



# Getting Down to **FACTS**



## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION Section 3: The ECE Workforce

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### Introduction

The early care and education (ECE) workforce is a vital component of California’s social and economic infrastructure. In addition to their central role supporting young children’s learning and development, ECE professionals create safe, nurturing environments that allow parents to pursue education or work—contributions that are essential for the functioning of the broader economy. Despite their skilled work and the growing recognition of the connection between workforce compensation, professional support, and quality, the ECE workforce remains among the lowest paid professions. These conditions contribute to the high staff turnover and widespread workforce shortages that continue to challenge the stability of the ECE field nationwide. Although this description holds for many sectors of the ECE workforce in California, transitional kindergarten (TK) offers an exception, illustrating the benefits of an early childhood sector which pays a living wage.

The previous section focused on preparation and ongoing support designed to ensure teacher effectiveness. In this section we describe the ECE workforce, its challenges, recent improvements and what is yet to be done. Specifically we ask:

- Who is in the ECE workforce and how are they distributed across program types?
- What are ECE staff across program types paid and what kind of benefits do they receive?
- What staffing shortages and turnover does the field experience?
- How is the ECE workforce faring in terms of mental health?
- What is being done in California to address shortages, turnover and mental health?

California has long suffered from a lack of data regarding its ECE workforce. The available data summarized in this section comes from many sources across several years. The “workforce” is categorized differently depending on the source of the data--sometimes by the age of children,

sometimes by the setting (e.g., school-based or not), sometimes by the source of funding, and so on. This piecemeal approach to providing information on the California ECE workforce is not ideal, but is unavoidable given the nature of the data. (See Section 6 for a detailed discussion of data challenges and needs.)

## ECE Workforce Demographics

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) surveyed more than 10,000 early educators as part of the 2025 California ECE Workforce Study. The sample does not represent the entire state, and the data must be interpreted with that caution. But it is the best data available on the state's ECE workforce.

The table below provides demographics of early educators in lead teaching positions in different types of early care and education programs. The vast majority of early educators are women, and women of color comprise the majority of the ECE workforce in all settings except for TK. The California early childhood workforce is aligned with national norms on gender distribution, but it is much more diverse than the national average, thus better representing the California children they serve.<sup>1</sup> TK teachers are by far the least racially and linguistically diverse. Age differences across sectors are also noteworthy. Only 5% of family child care providers are under 30 years old, and one in five are 60 years or older. The low number of young people and high number of people close to retirement age portends reduced availability of family-childcare slots in the near future.

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<sup>1</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center. (2021). *Characteristics of the child care workforce*. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/article/characteristics-of-the-child-care-workforce/>  
Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L. J. E., & Edwards, B. (2018). *Early childhood workforce index 2018*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/>

Demographics of Lead Teachers in California by Program Type, 2025<sup>2</sup>

	Family child care*	Title 22 Centers	State Preschool**	Head Start	Transitional Kindergarten
29 yrs old or less	5%	23%	14%	11%	10%
30 to 59 yrs old	76%	69%	78%	70%	82%
60 yrs old or more	20%	8%	8%	19%	8%
Asian	13%	10%	11%	5%	7%
Black	12%	4%	5%	7%	2%
Latina	44%	34%	59%	67%	21%
White	18%	35%	15%	10%	56%
Multiethnic	8%	12%	9%	7%	13%
Spanish spoken	45%	35%	54%	50%	24%
Another language spoken	17%	10%	4%	2%	2%
US born	48%	81%	66%	53%	87%
Woman	98%	98%	99%	100%	98%

\*Note that family child care providers may be licensed, receive subsidies, or participate in Family Child Care Home Education Networks under Title 5 regulations.

\*\*Many State Preschool sites also receive Head Start funding. The State Preschool column includes educators in these split funded-programs, while the Head Start column reports data for educators funded solely by Head Start.

The table below shows the most recent data on the educational attainment of early childhood educators who are considered lead teachers in their respective classrooms or programs. Although TK teachers are the most educated, over half of CSPP and more than a third of Title 22 Center teachers have a BA or above. The majority of family childcare providers have at least some college, including many with an associate’s degree; 25% have a BA or higher.

<sup>2</sup> Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2025). *State of the early care and education workforce: California regions*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025>

Educational Attainment of Early Educators in California, 2025<sup>3</sup>

	Family child care providers	Title 22 Centers	State Preschool*	Head Start	Transitional Kindergarten
High school or less	17.74%	1.01%	0.23%	3.97%	0%
Some college	31.80%	32.01%	13.68%	12.72%	0.10%
Associate degree	21.91%	24.09%	29.58%	34.29%	0.85%
Bachelor's degree	20.54%	35.06%	44.44%	43.35%	42.32%
Graduate degree(s)	8.01%	7.84%	12.06%	5.77%	56.73%

Note: This table excludes educators in assistant teacher or paraprofessional positions, who are likely to have significantly lower educational attainment.

\* Many State Preschool sites also receive Head Start funding. The State Preschool column includes educators in these split funded-programs, while the Head Start column reports data for educators funded solely by Head Start.

In addition to degrees, many early childhood educators have accrued years of professional experience teaching young children. The table below illustrates trends among lead teachers, many of whom previously worked as assistants in center-based care. Family childcare educators, who are most likely to be older than sixty, comprise the greatest share of educators with more than 15 years of experience (54%) while nearly half of Title 22 teachers have 10 or fewer years of experience. The trends across settings, however, are similar.

<sup>3</sup>Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2025). *State of the early care and education workforce: California regions*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025>

Years of Experience Teaching Early Childhood in California, 2025<sup>4</sup>

	Family Childcare Providers	Title 22 Centers	State Preschool*	Head Start	Transitional Kindergarten
5 years or less	13.09%	20.72%	12.57%	20.81%	19.15%
6-10 years	17.29%	27.86%	22.77%	21.01%	22.59%
11-15 years	15.97%	16.71%	13.60%	11.14%	18.26%
More than 15 years	53.65%	34.72%	51.07%	47.04%	40.00%

Table excludes educators in assistant teacher or paraprofessional positions.

\* Many State Preschool sites also receive Head Start funding. The State Preschool column includes educators in these split funded-programs, while the Head Start column reports data for educators funded solely by Head Start.

## Pay and Benefits

As discussed in Section 2, different settings in ECE have vastly different educational requirements. For instance, lead teachers in TK are required to hold a Bachelor’s degree and a teaching credential. Their pay was approximately double that of a center teacher’s, even when comparing educators with BAs.

<sup>4</sup> Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2025). *State of the early care and education workforce: California regions*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025>

Median Annual Wages, 2025<sup>5</sup>

	All Education Levels	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Small family childcare providers	*	*
Large childcare providers	\$52,000-\$65,000	\$51,000-\$63,000
Title 22 Centers	\$41,900	\$44,300
State Preschool**	\$55,000	\$58,200
Head Start	\$51,200	\$55,000
Transitional Kindergarten	\$90,000	\$90,000
Working Californians***	\$59,000	\$95,000

Table excludes educators in assistant teacher or paraprofessional positions.

\* Small FCC wage estimates are not available until CSCCE’s request for their contact information is fulfilled by Community Care Licensing. Suppressed due to small sample size (data pending)

\*\* Many State Preschool sites also receive Head Start funding. The State Preschool column includes educators in these split funded-programs, while the Head Start column reports data for educators funded solely by Head Start.

\*\*\* Authors’ analysis of 2023 American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau, five-year sample, retrieved from IPUMS.<sup>6</sup> Includes all adult members of the labor force in California working at least 25 hours per week, 40 weeks per year.

The table depicts plainly the huge disparity between TK teachers and teachers in all other settings serving preschool-age children, and the low earnings of all but TK teachers compared to other workers in California with a BA. The table also shows how modest the salary benefit is of having a BA in the ECE field.

A comparison of California preschool teacher salaries to other states is complicated by differences in the amount of education required. Most states require a BA for a state preschool lead teacher (see Section 2), and in most states, certification to teach kindergarten and other elementary grades can be achieved within a BA program, creating roughly equivalent education requirements for state preschool and K-3 teachers.

In part because of the similar education requirements, many states offer pay parity for K-3 teachers and lead preschool teachers in state preschools based in public schools. As of 2022, in 26

<sup>5</sup>Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L.J.E. (2025). State of the Early Care and Education Workforce: California Regions. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025>

<sup>6</sup> Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Cooper, G., Rivera Drew, J. A., Richards, S., Rodgers, R., Schroeder, J., & Williams, K. C. W. (2025). *IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]*. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>

states and Washington DC, the starting salary was the same for state preschool lead teachers in public school settings and K-3 teachers, although only seven states had the same starting salary for K-3 teachers and lead preschool teachers in nonpublic schools.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the majority of other states, in California state preschool programs (CSPP) teachers have significantly lower education requirements and lower pay compared to elementary school teachers, even though many CSPP programs are managed by LEAs and on the same campus as TK. The differences in education requirements might explain some gap in pay. The education requirements for CSPP teachers is much lower than for TK teachers, however the majority of CSPP teachers exceed the education requirement. Actual (as opposed to required) education level, however, has a minimal effect on pay.

Inequities apply to benefits as well. According to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment survey, most people in the early childhood workforce in California have medical insurance, often publicly supported, but employee-sponsored coverage varies. While 82% of TK teachers in their survey enrolled in employee-sponsored coverage, only 66% of State Preschool teachers did. Ninety-four percent of centers with Head Start or State Preschool funding offered health insurance to full-time staff, compared with only 69 percent of Title 22 centers.<sup>8</sup> No family childcare providers had access to employee-sponsored health-care benefits. In lieu of employer-sponsored plans, Medi-Cal or spousal coverage are common alternatives, particularly for family childcare providers (31% and 27% respectively). Retirement savings are similarly divergent; while 84% of TK teachers report having an account, only 27% of FCC providers did.

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<sup>7</sup> Kilander, A., Garver, K., & Barnett, W. S. (2022). *Unworthy wages: State-funded preschool teacher salaries and benefits* (Research Report). National Institute for Early Education Research. [https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/Unworthy\\_Wages\\_State-Funded\\_Preschool\\_Teacher\\_Salaries\\_and\\_Benefits\\_052722.pdf](https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/Unworthy_Wages_State-Funded_Preschool_Teacher_Salaries_and_Benefits_052722.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Powell, A., Muruvi, W., & Copeman Petig, A. (2026). *Early educators increasingly depend on Medi-Cal*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/california-ece-benefits-2025>

Early Educators with Health Insurance and Retirement Savings, 2025<sup>9</sup>

	Family child care providers	Title 22 Centers	State Preschool*	Head Start	Transitional Kindergarten
Employer-sponsored	N/A	37%	66%	61%	82%
Medi-Cal	31%	20%	14%	27%	3%
Spouse or parent	27%	27%	11%	11%	16%
Another source**	39%	17%	10%	8%	4%
No health insurance	10%	5%	3%	5%	0%
Any retirement savings	27%	48%	73%	77%	84%

The table excludes educators in assistant teacher or paraprofessional positions. Health care options may sum to more than 100% in cases where educators selected multiple forms of coverage.

\* Many State Preschool sites also receive Head Start funding. The State Preschool column includes educators in these split funded-programs, while the Head Start column reports data for educators funded solely by Head Start.

\*\* Other sources include options like Medicare, Covered California, TRICARE, and local plans.

## Staff Shortages & Turnover

Stability in the people who teach and care for young children helps children develop trusting relationships with their caregivers. Studies indicate that the relationship with teachers is one of the most important determinants of school success for young children and that young children’s attachments to their adult caregivers help them learn and develop on a healthy trajectory.<sup>10</sup> Research has also shown links between turnover rates and both the quality of settings and child outcomes.<sup>11</sup> For example, one study found that within-year turnover in Head Start classrooms (which was about 10% on

<sup>9</sup> Estimates created for this report. Powell, A. and Muruvi, W. (2025) *California Early Care and Education Workforce Study 2025* [data set]. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/projects/california-early-care-and-education-workforce-study/>

<sup>10</sup> Palermo, F., Hanish, L. D., Martin, C. L., Fabes, R. A., & Reiser, M. (2007). Preschoolers’ academic readiness: What role does the teacher–child relationship play? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(4), 474–487.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3856866/>

<sup>11</sup> Hale-Jinks, C., & Knopf, H. (2006). Tackling teacher turnover in child care: Understanding causes and consequences, identifying solutions. *Childhood Education*, 82(4), 219–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2006.10522826>

average) was negatively associated with children’s language, literacy, and socioemotional development.<sup>12</sup>

Most sectors in the field of early childhood education have difficulty offering that stability. Shortages continue to plague the field. Staff vacancies are common both because there are too few people entering the field and because many leave, sometimes midyear, creating high turnover.

Nationally turnover rates vary substantially depending on the program and population served. Data on staff turnover from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), which included nearly 7,000 center-based CCEE programs centers serving children from birth through five years, found that staff turnover was relatively high in the ECE workforce, but highly variable.<sup>13</sup> About one-third of centers had high turnover rates of 20 percent or greater in the year before the survey, while 44 percent of centers experienced no turnover. For-profit centers had higher rates of high turnover (45% for independent centers and 47%, for franchise/chain centers), compared to non-profit centers (26% for non-profit sponsored and 30% for non-profit independent), and centers run by the government (20% for sponsored and 24% for independent). Centers that served at least one child with a subsidy had higher rates of high turnover (50% for 0-3 year-old children; 48% for 3-5 year-old children), compared to centers that served no children with a subsidy (27% and 26% respectively). Centers that served children ages 0-3 only as well as centers that served children ages 0-5, had higher rates of high turnover (35% and 43%, respectively), compared to centers that served children ages 3-5 (18%). Data from the 2012 survey yielded similar results.<sup>14</sup> In brief, staff turnover rates were highly variable, with for-profit centers and centers serving children with subsidies and centers serving infants and toddlers having the highest rates.

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<sup>12</sup>Markowitz, A. J. (2024). Within-year teacher turnover in Head Start and children’s school readiness. *AERA Open*, 10, 23328584241245094. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584241245094>

<sup>13</sup> Amadon, S., Lin, Y.-C., & Padilla, C. M. (2023). *Turnover in the center-based child care and early education workforce: Findings from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education*. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families. [https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/workforce\\_turnover\\_snapshot\\_apr2023.pdf](https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/workforce_turnover_snapshot_apr2023.pdf)

<sup>14</sup>Caven, M., Khanani, N., Zhang, X., & Parker, C. E. (2021). *Center- and program-level factors associated with turnover in the early childhood education workforce* (REL 2021–069). Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED611681.pdf>

Turnover rates in California are likewise high. In the Spring 2025 Center for the Study of Child Care Employment survey, center directors at Title 5 Preschool/Head Start sites reported a 19% turnover rate of lead teachers and 23% turnover rate of assistants in the preceding twelve months.<sup>15</sup> At the time of the survey, 33% of State Preschool/Head Start directors had at least one lead teacher vacancy and 37% had at least one assistant vacancy. The highest rate of turnover, however, was among assistant teachers in Title 22 sites (29%).

Staff Turnover and Vacancy at Child Care Centers, 2025<sup>10</sup>

	Title 22 Centers	Title 5/Head Start Centers	All Centers
<b>Turnover rate in last 12 months</b>	<b>n=865</b>	<b>n=492</b>	<b>n=1,357</b>
Assistant teachers*	29%	23%	26%
Lead teachers	24%	19%	22%
<b>One or more vacancies currently</b>	<b>n=890</b>	<b>n=527</b>	<b>n=1,417</b>
Assistant teachers*	29%	37%	32%
Lead teachers	33%	33%	33%

Data reported by center directors and site leaders on behalf of their site. State Preschool and Head Start centers are combined due to the small sample size of centers with only Head Start funding in the sample.

\* Among sites that employ assistant teachers.

The shortage of infant and toddler childcare is the most severe. In a survey of California “navigators” who help connect families with child care providers offering subsidized care, 31 percent of respondents said that families were able to find affordable care for infants and 56 percent said they were able to locate it for toddlers, compared to 77 percent for preschoolers.<sup>16</sup> Staff turnover and ability to hire new staff were the two most common explanations for shortages. A 2023 report by the Council

<sup>15</sup> Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2025). *State of the early care and education workforce: California regions*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025>

<sup>16</sup> Danielson, C., Guinan, B., Hayes, J., Hill, L., Malagon, P., & Allison, A. (2025). *California’s changing child care landscape: Understanding costs and supply*. Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-changing-child-care-landscape-understanding-costs-and-supply/>

for a Strong America estimates that the annual economic cost of the infant- and toddler-childcare shortage in California is \$17B in annual lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.<sup>17</sup>

TK is the exception to staff shortages in most of the ECE sector. In the 2023-24 academic year districts reported less than a 1% shortage of TK lead teachers.<sup>18</sup> LEAs have reported that finding lead teachers for TK has not been nearly as much of a challenge as finding much lower-paid assistants for TK.<sup>19</sup> A 12% vacancy rate in assistant positions was reported for 2023-24.<sup>20</sup> The difference points to the effect of pay on attracting individuals to ECE positions.

In addition to contributing to teacher shortages, turnover adds to costs and undermines the quality of care children receive. Turnover can negatively affect the teachers who remain (e.g., reduced continuity of routines and relationships, stress levels), increase costs (to hire and train new staff), and undermine continuity of care and the quality of relationships for children.

There is considerable evidence that turnover rates are most affected by pay, with higher salaries associated with lower turnover.<sup>21</sup> Benefits also matter; in the NSECE 2019 survey, centers that did not provide health insurance and retirement benefits were more likely (40%) to have high turnover, compared to centers that provided these benefits (29%). Job satisfaction is, after salary, the next most important factor affecting turnover rates. Teachers are less likely to leave if they feel supported in their

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<sup>17</sup> Bishop, S. (2023). *\$122 billion: The growing, annual cost of the infant-toddler child care crisis*. Council for a Strong America. <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/1598/05d917e2-9618-4648-a0ee-1b35d17e2a4d.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Wang, V., Melnick, H., Leung-Gagne, M., Parker, S., & Wechsler, M. (2025). *California's universal prekindergarten implementation progress, 2023–24*. Learning Policy Institute. [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4714/download?inline&file=CA\\_UPK\\_Implementation\\_Progress\\_2023-24\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4714/download?inline&file=CA_UPK_Implementation_Progress_2023-24_REPORT.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Anthony, J., Elliott, L., & Quick, H. (2024). *Examining transitional kindergarten staffing challenges and solutions at the local level*. American Institutes for Research. <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Transitional-Kindergarten-Staffing-Challenges--Solutions-March-2024.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Wang, V., Melnick, H., Leung-Gagne, M., Parker, S., & Wechsler, M. (2025). *California's universal prekindergarten implementation progress, 2023–24*. Learning Policy Institute. [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4714/download?inline&file=CA\\_UPK\\_Implementation\\_Progress\\_2023-24\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4714/download?inline&file=CA_UPK_Implementation_Progress_2023-24_REPORT.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Totenhagen, C. J., Hawkins, S. A., Casper, D. M., Bosch, L. A., Hawkey, K. R., & Borden, L. M. (2016). Retaining early childhood education workers: A review of the empirical literature. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 30(4), 585–599. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1214652>

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*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/publications/ReportFINAL.pdf>

work community,<sup>22</sup> have shared values with other staff,<sup>23</sup> and perceive their workplace as fair and equitable.<sup>24</sup> Feeling confident and competent is also an important factor in educator retention, suggesting the importance of ongoing professional development and support.<sup>25</sup>

## Mental Health

Challenges related to the pay and benefit of early childhood educators are well known. Less well known are the emotional challenges. Mental health is important for the well-being of the ECE workforce and poor mental health in caregivers and teachers has been shown to undermine the quality of interactions with children and child outcomes.<sup>26</sup> There is some national evidence that early childhood educators experience more mental health problems than their K-12 counterparts. In one study, for example, compared to the national workforce, ECE staff reported higher levels of personal

<sup>22</sup> Jeon, L., & Wells, M. B. (2018). An organizational-level analysis of early childhood teachers' job attitudes: Workplace satisfaction affects Early Head Start and Head Start teacher turnover. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 47(4), 563–581. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-018-9444-3>

<sup>23</sup> Schaack, D., Le, V. N., & Stedron, J. (2020). When fulfillment is not enough: Early childhood teacher occupational burnout and turnover intentions. *Early Education and Development*, 31(7), 1011–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1791648>

<sup>24</sup> Capone, V., & Petrillo, G. (2016). Teachers' perceptions of fairness, well-being and burnout. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(6), 864–880. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-02-2015-0013>

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, E. M. (2013). Preparing the next generation of early childhood teachers: The emerging role of interprofessional education and collaboration in teacher education. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 34(1), 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2013.758535>

<sup>26</sup> Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., Grant, A. A., & Lang, S. N. (2019). Early childhood teachers' stress and children's social, emotional, and behavioral functioning. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 61, 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2018.02.002>

Jeon, L., Kwon, K., & Choi, J. Y. (2018). Family child care providers' responsiveness toward children: The role of professional support and perceived stress. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 94, 500–510. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.08.023>

Kwon, K., Jeon, S., & Jeon, L. (2019). The role of teachers' depressive symptoms in classroom quality and children's developmental outcomes in Early Head Start programs. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 74, 101748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2019.06.002>

Ota, C. L., Baumgartner, J. L., & Berghout Austin, A. M. (2013). Provider stress and children's active engagement. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 27(1), 61–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2012.739588>

Roberts, J., LoCasale-Crouch, J., Hamre, B., & DeCoster, J. (2016). Exploring teachers' depressive symptoms, interaction quality, and children's social-emotional development in Head Start. *Early Education and Development*, 27(5), 642–654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1127088>

demands (including perceived stress and depression), higher levels of external demands (including workload and staffing concerns), and lower job satisfaction.<sup>27</sup>

Stress is likely partly a consequence of the relatively low pay of ECE providers. One study with a nationally representative sample found that nearly 33% of childcare workers experienced some food insecurity, and 20% experienced low to very low food security.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the financial stress associated with low compensation, caring for young children is mentally demanding work. A 2023 statewide study of family childcare providers, center-based early educators, and TK teachers in California found that rates of high stress and significant depressive symptoms among early educators were more than twice those typically reported for the adult U.S. population.<sup>29</sup> The study showed that 65% of center teachers and assistants, 53% of TK teachers and 48% of family child care providers experienced high stress, as measured by the four-item Perceived Stress Scale.<sup>30</sup> Comparable rates of high stress among TK teachers and other early educators, despite TK teachers' relatively higher pay, underscore both the emotionally demanding nature of early care and education work and the need for adequate professional support.

A recent study conducted by CSCCE examined the sources of stress for early educators in California while at work. The top four challenges reported were the same for Family Childcare Providers, Center Care and TK Teachers, in order of frequency: 1) working with children with challenging behaviors, 2) finding time for planning, 3) conducting student assessments, and 4) spending

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<sup>27</sup> Farewell, C. V., Quinlan, J., Melnick, E., Powers, J., & Puma, J. (2022). Job demands and resources experienced by the early childhood education workforce serving high-need populations. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(2), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01143-4>

<sup>28</sup> Dynia, J. M., Koury, A. J., Bates, R. A., & Page McGinnis, C. (2021). *Food insecurity in a nationally representative sample of child care workers*. SproutFive, Center for Early Childhood Innovation. <https://www.sproutfive.org/impact>

<sup>29</sup> Kulshreshtha, A., Alonso, A., McClure, L. A., Hajjar, I., Manly, J. J., & Judd, S. (2023). Association of stress with cognitive function among older Black and White US adults. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(3), e231860. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.1860>

Zhang, Z., Jackson, S. L., Gillespie, C., Merritt, R., & Yang, Q. (2023). Depressive symptoms and mortality among US adults. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(10), e2337011. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.37011>

<sup>30</sup> Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2023). *The emotional and physical well-being of early educators in California: Early educator well-being series*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/CAemotional-physical-wellbeing-2023>

time with individual children.<sup>31</sup> Working with children with challenging behaviors was selected as a challenge by the most people in all three groups, but TK teachers were more likely (70%) to select it than center teachers (63%) or FCC providers (41%). These data suggest that training and support related to this challenge could reduce stress for all early childhood educators, and especially TK teachers.

A recent study offers mixed evidence on TK teachers' perceptions of their jobs. It showed that the majority of TK teachers (97.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that their school had an overall positive climate.<sup>32</sup> More specific questions, however, gave a less rosy picture. Over 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "Teachers, staff, and administrators function as a good team." And nearly 15% of TK teachers said they thought of leaving their job frequently or always.

Depression is also relatively high in the ECE field. A review of research on the well-being of the ECE workforce found that 23% of family care providers reported a depression disorder or diagnosis.<sup>33</sup> Clinically significant depression was lower in childcare center staff, ranging from 8.9% to 19%. A 2023 statewide study of family childcare providers, center-based early educators, and TK teachers in California also found that 39% of center teachers and assistants, 30% of TK teachers and 25% of family childcare providers in the sample experienced significant depressive symptoms measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D-10).<sup>34</sup> Similar to the findings on high stress, the comparable rates of depressive symptoms among TK teachers and other early educators underscore the importance of supportive work environments in early care and education.

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<sup>31</sup>Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2024). *The professional well-being of early educators in California: Early educator well-being series*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/ca-professional-wellbeing-2024/>

<sup>32</sup> Zhang, Y., Rho, E., Dong, Q., & Yang, C. (2025). *School climate and teacher well-being in transitional kindergarten education: Insights into compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and turnover intention (Part 3)*. 21st Century School Leadership Center, University of California, Berkeley. <https://21cslcenter.berkeley.edu/publications/school-climate-and-tk-teacher-well-being>

<sup>33</sup> Lessard, L. M., Wilkins, K., Rose-Malm, J., & Mazzocchi, M. C. (2020). The health status of the early care and education workforce in the USA: A scoping review of the evidence and current practice. *Public Health Reviews*, 41, 2. <https://publichealthreviews.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40985-019-0117-z>

<sup>34</sup> Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2023). *The emotional and physical well-being of early educators in California: Early educator well-being series*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/CAemotional-physical-wellbeing-2023>

## Recent Improvements

California policy makers appear to be well aware of the problems of staff shortages in the ECE field and have made some efforts to address them by improving salaries and benefits, offering funding to improve access to the education levels required for the Child Development Permit or a teaching credential, and supporting multiple pathways for individuals to achieve a credential (which offers the highest pay in the ECE sector). Increasing pay and offering opportunities to improve job status (and pay) through teaching credentials may be the most effective strategies for supporting the wellbeing of the ECE workforce who are not TK teachers.

### Improvements in Pay & Benefits

In 2022, the state took initial steps to address the challenges created by its bifurcated rate system by combining the Standard Reimbursement Rate (SRR) and the Regional Market Rate (RMR) into a single rate system that varies by county (see Section 1).<sup>35</sup> Rate ceilings were updated to be the greater of either the 75th percentile of the 2018 regional market rate survey for that region or the regional market rate ceiling that existed in that region on December 31, 2021.

Reimbursement rates for California ECE providers increased by 37% from 2016-17 to 2024-25. As is shown in the figure below, displaying increases in the Standard Reimbursement Rate and then the combined single rate structure, these increases are barely over inflation during that period (31-32%)<sup>36</sup> and have not kept pace with the state's minimum wage, which increased by 65% since 2016-17.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, not all of the rate increases were allocated to staff pay increases.

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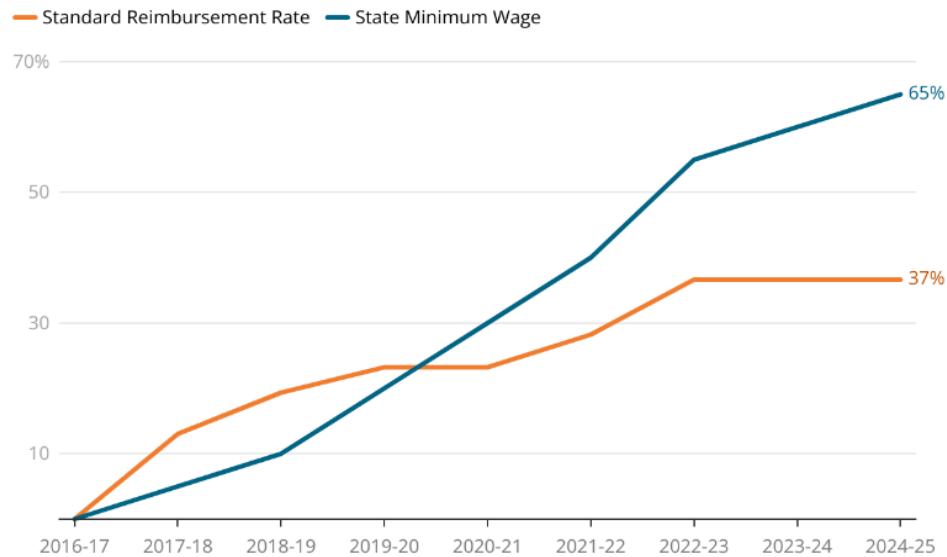
<sup>35</sup> California Department of Social Services. (2022, August). *A report by the Rate and Quality Workgroup*. Sacramento, CA. [https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CalWORKs/CCT/CCDD/Rate%20and%20Quality%20Stakeholder%20Workgroup%20Report\\_August%2012%202022\\_FINAL\\_.pdf?ver=2022-08-12-092638-323](https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CalWORKs/CCT/CCDD/Rate%20and%20Quality%20Stakeholder%20Workgroup%20Report_August%2012%202022_FINAL_.pdf?ver=2022-08-12-092638-323)

<sup>36</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics, Price and Index Number Research. (n.d.). *Survey of professional/technical workers: Total compensation, 2024 data*. U.S. Department of Labor. [https://www.bls.gov/pir/spm/spm\\_chart6\\_2024data.htm?utm](https://www.bls.gov/pir/spm/spm_chart6_2024data.htm?utm)

<sup>37</sup> Pryor, L., Schumacher, K., & Nair, N. (2025). *Higher wages for early care and education workers builds a stronger system* (Issue Brief). California Budget & Policy Center. <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/higher-wages-for-early-care-and-education-workers-builds-a-stronger-system/>

## The Rising Minimum Wage Has Outpaced Increases to the Payment Rate for Contract Child Care Providers

Percent Increase in the Minimum Wage and Standard Reimbursement Rate, 2016-17 to 2024-25



Note: The Standard Reimbursement Rate is per child, per day. The minimum wage increase reflects the highest wage in effect during each fiscal year for employers with 25 employees or less.

Source: California Department of Education, Department of Industrial Relations, California Welfare and Institutions Code, Division 9, sec. 10280, 10281.5



Furthermore, despite these increases, the median hourly earnings for California childcare providers in 2024 was \$18.38 – less than animal trainers (\$22.49).<sup>38</sup> Poverty rates for the ECE workforce in California were 11.8%, twice that of other workers (6.5%). In 2022, 47% of early educator households participated in one or more public safety-net programs.<sup>39</sup> Despite improvement, therefore, childcare providers and many preschool teachers are still not paid a living wage.

There have also been some modest improvements in benefits. In 2019 Governor Newsom signed a bill giving family child care providers collective bargain rights. In 2022, the union, Child Care Providers United (CCPU) won \$100 million annually from the state to help eligible childcare providers reduce or eliminate their out-of-pocket health care costs, and in 2025-26 \$80M was included in the

<sup>38</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *Occupational employment and wage statistics*. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/geoOcc/Multiple%20occupations%20for%20one%20geographical%20area>

<sup>39</sup> Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2024). *Early childhood workforce index 2024*. University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2024/>

budget for a retirement fund for Family Childcare Providers.<sup>40</sup> CCPU, however, only represents a fraction of the ECE workforce. Many center-based childcare providers remain unrepresented.

## Funding Education

People wishing to enter the profession or to improve their compensation by moving up steps in the permit matrix or obtaining a credential to teach in California have access to a panoply of federal and state grant programs. The state has made major investments to make college courses more affordable, including the Teacher Residency Grant Program, the Golden State Teacher Grant Program, and the Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program. None of these programs, however, cover all costs, rendering college still out of reach to individuals who have no resources to support their quest for higher education.

When UPK was launched, some funds were targeted to support ECE teachers. For example, in 2021, \$100M was authorized through the Early Education Teacher Development (EETD) grant to increase the number of early educators available to serve in the CSPP and TK, and increase specific competencies for early educators within CSPP, TK, or Kindergarten programs. The goals were both to recruit new teachers and to provide existing staff to move up the ladder of ECE levels. The 72 grantees, 42 COE and 27 LEAs that received allocations reported that a substantial portion of the money was used to provide offer tuition stipends to recruit educators, which grantees reported were most effective when they covered at least 75 percent of tuition costs.<sup>41</sup>

People aspiring to advance on the Child Development Permit levels have access to the [Quality Counts Workforce Pathways Grant](#). It was created in 2020 to increase the number of qualified ECE professionals and increase the educational credentials, knowledge, and skills of existing ECE professionals. The grants typically flow through County Offices of Education, with decisions made by Local Planning Councils. A total of about \$13.5 million is available for the QCC Workforce Pathways Grant per year from 2024-25 to 2026-27. Counties vary in what they support, but in addition to tuition,

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<sup>40</sup> Child Care Providers United. (n.d.). *Tentative agreement reached: Child Care Providers Union protects benefits, wins stability pay and ongoing COLAs.* <https://childcareprovidersunited.org/tentative-agreement-reached>

<sup>41</sup> California Department of Education. (2024). *Report to the Legislature and Department of Finance: Evaluating the impact of the Early Education Teacher Development Grant expenditures and outcomes.* <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/lr/eetdlegreport.asp>

the funds can be used to provide advice for helping individuals develop Professional Development (PD), Growth, or Education Plans and for books, childcare and other education-related expenses. The Child Development Training Consortium (CDTC) Permit Stipend Program pays the permit application fee to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

## Multiple Pathways for a Teaching Credential

California has made it possible for people to take different pathways to obtain a teaching credential that authorizes them to teach TK and other elementary grades. The *traditional pathway*, which most people take, is to enroll in a postgraduate, one-year teacher credential program after they complete their BA. Most California State Universities also offer an *Integrated Undergraduate Program*, which allows students to meet the teacher credential requirements while they are obtaining the BA. *Residency programs* are collaboratively administered by a credential program and a local educational agency (a school district, county office of education or charter school). Candidates teach alongside an experienced mentor teacher for at least one full school year in the district where they will ultimately serve as teacher of record, while completing coursework to earn their preliminary credential. In *Internship Programs* candidates serve as a teacher of record and earn a salary after completing 120 hours of pre-service requirements. While they are teaching they must complete the requirements for a preliminary credential. The internship program may be particularly appropriate for people who have a Child Development Permit and have been teaching preschool, but aspire to a credential that allows them to teach TK.

While early educators' interest in TK jobs is high, awareness of these pathways is relatively low. In a 2025 survey of preschool teachers in San Diego County, only 3 percent of educators reported they would consider quitting their job to pursue a credential full-time. Other respondents believed there was no path forward due to the time or cost, though 25 percent would consider an evening or weekend option.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2025). *State of the early care and education workforce: California regions*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025>

## Supporting Access and Completion

Whatever the pathway, some strategies have been put in place to improve access and completion, especially for people who are already working. Strategies include making courses accessible to people who work full time and providing support to help people complete their degrees. Offering courses in a hybrid or online format, off-site at a community location, or on evenings or weekends are common in California Community colleges but less common among 4-year colleges.

A novel program in California, EDvance, which offers a B.A. in early childhood studies, is specifically designed for early childhood educators who work at least part time.<sup>43</sup> Two pathways are offered, both using a remote college model. The lower division pathway offers ECE courses and early practicum experiences to cover the first two years of college, preparing students for the Child Development Teacher Permit. The upper division pathway offers coursework and support for continuing and transfer students to complete their BA degree. The programs offer remote courses scheduled at convenient times for full-time ECE practitioners and successfully recruits groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education. In 2024-25 the majority of enrolled students were Hispanic (45.5%) or Black (10%).<sup>44</sup> The program is small, however. Since EDvance became an independent accredited nonprofit institution in 2022 they graduated 63 students, 22 in 2024 and 41 in 2025.<sup>45</sup>

More typical 4-year colleges have used other strategies to help students complete their requirements. These include creating cohort models to build a sense of community among candidates and faculty, offering summer orientations for incoming candidates to establish connections with faculty and fellow students, and providing specialized advising and support to manage certification requirements, including academic and career advising, mentoring, writing and literacy support, and test preparation.

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<sup>43</sup> Gardner, M., Melnick, H., Meloy, B., & Barajas, J. (2019). *Promising models for preparing a diverse, high-quality early childhood workforce*. Learning Policy Institute.

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/preparing-diverse-high-quality-early-childhood-workforce>

<sup>44</sup> EdVance. (2024). *Student demographics 2024–25*. <https://www.edvance.edu/institutional-data>

<sup>45</sup> EdVance College. (n.d.). *Celebrating our first graduation: Highlights and interviews*.

<https://www.edvance.edu/post/celebrating-our-first-graduation-highlights-and-interviews>

EdVance College. (n.d.). *Celebrating the EdVance College class of 2025!*.

<https://www.edvance.edu/post/celebrating-the-edvance-college-class-of-2025>

## Analysis

In addition to offering a valuable resource to young children and families, the expansion of TK has given some early childhood educators access to a living wage and benefits. The near absence of a teacher shortage for TK lead teachers demonstrates what is needed to reduce shortages in other sectors of early childhood education. California has made progress toward improving pay and opportunities for the ECE workforce. Despite recent efforts, however, challenges remain in recruiting, retaining, and achieving fairness for workers across sectors. This section discusses some strategies for addressing these challenges.

## Pay and Benefits

The low pay along with minimal benefits is indisputably the primary reason for difficulty in both attracting and retaining early childhood educators in non-TK settings. Because pay for ECE providers has been low for so long, it has become an almost acceptable norm. Paying a living wage to the people who care for the state's children would be costly. But it is difficult to defend norms that put a higher monetary value on animal trainers than on caring for and educating children. There is also a symbolic issue. Pay reflects societies' values, and low pay for people raises questions about how much society values the care of children. Moreover, teaching jobs in early education are disproportionately held by women of color compared to elementary education jobs. Addressing systemic differences in pay between the settings would also promote equity among California's teachers.

Salaries have improved somewhat in recent years, especially in CSPP, but not commensurate with increases in the minimum wage. Child Care Providers United's negotiation for state funding for health care and retirement benefits is laudable and a move in the right direction, but a modest improvement, especially considering not all providers will benefit. In brief, although progress has been made, many early childhood educators continue to live in or close to poverty. There are practical and moral reasons to improve their pay and benefits.

### ***Pathways to Teacher Credentials***

Although most jobs in the ECE field continue to be unattractive from a monetary standpoint, the state has made efforts to facilitate entry into and opportunities for advancement in the field by creating

multiple pathways to obtain a teacher credential, but with somewhat limited effects. For example, by allowing students to take teacher credential courses while they are completing their BA, the Integrated Undergraduate Programs in the UC system have some potential of reducing the amount of time it takes, and the accompanying costs, to become a credentialed teacher. But few students are actually able to finish in four years or within the number of units normally required for a BA, even as full-time students. Unlike most states, which allow students to major in teacher education and receive a credential in a BA program, California requires students to major in another field that rarely includes courses that overlap with teacher credential requirements. Meeting major, general education, and teacher credential course requirements in one year is extremely difficult. Moreover, the majority of early educators are “non-traditional” students who continue working on their degrees after they enter the workforce.

One way to streamline integrated programs is to create more overlap between the BA major and the teacher credential requirements. An example is the new major in early childhood education in the Department of Child and Adolescent Development, developed at San Francisco State University. Some of the courses in the BA major count toward their new PK-3 teacher credential. In addition to reducing the total number of courses required for the PK-3 credential, this approach has the added value of providing a stronger background in early child development and education than is provided by a one-year teacher credential program alone. The state could provide dedicated funding to encourage more 4-year colleges to create majors that overlap with their teacher credential program.

Community college is a common first step in a pathway to a BA and ultimately a teaching credential. Better collaborations between community colleges and 4-year colleges could reduce the burden on students aspiring to a teaching credential. Some community college courses could count toward the major or teacher credential requirements, including supervised field experiences. But community college faculty need to be well informed of the specific requirements of the teacher credential program their students transfer to in order to make sure they design courses and field experience to meet the requirements. Articulation agreements between 4- and 2-year colleges are useful in clarifying how students can make efficient progress toward both their BA and teacher credential requirements while they are in a community college.

## Recruitment and Funding

Staff shortages in some sectors of the ECE field and the lack of diversity among TK teachers suggest that more could be done to recruit people to the early childhood education field. A strategy that has been used to recruit young people is to offer dual enrollment between high schools and community colleges. This allows high school students to meet some of the Child Development Permit requirements and make progress toward an AA degree.

More people might be recruited to the ECE workforce if state administrators and higher education programs increased their outreach to make sure the multiple pathways and supports are well known to potential candidates, especially to racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse people. Diversity is especially important given the diversity of the children served. Web-based resources that clearly summarize the various pathways and resources for students are important, but college counselors also need to be both informed and proactive in sharing this information with prospective students. Many teacher credential programs endeavor to recruit and retain diverse students and to offer courses in places and at times that make them accessible. But these efforts require resources beyond traditional programs. Some states that have needed to address staffing shortages have provided additional funding to higher education programs to implement such strategies.<sup>46</sup> California could target funds to teacher credential programs for this purpose.

In addition to creating multiple pathways, the state has provided funding to cover some of the costs of required college courses, and some higher education programs have worked to provide mentoring and other support. More could be done and there are many good models of state strategies to make teacher preparation more affordable and accessible.

In some cases only minor tweaks would need to be made to improve access to college courses for people who aspire to a child development permit. For example, community colleges focus counseling and course offerings on people who are aiming for an associate's degree more than on people who need units to meet specific requirements, such as those for a Child Development Permit. Quality Counts Workforce Pathways Grants can be used to offer credit-bearing coursework at alternative times and locations to meet the needs of working students, but this purpose competes with

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<sup>46</sup>Schachner, A., Wang, V., Yun, C., Plasencia, S., Mauerman, C., McJunkins, C., & Stipek, D. (2025). *Preparing early childhood teachers: Credentialing and preparation programs in four states*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/177.512>

providing support for tuition and other education-related expenses that the grants are designed to cover. Targeted support for more flexible course offerings would help.

Apprenticeships are a growing model for ECE workforce development.<sup>47</sup> This approach relies on partnerships between employers and institutes of higher education, and there are already several promising examples in California. Registered apprenticeships, in particular, are eligible for federal funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In California, standout programs like one in Alameda County combine public and private funds to boost wraparound support for candidates and provide them with a better wage.<sup>48</sup>

The lack of diversity among TK teachers is a particular concern given the languages spoken and backgrounds of the children they teach. The education requirements for a credential to teach TK create a steep climb and are the most likely explanation for the low diversity in TK teachers relative to center teachers and family childcare providers. Funding for tuition and other education-related costs are critically important for making the educational requirements realistic for the diverse individuals working in relatively low-paid ECE jobs. This is a diverse population likely to be interested in gaining a teacher credential to teach TK.

Funding for people aspiring to a child development permit is also important, but some potential recruits would need all education costs to be covered. Many have no other resources to cover tuition in addition to other costs such as books and childcare for their own children. Making funding ongoing would help. One-time grant programs are helpful in the short-term, but staffing shortages in some ECE sectors and the lack of diversity in TK are likely to be a long-term problems.

## Workplace Quality

Evidence cited above indicates that working conditions significantly affect teacher turnover. Staff are less likely to leave a workplace that they view as supportive, fair and equitable, and shares

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<sup>47</sup> Smith, L. K., Williams, T., & Mercado, K. (2023). *Apprenticeships: Building a strong child care workforce pipeline*. Bipartisan Policy Center.

[https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BPC\\_WOIA\\_Apprenticeship\\_Report\\_RV2.pdf](https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BPC_WOIA_Apprenticeship_Report_RV2.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Pufall Jones, E., Knight, J., Hess, H., & Copeman Petig, A. (2025). *Empowering early educators: An evaluation of the Alameda County Early Educator Apprentice Program*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/evaluation-of-alameda-county-early-educatorapprentice-program>

their values. In a seminal 2015 report, the National Academies of Sciences identified supportive working conditions as a key ingredient in the creation of a strong ECE workforce.<sup>49</sup> The report explains that working conditions should enable teachers to provide a stable environment for children’s healthy development and learning and ensure that teachers have the opportunity to refine their practice. Supportive working conditions are summarized in the Model Work Standards, first produced in 1999 in partnership with early educators and updated in 2019.<sup>50</sup> The Standards provide a framework inclusive of topics such as adequate planning time, substitute coverage, and physical conditions like adult-sized chairs.

Improving working conditions can also contribute to workers’ job satisfaction. California policy makers have not, however, addressed the working conditions for early childhood educators. The state may be able to improve recruitment and reduce turnover by ensuring that people in leadership positions are given support and training on how to create a supportive environment for early childhood educators. In the proposed Permit Matrix, Early Childhood Administrators are required to have two semester units of coursework in adult supervision and six units in EC administration. Creating a supportive workplace could be included in these courses, as well as in professional development programs for extant administrators would also be valuable.

Providing teachers with opportunities for developing their own skills and time to collaborate and plan are effective strategies for creating a supportive work environment. Most professional learning is compliance- and/or safety-oriented, due to the highly regulated nature of the sector. For instance, a 2024 study in San Mateo County found that only 18% of center teachers reported their most recent training was selected for a reason other than an external requirement.<sup>51</sup> Creating space for educators to select training that fits their learning needs and interests could improve teacher satisfaction as well as their teaching practices. The finding that staff in every sector of the ECE

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<sup>49</sup>Institute of Medicine & National Research Council. (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/19401>

<sup>50</sup> Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2029). *The model work standards*. University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/creating-better-child-care-jobs-model-work-standards/>

<sup>51</sup>Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2024). *The early care and education workforce of San Mateo County*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

workforce claimed that children with challenging behaviors were their greatest challenge and source of stress suggests that this is an area where PD could be particularly helpful.

One study found that financial support for PD was the best predictor of whether people in the ECE field participated in professional development, suggesting that paid PD opportunities are valuable for improving teachers' experience of their work environment as well as program quality.<sup>52</sup> Given the relatively high prevalence of mental health challenges, such as stress and depression, mental health support is likely to contribute to retention as well.

In summary, young children's wellbeing would be well served by attention to the wellbeing of the people who care for young children. The state has made strides, especially in pay for some sectors and pathways to advance in the profession. But there are still sectors of the workforce that remain relatively untouched by these advances. Increased attention to these sectors could benefit both children and their caregivers.

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<sup>52</sup> Warner-Richter, M., Paschall, K., Tout, K., & Lowe, C. (2020). *Understanding facilitators and barriers to professional development use among the early care and education workforce* (OPRE Report No. 2020-103). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ccepra\\_facilitators\\_and\\_barriers\\_report\\_508\\_gc.pdf](https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ccepra_facilitators_and_barriers_report_508_gc.pdf)