42%	63%	66%
White	44%	62%	70%
Multiethnic	45%*	48%*	73%*

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

*Interpret with caution due to small sample size (n<50).

**Data suppressed due to small sample size (n<10).

Physical Environment

Educators need substantial equipment and materials to perform their work. For instance, they may need tables, cribs, and play structures to set up the space. They also require developmentally appropriate books and toys, as well as curriculum manuals to support their practice in these spaces (Schlieber et al., 2022). This section presents educators’ impressions regarding their physical environment, with additional findings on workplace safety.

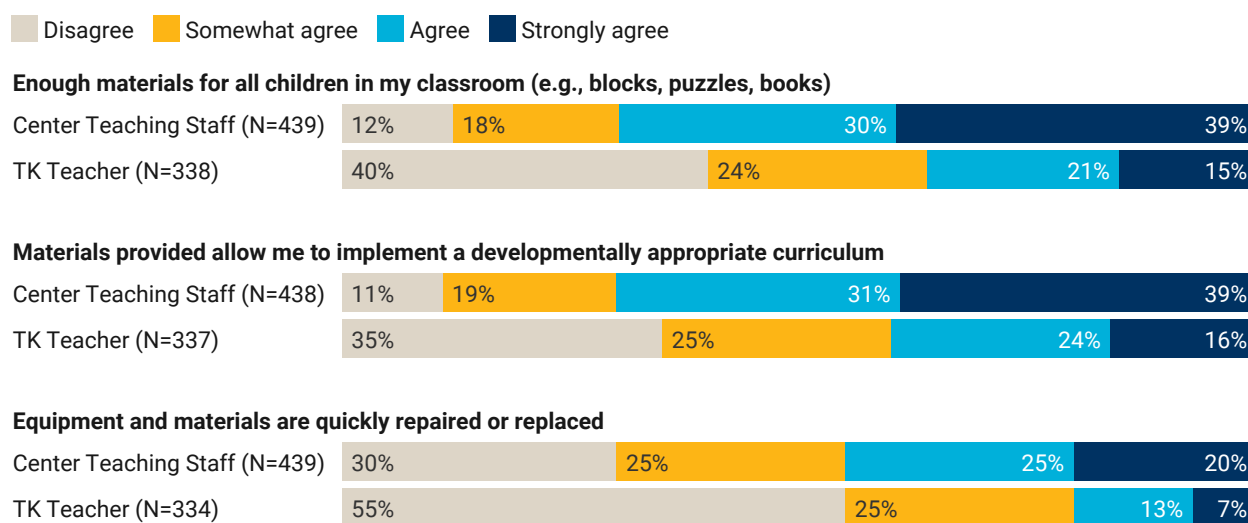
Equipment and Materials

Respondents rated their level of agreement with statements about the equipment and materials in their classroom, including being provided enough materials (e.g., blocks, puzzles, books) for all children in the classroom, having materials that allow implementation of a developmentally appropriate curriculum, and having equipment and materials repaired or replaced quickly. All levels of “disagree” are combined for reporting.

Center teaching staff and TK teachers have differing perspectives on the availability and timely repair of equipment and materials in their classrooms, with TK teachers more likely to indicate inadequate resources (**Figure 7**). For instance, 40 percent of TK teachers did not have enough materials for all children in their classroom, whereas only 12 percent of center teachers and assistants faced a similar challenge. Similar levels of disagreement were noted regarding the availability of materials that support developmentally appropriate practice.

FIGURE 7. EDUCATORS’ ACCESS TO EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023



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

Note: Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a six-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree,” to “somewhat disagree.” In the chart, all levels of “disagree” are combined.

This lack of access to classroom resources, including materials for implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum among TK teachers, echoes findings from our 2020 study (Montoya et al., 2022). These findings suggest a continued challenge for TK teachers as these programs are being expanded and new TK classrooms are being added.

Equipment and Materials

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements about their workplace safety. Two dimensions of safety are reported on: “Security measures are provided to ensure staff safety and well-being” and “I have a safe place to put my personal things.”

An overwhelming majority of educators feel their workplaces provide for their safety and security (Table 7). We did not find noticeable differences by program funding type, but there was some variation by educator race and ethnicity. For instance, among center teaching staff, both White and Asian educators were the most likely to agree that programs provided security measures, while Black educators were the least likely (93 percent, 93 percent, and 80 percent, respectively). Concerning the provision of a safe place to put personal items, Black center teaching staff were the most likely to agree with the statement, while their Asian peers were the least likely (88 percent and 77 percent, respectively).

TABLE 7. EDUCATORS’ SENSE OF WORKPLACE SAFETY

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2023

	Center Teaching Staff (N=422-439)	TK Teacher (N=317-342)
Security measures provided to ensure staff safety and well-being (e.g., good lighting, locks)		
All respondents	89%	87%
Asian	93%*	94%*
Black	80%*	**
Latina	88%	87%
White	93%	87%
Multiethnic	86%*	83%*
Safe place provided to put my personal things (e.g., phone, purse)		
All respondents	85%	84%
Asian	77%*	76%*
Black	88%*	**
Latina	85%	85%
White	86%	87%
Multiethnic	82%*	78%*

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

Note: Respondents rated their agreement on a six-point scale, with designations of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” All “agree” variants are combined for reporting.

*Interpret with caution due to small sample size (n<50).

**Data suppressed due to small sample size (n<10).

Conclusion

Our study shows that early educators find their work with children rewarding, despite the persistent inadequacy of their work environments. Supportive and safe work environments can enhance educators' practice, professional esteem, and job satisfaction (Whitebook et al., 2016; Zinsler et al., 2016; Curbow et al., 2000).

While early educators expressed strong satisfaction with their impactful work with children, they did not feel they are adequately respected for the work they do. This finding was most pronounced among center teaching staff who expressed the lowest job satisfaction. Results around workplace climate are encouraging, but there is room for improvement. While the majority of early educators reported having respectful and supportive relationships with their co-workers, this sentiment was expressed more strongly among TK teachers.

Of special concern are experiences of discrimination. Though they were rare, center teaching staff were more likely than TK teachers to be assigned tasks that no one else wanted, to feel that they were ignored by their supervisors, and to be the targets of racial slurs.

Bullying and racism have no place in the workplace and can have long lasting emotional impacts. Therefore, it is very important that investments are made to stop discrimination, and that program leaders and staff are trained to understand social justice concerns and the need to combat racism and harassment.

Classroom environments that facilitate educators' practice are important for morale and overall job satisfaction. Our findings show that many educators encounter challenges in the classroom, particularly working with children with challenging behaviors and finding planning time. Additionally, availability and adequacy of materials and equipment for their classrooms, including materials they need to implement developmentally appropriate practice, continue to be a challenge for TK teachers (Montoya et al., 2022).

Though work environments are frequently not considered in policy development, these findings show how they are critical to educator well-being. As a result, California policymakers must:

- Ensure public funds are sufficient to cover the true cost of care, including equitable provision of adequate classroom resources needed to facilitate educators' practice across all settings;
- Fund and support agencies to develop and make available ongoing and diverse professional development opportunities that promote educators' professional growth beyond the mandatory health and safety training and that deepen their understanding of social justice issues, including racial discrimination;
- Implement systemic changes tailored to eradicate unfair and discriminatory practices and uplift the status of the ECE profession; and
- Regularly collect data to assess how early educators are experiencing their work environment and use these findings to implement strategies to better support their practice and professional well-being.

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Founded in 1999, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) is the national leader in early care and education workforce research and policy. We act on the premise that educators should be valued, respected, and guaranteed economic dignity and that the provision of early care and education is a public responsibility.

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