naeyc® National Association for the Education of Young Children

“We Are NOT OK”

Early Childhood Educators and Families Face Rising Challenges as Relief Funds Expire

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NEW JERSEY

The problems are clear: As federal investments that have sustained the child care and early education sector expire, the structural challenges that have always plagued the sector have remained and grown. Program costs are rising, staff burnout and turnover remains high as wages remain too low, and already stretched families are having to pay more for the care they need. The result of these challenges is a reduced supply of high-quality care that everyone in our society—from families, to businesses, to communities—relies on to be successful.

The solutions remain clear: Public investments in child care and early learning remain necessary to build an early childhood education system that works. Congress should follow the example of the 11 states and District of Columbia that have invested new and significant state funding to support early childhood educators and stronger state systems by passing robust, sustained investments that ensure programs and educators have the support they need to provide high quality care for all families with young children.

In January 2024, more than 10,000 early childhood educators (ECE) 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 this field, the exhaustion of providers, the clear benefits of public funding, and the need for additional support following the loss of federal funding that helped stabilize the sector before it expired in September 2023.

Here are some reflections from survey respondents in NJ (New Jersey):

“We have lost staff to other centers who are able to pay higher wages. We had to temporarily close classrooms due to lack of staff. Due to those closures, we lost enrollments because families needed access to childcare. The impact to my program has been devastating.” - Director/Administrator

“We can’t hire teachers. Our current teachers and staff are competitively compensated but I don’t have the budget to hire teachers and staff we lost during the pandemic. People are not applying for the open positions.” - Director/Administrator

“We haven’t been able to raise tuition fast enough to cover wage increases necessary to attract and keep good staff over the last two years. Now, we can’t afford to raise wages again and we’re unable to hire qualified applicants. We have a budget deficit that makes us worry about our long-term viability.” - Director/Administrator

“The prices on everything have gone up and we are living paycheck to paycheck trying to make ends meet and still provide quality care for the families we serve.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator

Here's a brief summary of the survey data from NJ (New Jersey):

	STATE	NATIONAL
Total sample size	209	10,128
Total employed in family child care homes	11	1,450
Total employed in child care centers	99	5,084
AMONG ALL RESPONDENTS:		
Supply		
% reporting at least one child care program in their community OPENING over the last year	23%	30%
% reporting at least one child care program in their community CLOSING over the last year	39%	55%
Compared to this time last year...		
% indicating they are more burned out now	42%	46%
% indicating their economic situation has improved	19%	16%
% indicating their economic situation has worsened	25%	32%
Total sample of center directors and family child care owner/operator respondents working in child care centers and family child care homes	54	3,815
AMONG CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTORS AND FAMILY CHILD CARE OWNER/OPERATORS:		
Over the last 6 months...		
Supply		
% indicating their program was under-enrolled relative to capacity in the last 6 months	67%	56%
% indicating that they raised tuition	39%	48%
Staffing		
% indicating their program is experiencing a staffing shortage	52%	53%
% indicating that they raised wages	51%	51%
Costs		
% indicating their rent costs went up	39%	36%
% indicating their liability insurance costs went up	51%	49%
% indicating their property insurance costs went up	55%	53%

Methodology This online survey, created and conducted by NAEYC using SurveyMonkey, represents the responses of a non-randomized sample of 11,154 individuals working in early childhood education settings who completed the survey in English or Spanish between January 8-22, 2024. 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. These shares were calculated by the authors from the Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2022 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (Codes: 11-9031, 25-2011, 25-2051, 39-9011). The final sample size for the national-level analysis is 10,128. 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 and another 10 randomly selected respondents were provided complimentary registration to NAEYC's February 2024 Public Policy Forum 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/ece-workforce-surveys