

The Massachusetts Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Phase I Executive Summary

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With a solid reputation for innovative research addressing complex issues, the University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston's only public university, is home to numerous centers and institutes that conduct policy-relevant research to support the social, political, and economic development of the community-at-large. The Massachusetts Early Care and Education Workforce Study is directed by scholars from three centers and institutes at UMass Boston: the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, the Institute for Early Education Leadership and Innovation, and the Center for Social Policy.

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The Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy

works to advance women's public leadership and the public policies that make a difference in the lives of all women. Through its innovative educational programs, policy-relevant research, and public forums, it works to ensure that the voices, expertise, and experiences of all women are valued and included in civic discourse and the policymaking process. The center works across sectors to build a prosperous economy that increases access and opportunity for all, particularly low-wage workers and women of color. All center initiatives and research explore the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and class on policymaking and politics.

The Institute for Early Education Leadership and Innovation

envisions a world in which all young children have access to high-quality early care and education (ECE). To achieve this, we develop and support a growing corps of early educators to design, test, and implement innovative ideas and best practices in ECE centers, schools, home-based businesses, and systems; we conduct cutting-edge research about how to redesign systems and policies to cultivate the leadership of early educators.

The Center for Social Policy (CSP) researches the root causes of economic hardship and examines the intersection of public policies and employment practices to boost well-being. The center accomplishes this through active engagement with policymakers, researchers, service providers, and those facing economic hardship.

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Executive Summary

Background

In Massachusetts and across the nation, there has been a long history of low compensation and inadequate benefits provided to the early care and education workforce, with consequences not only on educators and their own families, but also on the children for whom they care and teach. A recent report from the University of California Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment found that, in Massachusetts, progress on compensation is "stalled."² The Massachusetts Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Study aims to generate current workforce survey data to inform the development of new policies to improve early childhood educators' pay, benefits, and working conditions. The data will also document the extent of public benefits usage, the need for debt relief and access to professional development opportunities. Funded by an appropriation in the Massachusetts FY2018 state budget, Phase One of the study was designed to inform domains and questions to be included in the statewide survey by exploring two emerging topics of relevance and concern for this workforce, cliff effects and debt load, particularly as related to compensation and professional development.

Research Design

An Advisory Committee was convened and provided helpful guidance on the framing of study topics and the identification of the most pressing types of data needed for informing policymaking in the Commonwealth. The UMass Boston research team conducted eight focus groups with 40 individuals in total in different regions of the Commonwealth and included several stakeholder types, with an emphasis on educators employed in different settings and diverse in regard to their racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Participants included English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Chinese-speaking educators. Additionally, focus groups involved center directors, case managers, benefits counselors, professional development providers, and higher education faculty members. In addition, a pilot survey focused on public benefits and the experience of cliff effects was administered and completed by 27 educators in Boston-based center. A survey was used instead of a focus group due to the sensitive nature of the topic and information requested. Finally, four individual interviews were conducted to allow for the participation of individuals who could not participate in scheduled focus groups.

Overall Findings

The three overarching findings of Phase One confirmed that some of the realities facing the workforce – while maybe not new or surprising to educators, advocates and policymakers – demonstrate that educators' compensation and professional development needs are complex and must be analyzed in the context of shifts in educator responsibilities, trends in the early childhood education field, and multiple effects of economic insecurity.

1. The commitment of many teachers to the field of early childhood education is deep and often long-term while simultaneously the nature of their work is shifting and expanding with an increase in responsibilities related to challenging child behavior in the classrooms and perceived rise in the diagnoses of autism, ADHD, and a variety of learning disabilities, and adverse circumstances facing young children and their families such as homelessness;
2. Early care and education as a professional field is experiencing a significant shortage of qualified early childhood educators and program directors and, as result, some centers and programs are not operating at full capacity; and

3. The high level of economic insecurity among educators in the ECE field impacts not only the ability of educators to pay their bills, but also the quality of life for themselves, their partners/spouses, and their own children.

Compensation and Benefits: Main Findings

Many educators cannot support themselves or their families on current earnings. Although many educators are hopeful about upcoming changes to the minimum wage law, most are aware that this will not significantly impact their ability to pay monthly bills or move them toward long-term economic security. Given the lack of progress on raising compensation, many educators are looking toward improved employer benefits as a way to gain additional support.

Some center directors are being creative in their attempt to recruit and retain staff, paying sign on bonuses, giving paid breaks, paying for increasing amounts of health insurance, giving tuition assistance, providing flexible spending accounts, and flexible schedules. Many early childhood educators are at risk for having no option to retire and no savings to fund their living expenses during retirement. Retirement plans – whether with an employer and/or employee contribution – seem limited for ECE workers. For family childcare providers who are essentially small business owners, these educators do not pay into Social Security. Moreover, there is pressure for early childhood educators to hold two or three jobs and while some educators are advised to get a second job where the employer is required to pay into Social Security, others are forced to take on a second job in order to make ends meet.

Professional Development and Credentialing: Main Findings

Educators are eager for professional development opportunities, but often face significant financial obstacles in accessing courses and/or degree programs. Few work for agencies that offer tuition assistance or scholarships; also, an educator's socioeconomic and parenting situation can influence their capacity to take on professional development opportunities. The coherence and sequencing of coursework/training over time need to be addressed in professional development offerings; opportunities need to account for differing needs of educators at all levels of the career ladder: entry level, mid-career, and advanced career. Another concern is about CEU trainings, and confusion about if and how these translate into college credits.

Access to professional development opportunities is limited by factors other than the cost; some are geographic and there are additional complex factors. For educators living in rural areas or in certain regions of the state, there is inadequate access to high-quality degree programs or other professional development opportunities. Additionally, family child care providers may have distinct professional development needs and interests that must be addressed through special offerings for this educator/provider group. There is a need for specialized training such as curriculum training focused on mixed age groups that are characteristic of family child care settings, trainings offered evenings and weekends, and access to college degree programs.

There is a significant disconnect between level of professional credentials and level of compensation for educators across different types of ECE programs. Furthermore, when educators complete professional development opportunities, they see little impact on paychecks. In addition, increased professional development and/or QRIS requirements may be having an impact on the stability of the birth to five ECE workforce. Some participants reported that as soon as ECE educators earn a BA they move on to another job, to earn a higher salary, particularly by taking teaching positions in the public school system where compensation and benefit levels are significantly higher. Educators also noted the demands of QRIS on family child care providers, without accompanying pay increases. Finally, working as an educator, caring for family members young and old, and going to school is an overwhelming triumvirate of responsibilities to carry. Some participants reported that going to school at night after teaching all day is exhausting, negatively affects their own parenting, and that they need support, particularly childcare.

There is a need for data to guide the development of a unified system for submitting and accessing educator credentials to allow for easier tracking and documentation of credentials and coursework. In

order to prevent having individuals retake CEU courses if they change jobs and lose their certificates, it's necessary to ensure that there be a single statewide system.

Public Benefits Usage and Cliff Effects: Main Findings

Many educators have to rely on public benefits in order to make ends meet. Forty-one percent of the survey respondents reported being on at least one benefit. Health insurance was the most frequently accessed benefit, with about thirty percent reported being on MassHealth for themselves or their children. Almost thirty percent reported being on more than one benefit. Other benefits noted were SNAP (food stamps), WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and Housing Support (encompassing both public housing and rental vouchers). Four respondents expressed concern about reduction in a benefit if their wages increase (the cliff effect), and most of these expressed concerns about rent increases.

Some educators are not eligible for public benefits although they need them. Benefit counselors reported working with few childcare workers. Focus group participants report that childcare educators are generally eligible for many public benefits – and some use them – but some educators are not using public benefits due to the eligibility requirements or barriers to access for different programs. Moreover, benefits counselors reported that they were typically responsible for one benefit and that it was typically not part of their job responsibility to be knowledgeable about all other benefits that a client may be on or potentially be on or eligible for, thus when the needs for those benefits arose (e.g., housing), they referred to another agency. Counselors often accessed various resources to share with their clients on benefit eligibility, work requirements, and job placements. Respondents reported that many times clients only needed childcare, yet the way the eligibility system is structured, they can only get the childcare voucher if they are on TAFDC.

Focus group participants also noted that it can be challenging to verify employment as large employers are on a centralized employer system (Work Number). People have trouble getting verifications from their employer as employers don't always want to give them the letter. Many benefits require employment verification, so the inability to produce a formal letter from their employers puts childcare workers at risk for losing a benefit entirely. When educators take on more work hours – often in a second job – even a small number of hours, their benefit levels are reduced. Participants report that many educators often want more work hours due to their low compensation, but fear they will become ineligible for public benefits because their paycheck will reflect this slight rise in income (which then needs to be reported to the agency administering the benefit), even though it is frequently temporary. In addition, educators' interest in professional advancement may be impacted by cliff effects. Some participants cited new policies in place for the past year to help recipients maintain SNAP benefits longer, so they are not penalized for working more. However, the policy of incentivizing work by the agency is a new policy; the impact of this policy could take a while before becoming evident.

Debt Load: Main Findings

Educators are not only struggling with low compensation, but are also experiencing economic stress due to student loan repayment pressures. While educational debt is known to be an issue for ECE educators, the extent of the problem has not been documented. Some study participants noted that loans are a tremendous barrier to enrolling in higher degree programs, and some leave the field due to education loan debt. Due to low compensation, educators often carry personal debt along with student loan debt causing additional stress for educators and their families.

Preliminary Sampling Options for Statewide Survey

Based on consultation provided by Anthony Roman, Senior Research Fellow at UMass Boston's Center for Survey Research, estimates of completed surveys required for a representative sampling of educators in Massachusetts were generated. The estimates were for various educator types, including family child care providers, center-based educators, and center-based administrators and for two sampling approaches: a statewide sample and regional sample. Several factors impacting sampling sizes and cost of survey administration were identified, such as the need for regional estimates, level of data precision required, expected response rate, and survey languages. In addition to survey data, it was determined that collecting

data on indicators related to compensation level, extent of financial and nonfinancial benefits provided by employers, usage of public assistance, and debt load might be combined to develop an index or scale related to economic security in the early care and education workforce. Decisions and choices about the myriad factors listed above will determine the cost of developing and implementing a statewide survey and analyzing data collected.

¹ Section 2 of Chapter 47 of the Acts of 2017 contained the following language in item #3000-1020: “not less than \$100,000 shall be expended for a comprehensive statewide study, conducted by the University of Massachusetts at Boston, relative to the early education and care workforce in the Commonwealth.”

² Whitebook, Marcy, McLean, Caitlin and Bethany Edwards. 2018. *The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018*. June 27, 2018. Retrieved on 28 June 2018 from <http://csce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index>.

Appendix. Statewide Survey Data Needs

Compensation and Benefits

- Earnings data by race/ethnicity, age, immigration status, size of household, other sources of household income, number of years in the profession, other factors
- Data on how many workers work at, below, above minimum wage (given new min. wage law)
- Provision of traditional benefits (health insurance, sick days) and non-traditional benefits; how related to recruitment, retention, and length of service; potential for increasing workers’ economic security
- Retirement data; Social Security eligibility; access to retirement savings accounts; employer contribution, and what level of retirement savings anticipated if they remain in the ECE workforce
- Data projections on how many retired ECE workers will live at or below poverty level
- Additional paid positions/types of employment, impact on educators’ health, well-being, classroom effectiveness

Professional Development and Credentialing

- Data on how many educators have received a BA, how many are currently pursuing their degree, and date they received or expect to receive a BA to allow analysis of trends
- Data to measure how degree attainment impacts educator retention and salaries, looking at ECE centers and family child care homes
- The extent of the disconnect between pay levels and educational levels to provide new data on the lack of impact new professional credentials has in educator’s pay
- Data on trainings completed by educators during the last calendar year, including length, mode, cost, and types of trainings; data on whether the educator’s employer offered tuition assistance or scholarships, and if so, whether all or part of the cost of the training or degree program was covered; data on the number of educators pursuing an AA (Associate’s degree), BA (Bachelor’s degree), or master’s/graduate degree, their status in the degree program, and anticipated completion year
- Data on educators’ professional development needs relative to their career level, credentials
- Geographic location of educators and closest college degree program(s) or access to online programs
- Data on educational credentials, professional development needs, and access to professional development of family child care providers
- Data to assess employer policy and practice regarding tuition assistance and work/family supports to educators seeking professional development

Public Benefits Usage and Cliff Effects

- Data on how many educators rely on some form of public benefit, by specific benefit programs; aggregate and analyze such comprehensive data to determine the benefit bundles, or combinations of benefits, used by members of the ECE workforce
- Data on homelessness and housing situation, impact of housing instability on employment maintenance
- Data on how many educators applied for a public benefit, but were turned down due to lack of eligibility for specific programs, or other reason
- Data on nature of ECE employment (in terms of hours, schedule predictability, and seasonal employment) to better understand access and maintenance of benefits; e.g. lack of formal payroll processes may make income verification challenging
- Data on lack of benefits information, lack of benefits counseling, bureaucratic rules that make it difficult to complete applications, difficulty accessing agencies (due to transportation or scheduling barriers), and other issues (e.g. summer break), managing benefits when pay and employer benefits are prorated
- Data on whether there is adequate translation of benefit information and benefit applications (for educators whose first language is not English)

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- Data on prevalence of losing public benefits due to temporary or permanent increased earnings, and data on the negative impact of losing benefits on ECE workers and households
 - Assess the extent to which workers understand paychecks (e.g., difference between gross, net earnings)

Debt Load

- Type and extent of personal debt such as car loans, credit cards, loans from family members
- Data on what percent of educators, by type of ECE setting, are paying off student loans, total loan amount, monthly payments, general loan requirements, stipulations, and likelihood of loan repayment
- Data to be analyzed as percentage of annual earnings for educators, and how this varies by race/ethnicity, age, educational level, type of ECE program, and other factors



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