

Compensation Matters:

A Q&A with Dr. Deborah J. Cassidy

Dr. Deborah J. Cassidy was a professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro who researched and co-authored *Teacher Work Environments are Toddler Learning Environments: Teacher Wages and Well-being, Classroom Quality, and Classroom Emotional Well-being*.¹ The study illustrates the importance of teacher compensation and teachers' perceptions of the fairness of that compensation for quality early care and education. Through the Child Care WAGES® Project, your partnership helps increase the compensation of participants. While this study highlights the need to address the wages of the early care and education workforce at large, WAGES is an important piece of the compensation puzzle. The following Q&A with Dr. Cassidy helps illustrate why compensation is a key piece for improving teacher well-being, classroom quality and the socioemotional development of toddlers specifically.

Dr. Cassidy, what prompted you to pursue this particular study?

My longstanding interest in teacher compensation and its relationship to classroom quality, teacher performance, and child outcomes motivated me to pursue evidence supporting these relationships.

Your study discusses many factors in addition to teacher wages and their perceptions of the fairness of those wages. For example, the results make it clear how important it is to involve teachers in decision-making practices. Can you briefly summarize the key findings, and particularly what you learned about teacher wages in relationship to children's development and their classroom experiences?

The study supports relationships among teacher wages, teachers' feelings about their work, teacher decision-making and toddler's emotional well-being and classroom quality. Results suggest that hourly wages of teachers and their feelings about work predicted classroom quality (as measured by the ITERS-R and CLASS), and overall emotional well-being of the classroom. Teachers' perceptions of their ability to make classroom and program decisions was also related to their feelings about their work, as well as classroom quality. These findings are so important to our ongoing argument that teacher wages and emotional well-being are critical for high quality classrooms and toddler emotional well-being. I am hopeful that the findings can be used to support policy initiatives to support improvement of teacher compensation.

¹ Deborah J. Cassidy, Elizabeth K. King, Yudan C. Wang, Joanna K. Lower & Victoria L. Kintner-Duffy (2017) Teacher work environments are toddler learning environments: teacher professional well-being, classroom emotional support, and toddlers' emotional expressions and behaviours, *Early Child Development and Care*, 187:11, 1666-1678, DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2016.1180516

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WAGE\$ recipients often share that the supplements enable them to focus on their classrooms rather than their financial struggles. For example, one participant said, “My WAGE\$ check has arrived at some dark moments when I was ‘scraping-bottom’ financially, and it helped me get my head back to work, and off the preoccupation of how I was going to pay my bills!” Does this reflect the findings of the study? Can this increased ability to focus on the classroom impact children and the quality of care they receive?

I think that this example is precisely what our study addresses!! It is illogical, in my mind, to expect teachers to NOT be affected by their wages and the many worries that come with low wages. I think the policy implications of our study are significant if only they don't fall on the deaf ears that we have experienced to this point.

What are some key lessons for policy makers that could be gleaned from this work?

Child care teachers and providers are low-wage workers with relatively high levels of education and incredibly important work that they do. As we all know, they have our youngest citizens in their classrooms and homes to support and educate. They deserve to be compensated in a manner similar to public school teachers.

Dr. Deborah J. Cassidy was a professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. During her tenure at UNCG, she had been the Coordinator of the Birth-Kindergarten Licensure Program and Director of the Child Care Education Program, which is an on campus child care program serving more than 80 children. Additionally, Dr. Cassidy served on the NC Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP) at UNCG. NCRLAP conducts the assessments for the Quality Rating and Improvement System in North Carolina. From 2009 until 2013, Dr. Cassidy was the Director of the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Her credentials included a Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Illinois and a Master's degree from the University of Illinois in Child Development. She authored or co-authored dozens of reports and articles dealing with early childhood issues, particularly child care quality and the professional development of early childhood teachers and providers.



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