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Beyond Homes and Centers:

The Workforce in Three California Early
Childhood Infrastructure Organizations

Executive Summary

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Beyond Homes and Centers: The Workforce in Three California Early Childhood Infrastructure Organizations Executive Summary

Staff working in early childhood infrastructure organizations play critical roles in the design and implementation of the early care and education system. They represent the field to the public and policy makers, provide education and professional development to those working directly with children, and serve as the liaisons between families and the many services and programs upon which they depend. Yet, until now, only minimal attention has been focused on those who work in these organizations in such roles as adult trainer or educator, referral counselor for families, program developer, and/or advocate or policy analyst.

The staff in infrastructure organizations demands our attention, particularly at a time when the organizations in which they work are looked to as leaders

in efforts to improve the quality of early childhood services. Many questions arise: what are the characteristics and backgrounds of those who fill these positions, do they have access to professional preparation and development appropriate to the skills and knowledge needed for their jobs, and how similar or different are they from those working directly with young children?

In 2009, we surveyed a population of 1,588 persons who work in three types of early childhood infrastructure organizations in California – child care resource and referral programs, local First 5 commissions and as child care coordinators.¹ All of these infrastructure organizations receive public dollars and at least one of each type is found in every county of the state.

¹For a description of these organizations, see Appendix A of the full report. For information about the study response rate, see the survey methodology section in the full report. <http://irle.berkeley.edu/cscce>

Findings

Who Constitutes this Workforce?

Gender and age. Staff responding to the survey were predominately female and middle-aged. Nearly one-third were 50 years or older, and less than one-fifth were 29 years or younger.

Ethnicity and language. Staff responding to the survey were ethnically diverse, with approximately one-half people of color. Virtually all staff reported being able to speak, read and/or write English and one-third reported being able to speak, read and/or write Spanish.

Job history and tenure. The majority of staff who responded to the survey reported working in their organizations for more than five years, with nearly one-quarter reporting tenure of more than 10 years.

Career history. Staff responding to the survey reported diverse job backgrounds, with half reporting experience working directly with young children in center- or home-based early care and education settings, about a quarter with backgrounds in social services, and the remainder drawn from other fields.

Earnings. Among infrastructure staff with a BA or higher degree, the average hourly wage was \$28.61, with a range of \$21.86 to \$42.97 depending on job role and organizational type. These earnings are considerably higher salaries than those working directly with children in licensed child care centers, even when taking level of education into account. The highest and lowest wage for a center teacher with a BA or higher degree was \$18.28 and \$15.57 respectively.²

What is Their Level of Educational Attainment and Early Childhood Related Training?

Overall education. Infrastructure staff responding to the survey were well-educated, with nearly two thirds

having earned a BA or higher degree. Educational attainment varied by ethnicity with 81 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander, 70 percent of White, non-Hispanic, 68 percent of African American and 53 percent of Latina staff, 81 percent reported they had completed a four-year or higher degree.

Early childhood or child development specialized education. Slightly less than one-quarter of infrastructure staff responding to the survey reported completing degrees related to early childhood or child development, although two-thirds of those with degrees in other subjects had completed some college-level coursework in child development or early childhood education.

What are Their Professional Development Needs and Aspirations?

Job preparation. The majority of staff responding to the survey reported satisfaction with their current level of job skills.

Desired training. While the majority of staff responding to the survey reported satisfaction with their current level of jobs skills, nearly half reported desiring additional knowledge in the area of child development. More than one-third classified as supervisors/managers reported that additional knowledge in the areas of management and supervision would be helpful for their current job.

Educational and career aspirations. Slightly more than half of infrastructure staff responding to the survey reported they planned to be working in the early childhood field in five years. Among those engaged in or interested in pursuing additional education to expand and improve their abilities and to help them advance in their careers, finances and lack of sufficient time while working full time were reported to be substantial barriers to their continuing education.

² Whitebook et al., (2006). Mean hourly wages per center have been adjusted for cost of living increases between 2005 when data were collected, and 2009, Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2009). Mean wage data for infrastructure staff were for each staff person. Data for center-based teachers and assistants were collected by center.

Discussion and Recommendations

In reflecting upon these findings, we noted how this sector of the early care and education workforce is both similar and different from those working directly with young children each day. While predominately female and ethnically and linguistically diverse like those working in center- and home-based programs, staff in infrastructure organizations as a group have achieved higher levels of education and earn considerably higher salaries, even when taking level of education into account. One-half of infrastructure staff reported previous experience working directly with young children. Among those, the need for earning a higher salary was the most common reason reported for no longer working in the child care center classroom or a family child care homes.

Similar to their counterparts who work in center- and home-based early care and education programs who are seeking educational degrees while working full-time, staff in infrastructure organizations report that

financial support and more flexible work schedules would be helpful to their pursuit of education (Whitebook et al., 2008). Staff working in these infrastructure organizations, in contrast to their counterparts who work in center- and home-based programs, did not report academic challenges as barriers to pursuing or completing higher degrees (Whitebook et al., 2008).

Finally, while there is education and role stratification by ethnicity within the three types of infrastructure organizations in this study, it is less pronounced than in early care and education centers. Indeed, infrastructure organizations appear to be a leadership pipeline for the early care and education workforce, a place where those from diverse ethnic background and/or those who have worked in center- and home-based programs can find a wage commensurate with their education and assume new job roles in the early childhood field.

Recommendation 1:

Include early childhood infrastructure staff in early childhood workforce data systems

Additional information about the workforce in the full complement of infrastructure organizations is needed to develop an in-depth portrait of this sector of the early care and education workforce. Because of the expense involved in conducting workforce surveys, we recommend that infrastructure organizations be included in the workforce component of the early care and education integrated data systems, such as registries, that are being developed in response to the federal charge to states through their Early Learning Advisory Councils.³

Recommendation 2:

Develop competencies for roles in infrastructure organizations and other early childhood leadership positions

Each day across the state, staff in infrastructure organizations guide families, prepare and support teachers and providers, and make decisions about how public resources are spent. In addition, many infrastructure organizations serve as the training ground for the field's established and emerging leadership. As states develop and improve their professional development systems, the extent to which infrastructure staff in various roles need to know about child development, early childhood pedagogy, public health and social welfare issues and/or to understand the early childhood system, and policy developments at the local, state and federal level, adult learning theory, and various aspects of management and administration should be determined.

³ For more information about integrated early childhood data systems, see the Data Quality Campaign website. <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/resources/830>

For more information about early childhood workforce registries, see The National Registry Alliance, <http://www.registryalliance.org/>

Recommendation 3:

Commit public resources to the expansion of higher education programs focused on building a linguistically and ethnically diverse workforce

The information collected in this study documents that many members of the workforce in infrastructure organizations seek additional education and training opportunities. We urge higher education institutions and other training organizations to heed the interdisciplinary nature of the jobs performed by staff in infrastructure organizations, as well as their varied career backgrounds from different sectors and jobs roles within and beyond the early childhood field. These programs should be designed to integrate child development theory and pedagogy, policy and research, and adult and organizational development. Because so many in the early care and education workforce across settings and roles are likely to be full-time working students, education and professional development experiences must include tuition assistance and be offered online, and in locations and at times that are convenient. Given the financing crisis in public higher education, public resources are essential to developing and/or revamping such programs (Whitebook et al., 2008; Whitebook & Austin, 2009).

Recommendation 4:

Improve compensation for those working with young children in centers and homes

While it is promising that infrastructure organizations function as a haven for many who have worked directly with young children and want to remain in the field, it is troubling, though not surprising, that the major reason cited for leaving the classroom was the desire for better pay. At a time when Head Start and many preschool programs are raising educational qualifications for teachers, the continued low pay signals a growing crisis as these better educated teachers are likely to follow other educated teachers out of the classroom.

Attention to the infrastructure staff is essential to the health of the early care and education field. The reform required to ensure a well-functioning, effective early learning system rests in no small measure on the skills and knowledge of infrastructure staff. As states are called upon through the Early Learning Advisory Councils to develop their early learning professional development systems, the workforce in infrastructure organizations can and should be a focus. This study is intended to begin the overdue examination of this essential sector of the early childhood community.

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