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## **Equal Pay for Pre-K and Teachers of Older Children: Case Studies from the Field**

*New research highlights how several states and cities across the U.S. are moving toward equitable compensation for pre-K teachers*

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**Berkeley** – As publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs have become widespread across the United States, the demand for pre-K teachers with education and credentials equal to their peers teaching kindergarteners and beyond has grown, yet salaries and benefits for these teachers consistently lag far behind. States and cities across the country are moving to improve pre-K teacher compensation as recruiting and retaining skilled educators is critical to delivering the high-quality learning environment these programs promise.

In [\*Strategies in Pursuit of Pre-K Teacher Compensation Parity: Lessons from Seven States and Cities\*](#), researchers from the [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](#) at UC Berkeley reveal how states and cities are closing the gap in compensation between equally qualified pre-K teachers and kindergarten and elementary school teachers.

The report looks at policies in Alabama, Georgia, New Jersey, Oregon, West Virginia, New York City, and San Antonio where a variety of strategies have successfully been implemented to get closer to or surpass equal pay and benefits for pre-K and teachers of older children. The [report](#) includes common approaches, challenges, and solutions across the states and cities.

“There remains great disparity in how states are addressing compensation parity for pre-K teachers, and many states do not have any explicit policies intended to move toward parity for pre-K educators. The seven states and cities analyzed in the report show how progress can be made – with dedicated public funding and explicit guidelines on salary and benefits for teachers, regardless of setting,” says report co-author Dr. Caitlin McLean.

The states and cities analyzed in the report highlight successful movement toward equivalent teacher compensation in a variety of contexts and provide several key questions for decision makers to consider for their communities:

- Which members of the early childhood workforce will be targeted by the policy effort?
- What benchmark should be used to identify the level of compensation improvement?

- How will “equivalent” be defined for the purposes of education, experience, and working hours?
- Should compensation parity be pursued incrementally or initiated all at once?

Interviews with pre-K administrators suggested several unexpected benefits of the policies put in place to improve compensation and benefits for pre-K teachers:

- In Alabama, there was increased interest on the part of kindergarten teachers in working in pre-K classrooms.
- In Georgia and New York, the debate about improved compensation for pre-k teachers spurred discussion about improved compensation for the early childhood workforce more generally, including infant-toddler teachers.

The researchers find that the biggest challenge is moving toward pre-k teacher compensation equity for teachers in private, community-based settings, which make up a majority of pre-k programs nationwide.

“Many of the challenges raised by pre-K teacher compensation policies reflect wider problems caused by an early care and education system that is currently segmented by age of child and funding stream,” said Dr. Marcy Whitebook, co-author of the report and director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

“Differences in how programs are funded perpetuate a sharp divide between ‘education’ and ‘care’ services, hampering efforts to reduce inequities in working conditions for early childhood educators,” according to Whitebook.

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The [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](#) is a project of the **UC Berkeley Institute for Research on Labor and Employment**.

