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# Who are Our Early Childhood Educators?

## An Exchange Trend Report

by Roger Neugebauer

We finally have a clear snapshot on this nation’s early childhood teachers and caregivers, thanks to the report recently released by the federal Administration of Child and Families, “Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education.” This survey collected information in 2012 from a scientific sampling of individuals providing direct care and education for children birth through five years. While the report neglected some key pieces of information, it does provide a unique snapshot of our workforce.

### Where Do Teachers Work?

The researchers estimated that in the United States there are one million teachers working in approximately 130,000 early childhood centers. In addition, another one million individuals are paid for their educational caregiving work in home-based settings.

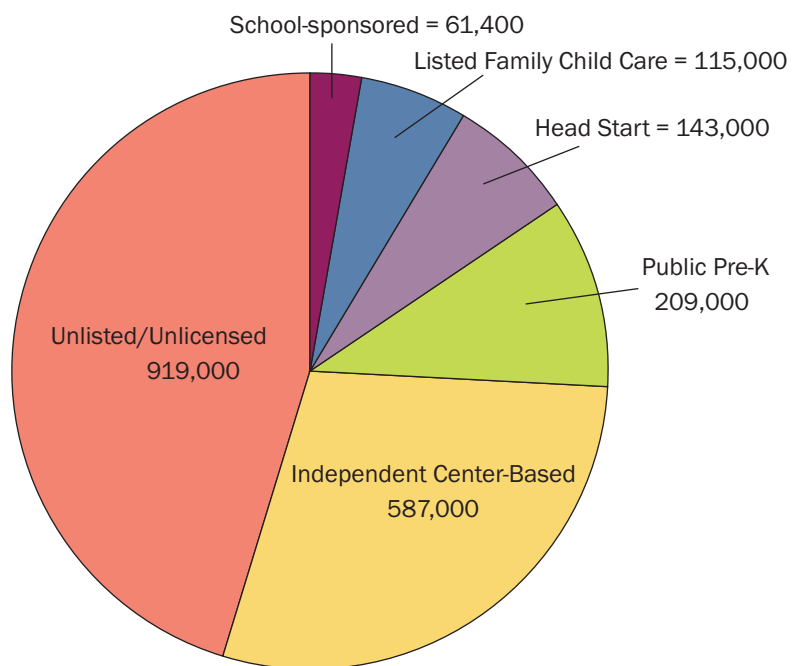
On the center-based side, teachers work in a variety of settings. Nearly 3 in 5 of the teachers work in independent centers (centers that receive no funding from the public schools, Head Start, or Public Pre-K programs). Twenty percent work in Public Pre-K programs, 15% in

Head Start programs, and 6% in school-sponsored programs (see Table A). In the home-based sector, over 90% of the educators work in unlisted home-based settings outside of the child care regulatory system, with the balance working in licensed or registered family child care homes.

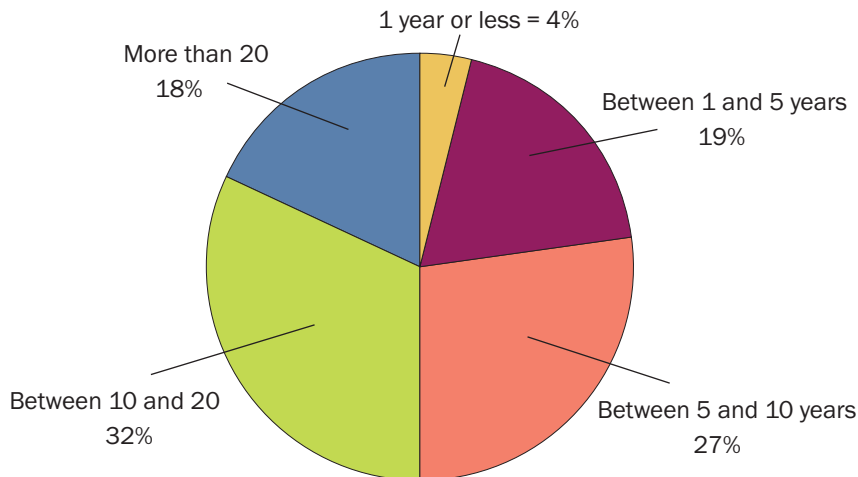
### How Long Have Teachers Worked?

One surprising finding of the survey was the longevity of teachers and caregivers. One of the concerns about maintaining levels of quality in this field is high rates of turnover. However, the survey found that three-fourths of the teachers had worked over five years in the field and half had worked more than

Table A – Where Teachers/Caregivers Work



**Table B – Years of Experience for Center-based Teachers**



ten years. Only 4% had worked less than one year (see Table B).

**How Much Education Have Teachers Received?**

Another surprising finding had to do with the level of education prevalent in the workforce. The survey found, for example, that 45% of the center-based teachers serving children 3 through 5 years of age had a Bachelor’s degree or higher. On the other hand, only 19% of teachers working with children under 3 had a Bachelor’s degree or higher (see Table C). It would be interesting to know how education levels are distributed among the various forms of

center-based care (for example, do Head Start programs have a higher level of college graduates than pre-K programs?), but this report did not provide that data. On the home-based side of the ledger, 16% of licensed or registered family child care providers and 19% of unlisted home-based providers had Bachelor’s degrees or higher.

**How Well are Teachers Paid?**

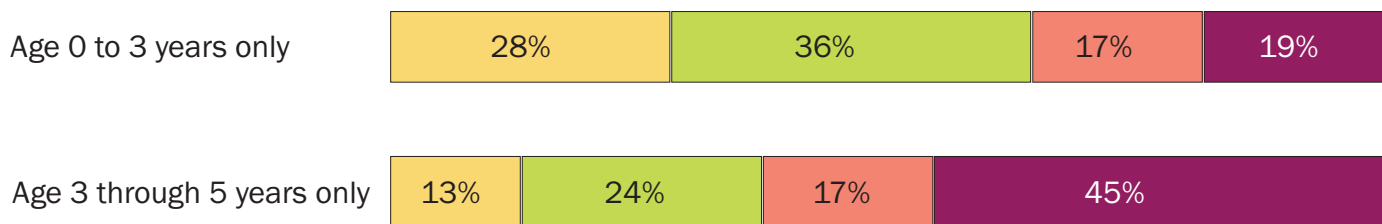
One finding that was not surprising was the low wages paid to America’s early childhood teachers. The median wage for the 1 million center-based teachers in 2012 was \$10.60 per hour.

For a full-time teacher this works out to about \$22,000 per year. There are a few variables; for example, a typical teacher with a Bachelor’s degree earned \$14.70 per hour compared with a teacher with a high school diploma or less who earned \$9.00 per hour. Likewise, a teacher working with children over 3 earned \$11.90 per hour, while a teacher of younger children earned \$9.30 per hour.

It would be interesting to know the average wage levels in different types of centers, but again no data on this was reported. One table gives some indication of this by showing the median hourly wages of center-based teachers by education type and type of program (see Table D). In reviewing this, it is clear that teachers in school-based settings earn the highest wages. The other center-based settings provide a mix of higher and lower wages at different levels of education.

In another aspect of compensation, the report revealed that 75% of the teachers in centers, 78% of family child care providers, and 75% of unlisted home-based providers reported being covered by health insurance, whether from their own employer, their spouse/partner’s employer, or a publicly-funded program such as Medicare, Medicaid, or veteran’s benefits.

**Table C — Training by Age of Children**



HS or less
  Some college, no degree
  AA degree
  Bachelor’s degree or higher

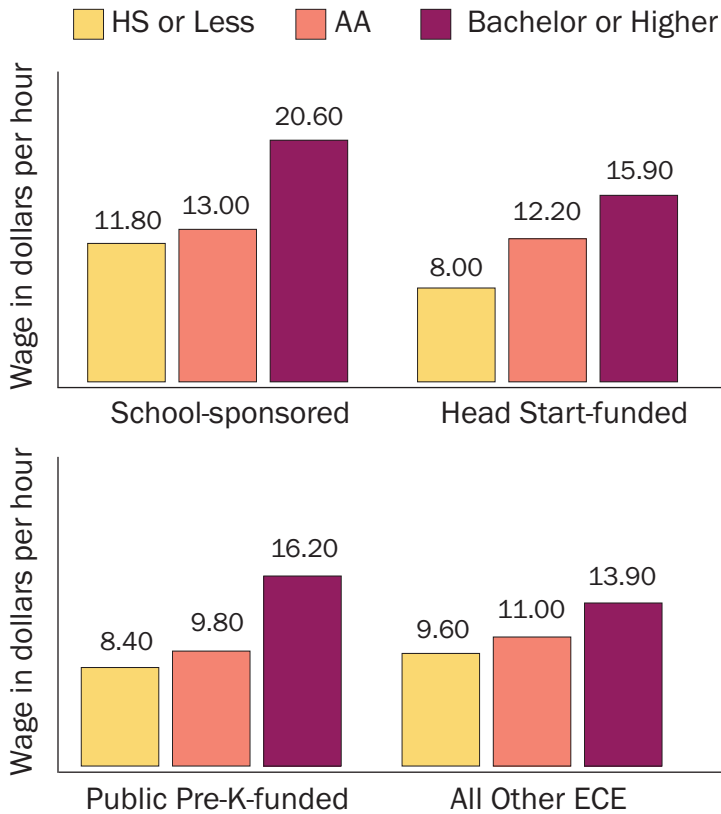
### Key Findings

A number of the findings of this landmark research project stand out:

- The majority of center-based teachers work in community-based for profit and non profit centers. This has been the case since the 1970s and has not dramatically changed.
- Turnover may not be as serious a factor as once believed. However, the longevity of teachers may have been influenced by the weak economy in 2012, when this study was conducted, leaving teachers fewer employment options than during a robust economy.
- There is a higher than expected number of teachers with at least a BA degree. It would be interesting to know if these degreed teachers are concentrated in programs with significant public funding, but the study’s report did not make this information available.
- And, coming as no surprise, we learn that on average, teachers are very poorly paid. It is possible that recent increases in public funding are helping to address this issue, but again the study does not help shed any light on wage levels of teachers in different forms of care.

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**Table D — Wages by Type of Program and Amount of Training**



Note: ‘Head Start-funded’ category excludes school-sponsored programs; ‘Public Pre-K-funded’ category excludes school-sponsored and Head Start-funded programs.