naeyc® National Association for the Education of Young Children

An Unsustainable Status Quo

We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System

March 2025

WASHINGTON, DC

The problems are clear: The structural challenges that have always plagued the child care sector are growing. Program costs are rising, staff burnout and turnover is increasing, and absent sufficient public support, families are having to pay more than they can afford for the child care they need. As a result, the supply of high-quality child care everyone in our society needs to be successful cannot match the demand for it.

The solutions remain clear: Public investments in child care and early learning are needed to build a system that works, and that ensures early childhood educators are supported in joining and remaining part of the early childhood education (ECE) profession, and that parents are able to access and afford high-quality care that meets their needs and the needs of their children.

In January 2025, more than 10,000 early childhood educators from all states and settings - including centers, family child care homes, faith-based programs, Head Start, and public preschool programs - responded to a new ECE field survey from NAEYC. The survey results and accompanying stories illustrate the ongoing challenges facing the field, the ways those challenges impact both families and providers, and the need for additional and ongoing public investment in this sector.

Here are some reflections from survey respondents in Washington, DC:

"Washington DC passed the Pay Equity Act. This pays EC educators on par with elementary school educators. This is a huge factor for me staying in the field." - Early Childhood Educator

"The problem is that we are understaffed." - Early Childhood Educator

Here's a brief summary of the survey data from Washington, DC:

	STATE	NATIONAL
Total sample size	57	9,883
Total employed in family child care homes	1	1,087
Total employed in child care centers	36	5,336
Total sample of center directors and family child care owner/operator respondents working in child care centers and family child care homes	21	4,550
AMONG ALL RESPONDENTS:		
Compared to this time last year . . .		
% indicating they are more burned out now	26%	47%
% indicating their economic situation has worsened	32%	34%
% indicating their economic situation has improved	24%	16%
Over the last year . . .		
Supply		
% reporting at least one child care program in their community OPENING over the last year	29%	40%
% reporting at least one child care program in their community CLOSING over the last year	41%	56%
Benefits		
% reporting they do not have health insurance	10%	16%
% reporting they do not have access to paid vacation time	38%	35%
% reporting they do not have retirement savings	25%	42%
% reporting they do not have access to paid family or medical leave	45%	57%
AMONG CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTORS AND FAMILY CHILD CARE OWNER/OPERATORS:[1]		
Over the last year . . .		
Program Enrollment		
% indicating their program was under-enrolled relative to capacity (nationally the top reasons for underenrollment were related to affordability and staffing challenges, not a lack of demand)		55%
% indicating that they raised tuition		55%
Staffing		
% indicating that they raised wages		60%
Costs		
% indicating their rent costs went up		32%
% indicating their liability insurance costs went up		46%
% indicating their property insurance costs went up		45%

Methodology This online survey, created and conducted by NAEYC using SurveyMonkey, represents the responses of a non-randomized sample of 10,066 individuals working in early childhood education settings who completed the survey in English or Spanish between January 6-27, 2025. To generate a more representative national sample from the pool of responses, a probability proportional to size (PPS) methodology was used to pull samples by state that are benchmarked to the share of the total early childhood workforce by state. The authors relied upon the methodology employed by the CSCCE's Early Childhood Workforce Index estimates of the size of each state's ECE workforce using U.S. Census Bureau ACS data (**https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Appendix-Table-2.1_2024-Index.pdf**). The final sample size for analysis is 9,883. In contrast, for the state-level analysis, the entire sample of responses from each state were used. We are unable to supply detailed analysis in states for which there are very small sample sizes across sub-groups.

The survey links were shared widely through email newsletters, listservs, social media, and via partnerships, and 10 randomly selected respondents were provided with a $100 gift card for participation in a sweepstakes. Given the constantly changing and widely varying nature of the crisis, the broad analysis from this survey is intended to present the experiences of the respondents, as captured in the moment that they take the survey, with extrapolations for the experiences of the field and industry at large. Additional information available at **www.naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys**.

1. Note that due to the small state-level sample of directors responding to the survey, state-specific data is not reported alongside the national data in those places.