

Wages for Early Childhood Professionals in North America

Results of an Exchange Insta-Poll

by Roger Neugebauer

- The typical director of a single early childhood center in North America earns \$35,000 a year.
- A lead teacher in an early childhood center in North America has an average income of \$23,000 a year.
- A teacher aide in North America earns on average less than \$17,000 a year.

These are a few of the findings from a recent *Exchange* Insta-Poll on Early Childhood Wages in North America. This survey was conducted on the *Exchange* web site, www.ChildCareExchange.com, from April 14 - 30, 2004. Over 900 early childhood professionals from 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 10 Canadian provinces provided input on this survey.

Regional Differences

Table I presents an overview of the findings of this survey. As you can see, there are considerable differences between regions of North America. For example, a director in New England typically earns 14% more than a director in the South; a lead teacher in the West typically earns 29% more than a lead teacher in the Southwest; and a teacher

aide in New England typically earns 22% more than a teacher aide in the Southwest.

To a large extent these regional differences reflect differences in the cost of living. Wages are highest in the highest cost of living regions. In addition, wages tend to reflect differences in licensing standards. Regions with the more strict standards (those with the strongest labor requirements) have the highest wages.

In viewing Table I (see page 17) it appears that early childhood wages are lower in Canada than the United States. However, this is misleading. With the current exchange rate weighted so heavily against the Canadian dollar (one Canadian dollar = less than .75 US dollars), the Canadian wages are highly deflated when expressed in US dollars as they are in Table I. If the US and Canadian dollars were on par, the Canadian wages would be dramatically higher than US wages in each category.

State Differences

Even greater differences exist if you compare average wages across states. For example, a center director in California makes nearly 50% more than her counterpart in Arkansas; and, a lead

teacher in New Jersey earns 60% more than her counterpart in Arizona. [These differences, however, may in some cases be distorted by unequal sample sizes — see “Disclaimers.”]

To get a general look at state variances, I have created an informal State Wage Index that can be viewed in Table II (see page 18). This shows where states (with sufficient sample sizes) fall in terms of a wage continuum. Again, as with regional differences, wages tend to follow the cost of living and licensing standards.

The Bottom Line

Needless to say, the most significant interpretation of this wage data is that a price for working in this profession is low wages. I will resist the urge to haul out the proverbial comparisons with the wages of parking lot attendees and corporate CEOs. Suffice to say, that despite the growing awareness of the importance of the early years, the almost mandatory talk by politicians about the value of education, and the growing dependence of our economy on available child care, at least in the United States, this recognition has not contributed to commensurate financial rewards for those delivering the services.

Disclaimers

In reviewing the data in this article, please keep these points in mind . . .

- The data for this article was collected in an informal web survey. It should in no way be interpreted as, nor should it be presented as, scientific fact. It is only suggestive of actual wage conditions.
- State averages incorporate large differences of wages (especially at the director level) within each state.
- Since the survey was completed by readers of *Exchange* and subscribers to *ExchangeEveryDay*, the sample includes a high diversity of center types. However, based on the professionally-oriented nature of this readership, it may be assumed that, if anything, the wages in this survey tend to be on the high side.

Check out other Insta-Polls on the Economics of our Field

Recent Exchange Insta-Polls have focused on the economics of early childhood education. In addition to the Insta-Poll on wages reported in this issue, there have been surveys on fees, vacancy rates, and challenges facing the field. Other Insta-Polls (which you can view by clicking on "View Past Insta Polls" on the home page of our web site, www.ChildCareExchange.com) have dealt with topics such as . . .

- Most Common Parent Concerns
- Technology in the Center
- Early Childhood Nomenclature
- Presidential Election Favorites
- Favorite Read Aloud Books
- No Time for Nap Time
- Source of Stress

While on our web site you may also want to sign up for a free subscription to *ExchangeEveryDay*, our daily electronic newsbrief bringing you every workday a piece of news, an idea, or a unique perspective on your work. Recent editions of *ExchangeEveryDay* have focused on . . .

- UK Parents Better Off Staying Home?
- Funding Strategies for Equitable Access
- Supporting Constructive Play Outdoors
- Artificial Light in the Classroom
- Get the Right People on the Bus

Table 1

Exchange Insta-Poll Survey Results

Survey on Child Care Wages in North America

Total votes: 906

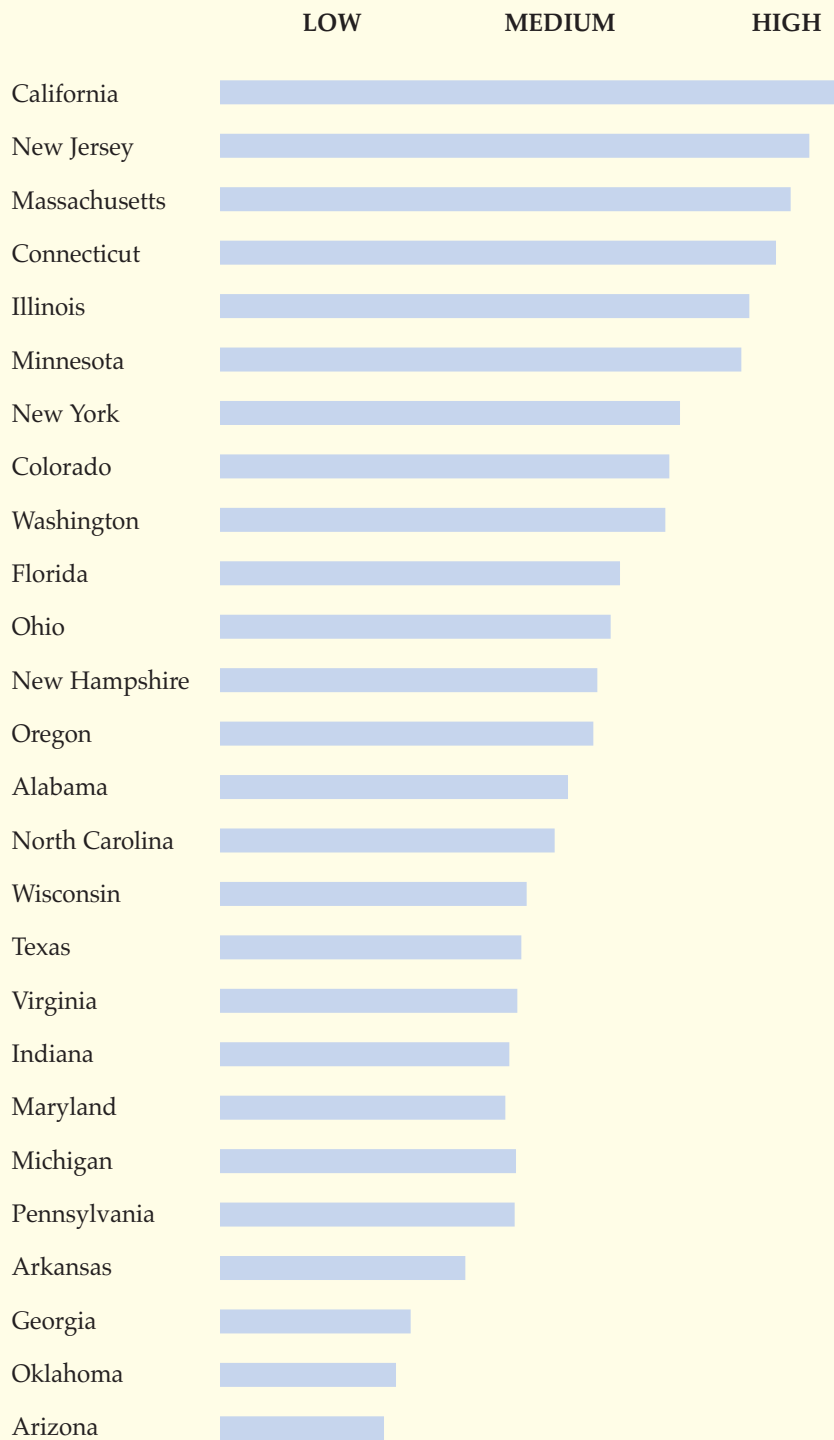
What is the average hourly wage for the following child care positions in your community?

	Director of a single center	Lead teacher	Teacher Aide
Canada	\$14.59	\$10.45	\$ 7.58
New England	\$17.83	\$12.11	\$ 8.67
The Mid-Atlantic	\$18.49	\$11.47	\$ 7.85
The Midwest	\$16.03	\$10.26	\$ 7.68
The South	\$15.64	\$ 9.85	\$ 7.40
The Southwest	\$15.43	\$ 9.39	\$ 7.10
The West	\$17.57	\$12.10	\$ 8.58

To view fees by state/province, click on the region of interest above.

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Table II
State ECE Wage Index



Note: The index above is derived from multiplying the average hourly wages of directors (X1), lead teachers (X5) and teacher (X10) and adding the three products. This index is designed for comparative use only. States not included above did not have sufficient sample size.