

## **Addressing Infant-Toddler Teacher Compensation**

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## Introduction

Infants and toddlers develop essential relationships not only with their parents, but simultaneously with their other regular caregivers, including early childhood teachers and providers. Over the last 25 years, we have gained greater knowledge of the powerful role of children's earliest encounters with caregiving adults in setting either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for lifelong development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

Indeed, young children's secure relationships with their teachers and caregivers have been found to play protective roles against stress (Badanes, Dmitrieva, & Watamura, 2012; Gunnar, Larson, Hertzgaard, Harris, & Brodersen, 1992). Young children cared for by teachers and caregivers who are rated as unsupportive, intrusive, and/or insensitive have been observed to display elevated stress hormones in child care, greater anxiety and vigilance and compromised immune functions (Badanes et al., 2012; Gunnar, Kryzer, Van Ryzin, & Phillips, 2010, 2011).

Over recent decades, we have also come to understand that links between adversity and stress have consequences for teachers' physical and mental health and their capacity to support the learning and behavioral growth of young children, especially those children who are in greatest need of sensitive and responsive care (De Schipper, Riksen-Walraven, Geurts, & de Weerth, 2009; Groeneveld, Vermeer, van IJzendoorn, & Linting, 2012a, 2012b; Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2012; Jeon, Buettner, & Snyder, 2014). The importance of teacher and caregiver well-being lends new urgency to the notion that taking care of children requires secure, healthy, and knowledgeable caregivers (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989).

In response to this new evidence, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences recently issued several recommendations to strengthen professional preparation standards for early childhood practitioners, including those working with infants and toddlers.<sup>1</sup> *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (Institute of Medicine (IOM) & National Research Council (NRC), 2015), recommends transitioning to a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree, with specialized

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to recommendations about educational preparation, the report also recommends that institutions responsible for the preparation and ongoing learning of practitioners develop and enhance interdisciplinary higher education programs for early care and education professionals, including practice-based and supervised learning opportunities.

[http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/Birthto8/BirthtoEight\\_brief.pdf](http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/Birthto8/BirthtoEight_brief.pdf)

knowledge and competencies, for all lead teachers working with children from birth to age eight.

The bachelor's degree requirement for teachers working with infants and toddlers represents recognition of the complexity of facilitating the optimal development and learning for babies and toddlers. It also represents a significant shift in our expectations about the preparation and ongoing professional development of the infant and toddler workforce.

These changing expectations up the ante on what is at stake when children's earliest caregivers and teachers—two thirds of whom have children of their own—(Maroto & Brandon, 2012) are themselves experiencing economic hardship, low social status, unsupportive and demanding working environments, clinical depression, and other chronic stressors frequently associated with early childhood work (Whitebook, Phillips & Howes, 2014).

It is daunting to think about how we will move a historically underpaid and under-resourced workforce to one that is adequately compensated and supported. In the absence of sufficient public and private resources to cover the true cost of care, these services for very young children have long been heavily subsidized by the low-wages paid to teachers and caregivers. Infant and toddler care and education is costlier to provide than that for older children, and high quality infant and toddler care is financially out of reach for many families. Sustainable and dedicated sources of funding to upgrade the compensation of the early childhood workforce to match these changing expectations, have yet to materialize. In this paper we explore how low compensation of the infant and toddler workforce contributes to stressors affecting its members and challenging their capacity to establish and maintain the positive relationships with children that are so essential to development and learning.

## Infant and Toddler Workforce Compensation

*Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study* (Whitebook, Phillips & Howes, 2014) called attention to persistent features of early childhood jobs, namely: low wages, the absence of a rational wage structure, the low value accorded to educational attainment, and the pervasive economic insecurity and extensive reliance on public income supports. The report used data from multiple sources to illustrate how these features of early childhood jobs affect the workforce across the birth to five age span. The report also notes that individuals who work with infants and toddlers face the harshest consequences of early childhood employment in the United States.

### The Size of the U.S. Adult Workforce Serving Infants and Toddlers

According to the National Survey of Early Care and Education (National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), 2013) as of 2012, the center based early childhood workforce serving children birth to three years included approximately 318,000 members. The home-based child care workforce receiving payment to work with children from birth through five included 118,000 providers listed in state or national databases and about 919,000 paid providers who were unlisted. The number of paid assistants working in home-based settings with infants and toddlers is not available.

### Inadequate Wages

One-quarter of center-based teachers and caregivers serving infants and toddlers earn, on average, only slightly more per hour than the current Federal minimum wage of \$7.25, which is considered to be inadequate to support a single adult without children (Cooper, 2015). As shown in Table 1, center-based teaching staff who work with children three or younger earn about 70 percent of what those working with children three to five years old earn. The mean wage for center-based infant-toddler caregivers in 2012 was \$10.44 per hour, which is slightly less than 200 percent of the 2012 federal poverty guideline for a single working adult (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

The available information about home-based child care providers, suggests that most care for one or more infants and/or toddlers, most often in combination with older children, and like their center counterparts, experience very low earnings. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 683,000 child care workers were employed at least 27 weeks per year for ten hours or more in private households, schools, child care

centers, and religious organizations between 2007 and 2011. Among these 683,000 child care providers, 38 percent lived in families with incomes below 200 percent of poverty. Seventy-five percent of these child care workers, approximately one-third of whom were home-based, earned less than \$10.10 per hour (the higher minimum wage proposed by President Obama) and only nine percent of child care workers earned \$15 per hour or more.

Center-based child care workers, a category in which most infant/toddler teachers and caregivers are included, have experienced no increase in real earnings since 1997 (Laughlin, 2010, 2013; Smith, 2002), while those who work as preschool teachers, typically with children 3 years and older, have fared somewhat better. While still low-paid, preschool teacher wages have increased by 15 percent in constant dollars since 1997 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997, 2013). As was true in 1989, child care workers still earn less than adults who take care of animals and barely more than fast food workers (Whitebook et al., 1989, 1990).

**Table 1. Distribution of Hourly Wages of Center-Based Teachers and Caregivers Serving Children Age Birth Through Three Years and Age Three Through Five Years, Not Yet in Kindergarten**

Age Group	Weighted Frequency	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	50 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Mean
Birth – 3 Years Old	318,000	\$8.00	\$9.20	\$11.50	\$10.40
3 – 5 years old	515,000	\$9.20	\$11.90	\$16.90	\$14.70

Source: National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2013). *Number and characteristics of early care and education (ECE) teachers and caregivers: Initial findings, National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2013-38. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Appendix Table 12 and 13.

### **Irrational Wage Structure**

Scientific evidence underscoring the importance and complexity of teaching and caring for young children has yet to be consistently reflected in the structure and financing of services for children of different ages across the birth through eight age continuum. As a result, compensation levels reflect the ages and the setting in which children are served rather than

the qualifications of those providing the service. Some differences in compensation can be attributed to variations in qualifications among those working with young children, with those serving the youngest children, as a group being required to meet the lowest education and training requirements. But when qualifications are equivalent, those working with infants and toddlers are paid less, reflecting the tensions between the higher costs associated with a smaller ratio of children to adults and the current financing of services which relies primarily on family fees and limited public dollars, neither of which are adequate to fund the costs of appropriate teacher salaries

Disparities in wages across program auspices particularly disadvantage the infant and toddler workforce, underscoring the irrationality of financing of the current early care and education system. Table 2 below compares the distribution of hourly wages of center-based teaching staff serving younger and older children in the birth to five age span. The highest paid auspice, school-sponsored programs, employs only 10 percent of the birth to five workforce, and these jobs are held almost exclusively (91 percent) by those working with children three and older. Infant and toddler teachers have almost no opportunity to work in the best paying jobs in the field.

Head Start (HS) funded programs offer the next best paying jobs (see **Table 2**), but here again, the infant and toddler workforce faces disadvantage. Established in 1965 to serve three and four year olds, Head Start serves more children than Early Head Start (EHS) which was established in 1994 to serve infants and toddlers. Early Head Start teachers are paid less on average than Head Start teachers working with older children. In part this reflects lower minimum educational qualifications in EHS than HS. However, even when educational attainment is comparable, EHS teachers earn less. For example, in 2015, the average HS salary for a teacher with a BA was \$31,238. The average EHS salary for a teacher with a BA was \$29,406 (Program Information Report, 2015).

The largest proportion of early childhood jobs across the birth to five age span are found in the lower paying non-Head Start funded public pre-K and all other ECE program<sup>2</sup> categories shown in Table 2. The same pattern holds: those working with infants and toddlers earn less on average than those working with older children, and infant toddler teachers and caregivers appear not to garner even the slight pay advantage available to teachers of older children, in public pre-K non-Head Start funded programs.

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<sup>2</sup> Programs referred to as other ECE may be partially funded via public dollars via vouchers to reduce costs to low income parents. Most are financed primarily through payments from parents.

**Table 2. Distribution of Hourly Wages of Center-Based Teachers and Caregivers Serving Children Age Birth Through Three Years and Age Three Through Five Years, Not Yet in Kindergarten, by Sponsorship and Funding of Center-Based Program of Employment**

Center Auspice	Birth – Three Years			Three – Five Years		
	Weighted Frequency	Median	Mean	Weighted Frequency	Median	Mean
School-sponsored	5,300	#	#	47,100	\$16.70	\$19.40
Head Start-funded, not school-sponsored	29,700	\$10.50	\$10.90	96,400	\$12.50	\$15.50
Public pre-K-funded, not school-sponsored or Head Start-funded	66,500	\$9.00	\$9.90	115,000	\$11.10	\$14.40
All other ECE	216,000	\$9.00	\$10.30	257,000	\$11.00	\$13.70
All Auspices	318,000	\$9.20	\$10.40	515,000	\$11.90	\$14.70

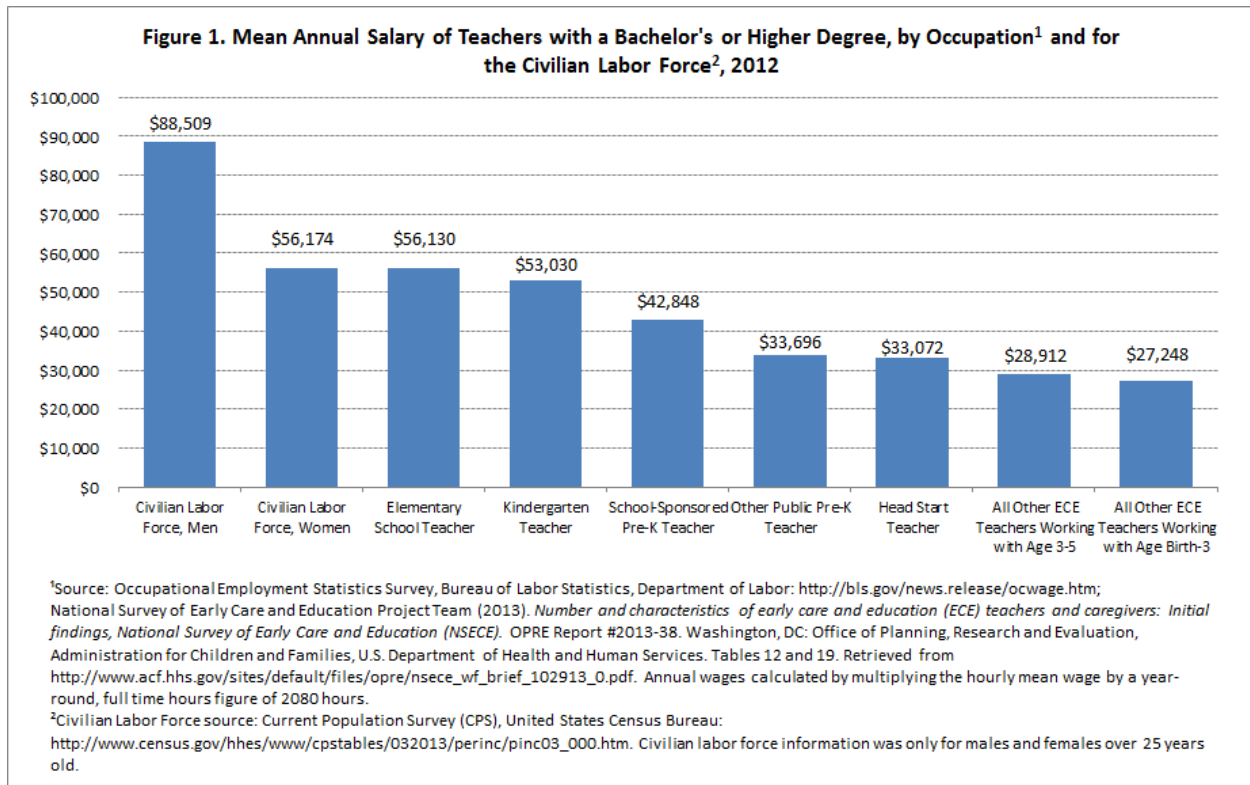
Source: National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2013). *Number and characteristics of early care and education (ECE) teachers and caregivers: Initial findings, National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2013-38. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Appendix Table 15 and 16.

# Value suppressed due to small n

### Lack of Premium for Educational Attainment

The disparities in wages of early childhood teachers in comparison to teachers working with children in kindergarten and older and others in the civilian labor force with comparable education are striking-- a pattern that has endured over the last 25 years despite increases in earnings for some segments of the early childhood workforce. Preschool teachers with bachelor's degrees earn about 60 percent of what kindergarten teachers earn, while infant toddler teachers with equivalent education earn only 50 percent. (See **Figure 1**).





At every level of education, from high school or less to a bachelor's degree or higher, those working with infants and toddlers earn less than those working with children who are three and older as shown in **Table 3**. Notably, the highest paid teachers with a bachelor's degrees working with infants and toddlers earn the same as highest paid teachers working with children three and older with associate degrees. Only a quarter of infant toddler teachers with bachelor degrees earn \$15 per hour while half of those working with older children earn at least \$15.50 per hour.

**Table 3. Distribution of Hourly Wages of Center-Based Teachers and Caregivers Serving Children Age Birth through Three Years and Three through Five Years, by Educational Attainment**

Highest Degree Received	Birth – Three Years				Three – Five Years			
	Weighted Frequency	25 <sup>th</sup>	50 <sup>th</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup>	Weighted Frequency	25 <sup>th</sup>	50 <sup>th</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup>
HS or less	89,200	\$7.50	\$8.60	\$9.90	66,100	\$7.70	\$9.00	\$11.00
Some college, no degree	117,000	\$8.00	\$9.00	\$10.80	124,000	\$8.30	\$10.00	\$12.50
AA degree	52,300	\$8.90	\$10.00	\$13.40	92,700	\$9.80	\$11.40	\$15.00
Bachelor's degree or higher	59,600	\$9.30	\$11.40	\$15.00	232,000	\$11.00	\$15.50	\$22.60
<b>Total</b>	<b>318,000</b>	<b>\$8.00</b>	<b>\$9.30</b>	<b>\$11.50</b>	<b>515,000</b>	<b>\$9.20</b>	<b>\$11.50</b>	<b>\$16.90</b>

Source: National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2013). *Number and characteristics of early care and education (ECE) teachers and caregivers: Initial findings, National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2013-38. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Appendix Table 12 and 13.

The National Survey of Early Care and Education provides educational attainment for home-based child care providers but not earnings data. Among listed and unlisted providers, slightly less than one-third have earned an AA or higher degree, which is only slightly lower than the percentage of center-based infant toddler teachers and caregivers (36 percent) with AA or higher degrees. There is little evidence to suggest that home-based child care providers with degrees would garner a higher premium than those of center-based infant/toddler teachers and caregivers.

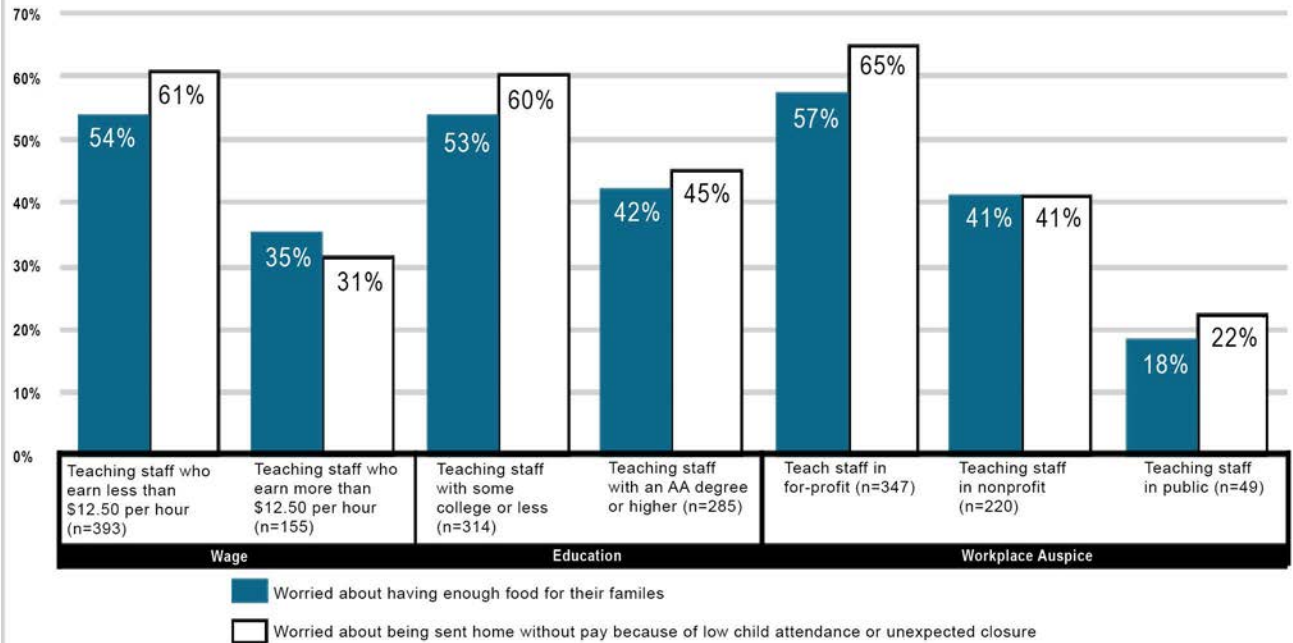
## Economic Insecurity

Since 1989, several investigations have identified the negative consequences of low teacher pay for early care and education programs: low pay impacts programs' capacity to attract educated and skilled teachers, stem turnover, and make improvements in quality. (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011; Whitebook, & Sakai, 2003, 2004). Yet the toll that poor compensation takes on the well-being of early childhood teachers themselves has received far less attention. (De Schipper, et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2004; Whitaker, Becker, Herman, & Gooze, 2013). Many early childhood teachers have children of their own, are employed full-time--and struggle economically, often to feed and house their own families--sometimes resulting in depression rates comparable to those found among women living in poverty (De Schipper et al., 2009; Groeneveld et al., 2012a, 2012b; Jeon et al., 2014).

*Worthy Work, Still Unlivable Wages* (Whitebook, et al, 2014) presents findings from a study examining economic insecurity among more than 600 early childhood teaching staff in one state. The study explored whether economic insecurity related to teaching staff characteristics and/or to the centers in which they worked. Based on 2012 data, teaching staff in the referenced study earning less than \$12.50 per hour expressed more worry, such as having enough food for their families or being sent home without pay due to low enrollment, than their colleagues earning higher wages (see **Figure 2**). Staff expressing significantly lower worry were working in programs that were publicly funded, such as Head Start or state-funded Pre-K and had earned two- or four-year degrees.

The study did not distinguish among teachers in classrooms by ages of children. However, infant toddler teachers and caregivers are more likely to earn lower wages than teachers of older children, less likely to have college degrees or to be employed in Head Start and/or school sponsored pre-K programs, which suggests they would be likely to express higher levels of economic worry, on average, than teachers working with older children.

Figure 2. Percentage of Teaching Staff Expressing Worry<sup>1</sup>, by Wage Education, and Workplace Auspice<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Teaching staff classified as "worried" about a particular item indicated that they somewhat to strongly agreed with a given statement, as represented by a 4 or higher on the Likert Scale.  
<sup>2</sup> The sample was drawn from one state's for-profit, non-profit, and public early care and education programs. Chronbachs alpha for the "worry" subscale= .918. The subscale is drawn from unpublished document, Whitebook, M. & Ryan, S. (2013). *Supporting Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning [SEQUAL]*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Childcare Employment. University of California, Berkeley.

Source: Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). *Worthy work, STILL unliveable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Childcare Employment. University of California, Berkeley. Figure 4.4 through 4.9.

## Utilization of Public Support

In 2012, nearly one-half (46 percent) of child care workers, compared to 25 percent of the U.S. workforce, resided in families enrolled in at least one of four public support programs: the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); Medicaid and The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).<sup>3</sup> Participation rates in public support programs varied little by whether child care workers were employed full-or part-time, but rates varied

<sup>3</sup> Among the 683,000 U.S. child care workers included in this analysis, all worked "year-round", defined as working at least 10 hours per week and at least 27 weeks per year, each year between 2007 and 2011. Approximately one-third worked in private households. The unit of analysis for the results reported here is a child care worker family, which includes both single and married child care workers with and without children. Eligibility for support programs is based on income, which is set at various levels for different family configurations. This report combines data from three sources: 1) aggregate government administrative data about annual enrollment and annual benefits paid for each of the four public support programs named above for all 50 states and Washington, D.C; 2) the March Supplement of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey (CPS); and 3) the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

considerably by child care worker wage level. Child care workers who earned less than the proposed \$10.10 federal minimum wage were 1.5 times more likely to reside in families participating in public support programs than were those in which the child care workers earned more than \$10.10 per hour. Given the lower wages of those working with younger children (see **Table 1**), it is reasonable to assume that their rate of public support utilization would be comparable to the usage rate for those earning less than \$10.10 per hour. (See **Table 4**).

**Table 4. Percentage of Child Care Worker Families Overall, and Percentage Participating in Public Support Programs, by Wages of Child Care Workers (Annual Averages, 2007-2011)**

	Percentage of All Child Care Workers by Wage Range r(N=683,000)	Percentage of All Child Care Workers Participating in One or More Public Program, by Wage Range(N=311,000)
Less than \$10.10 per hour	75%	82%
\$10.10 or more per hour	25%	18%
\$15.00 or more per hour	9%	5%

Source: Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). *Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Table 5.6.

## Implications

A high quality early care and education system carries the potential to reduce the devastating effects of poverty faced by many young children in the United States today. Currently early childhood jobs, especially for those working with infants and toddlers, are generating poverty for many children whose parents are members of the ethnically diverse, predominantly female early care and education workforce. Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8 will require, in addition to raising workforce qualifications, transforming early childhood jobs to ensure that they offer economic security and equitably reward teachers and caregivers for their educational attainment.

Numerous investigations over the last 25 years have confirmed the links between teachers' qualifications, pay and working conditions and the quality of services for young children (Cassidy et al., 2011; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2001; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997; Scarr, Eisenberg, & Seater-Deckard, 1994; The Cost-Quality and Outcome Team, 1995; Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). The seminal report, *Neurons to Neighborhood*, released by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine in 2000, recommended that, "The major funding sources for child care and early education should set aside a dedicated portion of funds to support initiatives that jointly improve the qualifications and increase the compensation and benefits routinely provides to children's nonparental caregivers" (Whitebook et al., 2014; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Yet, quality improvement policies targeting the early childhood workforce, at both the federal and state levels, have focused almost exclusively on professional preparation and development (For a detailed review of ECE policies and compensation, see chapter 6, *Worthy Work STILL Unlivable Wages*). With the notable exception of the Department of Defense and some public pre-K programs serving three and four year olds, the task of creating intentional, sustainable policies to address compensation for the workforce as a whole has gone unaddressed. Improving compensation has been left to discretionary and sporadic initiatives, characterized by insufficient funding (Whitebook et al., 2014).

Current initiatives, while not without important impacts, tend to be limited in scope, to compete for quality improvement funds with professional development and other pressing priorities, and to rely on one-time or short-term funding. Most of the workforce are unaffected by these efforts, which on balance, fall short of addressing the entrenched, intolerable conditions that characterize work with our youngest children. The need to develop a well-defined strategy for financing early care and education services that would address the need for equitable teacher

wages, aligned with educational levels, across ECE for children from birth to five years, while also relieving the tremendous cost burden that so many working families face, awaits our nation's attention.

The highly uneven playing field on which the wages of the workforce depend is based on where teachers and caregivers work and the ages of the children they work with rather than on their qualifications. Those who work with infants and toddlers, and the children in their care, are most disadvantaged by this state of affairs, which renders responsive, sensitive and secure adult-child attachments and the resulting appropriate interactions so much more difficult to achieve. While we await a sustainable, dedicated source of public funding to upgrade the compensation of those who care for and educate our nation's youngest children--one that does not come at the expense of the equally urgent economic needs of families--progress can be made.

A starting place would be to ensure that federal, state and program level policies regarding quality improvement link professional development and compensation efforts with appropriately dedicated funds. An example of this is the Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships, a recent competitive grant opportunity from the Department of Health and Human Services to support the partnering of EHS programs with child care providers, is designed to increase high quality early learning opportunities to infants and toddlers (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), 2014).

Successful grant recipients must demonstrate that teachers and family child care providers participating in child care programs already have or will earn an Infant/Toddler Child Development Associate (CDA), Family Child Care CDA Credential™ or a comparable credential form, as is required of EHS teachers and home-based child care providers respectively. Grant recipients are allowed to use resources made available through the grant to increase compensation for those who earn credentials and degrees. While many programs awarded the grants have proposed that they plan to increase salaries, doing so is optional and there may be competing program demands for those resources. Such efforts may have been bolstered if the programs were required to use grant dollars to increase staff salaries along with attaining credentials and degrees. It may strengthen such requirements to document the extent to which infant and toddler teachers and providers who participate in these quality opportunities are receiving compensation increases and remaining in the field, as well as demonstrating improved practice.

Against the backdrop of the expectations we now hold for teachers of infants and toddlers, researchers who study early care and education, both its developmental and social impact,

should renew attention to the adult work environment and teacher well-being as critical elements affecting supportive practice and cost benefits. As a country, we should deepen our understanding about the extent and consequences of such issues as food and housing insecurity experienced by members of the early childhood workforce. A better understanding of how workplace policies in the ECE field either worsen or relieve economic insecurity is also needed.

Economic insecurity fuels stress and depression among adults and affects their interactions with children, placing our most vulnerable infants and toddlers who live in poor families doubly at risk. Those employed to care for and educate our nation's babies should not be worrying about feeding and housing their own families. We can and should begin today to find a way to increase compensation for the infant toddler workforce. Increased compensation is the precondition for attracting and retaining an infant toddler workforce with the necessary knowledge and competencies to effectively facilitate young children's learning during their most critical phase of development.

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## About the Authors

Marcy Whitebook, Ph.D., established the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment in 1999, as a researcher focusing on issues of employment in settings for young children, the relationship between good jobs and the quality of services available to children and families, and appropriate and accessible professional preparation for teachers. Prior to joining UC Berkeley, she was the founding Executive Director of the Washington-based Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW), an organization she began in 1977 as the Child Care Employee Project. Marcy has led several large-scale early childhood research projects, including the landmark *National Child Care Staffing Study*, which first brought public attention to the low wages and high turnover of child care teachers. She co-developed the Early Childhood Mentor Program in California, now operating in 96 colleges throughout the state, and CARES, a California program to encourage professional development and retention of early care and education practitioners. She worked as an infant toddler and preschool teacher for many years, and received a Ph.D. in Developmental Studies from the UCLA Graduate School of Education.

Lea J.E. Austin joined the staff of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment in 2010. She has extensive experience in the areas of workforce development, early childhood leadership competencies and curricula, and public policy and administration. In previous roles with Mills College in Oakland, California and First 5 Alameda County (California), Lea developed leadership programs in higher education and community settings, and implemented a professional development initiative focused on attainment of college education. She is a co-author of *Leadership in Early Childhood: A Curriculum for Emerging and Established Agents of Change*. Lea earned a master's degree in Public Administration from California State University, Hayward, and a master's degree and Ed.D in Educational Leadership from Mills College.

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