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The Workforce Behind the Workforce

Examining the Early Childhood Education Labor Force in Massachusetts

There are more than 46,000 educators employed at early education programs across the state of Massachusetts.¹ From small and large centers and after-school programs to family child care (FCC) programs and pre-K classrooms, early educators provide quality education, safe spaces, and socio-emotional learning tools to our state's youngest learners while also supporting the ability of families to participate in the Commonwealth's labor force. They are the workforce behind the workforce.

In 2022, the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF) conducted a landscape analysis to calculate the economic impact of insufficient child care in Massachusetts. MTF's report found that Massachusetts loses close to \$3 billion each year due to inadequate child care. The calculations considered earnings lost for employees due to missing work or reducing their hours to make up for child care gaps, costs for employers tied to lower productivity and higher turnover costs, and reduced tax revenues for the state due to lower earnings and lost wages. The report, *The Untold Cost of Inadequate Child Care*, showed clearly that thoughtful investment in our state's child care system could bring a significant return on investment for children, families, businesses, and the entire state.

MTF is now focusing our attention on the importance of growing the early childhood education (ECE) workforce and on the challenges facing early educators and providers. The ECE workforce is overwhelmingly composed of women and most, especially family child care (FCC) providers, are women of color.² The ECE workforce also represents thousands of small businesses in the state. Building a strong ECE workforce is essential to the growth, equity, and sustainability of the child care system and of our state. However, low wages and structural challenges have created a system that is hard for educators to remain and thrive in, limiting the expansion of programs and child care access across the state.

To begin MTF's work in this area, this report will touch on the characteristics of the early educator workforce, examine several historical pain points that increase educator turnover, review current work being done to address these challenges, and then conclude with several policy recommendations to consider in this work going forward. Importantly, this brief begins with the need for better data infrastructure at the state level so that we can better understand the workforce and build policies that will be responsive to the needs of educators in the field and advance goals of access and quality. The report brings together several survey sources on the workforce which come with significant limitations, which will be discussed in detail in the report. It is essential that

¹ [Department of Early Education and Care Data Dashboard, Power BI.](#)

² Douglass, Anne, Christa Kelleher, Songtian Zeng, Vishakha Agarwal, Arazeliz Reyes, and Susan Crandall. "The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey 2019," June 2020.

policymakers be mindful of the need for more up-to-date, complete, and accurate data collected by the state before major policy decisions concerning the workforce are made. This report uses the best available sources, but we note limitations and areas for caution when drawing policy conclusions. New data analysis is currently ongoing by researchers at the Wheelock Educational Policy Center in partnership with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) which may provide updated data on the makeup of the EEC workforce. As this and further research are published, MTF will stay engaged in this topic and ensure that our analysis of the workforce remains updated as well. This report will serve as a jumping-off point for additional deep dives into the needs of the ECE workforce, including compensation and benefits, retention and advancement, and the particular needs of the FCC sector.

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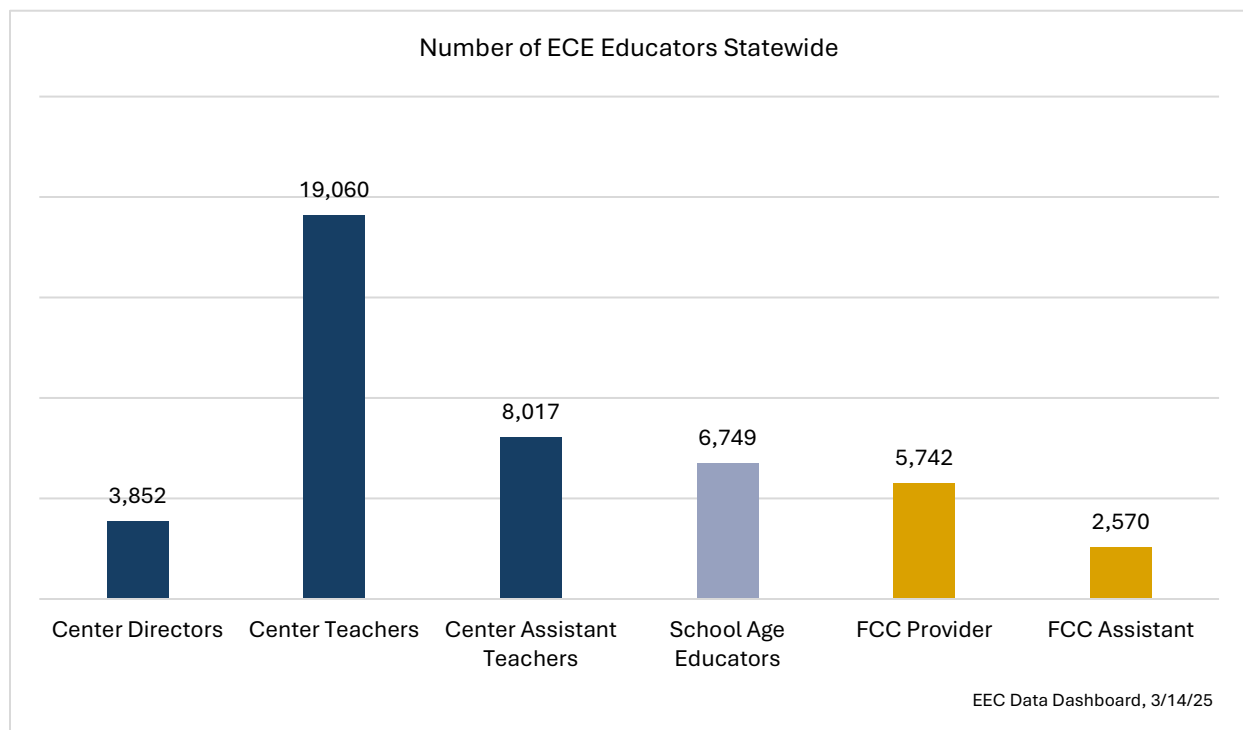
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Setting the Stage – Who is the ECE Workforce?

The ECE workforce is increasingly diverse and reflective of a system that provides a variety of settings, which allows families to find the care that works best for their needs. As of April 2025, there are almost 9,000 early childhood education programs in the state licensed by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) (roughly 6,000 FCC providers and roughly 3,000 center-based programs). Together, EEC licensed and funded early education programs employ more than 46,000 educators statewide; the workforce is more than half the size of teachers working in the public K-12 setting.³



According to information collected by EEC through the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grant program, about 67 percent of the sector workforce is employed at center-based programs, 18 percent run or are employed in smaller FCC settings, and 15 percent work in center-based school age programs. The data above does not include information on the number of educators employed at public pre-k programs because these programs do not participate in C3. Using statewide public pre-k enrollment numbers and educator-child ratios, we can estimate that there are between 3,200 and 4,000 educators employed in public pre-k classrooms.

While early education programs employ a diverse range of education, administrative, and support staff, this report focuses on five primary position categories.

- Center Directors – responsible for the day-to-day, on-site management and operation of a child care program. Directors are tasked with administering the program in accordance with

³ [Department of Early Education and Care Data Dashboard, Power BI](#). Data collected through C3 only counts educators at programs that participate in C3, which is roughly 90 percent of all early education programs in the state.

all state and local laws, rules, and regulations; defining and implementing protocols to ensure the performance of all staff; and communicating effectively with children, families, staff, and EEC.

- Center Teachers – lead classroom teacher in a center-based setting. Teachers are directly responsible for the education, care, and supervision of children.
- Center Assistant Teachers – entry-level center-based educators. Assistant teachers are responsible for assisting the classroom teacher with the implementation of education, care, and administrative activities.
- FCC Provider – the owner/operator of an FCC program, is also often the single educator employed at their program. FCC providers essentially operate as the classroom teacher in their program, as well as the director, and often perform the duties of administrative and support staff as well.
- FCC Assistant – educator employed as a part-time or full-time assistant at an FCC program. FCC assistants work under the supervision of the FCC provider.

All educators working with children must register annually with EEC. The current minimum requirements for center-based educators include some combination of college credits in required early education courses and work experience in the field.⁴

- A valid Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) can also be substituted for course requirements for teachers.
- An associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or advanced degree in Early Childhood Education or a related field reduces the amount of work experience required for teachers.
- The completion of 150 practicum hours of student teaching can also be substituted for some of the required work experience for teachers.
- Directors must meet teacher requirements, complete additional coursework, including courses related to child care administration, and have six additional months of work experience.

FCC providers must have some combination of experience caring for children and a certain number of hours of training depending on the number and age of children served. FCC educators are also required to complete a certain number of professional development training hours each year. FCC assistants, whether certified or regular, must also be registered with EEC and must demonstrate the ability to implement the provider's curriculum, activities, and routines.⁵

EEC currently offers optional professional certifications for teacher and director levels which build on minimum requirements. As educators gain additional work experience and educational qualifications, they can attain additional professional responsibilities and advance to higher roles. As will be discussed later in this report, EEC is undergoing a redesign of their certification, credential,

⁴ "Early Education & Care Positions," Mass.gov, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/early-education-care-positions#infant-toddler-or-preschool-teacher->.

⁵ "606 CMR 7.00: STANDARDS for the LICENSURE or APPROVAL of FAMILY CHILD CARE; SMALL GROUP and SCHOOL AGE and LARGE GROUP and SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE PROGRAMS Section" (Department of Early Education and Care, n.d.), https://www.sec.state.ma.us/reg_pub/pdf/600/606007.pdf.

and career pathway system which will consider multiple pathway options and encourage ongoing education and professional development for all educators.

Demographics, Experience, Education Level, and Diversity

Early education providers benefit from a workforce that has high levels of educational attainment and racial and ethnic diversity. However, the field struggles to attract younger educators and lacks gender diversity⁶. This section will summarize findings from several educator surveys and C3 data to give insights into the demographic characteristics of the workforce. These survey results highlight the need to continue to support the growth of diverse educators in the field and the need to expand the educator pipeline so that the sector can sustainably grow into the future.

A note regarding data:

Comprehensive, updated data on early educator demographics is not systematically collected for use in policy analysis and therefore, this report utilizes data collected through multiple educator surveys in order to start to paint the picture about who makes up the ECE workforce. The first survey that is referenced below, *Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond*, was conducted by the Boston Opportunity Agenda in 2022. This survey was designed primarily to profile the workforce in ECE programs across Boston but was also expanded to include a sample of educators outside of Boston as well. The data presented below focuses on the outside of Boston data that was shared in the Boston Opportunity Agenda report. This data helps shed some light on the characteristics of the ECE workforce; however, due to a potential for selection bias, this data is likely not perfectly representative of the whole state. The second survey that is referenced below, *The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey*, was conducted by researchers at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston in 2019. This survey utilized a statewide representative sample of educators at centers and FCC programs; however, because the survey was completed in the summer of 2019, the data is several years old and provides a picture of the workforce prior to the pandemic. For these reasons, this report also utilizes data collected through the C3 grant program to supplement survey data where possible, mainly in the section on FCC demographics. However, there are limits to the data collected through C3 as well because C3 applications and surveys are largely focused on program-specific data and collect limited educator-level data, especially from center-based programs. Because of these data limitations, this section is intended to provide insights into the characteristics of the ECE workforce and how they may have changed over time, but the data sources each present significant challenges for policy interpretation in terms of timeliness, comprehensiveness, and sample composition. These limitations illustrate why it is so essential that the state systematically gather accurate information on the ECE workforce and share that information with researchers and policymakers. As will be noted at the end of this section, MTF recommends that greater data collection and maintenance be done at the state level to aid further research and policymaking going forward.

⁶ Pratima Patil, Paula Gaviria Villareal, and Fernanda Campbell, “Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond ” (The Boston Foundation, February 2024).

Age & Years of Experience ⁷

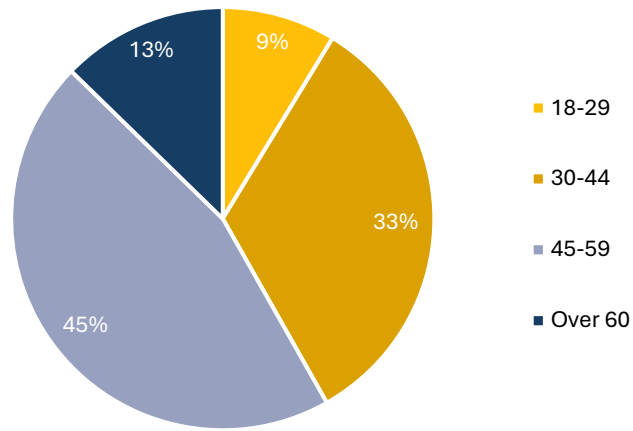
Generally, the ECE field leans older, and a majority of early educators have many years of experience.

For the most recent data on the experience and age distribution of early educators in the state, we look at a report published by the Boston Opportunity Agenda in 2024, which provided responses from a 2022 survey of a sample of FCC educators, center directors, and center-based teachers. The data showed that:

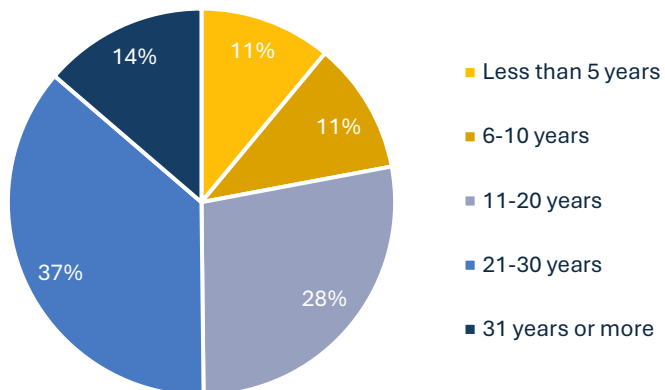
- The majority of those surveyed were 45 years or older.
- When broken down by role, 47 percent of center directors and 61 percent of FCC educators surveyed were between 45 and 59 years old.
- Roughly half of the educators surveyed had been in the field for more than 20 years.

Though grouping educators slightly differently by age, the 2019 UMass Boston survey painted a similar picture, with 50 percent of respondents being over 47 years old.⁸

Age Distribution, 2022 survey



Years of Experience, 2022 survey



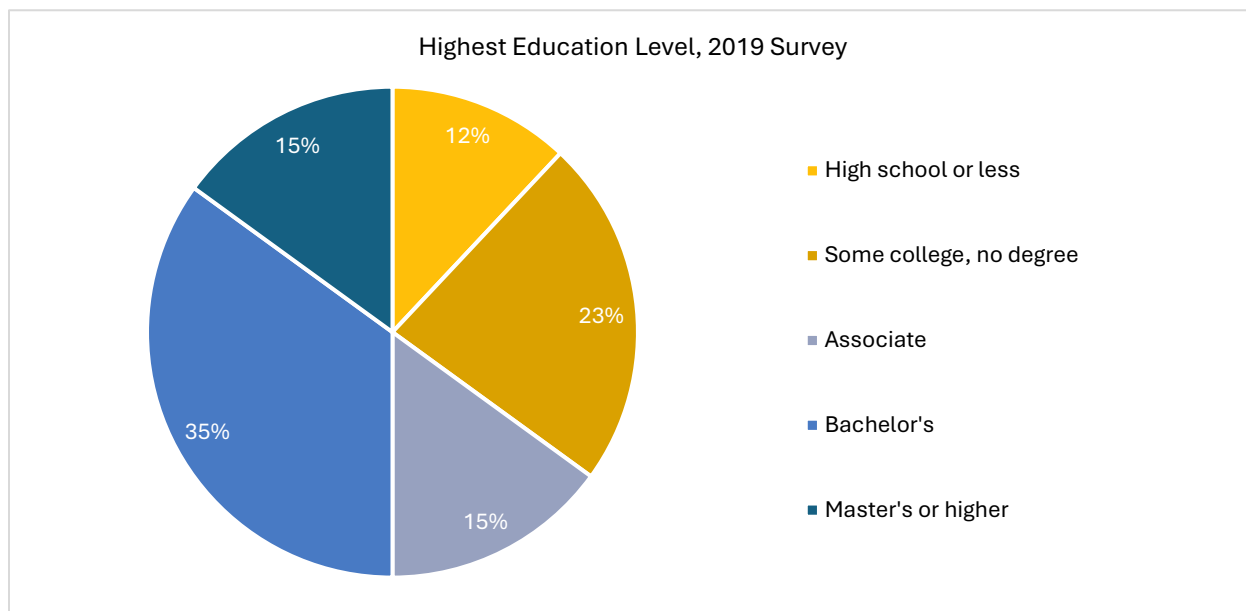
While a high percentage of veteran educators adds immense benefits to the field when it comes to expertise and mentorship opportunities for newer educators, these figures also highlight the struggle to attract young educators who may not currently see the ECE field as a viable career path.

⁷ Pratima Patil, Paula Gaviria Villareal, and Fernanda Campbell, “Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond ” (The Boston Foundation, February 2024).

⁸ Douglass, Anne, Christa Kelleher, Songtian Zeng, Vishakha Agarwal, Arazeliz Reyes, and Susan Crandall. “The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey 2019,” June 2020.

*Educational Attainment*⁹

As discussed above, though the current minimum requirements for ECE educators do not necessarily require completion of higher education degrees, survey data seem to point to a workforce that is educated and has benefited from multiple higher education options.



The 2019 UMass Boston survey showed that 88 percent of the educators polled had received at least some post-secondary education after high school, and 50 percent reported having a bachelor's or graduate degree. Importantly, almost a quarter of the respondents stated they had some college but did not receive a degree, indicating a clear challenge in retention and completion for educators, even when a degree is likely a goal. Both the UMass Boston survey and the Boston Opportunity Agenda survey also found that FCC providers were less likely to have a degree compared to center-based educators.¹⁰ Workforce changes since the pandemic may have also altered these trends further, which is why consistent and updated data collection would be beneficial going forward.

Understanding the current interplay between higher education and the ECE workforce will be important as the state builds its new credentialing system. Data collected through both the 2019 and 2022 surveys indicate that the field certainly will benefit from having multiple pathways that can fit with the unique needs and challenges facing different educators, depending on their education history and career goals.

⁹ Pratima Patil, Paula Gaviria Villareal, and Fernanda Campbell, "Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond" (The Boston Foundation, February 2024).

¹⁰ Pratima Patil, Paula Gaviria Villareal, and Fernanda Campbell, "Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond" (The Boston Foundation, February 2024).

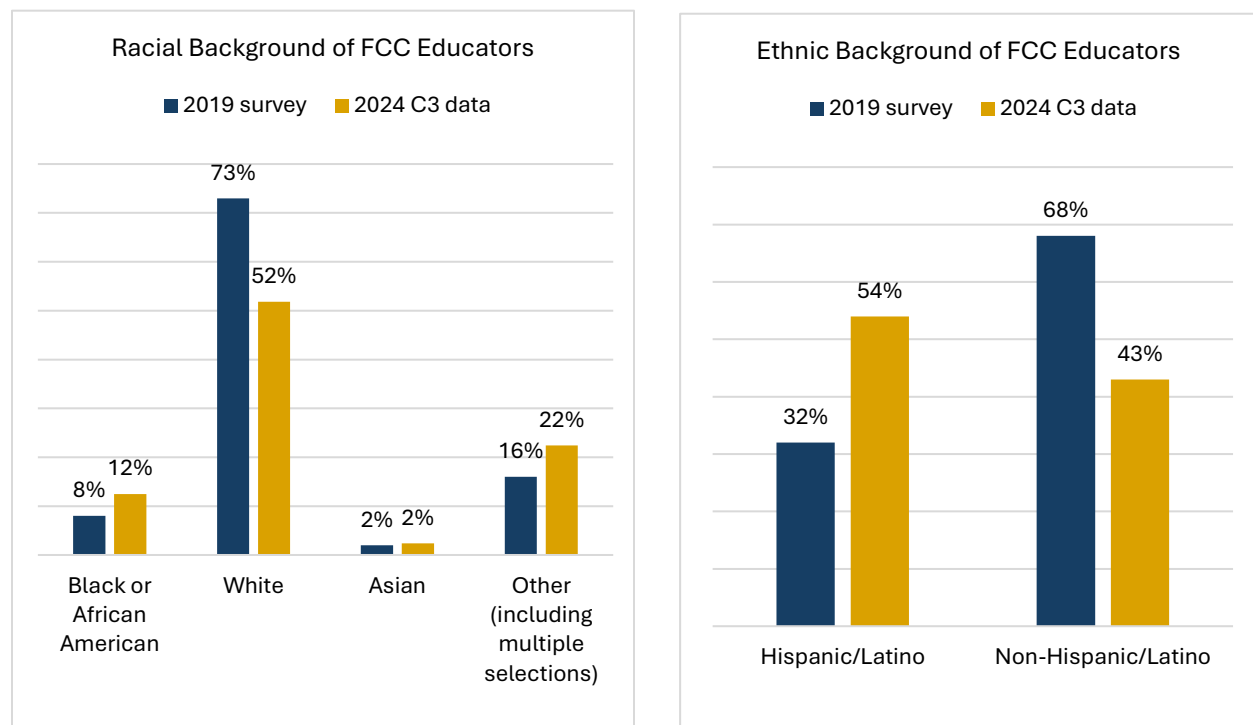
Douglass, Anne, Christa Kelleher, Songtian Zeng, Vishakha Agarwal, Arazeliz Reyes, and Susan Crandall. "The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey 2019," June 2020.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity¹¹

Overall, the ECE sector is quite racially and ethnically diverse, especially when we look at FCC providers. For this section, we will look at the diversity of center-based and FCC educators separately because of the data sources available.

Because of a lack of consistent data collection on educator demographics, the two charts below compare the UMass Boston 2019 survey¹² to data that EEC has been able to collect from FCC providers through ongoing C3 reporting.¹³ While not a direct comparison, as the data sets are using different samples, both the UMass Boston survey and the C3 application asked FCC providers to select their racial background and whether or not they identify as Hispanic/Latino. This exercise hints towards the growing diversity of FCC providers in Massachusetts.

While the data sets are not the same, they cover similar populations. The data analysis here implies that in the last 5 years, the share of FCC providers who identify as non-White may have grown significantly, especially due to the growth of Hispanic/Latino providers.



¹¹ Douglass, Anne, Christa Kelleher, Songtian Zeng, Vishakha Agarwal, Arazeliz Reyes, and Susan Crandall. "The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey 2019," June 2020. Commonwealth Cares for Children Application Data (Department of Early Education and Care, May-June 2024). Emily Hanno et al., "Pandemic Meets Preschool: Impacts of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Early Education and Care in Massachusetts" (Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education, August 2020).

¹² Douglass, Anne, Christa Kelleher, Songtian Zeng, Vishakha Agarwal, Arazeliz Reyes, and Susan Crandall. "The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey 2019," June 2020.

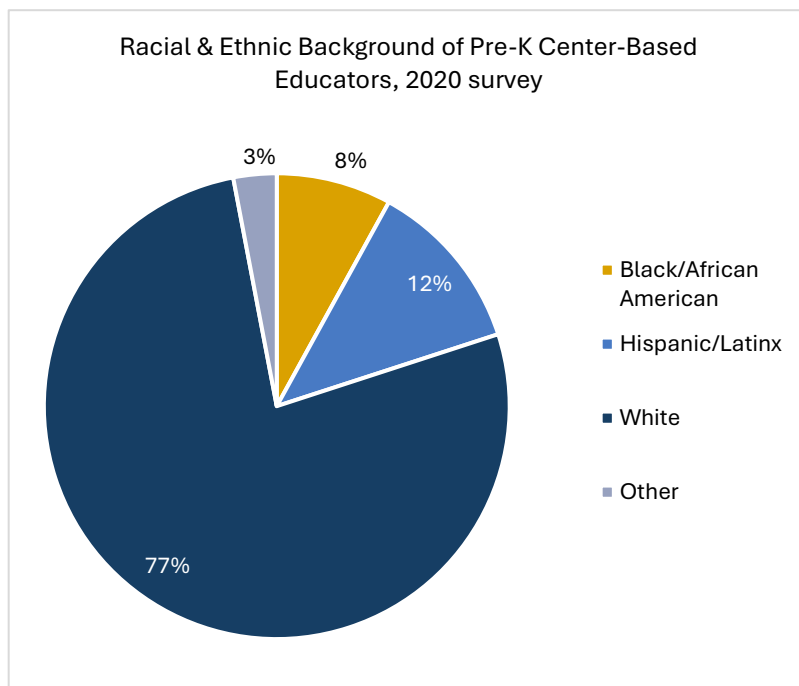
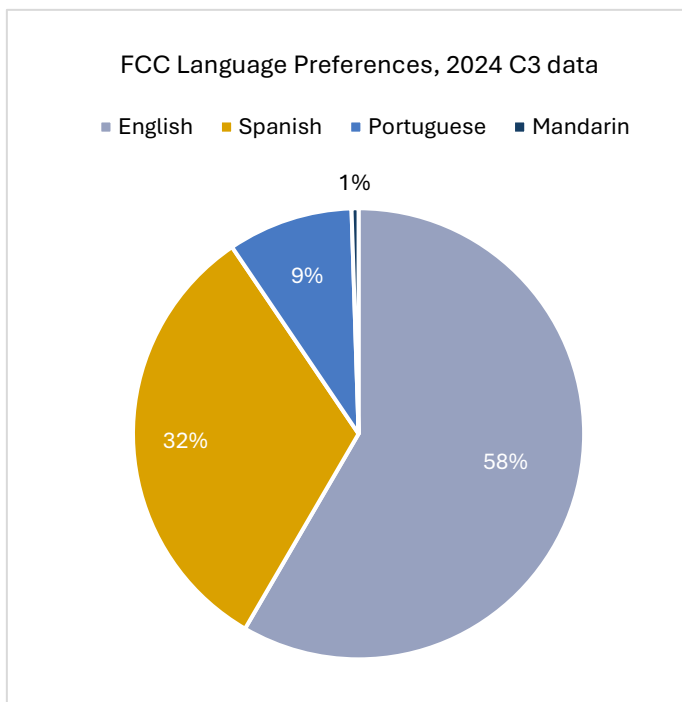
¹³ Commonwealth Cares for Children Application Data (Department of Early Education and Care, May-June 2024).

One of the potential benefits of the C3 program is timely and comprehensive data on the early education workforce. As noted later in the report, this goal has yet to be fully achieved at the educator-level, but C3 data has been able to provide updated information on FCC demographics, including the language preferences of FCC educators, shown in the chart to the right.¹⁴

In addition to the high proportion of Spanish speakers within the FCC population, the growing Portuguese speaking population is also notable. Looking at language helps us to highlight Portuguese speaking/Brazilian FCCs who might otherwise get lost within the other metrics of race and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

Especially in a context of increased pressures on immigration due to policies advanced by the Trump administration, it is especially important to note the significance of Hispanic/Latino and other diverse early education providers, especially in the FCC space, and the positive impacts these educators and their businesses have in their communities and in our state economy.

Data on the demographics of center-based educators is even more limited than for FCC providers. The chart to the right showcases data from the 2020 Harvard Early Learning Study, which collected data on Pre-K center-based educators.¹⁵ The data show that while this sample was slightly less diverse than the FCC educator samples analyzed above, compared to the K-12 sector, educators in this survey were still more likely to be diverse and reflective of the communities they serve. According to data provided by DESE, in 2023 89.9



¹⁴ Commonwealth Cares for Children Application Data (Department of Early Education and Care, May-June 2024).

¹⁵ Emily Hanno et al., “Pandemic Meets Preschool: Impacts of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Early Education and Care in Massachusetts” (Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education, August 2020).

percent of K-12 teachers in the state were White, 4.1 percent were Hispanic/Latino, and 3.5 percent were African American.¹⁶

Call-Out Box: KinderCare Educator Data

As an exercise to supplement publicly available data on the demographics of center-based educators, KinderCare provided MTF with a disaggregated dataset on the demographics of early educator staff across Massachusetts KinderCare programs. The data from KinderCare shows significant staff diversity, slightly more than the diversity levels found in the 2020 Harvard study of Pre-K educators. KinderCare operates more than 50 centers across the state.

KinderCare educators are:

- 75 percent White
- 12 percent Black or African American
- 6 percent Asian
- 6 percent identify as other or multi-racial
- And 18 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino

Though the KinderCare data is not necessarily representative of the center-based system at large, the variance with the 2020 study could indicate an increase in diversity in the center-based sector since 2020.

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Overall, the diversity of the ECE field is a major strength of the sector. Education research shows that educator diversity leads to enhanced cognitive skills¹⁸, cross-cultural skills¹⁹, improved test scores²⁰, and more positive racial attitudes²¹. This is why it is so important that we continue to support the growing diversity of our ECE workforce, so that our youngest learners are able to reap these benefits from the beginning of their educational journeys.

Emily Hanno et al., “Pandemic Meets Preschool: Impacts of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Early Education and Care in Massachusetts” (Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education, August 2020). <https://educationtocareer.data.mass.gov/stories/s/The-state-of-educator-racial-diversity-in-Massachu/fm6k-958d/>

¹⁷ Educator Employee Census, (KinderCare LC Human Resources, 2025)

¹⁸ Lising Antonio, Anthony, Mitchel Chang, Kenji Hakuta, David Kenny, Shana Levin, and Jeffrey Milem. “Effects of Racial Diversity on Complex Thinking in College Students.” *Psychological Science*, May 2004.

¹⁹ Uma Jayakumar, “Can Higher Education Meet the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse and Global Society? Campus Diversity and Cross-Cultural Workforce Competencies,” *Harvard Educational Review* 78, no. 4 (December 2008).

²⁰ Backes, Benjamin, James Cowan, Dan Goldhaber, and Roddy Theobald. “Teachers and School Climate: Effects on Student Outcomes and Academic Disparities.” Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, 2022.

²¹ Christy M. Byrd, “Does Culturally Relevant Teaching Work? An Examination from Student Perspectives,” *SAGE Open* 6, no. 3 (2016).

The Need for Data

As discussed at the beginning of this section, several data challenges emerged through the research on the makeup of the early educator workforce. While EEC has increased its data collection efforts in the past several years, data remains largely at the program or provider level, and there are still gaps in what we know about the makeup of the educator workforce. In order to compile demographic data for early educators, we looked at multiple outside surveys completed each at different points in time. Most of the data shared above has not been updated for several years, and the Boston Opportunity Agenda survey in particular did not have a statewide focus, which limits the information's usefulness. C3 surveys have been able to fill some knowledge gaps when it comes to FCC providers, but C3 does not collect information on center educator diversity or educational attainment and career tenure.

Because C3 surveys are centered around programs and not educators, EEC's upcoming educator portal would be a better way to collect accurate and real-time educator-level data and make that data available to researchers and policymakers. This project is a part of EEC's goal to modernize their technology systems more broadly, and since the portal is intended to reach educators themselves it could serve as a useful data collection tool.

MTF recommends that the following data points be collected and updated consistently from EEC so that policymakers are able to track progress towards key goals:

- ***Racial/ethnic background of the center-based workforce and of FCC assistants***
- ***Educational attainment of educators, FCC providers, and center administrators***
- ***Age and length of time in the field***

Especially as additional state funding is directed to expand and strengthen the ECE workforce, it would be helpful for policymakers, EEC, programs, and researchers to be able to track the current state and evolution of the diversity and needs of early educators going forward. Tracking the number of educators at different levels will also be important as EEC rolls out its new credentialing system.

A Selection of Challenges – Compensation & Benefits, Career Advancement, and Turnover

Analysis of the current makeup of the ECE workforce raises three important questions:

1. What barriers are limiting new and young educators from entering the field?
2. What factors make it difficult for educators to persist and be successful in the field?
3. What does this mean for the stability and sustainability of early education programs?

In reviewing past research and speaking to those in the early education field, it is apparent that there are many challenges facing the ECE workforce – from rising burnout to the need for business training for providers. However, this report focuses on three areas that are repeatedly referenced as major factors limiting the growth and success of the early education workforce and of the sector as a

whole.²² All three are also intricately connected and are areas where we have seen increased attention in recent years.

Foundational Challenge 1: Low Wages and Limited Access to Benefits – Especially in a state with a very high cost of living,²³ low compensation and lack of benefits leave ECE educators in a difficult financial position. UMass Boston’s survey pointed out that across educator groups, having enough money saved for retirement, having enough to pay the bills, and having enough saved in the event of an emergency were top financial worries across the board.²⁴ This makes it difficult to attract and recruit new educators into the field, and similarly challenging to support educator retention.

Foundational Challenge 2: A Historically Unclear Pathway for Career Advancement – Limited options for professional development and career advancement also make it difficult for early educators to view the field as a strong career long term. If advanced pathways are uncertain, it also makes it more difficult for educators to see the steps that they can take to raise their wages and take on new roles within the field.

Systemic Challenge: High Turnover Limiting the Growth of the ECE Sector – The foundational challenges of low wages, limited benefits, and lack of accessible options for career advancement make it difficult for individual programs and the ECE sector as a whole to thrive. Especially in entry-level positions, the field faces high turnover rates and position vacancies across the state. If it is one of our goals to increase the capacity of our child care system, we will need to ensure that there are enough educators to administer programs and teach our children. Otherwise, it will be incredibly challenging to significantly increase the number of children who have access to high-quality early education in the state.

Foundational Challenge 1: Low Wages and Limited Access to Benefits

Early educators have historically faced low wages and very limited access to benefits like health and dental insurance, retirement, and paid vacation time or sick leave. FCC educators especially have challenges accessing and offering benefits to their staff. The chart below shows the average hourly

²² Topf, Sydney. “Low Wages, Long Hours: How Mass. Is Addressing the Childcare Workforce Crisis.” Boston Business Journal, December 2024. <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2024/12/23/low-wages-long-hours-childcareworkforce-crisis.html>.

The Editorial Board. “Mass. Can Do Better than \$18.20 an Hour for Early Educators - the Boston Globe.” The Boston Globe, May 2025. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/05/01/opinion/early-education-credentials-healey/>.

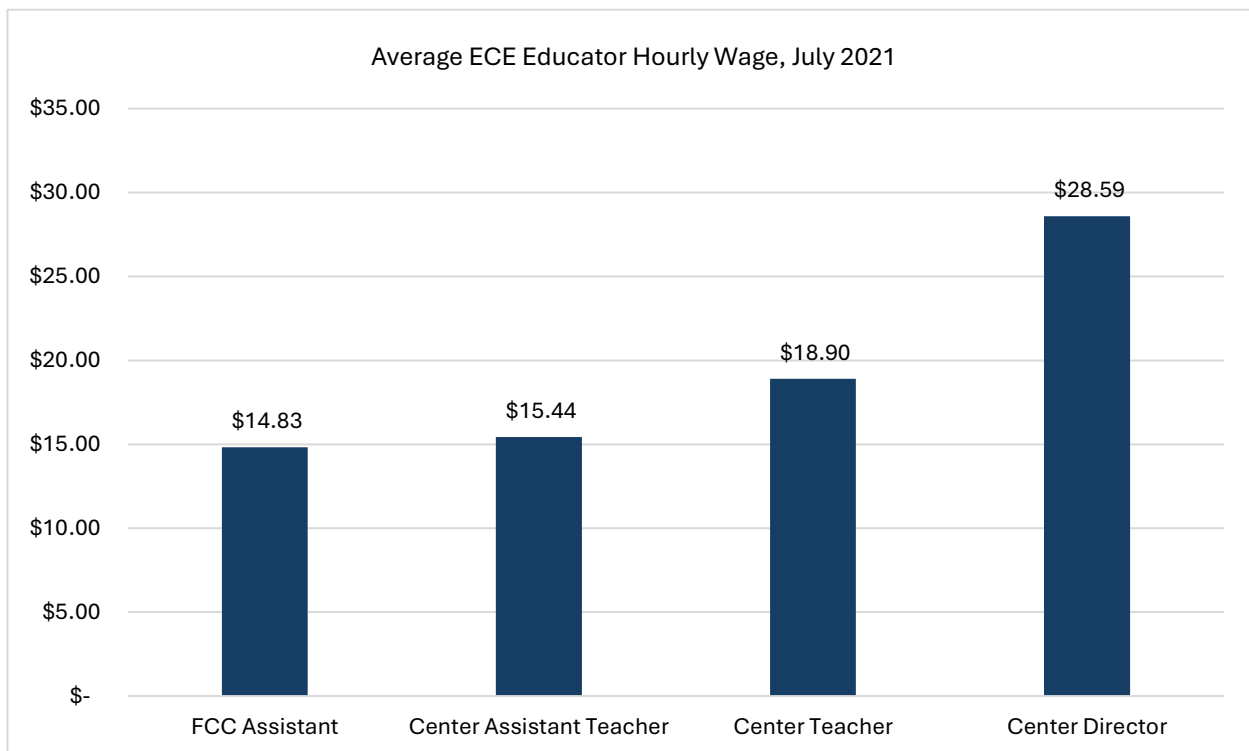
National Association for the Education of Young Children, “Compensation Means More than Wages Increasing Early Childhood Educators’ Access to Benefits” (NAEYC, May 2024).

Jessica Milli, “Why Investing in Child Care Providers Is Essential for Providers, Children, and Families” (The Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2022).

²³ “Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Massachusetts,” February 2025, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/25>.

²⁴ Douglass, Anne, Christa Kelleher, Songtian Zeng, Vishakha Agarwal, Arazeliz Reyes, and Susan Crandall. “The Massachusetts Early Education and Care Workforce Survey 2019,” June 2020.

wage across educator roles in July 2021.²⁵ These data points are helpful for context setting because July 2021 was the beginning of C3 implementation. The average hourly wage for a center-based teacher in July 2021 amounted to approximately \$39,000 per year for a teacher who works full-time year-round. The state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) publishes data on teacher salaries which shows that in the 2020-2021 school year, the average teacher salary in Massachusetts was over \$86,000. Even in the 10 lowest-paying districts, the average teacher salary was around \$49,000.²⁶ These figures showcase the significant gap in compensation between the early education and K-12 sectors at the start of C3 implementation.

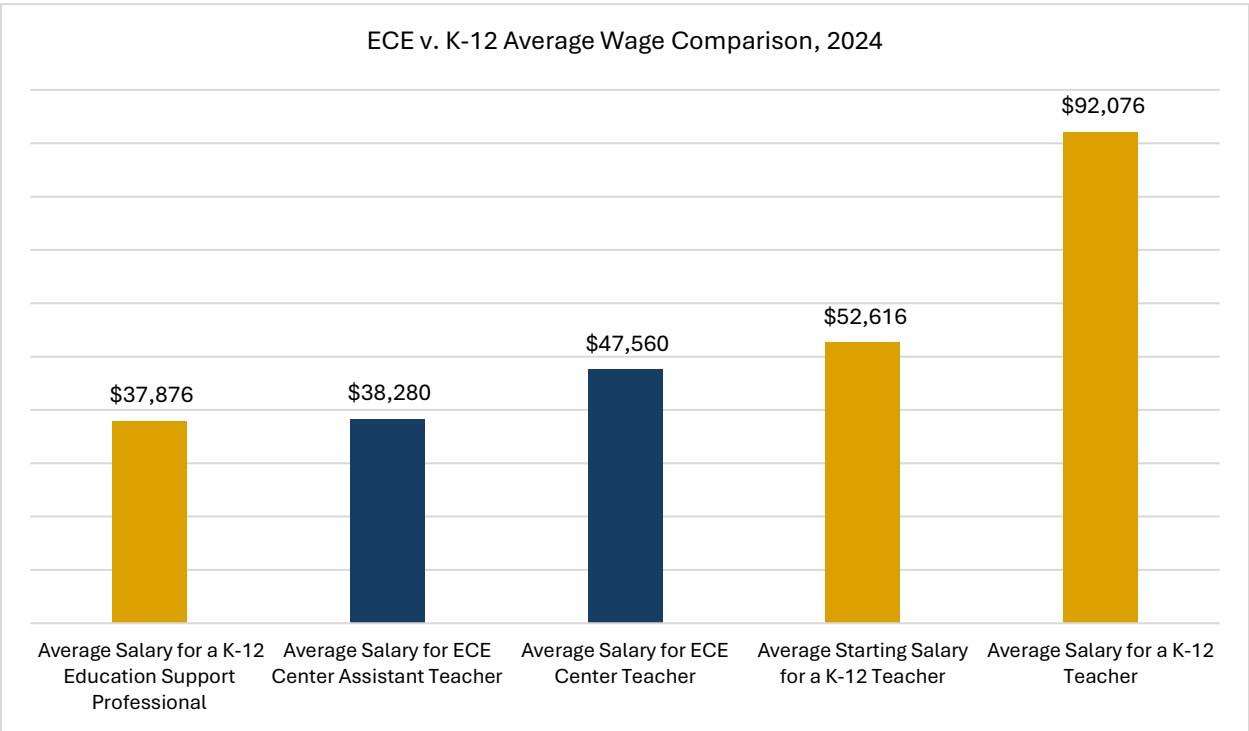


There has been a significant push in recent years to attempt to prioritize increases to ECE salaries, as evidenced by the focus of workforce support funding through C3 and in the inclusion of a goal of pay parity with the K-12 system included in recent budget policy language in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 state budget. Prior to C3, the state had limited means to support wage growth in the ECE sector. Designed as an operational grant program, C3 has helped to support programs and allowed providers to raise wages since the pandemic. The average center-based teacher salary increased from about \$39,000 in 2021 to over \$47,000 in 2024. However, there is still a significant gap in compensation between the early education and K-12 sectors. The chart below compares average wages for center-based assistant teachers and center-based teachers with the average salaries for educators in the K-12 sector in 2024.²⁷

²⁵ Commonwealth Cares for Children Bi-Annual Provider Survey, (Department of Early Education and Care, Fall 2023).

²⁶ "Teacher Salaries Statewide Report 2020-2021," School and District Profiles, June 2023, <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/teachersalaries.aspx>.

²⁷ "Educator Pay in America" (National Education Association, April 2025).
[Department of Early Education and Care Data Dashboard, Power BI.](#)



EEC’s most recent C3 survey also sheds light on the persisting lack of benefits in the ECE sector, especially for FCC providers, FCC assistants, and to a lesser extent, center educators and directors. The table below shows the percentage of each educator group with access to benefits through their employer.

Access to Benefits for Early Educators, 2024 ²⁸				
Benefit	Center Directors	Center Teachers	FCC Owners	FCC Assistants
Paid Time Off	93%	93%	42%	41%
Paid Sick Leave	87%	87%	24%	26%
Health Insurance	66%	63%	15%	4%
Reduced Cost Child Care	39%	42%	4%	6%
Retirement	39%	40%	5%	1%
Dental Insurance	35%	35%	7%	2%

²⁸ Commonwealth Cares for Children Bi-Annual Provider Survey, (Department of Early Education and Care, Fall 2024).

The shift in benefits between center-based and FCC educators is very striking. FCC providers, while they own their own business, are much less likely to have access to benefits than if they worked in a center. Similarly, the lack of benefits for FCC assistants disincentivizes assistants to remain at FCC programs if they are also qualified to be employed at a center. This makes it much more difficult for FCC providers to recruit and retain educators to support the growth of their programs. The lack of paid time off and sick time is especially eye-catching as these benefits also speak to the high demand and inflexibility of working in early education. Another potential layer when we think of access to benefits is the relationship between already low wages for educators and how that might impact the uptake of benefits even if they are offered by employers.

Though the state doesn't have direct control over the compensation of early educators, the state should continue to use C3 as a tool to incentivize efforts to expand salaries and benefits for the ECE workforce, especially for FCC educators if we are to support their continued growth and success.

Foundational Challenge 2: A Historically Unclear Pathway for Career Advancement

Traditionally, the ECE sector has faced challenges in recruiting new educators, and once educators entered the field, opportunities for career growth are often unclear or limited. Unlike the K-12 sector, which operates within a very formal structure, the nature of the early education system is that programs come in many different forms, and the profession was not formalized in the same way as traditional K-12 education. The professionalization of the workforce has thus been a major goal of EEC and the field more broadly.

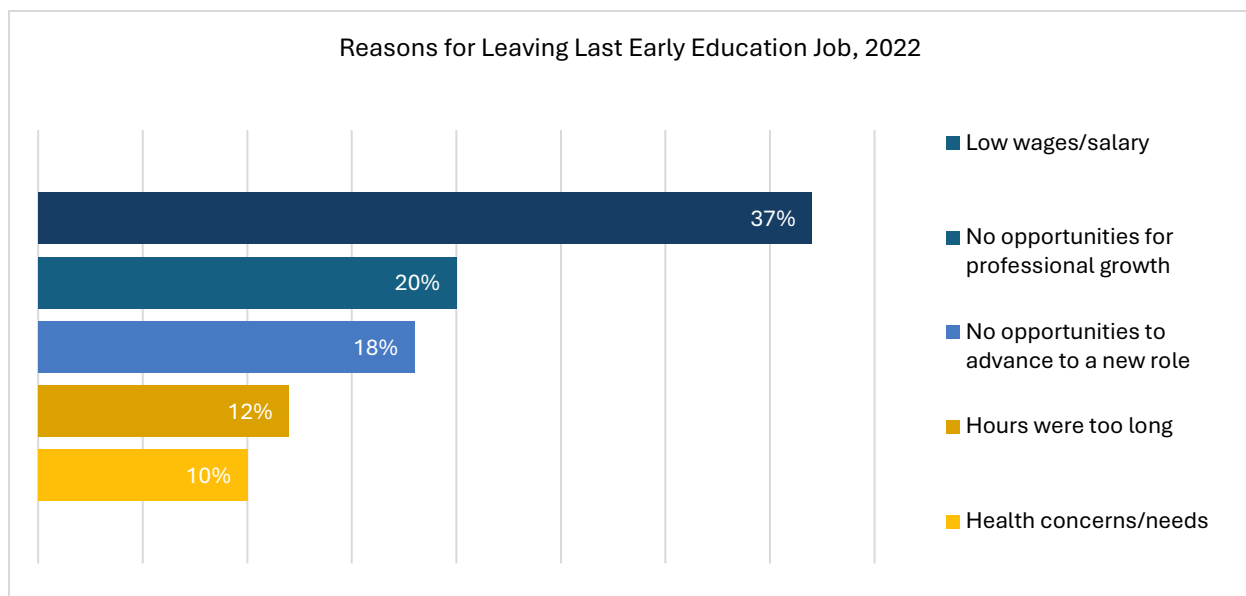
Seeing a profession as a viable long-term career is a strong recruitment tool across industries. Strong career pathways provide a roadmap for a workforce that can help enhance pipelines and retention.²⁹ Research conducted in the healthcare³⁰ and K-12 education³¹ sectors shows that the development and promotion of career pathways reduce turnover rates and contributes to a more diverse, stable, and high-quality workforce. The lack of a clear career ladder is a difficult obstacle for the ECE sector. The Boston Opportunity Agenda survey found that of the top five most common reasons educators gave to explain why they left their last early education job – the top three were related to wages or lack of professional growth options.³²

²⁹ Institute of Medicine and National Research, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, [Nap.nationalacademies.org](https://nap.nationalacademies.org), 2015, <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>.

³⁰ Abdulqadir J. Nashwan, "The Vital Role of Career Pathways in Nursing: A Key to Growth and Retention," *Cureus* 15, no. 5 (May 2023).

³¹ Megan Boren, Sheniqua Pierce, and Jessica Nadzam, "Teacher Career Pathways and Advancement Options" (Southern Regional Education Board, September 2024).

³² Pratima Patil, Paula Gaviria Villareal, and Fernanda Campbell, "Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond" (The Boston Foundation, February 2024).



When the number of respondents who cited no opportunities for professional growth is combined with those who cited no opportunities to advance to a new role, these reasons for leaving rival low compensation as a major factor causing educator turnover.

The work that EEC has been undertaking, in partnership with stakeholders and the field, to create a new credentialing system that will make it easier for educators to enter and progress in the field is detailed later on.

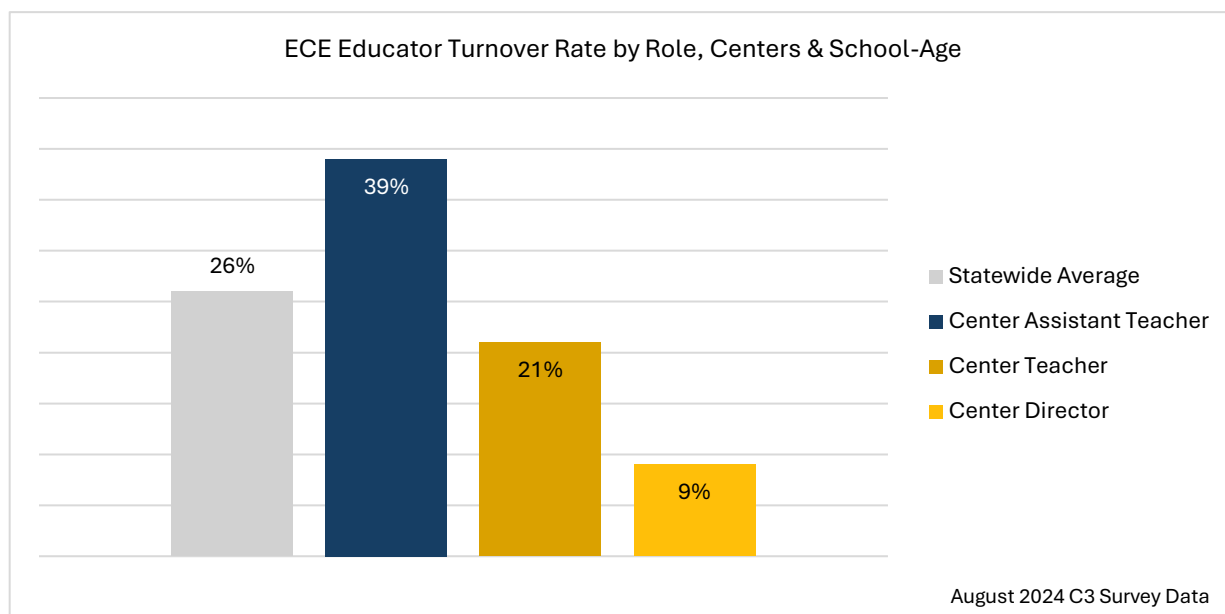
Systemic Challenge: High Educator Turnover

The final challenge examined in this report is the systemic challenge of high turnover in the field. The challenges we’ve discussed around wages, benefits, and career pathways all contribute to the systemwide challenge of vacancies and turnover so this section will bring all these pieces together.

High turnover is a problem for the sector because it creates instability for programs and children and families. We want educators to remain in and grow their careers in the field so that they can provide expertise in the classroom, mentoring for new educators, and become leaders in their programs. High turnover and high staff vacancy rates limit program growth as well. Unfilled staff openings have been the most-cited factor limiting center-based programs’ ability to serve their full licensed capacity, with 21 percent of center-based providers who were unable to serve their full capacity citing vacancies as the main barrier in the fall 2023 C3 survey.

Data collected through bi-annual C3 surveys shows that though the overall educator turnover rate has decreased since 2022 from 32 percent to 26 percent, turnover still meets the U.S. Health and Human Services’ definition of “high turnover” – above 20 percent. Assistant and entry-level roles experience the highest turnover rates, as shown in the chart below. The data also shows that turnover and vacancies decrease as educators move up the career ladder, indicating that career advancement opportunities are key to retention in the sector. The chart below shows that assistant teacher turnover is almost double what is considered “high turnover,” and turnover is very low for

center directors. An educator counts as “turning over” if they leave a program, either for another program or leave the field entirely. Educators moving between roles at the same program, for example, an assistant teacher who is promoted to lead teacher, do not count as turning over. Unfortunately, turnover data is not reported for FCC assistants, but we can imagine that other higher wage options and limits to professional development and career advancement would contribute to high turnover there as well. A recent report by Harvard economist Jeffrey Liebman identified the two most popular professions for early educators to have after exiting the sector: teacher assistants, and pre-school and kindergarten teachers.³³



Limiting educator turnover and ensuring that vacancies are reduced is essential for programs to be able to serve and grow their full capacity. Liebman’s report argues that in order to increase capacity and make affordable, high-quality child care available to all young children in Massachusetts, one of the first steps is to raise the quality of care through raising wages for early educators and helping them build sustainable careers in the sector. As discussed, the wage gap between the K-12 sector and early education remains significant, creating a significant incentive for early educators to transition to the K-12 system. Among other factors, it is imperative that we work to continue to increase ECE wages so that the sector is able to retain talented educators and grow system quality and capacity.

Recent State Investment in the ECE Workforce

This section reviews several important initiatives that have contributed to the progress we have seen in supporting the workforce in recent years. The commitment by the state to fund C3 and Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) provider reimbursement rates coupled with the creation of strong career pathways for educators and creative programs like apprenticeships, the Career Pathways program, and the Early Education and Care Staff Pilot Program have helped to elevate the profile of the early

³³ Jeffrey Liebman, “An Economic Analysis of the Child Care and Early Education Market in Massachusetts” (Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, October 2024).

education profession, raise wages, improve retention, and grow system capacity. As we work to continue to advance towards our goal of a well-compensated, high-quality, and growing ECE workforce, these pieces provide helpful scaffolding on which we can continue to build on.

Increased Investment Through C3 and CCFA

Since the pandemic, the state has significantly increased its investments in the ECE sector. Between Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and FY 2025, total investment in EEC has grown by \$858 million, or 125 percent. The introduction of C3 and funding to increase CCFA provider reimbursement rates have been two major factors driving the overall growth in ECE funding. Both C3 and rates have been instrumental to the ability of providers to raise wages for their staff in recent years.

MTF's [past research](#) outlined the work EEC has undertaken to study the cost of care and reform the CCFA reimbursement system to better reflect the actual cost of providing care and running an early educator program in Massachusetts. The cost of care work has been built into new rate increases in FY 2024 and FY 2025 and the current reimbursement rate structure more equitably distributes funds across the state and raised rates across regions and age groups across the board.³⁴ EEC's cost of care study also modeled the effects of increased salaries and increased staffing levels as a model to build on in the future.

In addition to CCFA rates, C3 has had a clear impact on program stability and workforce growth. C3's goal as an operational grant program is distinct from CCFA, but it has been used as a tool to support and complement CCFA. Data from the August 2024 C3 survey showed that programs report spending a high proportion of C3 funding on workforce-related expenses; 68 percent of C3 funding across all programs was spent on workforce initiatives, including maintaining and expanding wages and benefits.³⁵ By directly assisting the early educator workforce and by incentivizing CCFA participation to increase C3 grant awards, the state has been able to use multiple levers to support the workforce and grow the supply of child care in Massachusetts.

Expanding Educator Pathways Through Credentialing, Higher Education, & Apprenticeships

EEC has begun a re-evaluation of the historically disjointed educator credentialing system with the goal of transitioning to a new pathway-based system that is more accessible to new educators, encourages ongoing career development, and appropriately accounts for experience and competency across career pathways. Though there is still work ongoing to finalize the system, the new system is intended to create an advancement structure with multiple options that can be useful to aspiring and existing educators working in a variety of settings with a diversity of career ambitions.

The current pathway to educator credentialing is largely centered around participation in higher education courses. As demonstrated through multiple reports, higher education is often difficult for early educators, especially FCC providers, to access.³⁶ The new two-pathway system proposed by EEC is designed to be more accessible for educators by providing options outside of traditional higher education and allowing for educator choice and movement between pathways. The two pathways

³⁴ Victoria Bergeron, "Building Blocks: Status of Child Care Reform in Massachusetts and What Comes Next," ed. Douglas Howgate (Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, November 2024).

³⁵ Commonwealth Cares for Children Bi-Annual Provider Survey, (Department of Early Education and Care, Fall 2024).

³⁶ Pratima Patil, Paula Gaviria Villareal, and Fernanda Campbell, "Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond" (The Boston Foundation, February 2024).

are intended to be commensurate in quality and will also consider the years of experience current educators have.

- The Higher Education Pathway incorporates the completion of higher education coursework, degrees, and certificates with an option to integrate an apprenticeship as well.
- The Professional Development Pathway also allows for apprenticeship tie-ins and incorporates training and job-embedded practice through approved EEC-endorsed training packages. Apprenticeship programs allow entry-level educators and those already in the field to access career training through job placement and mentorship, as well as coursework.

Once completing the required coursework, background check, and working in a program for at least 3 months, new educators will be supported in selecting their preferred pathway and beginning the educator certification process. Educators who are already working will be able to choose the path that works best for them to demonstrate their current skills and to support their movement through higher credentialing levels.

EEC is working closely with the community colleges to develop a foundational certificate to go along with the Higher Education Pathway, which will be credit-bearing and consistent across the schools. EEC is also developing training packages that will be used in the Professional Development Pathway to meet Level 1 and Level 2 educator certification levels. The two pathways and credential levels outlined below will be relevant for all educators in the field, whether they work at a center-based, FCC, or out-of-school-time (OST) program.

The proposed credentialing system, shown visually in the figure below, expands the number of credentials offered by EEC and offers additional leader credentials that provide certification for further roles outside of the classroom that educators often move through as they advance in their careers. The new credentialing system will allow growth in and out of the classroom, give educators opportunities to demonstrate special skills and expertise within levels, and enable FCC and OST educators to get training and recognition for administrative skills early on in their careers. The new system also includes additional endorsements that are optional and available within credential levels based on the completion of relevant competency-based training.

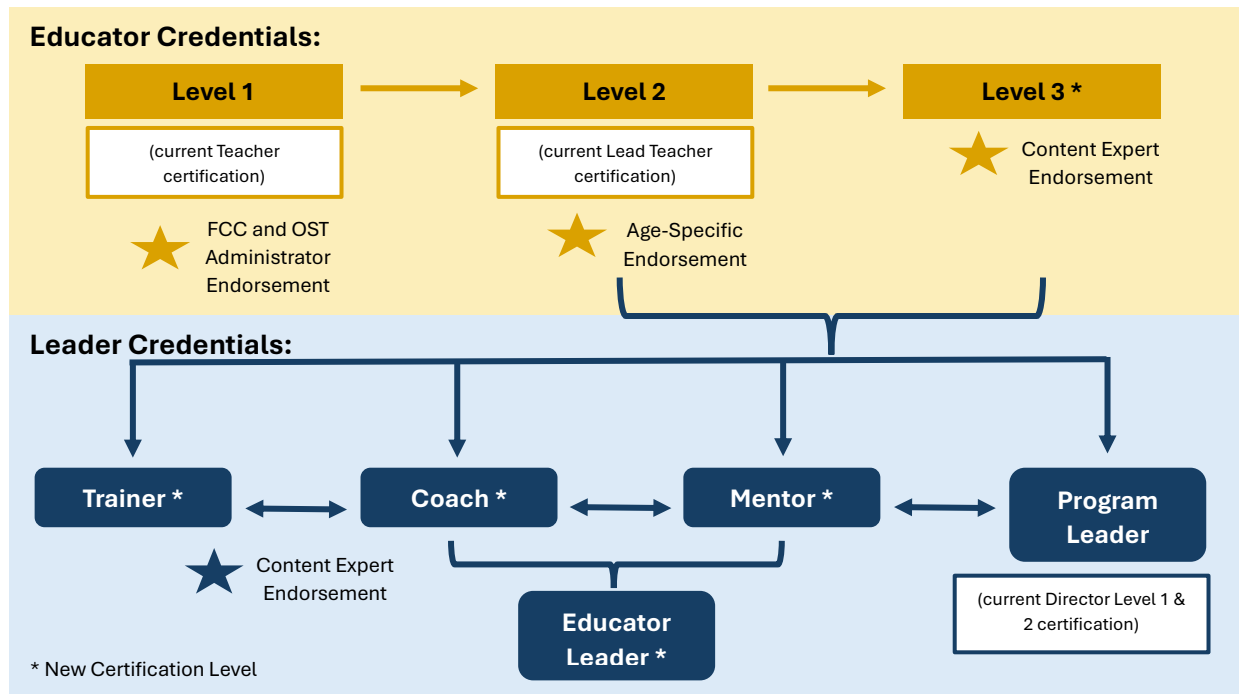
The features planned for the new educator pathways incorporate many of the elements identified as best practices for teaching career pathways³⁷:

- A strong focus on content knowledge and pedagogy,
- Opportunities for on-the-job education and training,
- Advancement and leadership options in addition to traditional administrative positions,
- Stackable credentials and certifications, and
- Clearly documented policies that bring structure to advanced roles.

It is also important to connect increased compensation to higher career levels, something that EEC is working to incorporate into the new career pathway system.

³⁷ Megan Boren, Sheniqua Pierce, and Jessica Nadzam, “Teacher Career Pathways and Advancement Options” (Southern Regional Education Board, September 2024).

*Draft New EEC Educator Credential Pathways (Still Under Development)*³⁸



Call-Out Box: Career Pathways Grant Program

Through the Career Pathways program, EEC works with and provides funding to the 15 public community colleges in Massachusetts to support the ECE workforce to enter, remain in, and progress along a professional pathway.

In addition to providing funding for courses towards EEC certification and degrees in early childhood, Career Pathways also provides students with other academic and wrap-around services at no cost to the educator including:

- Support with class selection and enrollment.
- Support for applying for the FAFSA or other financial aid scholarships.
- Access to tutoring, mentoring, technology training, food assistance, and other student support services.

The program has provided critical and tailored support to early educators who wish to advance their higher education. Even with the recent creation of a free community college program in Massachusetts, the Career Pathways program should continue to be invested in, as it provides unique support for educators who are already in the workforce in a way that broader-reaching programs are not able to do. Beyond a financial aid program, because Career Pathways is tailored for early educators, it has seen immense support from the field who are able to benefit from specialized support.

³⁸ “Early Education and Care Workforce Council Meeting - June 5, 2025,” Mass.gov (Department of Early Education and Care, June 2025), <https://www.mass.gov/event/early-education-and-care-workforce-council-meeting-june-5-2025-100pm-230pm-06-05-2025>.

Call-Out Box: Early Educator Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships in the ECE sector are relatively new but have become a key piece of the early educator workforce development space. There are currently six early education apprenticeship programs that are registered with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD). These apprenticeship programs are run by community groups across the state and all serve to provide training, mentorship, and higher education or credentialing opportunities for participants looking to enter or advance in the ECE field.

As part of this report, representatives from three of the registered apprenticeships, - Neighborhood Villages, the Community Group, and the MassHire Greater Brockton Workforce Board - were interviewed and several common themes were highlighted:

- The significance of investing in mentorship, mentorship training, and building a mentorship pipeline.
- The need for employer buy-in early on to support educators participating in the apprenticeship.
- The importance of state funding to support the cost of the program, including for college coursework, for stipends, or for mentorship compensation.
- The need for outside-of-the-classroom training like technology skills and business operations.

In the fall of 2024, EEC announced a first round of pilot partnerships to provide grant support to organizations to serve as regional intermediaries for the ECE registered apprenticeship programs. FCC apprenticeship development was also included as part of this initiative, an important step towards advancing the FCC pipeline and creating structured support for FCC educators. The creation of these regional apprenticeship partnerships appears to be in line with one of the recommendations from the Inter-Agency Task Force on EEC: to leverage and scale registered apprenticeship as a tool to build the educator pipeline and advance the profession.

EEC is also currently conducting a study of early childhood education apprenticeship programs in Massachusetts in partnership with the Division of Apprenticeship Standards to evaluate the experiences of educators, employers, and mentors and learn how apprenticeships can better help employers meet their hiring and retention workforce needs. The study intends to inform further development, implementation, and scaling of high-quality early education apprenticeships, and hopes to begin to share findings in the end of 2025.

Prioritization of Educator Personal Child Care

In 2023, EEC implemented an Early Education and Care Staff Childcare Program which provides priority access to CCFA for income-eligible staff working in licensed and funded early education programs. The goals of the program are to provide greater access to affordable care, support the economic mobility of families, and provide a recruitment and retention tool for the workforce.

Currently, educators who make up to 85 percent of the state median income (SMI) are eligible for CCFA under the pilot. As of June 2025, there were over 1,600 educator families with children enrolled

in care through the EEC Staff Childcare Program, amounting to over 2,400 children. Notably, there are an additional 1,300 educator families, or around 1,800 children on the waitlist who also qualify for the program; however, because CCFA vouchers have been frozen for over a year, these children of early educators remain on the waitlist for assistance.

In November 2024, MEF Associates and Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research conducted an evaluation of the EEC Staff Childcare Program.³⁹ Through the evaluation, researchers surveyed 406 early educators at FCC and center-based programs, 84 percent reported receiving CCFA for one or more of their children.

Of the respondents:

- 68 percent reported a household income of less than \$50,000 in 2023,
- 54 percent were single parents, and
- 60 percent were the only adult income earners in their household.

The survey found that:

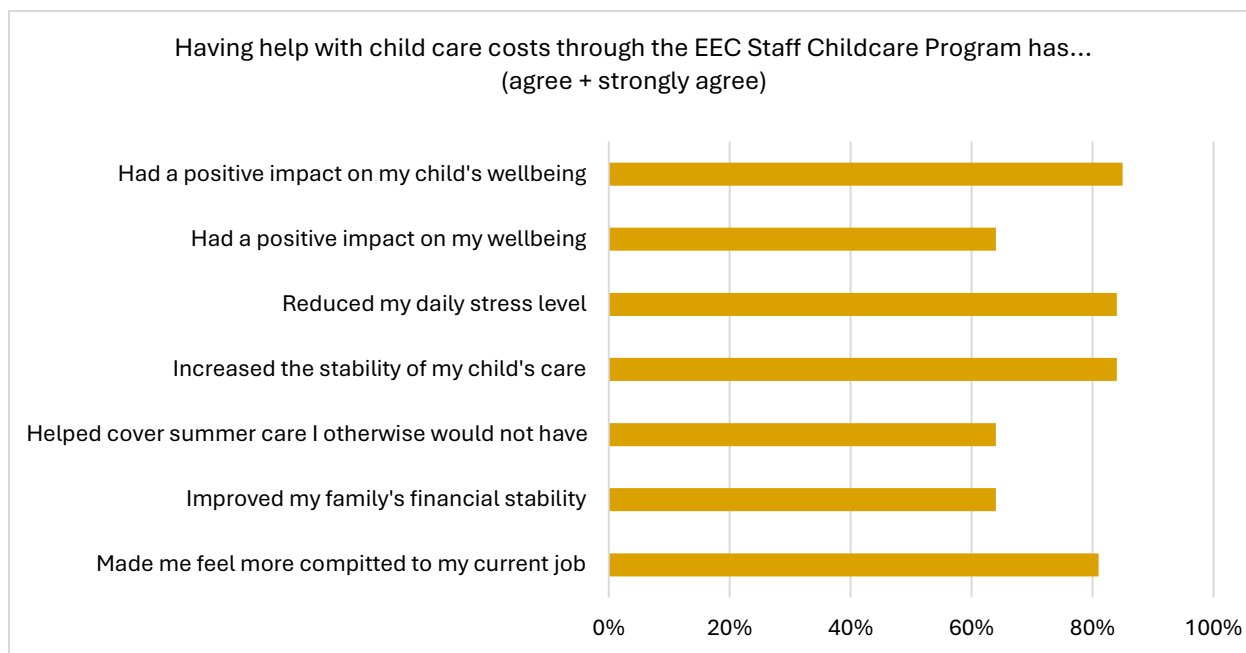
- 36 percent of participants changed their child's care arrangement after receiving CCFA, many saying that the program allowed them to enroll their child at their own place of employment.
- 41 percent of those who changed their care arrangements after entering the program were using parental care only beforehand, and the access to CCFA also allowed educators to expand access to new arrangements, including after school and summer camps for their children, which were previously financially out of reach.
- 76 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them access care that was a better fit for their family and/or their child.
- 92 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the program should continue and be expanded to allow educators with higher income levels to be eligible.

Participants were also asked whether they believed that offering CCFA to educators through the EEC Staff Childcare Program would help with recruitment and retention.

- 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the program would help recruit new staff into the field.
- 75 percent also agreed or strongly agreed that it would help the existing workforce stay in the field longer.

The following chart illustrates additional benefits of the EEC Staff Childcare Program for early educators.

³⁹ Bumgarner, Erin, Dani Hansen, Rachel Richman, Rebecca Fauth, Nikita Singhal, and Clare Kennedy. "Massachusetts' Early Education and Care Staff Pilot Program: Evaluation Findings," November 2024.



It is clear from these responses that participants strongly believe that the program has been instrumental in expanding access to care that works best for educators and their children, increasing financial stability for families, and creating positive incentives for educators to work and remain in the field.

Despite these successes, the availability of funding will be a constraint on the program's expansion going forward. The number of eligible educators with children on the CCFA waitlist, as well as the responses surrounding the desire for eligibility expansion, indicates continued demand for the program that is beyond current fiscal capacity. In addition to advocating for continuation of the program, EEC should also continue to explore other ways to make it easier and affordable for educators to access care for their own children, including by creating new incentives for programs to offer additional child care discounts for their staff. The benefit of covered child care is incredibly significant for any industry, but especially in the ECE sector, where over 98 percent of educators are women⁴⁰ and around 4,800 staff working in ECE have children under age six.⁴¹

Bright Spots & Positive Outcomes

Increasing Wages and Access to Benefits

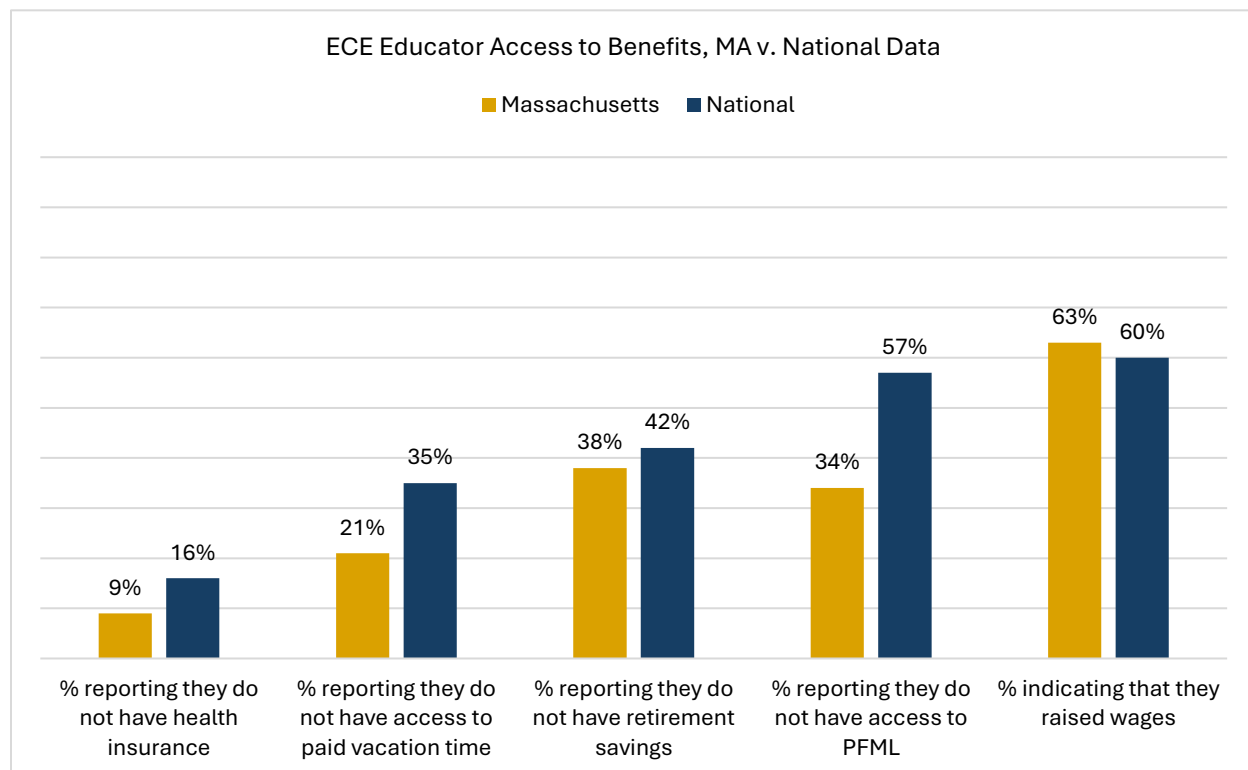
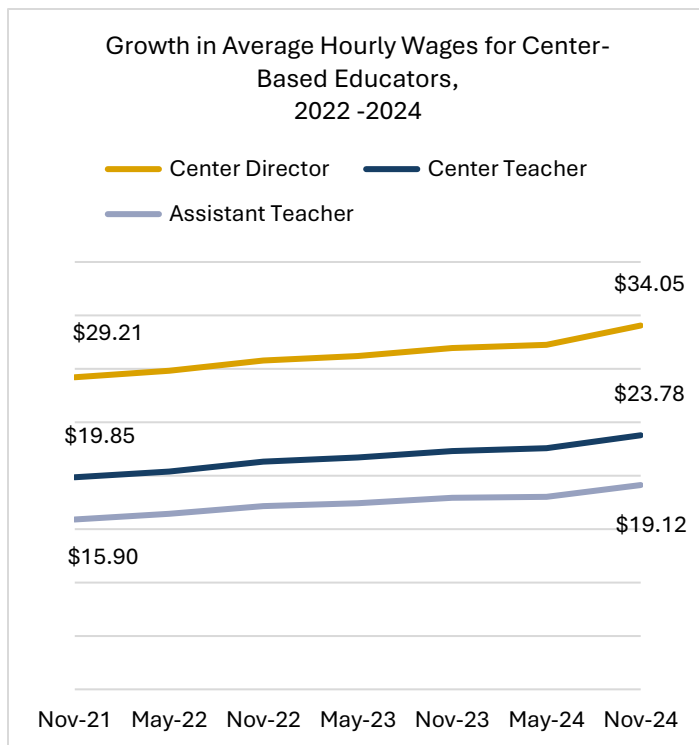
As illustrated above, historically, wages for early educators have been exceptionally low in Massachusetts and do not meet the levels of compensation received by K-12 educators in our state. However, we know that C3 and increases in CCFA provider reimbursement rates have been

⁴⁰ Emily Hanno et al., "Pandemic Meets Preschool: Impacts of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Early Education and Care in Massachusetts" (Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education, August 2020).

⁴¹ Anna Powell and Annie Dade, "What the Bluegrass State Can Teach Us about Increasing Access to Child Care" (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, October 2023).

instrumental to the ability of providers to raise wages for their staff in recent years, as shown in the chart to the right for center-based educators. As of November 2024, the year-over-year increase in hourly wages for each educator role shown in the chart was seven percent.⁴²

Data collected from Massachusetts through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) shows that Massachusetts educators are also more likely than other early educators across the country to report that they have benefits like health insurance, vacation time, and paid family or medical leave; and center directors and FCC owners were more likely to report that they were able to raise wages for staff.⁴³



⁴² [Department of Early Education and Care Data Dashboard, Power BI.](#)

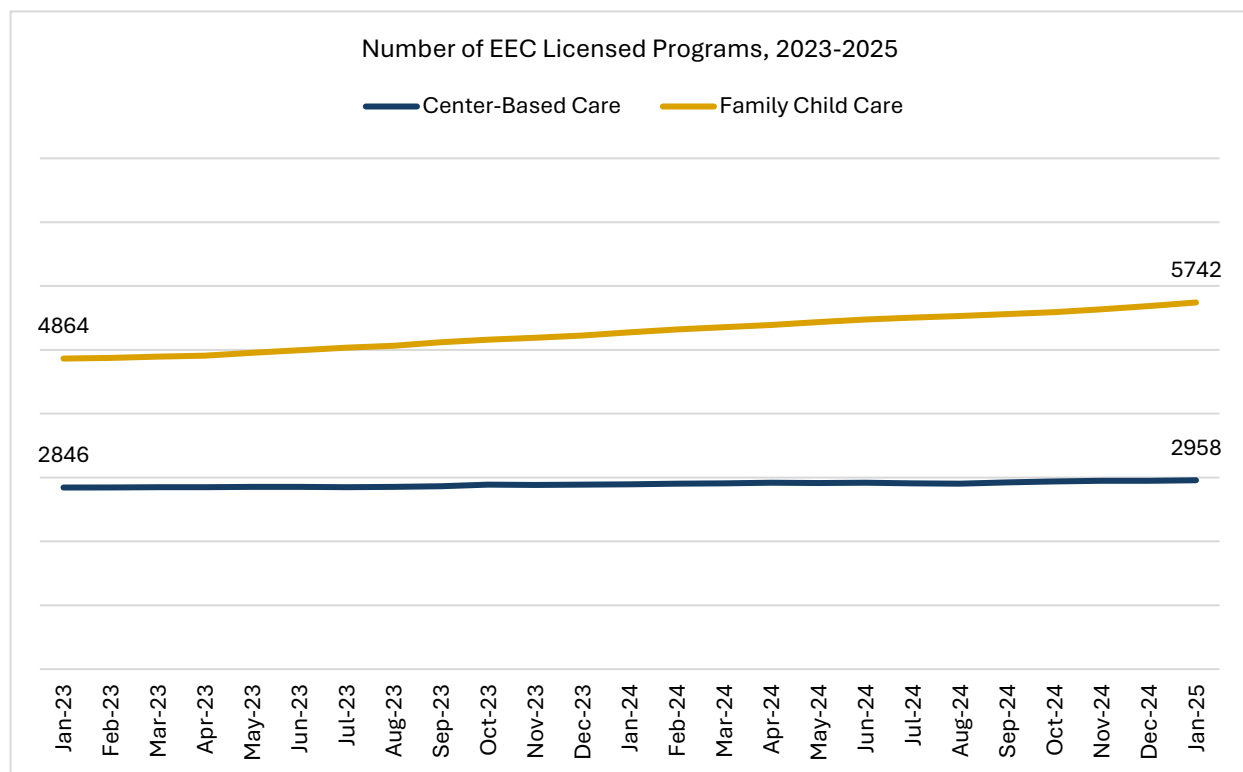
⁴³ “Child Care & Early Learning Help Our State Thrive - Massachusetts Fact Sheet” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2025), https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/state_factsheet_2025_machusetts_0.pdf.

NAEYC’s national survey illustrated the importance of professional benefits on the ability of programs to recruit and retain qualified staff; those who have professional benefits were more likely to report planning to stay in the field compared to educators who did not have access to benefits.⁴⁴

Despite these bright spots, ECE wages still fall below [the state’s living wage](#) in most regions. The continued need to improve the compensation of the ECE workforce is highlighted in the state’s Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force Year 1 Report, which was released in early 2025. The report calls for Massachusetts to identify additional opportunities to increase compensation for educators, explore opportunities to expand enrollment in affordable health care among the workforce, and research potential options for access to retirement benefits for ECE staff who do not currently have these benefits.⁴⁵ As the work of the Task Force continues, it will be important to follow progress towards these goals.

FCC Growth

Finally, while center-based programs employ the largest number of educators and serve a majority of children in formal care in the state, since the pandemic, FCC providers have seen the largest growth in the sector – representing a significant opportunity for expanding capacity across the Commonwealth that should not be ignored.



⁴⁴ “An Unsustainable Status Quo We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, February 2025).

⁴⁵ “Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force Year 1 Report: Community & Executive Branch Engagement on Early Education and Child Care in Massachusetts” (Mass.gov, May 2025).

Between January 2023 and January 2025, the number of licensed FCC programs grew by 878 or about 18 percent while the number of center-based programs grew by 112 or about 4 percent.⁴⁶

This growth in FCC providers translates to over 6,200 more kids being enrolled in FCC care in 2025 than in 2023. However, this figure indicates that not all FCC providers are able to serve the maximum of 10 children, if that were the case, we would have seen a growth in capacity of over 8,700 children.

In the FY 2025 state budget, the statutory cap on the number of children FCCs are allowed to enroll was removed and EEC is currently undergoing a process to consider revisions to regulations to expand the ability of FCC providers to serve greater than 10 children. A potential shift to allow FCC providers to enroll up to 12 children, for instance, would certainly have a positive effect on the capacity of the child care system.

In spite of positive improvements, significant barriers continue to limit the full potential of FCC providers to serve additional children beyond their current capacity. These challenges, some of which have been discussed throughout this report, include:

- The ability to recruit, compensate, retain, and provide benefits for an FCC assistant.
- Limited capital and financial barriers to potentially expand or renovate facilities to be able to safely serve more children.
- A greater need for business and entrepreneurship training and support.
- Limited state funding for CCFA vouchers and the reimbursement rate structure for FCCs.

We have already outlined the challenges of pipeline, compensation, and benefits that affect all providers in the state. However, these challenges are particularly acute for FCC providers who very often struggle to adequately compensate and provide benefits for themselves, let alone for their assistants, who are often the lowest paid educators in the sector.

A survey of FCC providers conducted by researchers at Northeastern University and Wellesley College between 2020 and 2023 asked new FCC entrants about challenges they experienced as they were starting their business. Respondents highlighted challenges like finding a suitable space for their program, especially if they were renting their home, updating their physical space to meet regulations, high additional start-up costs like furniture and supplies, and the struggle to obtain liability insurance.⁴⁷ The survey also found that some FCC providers who left the field reported not feeling fully prepared for the business side of operating a program, which contributed to the difficulties they faced.⁴⁸

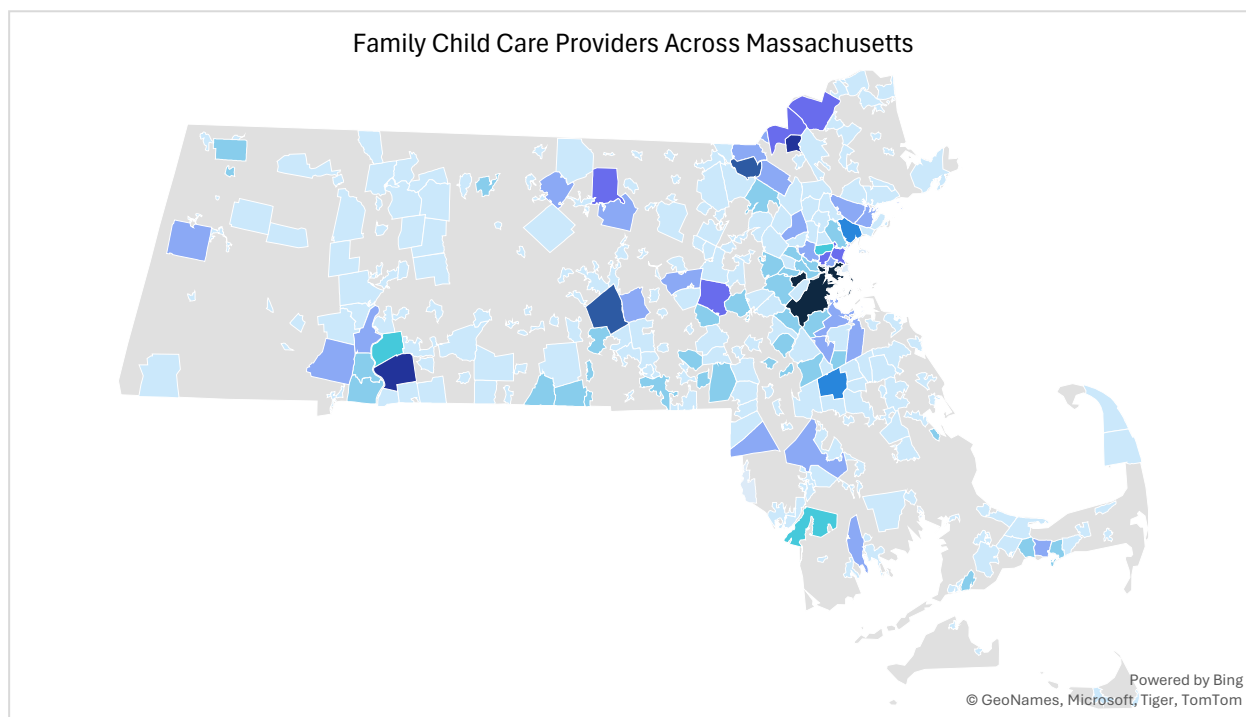
FCC programs are an essential part of the Commonwealth's mixed-delivery early education and child care system. As shown throughout this report, FCC providers bring greater diversity to the ECE sector, with 54 percent of FCC providers now identifying as Hispanic/Latino. MTF's 2025 report, *¡Vamos Massachusetts!*, found that between 2022 and 2024, the number of Hispanic/Latino-owned businesses in Massachusetts grew by more than 11,000 or about 23 percent, outpacing statewide

⁴⁶ [Department of Early Education and Care Data Dashboard, Power BI.](#)

⁴⁷ Lucas, Kimberly, Wendy Wagner Robeson, Haein Kim, Alyssa Lima, Khaing May Oo, Sandra Madu, Noely Irineu Silva, Innocentia Ashai, and Constance Pagan Salazar. "Understanding 'Post-Pandemic' Family Child Care Providers." Wellesley Centers for Women, 2024.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

growth rates.⁴⁹ The FCC field offers a path for Hispanic/Latino educators, and others with historically disadvantaged backgrounds, to own their own business and grow their own wealth while they further contribute to the growth of the state’s economy. FCCs also represent a unique opportunity to expand child care capacity across the state. An analysis of state C3 data found that out of the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts, FCC programs operate in approximately 306 communities across the state.⁵⁰



Conclusion – Understanding Challenges and Recommendations for Continuing Work

Early education professionals in Massachusetts are the workforce behind the workforce. They are essential to our state’s education system, the Commonwealth’s labor force, and the fabric of our communities. However, the ECE workforce has historically faced many challenges that limit the ability of educators to provide for themselves and their families, to advance meaningfully in their careers, and limit systemwide expansion of child care.

This report outlined the current state of the ECE workforce and found that:

- Low wages and limited access to benefits disincentivize remaining in early education, and the ECE system has historically lacked a clear career pathway structure, further hampering the professionalization of the workforce.
- Intentional state programming has been successful when it comes to providing operational funding to programs, reducing turnover, and expanding child care access for educators.

⁴⁹ Pablo Suarez and Andy Bagley, “¡Vamos Massachusetts! Unlocking Hispanic/Latino Economic Advancement,” ed. Douglas Howgate (Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, April 2025).

⁵⁰ Commonwealth Cares for Children Application Data (Department of Early Education and Care, May-June 2024).

- There is great potential for capacity growth in the FCC sector but in order to realize that potential, it is important that workforce support initiatives are inclusive of all provider types and consider the unique needs and opportunities in the FCC sector.
- More consistent and reliable data collection is needed in order to understand the needs of the workforce in more detail and to create programs that are responsive to the diversity of the workforce.

Building off these findings, MTF proposes the following recommendations going forward:

1. Improve Educator Data Collection & Availability

Educator-level data collection should be incorporated into the new educator portal being developed by EEC. Current plans for the educator portal include collecting information on educator registration and credentialing. Adding in a component where educators could enter their age, race and ethnicity information, preferred language, and years of experience would be incredibly helpful for understanding the workforce at a deeper level. A feature of universal ID numbers that could help link educators across systems and reporting mechanisms would also be an incredibly helpful tool for ongoing data management. This information would assist policymakers and help EEC build more effective and responsive programs for early educators. Incorporating this demographic information into an existing universal system would also hopefully not add additional administrative burdens onto educators.

2. Maintain Momentum and Build on Existing Investments

Significant progress in improving the state's early education system has been made in recent years. It is important that this momentum remains and can be built upon. The state should continue to support areas that have seen proven success and represent growth opportunities – C3, the EEC Staff Pilot, and the increase in FCC providers are three key areas to sustain.

- C3 in particular has been essential to the ECE sector since the pandemic. The grant program has offered a unique form of stabilizing operational support that was not available to providers prior to C3, allowing programs to invest in their workforce – creating a boost in wages and retention. The state should continue to fund C3 and create opportunities to incentivize greater investment in the educator workforce. If additional sustainable funding is available, policymakers should consider an expansion of C3 funding to account for increasing costs, rather than using new funding to create new state programs that have not yet been tested.
- The EEC Staff Pilot to expand personal child care access for early education staff has also seen success in recent years, improving educators' financial stability and general wellbeing. If funding for the program remains limited, the state should consider additional incentives for programs to offer child care benefits for their staff, whether through C3, tax incentives, or other creative ideas.
- Finally, the continued growth of the FCC sector and Hispanic/Latino providers offers the state a clear opportunity for expanding system capacity. We should continue to explore strategies to increase compensation for assistants and work to provide

business support assistance and training to FCC providers – from filing taxes to marketing and contract writing. The provider reimbursement structure for FCCs should also be examined further to ensure that it accurately accounts for the unique structure and costs of FCC programs. Currently, FCC reimbursement rates take into account the age of children served, with higher rates for children under the age of two. However, this system may not work well in practice because FCC programs tend to serve children of multiple age groups together, and costs are not as distinguishable between ages as they are when we look at center-based programs, which separate classrooms by age. Ultimately, even if the cap on the number of children FCCs can serve is increased, there are other barriers that will limit further growth in capacity if not addressed.

3. Prioritize Collaboration and Sustainability

In the face of economic uncertainty and changes in policy and funding at the federal level, it is crucial that Massachusetts policymakers plan sustainably for the future and prioritize working collaboratively within state government and with outside stakeholders to achieve collective goals in the early education space.

- As state policymakers look to expand support for the ECE workforce, it is critical that they work collaboratively with the field, government agencies, advocates, and other stakeholders to create innovative solutions to the challenges facing the workforce. The state's Inter-Agency EEC Task Force is a prime example of this objective. The Task Force has brought together every secretariat to collaborate on solutions to strengthen the Commonwealth's early education system, hopefully creating an environment for innovation and tangible progress.
- The ECE sector has seen a surge in state support in recent years; however, economic uncertainty and decisions at the federal level may limit similar levels of expansion in the coming years. Therefore, it is critical that new funding be intentionally planned and sustainably utilized. For example, EEC was awarded \$45.5 million in the 2025 Fair Share Innovation & Capital Fund supplemental budget in 2025. While some of this funding was earmarked towards specific investments, about \$10 million is available for general affordability, quality, and workforce support initiatives. It is MTF's recommendation that these funds be utilized in a way that would not have to be annualized, because this supplemental funding is one time in nature. One potential opportunity would be to use those funds to offer grants to new small center-based programs or FCCs to help cover start-up costs, business training support, or capital improvements. EEC already administers a capital grant program for out-of-school time providers as well as FCC providers that have seen significant demand from programs; these programs offer opportunities to build off of in the future. Another potential use of these one-time funds would be to invest in the study of existing investments and programs; EEC is currently undertaking this type of study in relation to apprenticeship programs. Finally, investing in data infrastructure is a key recommendation of this report so that we can ground policies and programs on useful and actionable information on the ECE sector. It is critical for the long-term

health and success of the early education sector that sustainable programs and funding sources are prioritized whenever possible in the face of economic uncertainty at the state and federal level.

Early education has been lifted up in recent years as essential infrastructure and education. Through new funding streams, the state has been able to strengthen the sector since the pandemic – investing in program stability and making the system more accessible for families.

It is crucial to the long-term future of the early education sector that policymakers turn their focus to the needs of the early education workforce so that we can continue to build a system that allows educators to thrive and grow – supporting our communities, families, and the state economy in the process.

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