

“I Could Not Afford to Continue”

Job Changes and Exits in Early Care and Education

Family child care (FCC) providers and child care center staff feel a deep sense of reward from their work with young children, but many of them experience job changes or leave the field entirely. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) followed nearly 1,500 early educators in California from 2020 to 2023 to learn about when and how some of them change jobs—even pursuing jobs outside of direct care and supervision. This group is a subset of CSCCE’s sample from the [California Early Care and Education Workforce Study](#). This data snapshot highlights the key findings from early educators who participated in both surveys in 2020 and 2023.

Key Findings

- ① While many early educators remained at the same job role in 2020 and 2023, center-based educators sometimes changed sites.
- ② Some early educators experienced job advancement within early care and education (ECE), including a few center teachers or assistants who became directors.
- ③ While we likely reached fewer members of the workforce who had left the field entirely, we found that many educators no longer working in direct care or supervision had taken other jobs in education or with young children.
- ④ Inadequate wages are the top driver for leaving jobs in ECE, and they are also the most important change that could lure workers back. Job demands and work environments, however, are also big factors.

Most early educators did not change job role from 2020 to 2023.

By job role, we mean the type of position or provider, but not necessarily the same employer or classroom assignment.

This snapshot looks at four job roles: FCC provider; center director; center teacher; and center assistant. While we do not focus on transitional kindergarten (TK) in this snapshot, 12 educators who participated in our survey series became TK teachers between 2020 and 2023.

Among early educators who took surveys in both 2020 and 2023, FCC providers were most likely to stay in the same job role, and center assistant teachers were least likely.

We likely reached a smaller share of the individuals who left jobs in ECE because their contact information was more likely to change. As such, the estimates below reflect changes among members of our sample and may not align with changes among the full population of the ECE workforce.

In our sample of **692 FCC providers,**

86.9%

remained FCC providers in 2023.

3.1%

worked in teaching or supervision in another ECE setting.

10.0%

took other jobs (in ECE or elsewhere), became unemployed, or retired.

In our sample of **393 center directors,**

83.3%

remained center directors in 2023.

4.1%

worked in another ECE teaching role.

12.7%

took other jobs (in ECE or elsewhere), became unemployed, or retired.

In our sample of **432 center teachers,**

72.3%

remained center teachers in 2023.

11.9%

worked in another ECE teaching or supervision role.

15.8%

took other jobs (in ECE or elsewhere), became unemployed, or retired.

In our sample of **152 center assistants,**

36.3%

remained center assistants in 2023.

48.3%

worked in another ECE teaching or supervision role.

15.4%

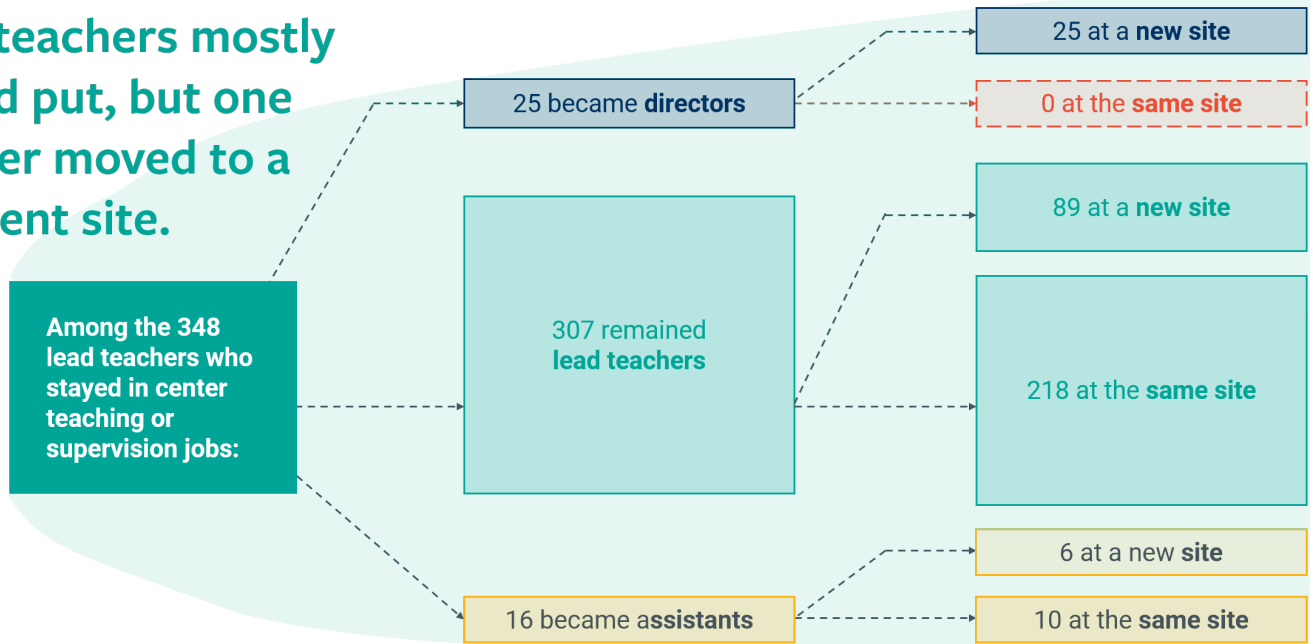
took other jobs (in ECE or elsewhere), became unemployed, or retired.

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

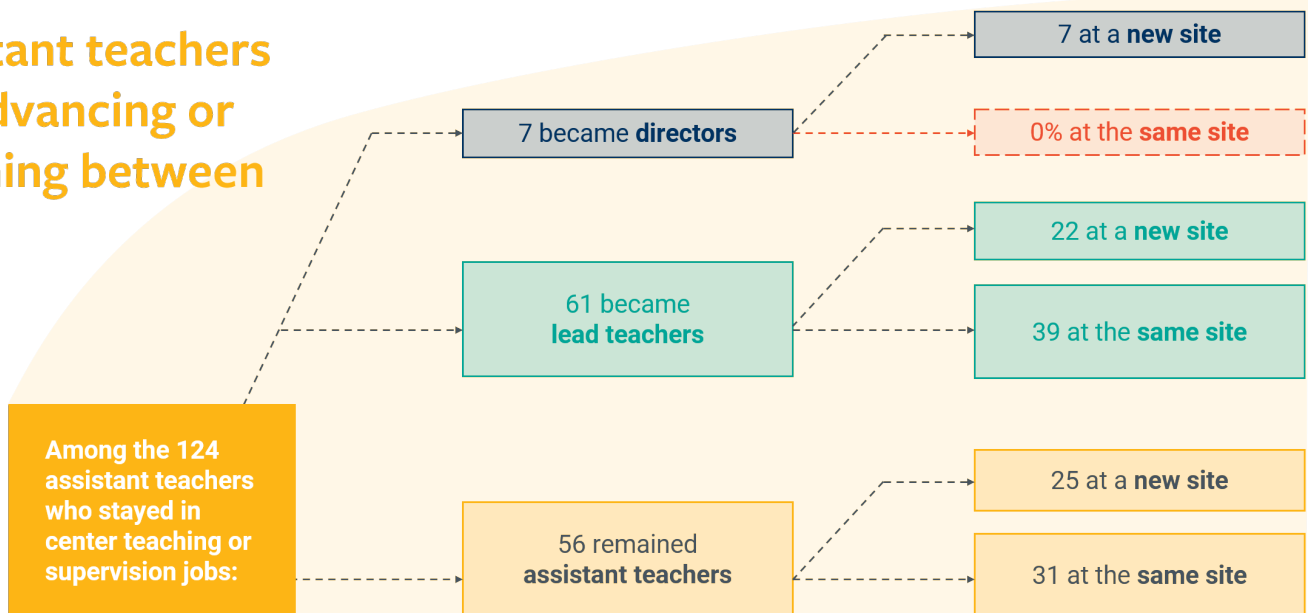
Note: Twelve individuals became TK teachers between 2020 and 2023. TK counts as “another ECE teaching role.”

Most center-based assistant teachers changed jobs between 2020 and 2023, while most lead teachers remained in the same position.

Lead teachers mostly stayed put, but one quarter moved to a different site.



Assistant teachers are advancing or churning between sites.



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

Note: The figure excludes early educators who took jobs outside of center teaching and supervision roles.

Early educators who left jobs in ECE teaching and supervision came from all corners of the sector.

The share of educators who left varied by job role and by race and ethnicity.

White FCC providers, Black center lead teachers, and Latina center directors were more likely to move on to other jobs (14 percent, 38 percent, and 17 percent, respectively).

There were minimal differences in exits based on center funding type.

Specifically, 18 percent of lead teachers in centers receiving Head Start and Title 5 funding and 17 percent of lead teachers in all other centers left ECE care and supervision,.

Infant/toddler teachers were somewhat more likely to leave—especially assistants.

Around 25 percent of assistant teachers working with infants and toddlers left direct care and supervision, compared to only 8 percent of assistant teachers of three-year-olds.

Two thirds of early educators who planned to retire after 2020 did so, along with a few others who retired despite reporting in 2020 that they planned to stay in the field.

EARLY EDUCATORS WHO LEFT DIRECT CARE AND SUPERVISION BETWEEN 2020 AND 2023

	FCC Providers (N=692)	Center Directors (N=393)	Center Teachers (N=414)	Center Assistant Teachers (N=146)
All	10%	13%	16%	15%
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	6%	4%*	12%*	8%*
Black	9%	12%*	38%*	**
Latina	7%	17%	16%	14%
White	14%	13%	14%	10%*
Center Funding Type				
Head Start/Title 5		20%	18%	19%
All other		18%	17%	14%*
Classroom Age Group				
Infant/toddler			18%	25%*
3-year-old			14%	8%*
4- or 5-year-old			12%	16%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Data suppressed (fewer than 10 respondents).

Many early educators who left ECE teaching and supervision landed in related jobs.

Most often, respondents continued to work in the field of education.

- Common jobs in education included center site support, elementary education, early intervention, or coaching/training.
- Some educators reported other jobs working with children such as out-of-school-time programs or social services.
- Other jobs ranged from fast food to health care. These jobs may be underrepresented in our data, however, since individuals fully disconnected from ECE may have been less likely to respond to our 2023 survey.

TYPES OF NEW JOBS FOR FORMER EARLY EDUCATORS

	FCC Providers (N=42*)	Center Directors (N=63)	Center Teachers (N=53)	Center Assistant Teachers (N=19*)
Other role in education	29%	59%	51%	55%
Other job working with children	19%	6%	14%	11%
Other job (not in education or working with children)	31%	34%	25%	16%
Nanny or caregiver	11%	0%	10%	10%
Unemployed	10%	1%	0%	9%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Provider Voices

“I currently do work in the ECE field, but as a coach/trainer to ECE educators.” — Former Center Assistant

“I have the education, the experience, the permit, and the bilingual background to be a TK teacher in any public school. Unfortunately, they are asking me to get a credential, which would mean more debt and doing an internship in grade levels that are of no interest to me (with no pay). As a result, I would be forced to stay in low-paying teaching positions at centers (even Head Start). I am making more money as a school secretary.” — Former Center Teacher

“Moved out of state due to financial hardship resulting from COVID-19 issues. Had to sell my home where the business was located. Not working at this time.” — FCC Provider

“As a [high school] sub I make more money in a day, and I work less. But I’m not satisfied, and I miss my center director position.” — Former Center Director

Inadequate wages are the top driver for leaving jobs in ECE, and increased compensation is the most important change that could lure workers back.

Around 4 in 10 former early educators cited wages or benefits as a reason they took a different job.

- Issues with their workload or schedule were the next most common reason, followed by the needs of their own family.
- Besides the items in the list below, some respondents cited other reasons like stress, burnout, and center closures. Some experienced a positive development: career advancement into non-classroom roles in ECE or education, or they returned to school to advance their own education.

REASONS EARLY EDUCATORS LEFT DIRECT CARE AND SUPERVISION

	FCC Providers (N=57)	Center Directors (N=69)	Center Teachers (N=63)	Center Assistants (N=23*)
Wages or benefits	40%	39%	37%	39%
Work load or schedule	30%	30%	22%	39%
Health worries	40%	12%	17%	30%
Own family's needs	30%	14%	30%	30%
Too many regulations	16%	14%	6%	22%
Moved away	11%	6%	10%	9%
Chose a different field	18%	10%	11%	4%

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

Note: Survey participants could select multiple options. Excludes educators who retired.

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Center-based educators, including almost one third of former center directors, sometimes cited programmatic or operational changes that would be needed for them to return to their old jobs, including almost one third of former center directors.

“There would need to be adequate support staff to allow for more schedule flexibility for me as director... I was filling in for staffing shortages on a daily basis. As a result, I was working an insane number of hours.”
— Former Center Director

“Higher income, earn enough to help save for retirement 401K, IRA, price matching contribution, healthcare coverage.... We would need a play-based curriculum and better director conflict resolution between teachers of varying abilities and different ways of thinking.” — Former Center Teacher

Provider Voices

“I was the only one running the in-home preschool much of the day, which made it hard to be with my family when needed. I [also] wanted to limit enrollment after COVID, and so I was taking a financial cut. [That] made the decision inevitable.” — Former FCC Provider

“I didn’t have a supportive principal. We were expected to spend hours per week making lesson plans and getting materials together on top of working from 7:30am to 4:30pm. It became too much, and I needed [to] prioritize my own mental health.” — Former Center Teacher

Most center educators would return if certain things changed about their old jobs.

- FCC providers were most likely to report they would not return (38 percent).
- Assistant teachers were most likely to be already planning to return (12 percent).

Among educators who would return under any circumstances:

80% of center directors mentioned pay or benefits would need to improve

85% of center teachers mentioned pay or benefits would need to improve

95% of center assistants mentioned pay or benefits would need to improve

96% of FCC providers mentioned pay or benefits would need to improve

Note: This snapshot was amended to correct typographical errors in May 2024.

Suggested Citation

Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Austin, L.J.E., & Copeman Petig, A. (2024). *“I could not afford to continue”: Job changes and exits in early care and education*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/california-job-changes>

Acknowledgements

The California ECE Workforce Study is currently supported by grants from the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent collaborating organizations or funders.

Editor: Deborah Meacham