

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION



Executive Summary

Quality early care and education is an essential two-generation resource for national, state and local economies. Early care and education professionals allow families the opportunity to participate in the workforce and achieve self-sufficiency while also providing safe, learning-rich environments that lay the foundation for children's school and life success.

This report identifies primary characteristics of professionals who identify as leaders of early care and education centers and preschools and their working environments. Included with research results are recommendations that aim to support leaders as they manage change and lead improvements to the quality, access and affordability of their critical services for families, young children and their communities.

Key Findings

Early care and education leaders, administrators and teachers provide an invaluable service, but their compensation does not reflect their critical role in children's lives and in the community.

For children to thrive, Colorado needs well-informed, capable leadership. In most cases, quality of early care and education starts with strong leadership, management and child development knowledge. Colorado's early care and education leaders are highly skilled and trained professionals. In fact, 82 percent have a college degree and 63 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. When compared to other professionals with similar educational backgrounds and work responsibilities, we can see that early care and education leaders are grossly underpaid.

Low teacher wages make it challenging for early care and education leaders and administrators to find, hire and retain qualified professionals.

When a workforce is chronically underpaid, severe and negative repercussions exist. This includes challenges in recruiting qualified staff and high turnover of positions that are both costly to the business and, more importantly, to children, who thrive with secure, attached adult relationships. Nearly 70 percent of respondents reported experiencing some turnover of teaching staff in the past 12

months with a common reason for the turnover being the need for more money.

Results of the current study identified a severe lack of qualified professionals to fill vacancies. Not only is teacher pay low, but 60 percent of leaders reported that the lack of qualified professionals was the top challenge in hiring. Leaders are in a current struggle to not only find qualified professionals, but to also find ways to successfully retain the teams they have.

Support is needed for early care and education leaders in the management and implementation of historic change.

Recently, there have been historic federal and state investments in early care and education that have set forth significant change in a short period of time. Leaders and administrators bear great responsibility in implementing a wide array of new policies, regulations, expectations and standards in the short-term for positive impacts in the long-term. Those in decision-making positions are responsible for ensuring that their teams of teachers and staff members are equipped to execute changes in curriculum and safety and sanitation procedures, provide high quality

Average Leader's Annual Income Compared to Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado				
Geographic Designation	County Examples	Average Income per Geographic Designation	Required Income to Meet Basic Needs	Difference (+/-)
Urban	Denver	\$41,253	\$47,914	-\$6,661
	Jefferson		\$51,888	-\$10,635
	Larimer		\$46,552	-\$5,299
Rural	Archuleta	\$38,365	\$38,511	-\$146
	Morgan		\$31,606	+\$6,759
	Rio Blanco		\$40,817	-\$2,452
Rural Resort	Grand	\$47,814	\$43,617	+\$4,197
	Routt		\$58,808	-\$10,994
	Summit		\$59,595	-\$11,781

Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado (2015). Family is defined as one adult and one preschool aged child and basic needs include, but are not limited to, housing, child care and food.

Average Hourly Teacher Wage Compared to Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado				
Geographic Designation	County Examples	Average Hourly Wage per Geographic Designation	Required Income to Meet Basic Needs	Difference (+/-)
Urban	Denver	\$13.70	\$22.69	-\$8.99
	Jefferson		\$24.54	-\$10.84
	Larimer		\$22.04	-\$8.34
Rural	Archuleta	\$14.04	\$18.23	-\$4.19
	Morgan		\$14.96	-\$0.92
	Rio Blanco		\$19.33	-\$5.29
Rural Resort	Grand	\$16.69	\$20.65	-\$3.96
	Routt		\$27.84	-\$11.15
	Summit		\$28.22	-\$11.53

Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado (2015). Family is defined as one adult and one preschool aged child and basic needs include, but are not limited to, housing, child care and food.

care and instruction and participate in new state-level systems of support.

Strong leaders can manage changing expectations and lead their teams through the process, while also running a business and staying engaged with families. To ensure that more programs benefit from skilled leaders and administrators, access to resources in business management and professional development is critical.

The state's Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System factors in leadership, management and administration practices as one of five separate standard criteria for earning a quality rating designation along with workforce qualifications and professional development, family partnership, learning environment and child health promotion. A new focus is needed to ensure that each leader is equipped with business skills including building a healthy work environment, establishing effective policies and procedures, operating sound fiscal management practices, implementing

risk management strategies, engaging families, utilizing community resources and maximizing marketing and public relations strategies.

Needed Action

A one-sized fits all solution is not easy to find given that the early care and education field is complex. Action for advancing the field is challenging and requires multi-faceted solutions, which may vary in every community.

- Adequate compensation for both leaders and teachers remains a hurdle that requires the time and attention of advocates, decision-makers, business leaders and community leaders. Serious explorations are needed to uncover innovative ways to compensate leaders and teachers at higher wages.
- Early care and education teacher wages are low and the type of work is mentally and emotionally

taxing. Compensation must increase and professionals must receive the professional support needed to stay in the field.

- Considerations can be made to successful models that are currently in place across the country aimed to improve access and affordability of quality care. For example, five states – Iowa, Kansas, Florida, New Mexico and North Carolina – participate in the Child Care WAGES® Project. The WAGES® Project has successfully lowered turnover and increased quality by using private funding to increase compensation based on increased levels of education. In addition, Louisiana uses School Readiness Tax Credits as a wage supplement for leaders and teachers based on the level of education and training.
- Both the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education should continue to empower local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and Early Childhood Councils to conduct community outreach to generate buy in across the field and offer tools to support each unique team of professionals in diverse settings.

“Although their work with young, vulnerable and at-risk children is viewed as a way to ameliorate poverty, the profession is actually generating poverty for teachers and their own children.”

Whitebook, 2015