Better Compensation: The Key to an Educated and Committed Early Childhood Workforce

Did you know that...

• There is a direct relationship between the qualifications of early childhood teachers, compensation and the quality of their classrooms?

There is strong significant evidence of a positive correlation between teacher qualifications and quality with respect to the learning environment for all young children in early childhood education and care settings, including infants and toddlers. A large international meta-analysis suggests if we require educated, qualified teachers we will see significant improvements for quality within center-based and home-based settings. The qualifications, compensation and retention of early childhood teachers are the primary indicators of quality in an early care and education program. Early childhood professionals receiving higher compensation provide higher quality care.

• Many early childhood teachers already have credentials and degrees?

The National Survey of Early Care and Education found a majority (53%) of center-based and almost a third (30%) of home-based teachers and caregivers reported having college degrees, and almost a third of those reported BA or graduate/professional degrees.

• The biggest barrier for quality in child care programs is the level of compensation for the teachers?

81% of early childhood educators surveyed agree that any major effort to increase the quality of early childhood education programs will fail unless early educators received increased salaries and benefits.

• The lowest paid profession in our country is the child care workforce?

Child care workers are in the 2nd percentile (nearly at the bottom) when all occupations are ranked by annual wages, earning $9.77 per hour. They earn less than half the hourly wage of teachers of elementary-aged children, often with the same credentials. Administrators of programs for young children typically earn less than 60% of what administrators of programs for elementary-aged children earn.

• The lifetime earnings of child care teachers with a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education will be less than a graduate with any other major?

Unlike other professions, a child care teacher with an early childhood education degree is unlikely to be paid significantly more than her co-teachers without degrees. A bachelor’s degree in early childhood education occupies the dubious distinction of the college major with the lowest projected lifetime earnings.

• When a child’s brain is experiencing the most growth, their teachers are being paid the least?

Infant-toddler teachers are paid less than teachers working with preschool-age children. Teachers with a bachelor’s degree working with infants and toddlers are paid at rates similar to teachers working with children age three and older with associate degrees. Only 25% of infant and toddler teachers with bachelor’s or higher degrees earned $15 or more per hour, while half of those working with older children earned at least $15.50 per hour.

• Nearly half of the child care workforce is on public assistance?

Almost one half (46%) of child care workers, compared to 26% of the U.S. workforce as a whole, are part of families enrolled in at least one of four public support programs (EITC, Medicaid and CHIP, SNAP, and/or TANF). In every state, the average/median wage for a child care teacher was below the eligibility cut-off for SNAP.