

# The Early Care and Education Workforce of San Mateo County

By Anna Powell, Wanzi Muruvi, Abby Copeman Petig, and Lea J.E. Austin



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## About CSCCE

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), founded in 1999, is the national leader in early care and education workforce research and policy. CSCCE provides research and analysis on the preparation, working conditions, and compensation of the early care and education workforce. We develop policy solutions and create spaces for teaching, learning, and educator activism. Our vision is an effective public early care and education system that secures racial, gender, and economic justice for the women whose labor is the linchpin of stable, quality services.

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment  
Institute for Research on Labor and Employment  
University of California, Berkeley  
2521 Channing Way #5555, Berkeley, CA 94720  
[cscce.berkeley.edu](https://cscce.berkeley.edu)

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# Introduction

Early care and education (ECE) programs provide nurturing environments for young children—and the learning environments of children simultaneously serve as the work environments of early educators. In San Mateo County, there are approximately 465 family child care (FCC) providers operating in their own homes and approximately 280 child care centers serving children from birth through age five. Centers include sites funded by Head Start or State Preschool, centers enrolling children with child care subsidies, and centers enrolling children with no public funding, either as nonprofit or for-profit entities.

Building on the [California Early Care and Education Workforce Study](#), this report provides a snapshot of the state of the licensed ECE workforce in San Mateo County. **Chapter 1** offers a profile of its core members: FCC providers and center-based educators (directors, lead teachers, and assistants). **Chapter 2** describes the state of educator well-being. **Chapter 3** explores stability for center- and home-based programs and for professionals in the field.

## About the Study

The San Mateo County Workforce Study was conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) between March and August 2024 in partnership with the San Mateo County Child Care Partnership Council. The study reached 462 educators across three groups: 98 family child care providers, 117 center directors, and 247 center teachers and assistants. The educators in our center-based sample work in more than 130 different sites throughout the county.

The survey took place online in English, Spanish, and Chinese. We recruited study participants through email and/or text message invitations to all program leaders (center directors and FCC providers) using contact information furnished by San Mateo 4Cs, the state-funded resource and referral agency for child care in the county.

Site-level data from center directors are weighted by center type, and FCC providers are weighted by small or large program licensure. For more detail, refer to the **Key Terms** box below. We also weight the data by region within the county to account for uneven response rates geographically.<sup>1</sup> These adjustments allow us to align our sample with the full population of sites in the county found in the resource and referral agency data.

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<sup>1</sup> We divide the county into three regions: the coastal towns, including Pacifica and Half Moon Bay; the northern part of the county from Daly City through the City of San Mateo; and the remainder of the county from San Carlos through East Palo Alto.

Throughout the report, we annotate tables with small subsamples using an asterisk and encourage readers to exercise caution in interpreting the results.

In some sections of the report, we compare responses from San Mateo County with responses from our statewide sample. We conducted California-wide surveys in both 2023 and 2024 with different sets of questions. As a consequence, some sections of the report provide state-level comparison data from 2023 rather than 2024.

In this report, we present findings by provider type: FCC providers; center directors; and center teachers and assistants. We also disaggregate findings for a closer look in select tables, using dimensions such as FCC size (small or large license) and center type (Title 22 and Title 5).

## Key Terms

**Large and small family child care (FCC):** The FCC sample includes 41 “large” and 59 “small” FCC providers, a distinction in licensure that corresponds to the maximum group size (up to eight children for a small license and up to fourteen for a large license). We weight our FCC data to align with the proportion of small and large licensees operating in the county.

**Title 5 and Title 22 centers:** California maintains different statutes on child care program operations. Title 22 applies to all licensed sites and thus represents the bulk of centers. A smaller portion of centers must adhere to an additional set of requirements laid out in Title 5. Title 5 is stricter: for instance, each teacher works with a smaller group size and must hold more units in ECE coursework. This standard applies to sites that operate with funding for Head Start or California State Preschool. Our center director and site-level data are weighted by center type. For a comparison of the two statutes, refer to [this resource](#) from the Community Child Care Council of Santa Clara County.

## Core Findings

### Profile of the Early Care and Education Workforce

- Approximately 56 percent of FCC providers have more than 15 years of experience in the field, along with 69 percent of center directors and 29 percent of center teaching staff.

- Despite their years of experience, early educators earn low wages (though wages are slightly higher in San Mateo County than statewide). Center teacher pay falls between \$25 to \$32 per hour in the county, compared with \$20 to \$25 statewide.
- Centers in San Mateo County are more likely to offer benefits than the statewide average. In particular, Title 22 sites are much more likely to offer benefits: 88 percent offer health insurance in San Mateo County, compared to only 71 percent of Title 22 sites statewide.
- Staff turnover and vacancies are similarly common in the county and statewide. When asked what strategies would most help stem turnover, directors most often indicated higher pay or better benefits. Job-related factors like planning time and ratio, however, still helped “a lot” according to nearly one half of directors.

## Workforce Well-Being

- The vast majority of early educators feel their work makes a difference, but they don’t always feel respected for it: while 65 percent of FCC providers feel respected, only 43 percent of center teachers share this sentiment.
- “Working with children with challenging behaviors” was the most common issue in early educators’ classrooms, with FCC providers somewhat less likely to select this option than center-based educators (60 percent of FCC providers, compared to 71 percent of center teachers). This finding aligns with another from **Chapter 3**: site leaders agree that challenging behaviors are more common since the pandemic.
- Professional learning opportunities tend to be compliance-related in early care and education. For instance, 77 percent of FCC providers reported their last training fulfilled a requirement, rather than being an individual choice to advance their learning. Fortunately, very few early educators pay for their training, though FCC providers are more likely to cover these costs.
- Low wages in early care and education lead to challenges in economic well-being like insufficient food or reliance on public assistance programs. FCC providers have similar levels of food security to their peers statewide, but center-based educators are more likely to lack access to the kinds of food they want in San Mateo County.
- About one in three early educators uses one or more forms of public assistance, most often in the form of Medi-Cal. Center assistants are even more likely to use public assistance (44 percent).
- High levels of perceived stress are common among the ECE workforce, though center assistants less often meet the threshold (only 55 percent, compared to 72 percent of lead teachers). Some early educators also report chronic health issues like back pain.

## Stability of the Field

- The COVID-19 pandemic posed a substantial threat to child care programs. Thanks to federal relief funding, most programs were able to remain in business, but there are still financial scars. Moreover, the expansion of transitional kindergarten (TK) poses an overlapping challenge by drawing four-year-olds from other ECE settings.
- FCC providers are more likely to report business challenges like having to go without paying themselves at some point (48 percent, compared to 13 percent of center directors).
- The greatest impact on program operations from COVID-19 relates to changes in children's development and behavior; fewer respondents indicated other issues like delaying repairs or retaining COVID-era sick policies.
- Challenges recruiting staff are endemic: 82 percent of FCC providers who employ assistants faced staffing challenges, along with 93 percent of center directors. The most common challenge was finding a candidate with the desired qualifications.
- Retention is also a serious issue: only one third of center teachers and assistants are likely to stay at their current site for at least three more years. For educators who plan to stay, positive working relations and support are valuable assets that are keeping them in their jobs. Conversely, financial considerations like pay are common drivers for people to leave their centers (discussed in **Chapter 1**).
- In light of the ongoing shift of four-year-olds from preschool to TK, we asked current preschool teachers what their plan would be if their current job could not continue. Lead teachers were split between interest in working with three-year-olds or pursuing a job in TK. Few would consider working with infants and toddlers.
- We explained that educators could pursue a new PK-3 Credential to become eligible to teach TK and asked how they would approach the opportunity. While some educators were uncertain or found getting a PK-3 Credential infeasible due to time or money, about one half of center-based educators envisioned needing to retain their current job and work on a TK prep program in the evenings.

# I. Profile of the Early Care and Education Workforce



In this chapter, we provide a snapshot of the early care and education workforce in San Mateo County.

## Demographics

The study sample included 462 educators across three groups: 98 family child care providers, 117 center directors, and 247 center teachers and assistants. The educators in our center-based sample work in more than 130 different sites throughout the county.

**Table 1.1** provides the gender, languages spoken, and household composition of our study sample.

We provide additional demographic detail in the **Appendix** using U.S. Census data (the age groups and the race and ethnicity of early educators in the county and statewide).

## Table 1.1. Early Educator Demographics

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers	Center Directors	Center Teachers/ Assistants
<b>Gender</b>	N=88	N=99	N=238
Woman	97%	96%	98%
Man	3%	4%	1%
All other	0%	0%	<1%
<b>Language Fluency</b>	N=88	N=99	N=238
English	77%	96%	84%
Spanish	41%	28%	40%
Chinese	15%	7%	16%
Tagalog	7%	5%	7%
Hindi	2%	0%	3%
Arabic	1%	0%	3%
Russian	2%	1%	1%
Farsi	1%	0%	0%
<b>Children in Household</b>	N=88	N=99	N=234
At least one child under age 5	25%	9%	20%
At least one child age 6-17	36%	36%	42%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Education and Experience

**Table 1.2** presents the educational attainment and years of experience of the ECE workforce. Approximately 37 percent of FCC providers hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, along with 70 percent of center directors and 44 percent of center teachers and assistants. Additionally, 56 percent of FCC providers have more than 15 years of experience in the field, along with 69 percent of center directors and 29 percent of their teaching staff.

**Table 1.2. Early Educator Education and Experience**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers	Center Directors	Center Teachers/ Assistants
<b>Educational Attainment</b>	N=89	N=111	N=234
High school or less	16%	0%	7%
Some college	29%	12%	25%
Associate degree	19%	18%	23%
Bachelor's degree	24%	47%	34%
Graduate degree(s)	13%	23%	10%
<b>Major of Highest Degree</b>	N=47	N=96	N=155
Early Childhood Education	41%	41%	50%
Child Development	23%	17%	19%
Elementary Education	4%	7%	10%
Special Education	3%	9%	7%
Psychology	7%	11%	6%
All other majors	22%	15%	8%
<b>Years of Experience</b>	N=90	N=99	N=239
Less than 5 years	12%	10%	28%
5 to 15 years	31%	21%	43%
16 to 25 years	35%	33%	18%
More than 25 years	21%	36%	11%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Compensation

Poor compensation is endemic to the ECE field, driven by historical and contemporary factors. The cost of most early care and education is borne by parents, who pay at least 32 percent of their household income in California, similar to the share that a family might pay for their housing (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2022). Parents' inability to pay more directly limits the wages that centers can offer or FCC providers can

earn. As a result, the ECE workforce effectively subsidizes the cost of early care and education through their low wages and inadequate benefits (Montoya et al., 2022).

## Wages

**Table 1.3** shows the median annual earnings of FCC providers and center directors, with a statewide estimate for comparison. For FCC providers, we estimate a range of earnings; for center directors, we use self-reported earnings. For more information on our FCC earnings methodology, refer to our report on ECE compensation in California (Montoya et al., 2022).

Program leader wages are higher in San Mateo County than in California as a whole, with the exception of small FCC providers: we estimate small FCC providers earn between \$45,000 and \$46,800 in the county and between \$36,100 and \$46,000 statewide.

In **Table 1.3** and also **Table 1.4**, which displays center teacher and assistant wages, our sample size is smaller than in other sections of the report. For instance, only one half of FCC providers answered the survey questions that we use to calculate the wage ranges in **Table 1.3**. In all CSCCE surveys, we allow educators to skip sensitive questions, and lower participation in wage questions is typical.

### Table 1.3. Program Leader Median Annual Earnings

Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>FCC Providers</b>	N=68	N=365
<b>All respondents</b>	\$46,000 to 58,000	\$42,500 to 52,500
Small license	\$45,000 to 46,800*	\$36,100 to 46,000
Large license	\$50,000 to 63,700*	\$48,000 to 60,000
<b>Center Directors</b>	N=88	N=415
<b>All respondents</b>	\$77,000	\$64,900
Title 5 centers	\$72,800*	\$65,000
Title 22 centers	\$80,000	\$64,500

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Table 1.4** provides median hourly wages of center teachers and assistants, expressed in two ways for San Mateo County educators: the director-reported pay range and the self-reported wage. The range estimates the median lowest and median highest wages paid at the site level, as reported by the directors and administrators who answered questions about staff at their sites. Meanwhile, the self-reported estimate comes directly from the teaching staff who took our survey.

According to directors' survey responses, lead teacher pay starts at approximately \$25 per hour and caps at \$32 per hour. Assistant teacher pay, meanwhile, is just below those amounts, ranging from \$21 to \$25 per hour. Self-reported wages tend to fall on the high end of the director-reported pay range. The ranges themselves are narrow, which reflects the history of compressed wages in the field (Montoya et al., 2022). Among lead teachers, those at Title 5 centers earn slightly more in San Mateo County as well as statewide.

**Table 1.4. Center Teaching Staff Median Hourly Wages**

Early Care and Education Centers, 2024

	Self-Reported (County)	Director-Reported Range (County)	Director-Reported Range (State)
<b>Lead Teachers</b>	N=95	N=86	N=296
<b>All respondents</b>	\$31	\$25 to \$32	\$20 to \$25
Title 5 centers	\$33*	\$24 to \$33*	\$22 to \$28
Title 22 centers	\$28*	\$25 to \$31	\$20 to \$24
<b>Assistant Teachers</b>	N=56	N=62	N=209
<b>All respondents</b>	\$24	\$21 to \$25	\$18 to \$20
Title 5 centers	\$24*	\$21 to \$26*	\$18 to \$22
Title 22 centers	\$25*	\$21 to \$25*	\$18 to \$20

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: The "director-reported range" reflects the median lowest and highest wages being paid across sites. By contrast, the "self-reported" wage comes from the teachers and assistants who took our survey and reported their earnings directly.

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

## Benefits

To supplement our discussion of wages for center-based staff, we provide an estimate of sites that offer benefits to full-time employees, as reported by center directors (**Table 1.5**). San Mateo County centers are more likely to offer benefits than the statewide average. In particular, Title 22 sites are much more likely to offer benefits: 88 percent offer health insurance in San Mateo County, compared with only 71 percent of Title 22 sites statewide.

To better understand the benefits early educators ultimately use, we also asked educators directly whether they currently have health insurance (**Table 1.6**) or retirement savings of any kind (**Table 1.7**). These questions consider sources of benefits besides those sponsored by employers, including public offerings for health care like Medi-Cal.

**Table 1.5. Centers Offering Benefits to Full-Time Teaching Staff**

Early Care and Education Centers, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>Title 5 Centers</b>	N=27*	N=112
Health insurance	93%	95%
Paid vacation	90%	87%
Retirement	85%	85%
<b>Title 22 Centers</b>	N=42*	N=268
Health insurance	88%	71%
Paid vacation	95%	87%
Retirement	66%	56%
<b>All Centers</b>	N=75	N=393
Health insurance	88%	79%
Paid vacation	89%	86%
Retirement	66%	65%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: California-wide data collected in 2023.

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Table 1.6** shows that large FCC educators are similarly likely to hold health insurance in San Mateo County (94 percent) and statewide (93 percent), while small FCC providers are somewhat less likely: only 89 percent of small FCC educators have health insurance in the county, compared with 94 statewide. Meanwhile, among center-based teaching staff, educators in the county are more likely to have health insurance. For instance, among teachers and assistants working in Title 22 sites, 97 percent of respondents had health insurance, compared with 94 percent statewide. This finding connects to those shown in **Table 1.5**, which demonstrated that more centers are offering health benefits in the county than statewide. While these differences are small in percentage terms, each percentage point is particularly meaningful due to the essential nature of accessing health coverage.

**Table 1.6. Early Educators With Health Insurance From Any Source**

Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>FCC Providers</b>	N=82	N=495
<b>All respondents</b>	92%	94%
Small license	89%	94%
Large license	94%	93%
<b>Center Directors</b>	N=95	N=501
<b>All respondents</b>	97%	97%
Title 5 centers	100%	98%
Title 22 centers	95%	97%
<b>Center Teachers/Assistants</b>	N=210	N=425
<b>All respondents</b>	99%	97%
Title 5 centers	100%	98%
Title 22 centers	97%	94%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: California-wide data collected in 2023.

While the vast majority of early educators have health coverage, retirement savings are less common (**Table 1.7**). Educators in San Mateo County are also less likely to have retirement savings than our statewide sample. In particular, while 68 percent of Title 22 teachers and assistants have an account statewide, only 51 percent of county respondents do.

**Table 1.7. Early Educators With Retirement Savings From Any Source**

Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>FCC Providers</b>	N=80	N=499
<b>All respondents</b>	27%	28%
Small license	19%	22%
Large license	39%	37%
<b>Center Directors</b>	N=92	N=481
<b>All respondents</b>	69%	74%
Title 5 centers	74%	81%
Title 22 centers	66%	72%
<b>Center Teachers/Assistants</b>	N=201	N=406
<b>All respondents</b>	62%	72%
Title 5 centers	73%	75%
Title 22 centers	51%	68%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: California-wide data collected in 2023.

## Staffing Patterns

**Table 1.8** reports the prevalence of paid and unpaid assistants in family child care. Small FCC providers in San Mateo County are more likely to work with a paid assistant: 35 percent, compared with 23 percent statewide (including those with a combination of paid and unpaid assistants). Large FCC providers are less likely to work alone in the county, as well: only 3 percent work alone, compared with 19 percent statewide.

**Table 1.8. Family Child Care Staffing**

Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>Small FCC Providers</b>	N=51	N=283
No assistants	48%	63%
Paid only	32%	17%
Unpaid only	17%	14%
Combination	3%	6%
<b>Large FCC Providers</b>	N=36*	N=246
No assistants	3%	19%
Paid only	45%	48%
Unpaid only	11%	10%
Combination	41%	23%
<b>All FCC Providers</b>	N=92	N=529
No assistants	24%	43%
Paid only	39%	31%
Unpaid only	14%	12%
Combination	23%	14%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: California-wide data collected in 2023.

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Table 1.9** reports center staffing patterns. Directors in San Mateo County and statewide report similar numbers of lead teachers per site: an average of 6.9, compared to 7.1 positions statewide. Title 5 sites in San Mateo County, meanwhile, report half as many assistants as our statewide sample: the county averages 3.0 assistants per site, compared to 6.3 assistants statewide.

### Table 1.9. Average Center Staffing, By Program Funding

Early Care and Education Centers, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>Title 5 Centers</b>	N=37*	N=87
Lead Teachers	6.9	6.5
Assistants	3.0	6.3
Total Teaching Staff	9.5	12.6
<b>Title 22 Centers</b>	N=69	N=226
Lead Teachers	7.2	7.3
Assistants	2.3	2.5
Total Teaching Staff	8.6	9.8
<b>All Centers</b>	N=111	N=321
Lead Teachers	6.9	7.1
Assistants	2.7	3.6
Total Teaching Staff	8.8	10.6

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: Lead and assistant teacher numbers do not sum to the total teaching staff, because not all centers reported having assistant teachers.

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

## Center Turnover and Vacancies

Our survey included additional questions for center directors regarding staff turnover and current vacancies at their site. **Table 1.10** displays the proportion of sites experiencing turnover and vacancies. The share of centers experiencing turnover and vacancies is fairly consistent between our county and statewide samples.

We can add to the data in **Table 1.10** by looking more closely at the number of vacancies per site in San Mateo County. Among sites with vacancies, lead teacher vacancies averaged two per site, and assistant teachers averaged two per site. (It should be noted that the same sites are not necessarily reporting vacancies for both lead and assistant teacher roles.) The most acute shortage was among Title 5 sites, which reported an average vacancy of 2.5 assistant teacher positions.

**Table 1.10. Centers With Turnover and Vacancies, By Program Funding**

Early Care and Education Centers, 2024

	San Mateo County	California
<b>Title 5 Centers</b>	N=37*	N=144
Any turnover since January 2023	75%	72%
Any vacancy now	55%	58%
<b>Title 22 Centers</b>	N=69	N=305
Any turnover since January 2023	79%	77%
Any vacancy now	52%	45%
<b>All Centers</b>	N=114	N=459
Any turnover since January 2023	79%	76%
Any vacancy now	54%	49%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley  
 \*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

The survey asked directors to share their opinions about what could make a difference in addressing turnover. **Table 1.11** reports the level of impact that strategies could have, including both compensation-related and work environment-related options. The response options ranged from “a little” to “a lot.” Directors were much more likely to identify compensation-related options, like higher pay or better benefits, as helping “a lot” with stemming turnover. However, job-related factors, such as planning time and ratio, still helped “a lot” according to nearly one half of directors. These findings demonstrate that compensation is paramount, but programs should continue to explore improvements to the work environment, as well.

**Table 1.11. Director Ratings of Strategies to Help With Turnover**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Centers, 2024

	Not At All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot
Increasing pay, as needed, to ensure teachers make a better wage	3%	3%	21%	72%
Offering more benefits, such as health insurance	10%	7%	22%	61%
Offering more paid time off (i.e., paid vacation, sick days)	7%	10%	23%	60%
Increasing the amount of time teachers have for planning	8%	8%	36%	49%
Decreasing the staff-to-child ratio (i.e., more teachers)	11%	16%	27%	46%
Providing more career advancement opportunities	5%	13%	37%	45%
Providing financial and other support for renewing Child Development Permit	13%	14%	28%	45%
Increasing opportunities for free or low-cost continuing education	7%	13%	35%	44%
Increasing the amount of time teachers have for paperwork	9%	16%	36%	39%
Increasing the number of breaks a teacher can take during the day	19%	21%	39%	22%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: Directors (N=110) responded to the question, “To what extent would the following factors help to reduce turnover of high-quality teachers at ECE programs in your area?”

Directors also had the opportunity to write in additional factors that could help reduce turnover. Themes included expanded discussions of compensation, as well as contextual factors like site leadership and the high cost of living. We provide a selection of quotes taken from this open-ended question below.

*“There are not enough qualified individuals in the workforce to retain high-quality help for the lead teachers. If we had more individuals going into teaching early childhood, we would have better support staff making our jobs easier and be able to get more done, but having to do a lot ourselves makes for less time with the children. The pay for these individuals does not match what it costs to live in the Bay Area as a single person.”*

— Director of a privately funded center, San Mateo

*“Good leadership that values and invests in their staff. Leadership that is ‘all hands on deck’ to support their team, rather than remaining in the office while the team struggles with staffing shortage.”*

— Director of a publicly funded center, South San Francisco

*“Preschool teachers should get the same affordable housing, discounts, benefits, and privileges as elementary teachers. Especially if preschool teachers also have the same bachelor’s or master’s degrees, then they should also be paid on high pay scales or salaries. They should have the same time off, such as more school breaks. Many preschool teachers compare the packages that they can get as a public TK teacher, so they are leaving the ECE field to become public school teachers.”*

— Director of a privately funded center, Belmont

*“More flexible days for programs that have a CSPP or CCTR contract. State contract programs have to be open for 240 days per year. That leaves VERY few days for school vacation, professional development. Given the pressures on programs, staff, and teachers, we choose to close for 10 days and give the whole program time to rest. All 10 days are thoughtfully coordinated with breaks at local public schools. That leaves only three days for team professional development for the entire year. Twice that number (six days, or one every other month) is the minimum needed to provide real robust support for teachers.”*

— Director of a publicly funded center, Menlo Park

*"I have been a director/site supervisor since 2008. I do not think there are many other factors that will have as much influence retaining high-quality teachers as the first four items on your list. Most teachers I know want to teach children. Having a low staff-to-child ratio is important for most teachers to be effective. I have never met a teacher who didn't do some work outside of the classroom, so breaks during the day and cost of continuing education are not very strong incentives to retain teachers. Many teachers I know leave the field because they cannot afford to continue teaching once they begin raising a family or want to have a life outside of work. Having higher wages and paid time off would have made a difference in keeping more than 50 percent of the really good teachers I have worked with in the past."*

— *Director of a privately funded center, South San Francisco*

## II. Workforce Well-Being



This chapter describes aspects of well-being for the ECE workforce in San Mateo County, including professional and personal dimensions. We focus on educators who work directly with children: family child care providers and center teaching staff (lead teachers as well as assistants).

### Professional Well-Being

Workplaces that provide a supportive environment can enhance educators' job satisfaction and mitigate some stresses of ECE work. Professional well-being further impacts educator turnover and retention (Curbow et al., 2000; Whitebook et al., 2016; Zinsser et al., 2016).

#### Job Rewards

As **Table 2.1** shows, the vast majority of early educators feel they are “helping children grow and develop” and “making a difference” with the children in their care. Fewer respondents say they receive praise from parents or feel respected for their work. Center teachers were least likely to agree with the statement “I feel respected for the work that I

do” (only 43 percent). Center assistants, meanwhile, were least likely to “get praise from the parents for the work that [they] do” (40 percent).

**Table 2.1. Early Educators Experiencing Job Rewards**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=80)	Center Teachers (N=133)	Center Assistants (N=75)
I feel like I am helping the children grow and develop	94%	84%	92%
I see that my work is making a difference with a child	90%	83%	79%
I feel the satisfaction of knowing that I am helping parents	82%	69%	76%
I feel respected for the work that I do	65%	43%	51%
I get praise from the parents for the work that I do	60%	48%	40%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Center teachers working in Title 5 centers were more likely to “feel the satisfaction of knowing that [they are] helping parents,” with 80 percent of respondents agreeing, compared with only 60 percent of respondents in Title 22 programs. By contrast, teachers at Title 5 sites were slightly less likely to “get praise from the parents” (46 percent, compared to 50 percent at Title 22 sites).

There were also some small differences in responses among FCC providers: large FCC providers were slightly more likely than small FCC providers to report each form of job reward, with the exception of “helping the children grow and develop.” In this case, 98 percent of small FCC providers reported experiencing this job reward, compared with 89 percent of large FCC providers.

# Teaching Challenges

Our survey included a list of teaching challenges providers might experience in the classroom or program. **Table 2.2** reports on the percentage of early educators in San Mateo County who see certain aspects of their work as challenging. Early educators most often indicated “working with children with challenging behaviors” was an issue, although FCC providers were somewhat less likely to select this option than early educators working in centers (60 percent of FCC providers, compared to 71 percent of center teachers and 72 percent of assistants).

Teachers in Title 5 centers were more likely to report each teaching challenge from **Table 2.2**. For instance, 78 percent of Title 5 teachers felt challenged by children’s behavior, compared to 65 percent of teachers in Title 22 centers.

**Table 2.2. Early Educators Reporting Teaching Challenges**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=82)	Center Teachers (N=132)	Center Assistants (N=75)
Working with children with challenging behaviors	60%	71%	72%
Finding time for planning	44%	55%	27%
Spending time with individual children	30%	48%	31%
Conducting child assessments	25%	33%	20%
Finding time for observing children	20%	30%	21%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

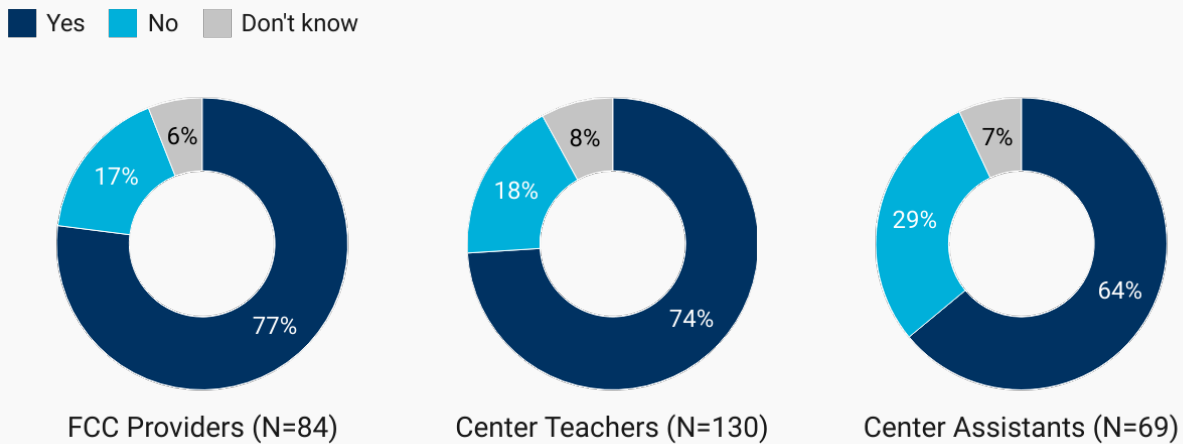
# Professional Development

Employment in early education frequently comes with state- or employer-mandated training, most of which aligns with health and safety requirements. Some early educators must also complete training as part of the Child Development Permit requirements, and there are further requirements for sites participating in a quality improvement program. As a consequence, most professional learning opportunities are compliance-oriented (**Figure**

2.1). This situation leaves educators with less time to seek out training based on their own professional interests or individual needs. **Figure 2.1** shows the share of educators who most recently attended training to fulfill a requirement. FCC providers were particularly likely to fall into this category (77 percent).

### Figure 2.1. Most Recent Training Completed to Fulfill a Requirement

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Teachers in Title 5 centers were more likely to report they attended their most recent training to fulfill a requirement: 88 percent, compared to 63 percent in Title 22 sites. For assistant teachers, however, the data show the opposite trend (and with a much smaller gap): while 62 percent of Title 5 assistants reported their last training was required, 70 percent of Title 22 assistants gave a similar response.

There were also differences by FCC size: while 84 percent of large FCC providers attended their last training to fulfill a requirement, only 68 percent of small FCC providers' most recent training fulfilled a requirement.

Our survey also asked whether early educators paid for their most recent training or if the training was free or paid for by someone else (**Table 2.3**). Typically, early educators did not report paying: only center-based educators most often attended training paid for by their employer (47 percent of lead teachers and 37 percent of assistants), while FCC providers most often took advantage of free training (51 percent).

Title 5 teachers were somewhat more likely than Title 22 teachers to have attended a free training most recently (40 percent, compared to 29 percent of Title 22 teachers).

Meanwhile, when comparing FCC providers, educators with a small license were much more likely to have attended a free training most recently: 63 percent of small FCC providers reported their latest training had been free, compared to only 38 percent of large FCC providers. Instead, nearly one half of large FCC providers had paid for their most recent training.

**Table 2.3. Source of Payment for Most Recent Professional Development**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=84)	Center Teachers (N=133)	Center Assistants (N=71)
My employer paid	N/A	47%	37%
It was free	51%	34%	34%
I had to pay for it myself	39%	12%	23%
Don't know/other	11%	8%	7%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Finally, our survey asked educators which strategies would be most supportive of their access to professional development (**Table 2.4**). Center teachers were most likely to see “paid time off” for training as helpful (65 percent); FCC providers and center assistants most often selected “training available online” (69 percent and 61 percent, respectively).

**Table 2.4. Strategies Needed to Access Professional Development**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=81)	Center Teachers (N=134)	Center Assistants (N=74)
Paid time off to attend training during my regular work hours	N/A	65%	47%
Training available online	69%	52%	61%
Training available in the evening and on weekends	43%	34%	34%
Stipends to cover the training	52%	55%	46%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: Respondents could select multiple strategies.

# Economic Well-Being

In this section, we discuss indicators for economic well-being, including food security, paying for an emergency expense, and public assistance participation. We provide comparison data from our statewide survey of the ECE workforce collected in 2023.

## Food Security

**Table 2.5** reports on food security among the ECE workforce. Our survey leveraged an item from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (Flood et al., 2023), which defines food security as having “enough of the kinds of food we want to eat.” By this measure, center assistants were the least likely to be food secure (only 44 percent), with 11 percent reporting they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat. Assistants in Title 5 sites were more likely than their peers in Title 22 centers to not have enough food (14 percent and 9 percent, respectively). Compared to our statewide sample in 2023, FCC providers have similar levels of food security to their peers statewide, but center-based educators are more likely to be food insecure.

**Table 2.5. Food Security Among Early Educators**

Early Care and Education Workforce

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers	Center Assistants
San Mateo County (2024)	(N=77)	(N=130)	(N=72)
Enough of the right kinds of food	63%	58%	44%
Enough food, but not always the right kinds	30%	35%	44%
Sometimes/often not enough to eat	6%	7%	11%
Statewide (2023)	(N=524)	(N=499)	(N=74)
Enough of the right kinds of food	62%	63%	53%
Enough food, but not always the right kinds	34%	33%	33%
Sometimes/often not enough to eat	4%	5%	15%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Paying for an Emergency Expense

To gauge financial well-being, our survey asked respondents how they would pay off a \$400 emergency expense, an indicator derived from the Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (Federal Reserve Board, 2024). **Table 2.6** shows how educators responded, taking into account whether they would need to take on some form of debt, including credit card debt, a line of credit, a payday loan, or pawning something. Most early educators would need to cover at least part of the expense through some form of debt, including 53 percent of FCC providers, 56 percent of center teachers, and 53 percent of center assistants.

**Table 2.6. How Early Educators Would Cover a \$400 Emergency Expense**

Early Care and Education Workforce

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers	Center Assistants
San Mateo County (2024)	N=82	N=129	N=73
Pay outright	41%	36%	34%
Pay using some debt (e.g., partial credit card payment)	14%	14%	12%
Pay using only debt (e.g., taking on credit card debt)	39%	42%	41%
Can't pay	7%	8%	12%
Statewide (2023)	(N=534)	(N=379)	(N=73)
Pay outright	43%	37%	33%
Pay using some debt (e.g., partial credit card payment)	11%	11%	12%
Pay using only debt (e.g., taking on credit card debt)	41%	42%	47%
Can't pay	5%	10%	8%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

When comparing Title 5 and Title 22 centers, teachers were similarly likely to be able to pay outright for a \$400 expense. When looking at differences by FCC size, however, there was a stark gap: while 55 percent of large FCC providers could pay the unexpected expense outright, only 22 percent of small FCC providers could do likewise.

Compared to our statewide sample in 2023, there were only minor differences: for instance, while 12 percent of center assistants in the county currently could not pay for a \$400 emergency, only 8 percent of assistants selected this option in the statewide 2023 survey.

## Public Safety Net Programs

**Table 2.7** reports the share of early educators who participate in one or more forms of public assistance. In San Mateo County, center assistants were the most likely to be enrolled in some sort of public assistance program (44 percent). Medi-Cal enrollment was the most common use of the public safety net for all early educators, often for a child in their family.

Center educators at Title 5 and Title 22 sites were similarly likely to participate in the public safety net. Among FCC providers, however, small licensees were more likely than large licensees to participate (40 percent and 28 percent, respectively).

Compared to our 2023 statewide survey, FCC educators were less likely to enroll in public assistance. In particular, FCC providers in San Mateo County were much less likely than their peers statewide to be enrolled in Medi-Cal for themselves (9 percent and 24 percent, respectively).

**Table 2.7. Early Educator Use of Public Safety Net Programs**

Early Care and Education Workforce

	FCC Providers (N=82)	Center Teachers (N=129)	Center Assistants (N=73)
San Mateo County (2024)	(N=82)	(N=129)	(N=73)
<b>One or more forms of public assistance</b>	34%	33%	44%
Medi-Cal for child	12%	12%	23%
Medi-Cal for self	9%	11%	18%
CalFresh/food stamps	4%	5%	7%
Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC)	2%	5%	10%
Statewide (2023)	(N=498)	(N=362)	(N=70)
<b>One or more forms of public assistance</b>	50%	29%	38%
Medi-Cal for child	16%	12%	15%
Medi-Cal for self	24%	16%	21%
CalFresh/food stamps	9%	7%	15%
Women, Infants & Children Program (WIC)	3%	2%	3%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Emotional and Physical Well-Being

### Stress and Depression

Our survey additionally included two validated measures of emotional well-being: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4) (Warttig et al., 2013) and the Center of Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D-10), a 10-item self-report measure of depression (Roberts et al., 2019).

**Table 2.8** reports on educators experiencing two types of challenges to their mental health. The table shows: 1) the proportion of educators who scored six or more on the PSS-4, which corresponds to high levels of perceived stress; and 2) the proportion of educators with a score of 10 or more on the CES-D-10, which is indicative of significant depressive symptoms.

High levels of perceived stress are common among early educators, though center assistants less often meet the threshold (only 55 percent, compared to 72 percent of lead teachers). Significant depressive symptoms are less common: for instance, only 38 percent of lead teachers and 24 percent of assistants.

Educators in Title 5 centers and Title 22 centers had similar responses regarding their mental health, and FCC providers had similar responses when comparing program size. However, **Table 2.8** shows elevated levels of perceived stress among San Mateo County FCC providers compared with our 2023 statewide sample: 67 percent of FCC providers reported high levels of perceived stress, compared to 48 percent statewide. However, center assistants in the county were less likely than their peers statewide to meet the threshold (55 percent and 68 percent, respectively).

**Table 2.8. Early Educators Reporting Challenges to Their Mental Health**

Early Care and Education Workforce

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers	Center Assistants
San Mateo County (2024)	(N=82)	(N=129)	(N=73)
High levels of perceived stress*	67%	72%	55%
Significant depressive symptoms**	20%	38%	24%
Statewide (2023)	(N=514)	(N=360)	(N=75)
High levels of perceived stress*	48%	64%	68%
Significant depressive symptoms**	25%	37%	27%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley  
 \*Reflects the proportion of respondents who scored six or more on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), the threshold for high levels of perceived stress.  
 \*\*Reflects the proportion of respondents who scored 10 or more on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D-10), the threshold for significant depressive symptoms.

## Chronic Health Conditions

Working with young children is highly physical and can take a toll on the body. Our survey asked about a number of health challenges. **Table 2.9** reports on the number of early educators who have one or more diagnoses of chronic health issues. Educators in homes and centers were similarly likely to report having at least one condition: 48 percent of FCC providers and center teachers, as well as 44 percent of center assistants.

Conditions with chronic pain were more prevalent among FCC providers, who are also somewhat older on average (Muruvi et al., 2023): 38 percent of FCC providers reported a condition like back pain or arthritis, compared to 20 percent of center teachers.

Compared to our 2023 statewide survey, San Mateo County providers less often reported cardiovascular or pulmonary conditions. Among center-based educators, conditions with chronic pain were also less common.

**Table 2.9. Early Educators With Chronic Health Conditions**

Early Care and Education Workforce

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers	Center Assistants
San Mateo County (2024)	(N=74)	(N=121)	(N=66)
<b>Any chronic condition</b>	48%	48%	44%
Condition with chronic pain (e.g., back pain, arthritis)	38%	20%	21%
Cardiovascular condition (e.g., heart disease)	7%	16%	11%
Pulmonary condition (e.g., asthma, COPD)	2%	12%	9%
Statewide (2023)	(N=474)	(N=330)	(N=59)
<b>Any chronic condition</b>	59%	70%	64%
Condition with chronic pain (e.g., back pain, arthritis)	39%	39%	32%
Cardiovascular condition (e.g., heart disease)	18%	23%	17%
Pulmonary condition (e.g., asthma, COPD)	10%	17%	15%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Health Risks at Work

Our survey also asked respondents about their level of concern regarding health risks they face on the job. The response options included “not at all concerned,” “slightly concerned,” “moderately concerned,” and “very concerned.” **Table 2.10** shows the proportion of our sample that selected either “moderately” or “very concerned.”

There were a few small differences in responses among educators by job role: for instance, while 49 percent of center teachers worried about getting injured on the job, only 37 percent of center assistants were similarly concerned.

**Table 2.10. Early Educators Concerned About Health Risks at Work**

Early Care and Education Workforce

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers	Center Assistants
San Mateo County (2024)	(N=84)	(N=135)	(N=78)
Working with young children who are not vaccinated	46%	41%	40%
Getting injured while performing my regular duties	43%	49%	37%
Being exposed to infections at work	40%	46%	47%
Statewide (2023)	(N=540)	(N=372)	(N=75)
Working with young children who are not vaccinated	39%	49%	40%
Getting injured while performing my regular duties	41%	42%	36%
Being exposed to infections at work	49%	56%	53%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: The table reports the proportion of educators who selected “moderately” or “very concerned” on a four-point scale of “not at all concerned,” “slightly concerned,” “moderately concerned,” and “very concerned.”

There were only minor differences between educators in Title 5 and Title 22 centers. Nonetheless, Title 22 teachers were somewhat more likely than Title 5 teachers to be worried about an infection from an unvaccinated child (47 percent and 36 percent, respectively).

Compared to our 2023 statewide sample, FCC providers in San Mateo County reported greater worry about exposure to infection from an unvaccinated child (46 percent, compared with 39 percent statewide); however, our statewide sample of FCC providers reported greater concern about getting infected in general (49 percent, compared with 40 percent in San Mateo County).

## III. Stability of the Field



In this chapter, we first examine the stability of child care programs, including their operational challenges and their adaptability in the face of major shifts due to the receding COVID-19 pandemic and the growing presence of transitional kindergarten. We also examine the career intentions and ambitions of individual early educators.

### Program Stability

#### Business Challenges

**Table 3.1** reports business challenges that San Mateo County FCC providers and child care centers have experienced since 2023. FCC providers were more likely to report the three main challenges. In particular, FCC providers reported taking on personal credit card debt to cover program expenses or going without paying themselves three times as often as center directors. Taking on credit card debt was most common among large FCC providers (54 percent).

**Table 3.1. ECE Programs Experiencing Business Challenges Since 2023**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Sites, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=84)	Center Directors (N=84)
<b>All respondents</b>		
Have missed rent, utility, or vendor payment for my program	21%	8%
Have taken on personal credit card debt to cover program expenses	45%	16%
Have been unable to pay myself	48%	13%
<b>Detail: Program leaders who have been unable to pay themselves</b>		
<b>FCC providers</b>		
Small FCC providers	42%	
Large FCC providers	54%*	
<b>Centers</b>		
Title 5 centers		6%*
Title 22 centers		18%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Our survey asked about lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (**Table 3.2**). During shelter-in-place, California issued emergency guidance about the operation of child care programs that caused sites to make significant changes to their policies, group sizes, and more (Early Edge California, 2024). The upheaval for families also led to changes in when or how they accessed child care (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2020). **Table 3.2** reports how some of these effects have endured, even though the state of emergency was lifted in early 2023.

The most common impact site leaders reported was an increase in challenging behaviors among children: 66 percent of directors selected this option, along with 39 percent of family child care providers. A lag in children’s development was also commonly noted among directors (45 percent), but not FCC providers (16 percent). No more than approximately one third of the respondents selected any of the other items, like families leaving and not being replaced, having to delay repairs, or still retaining COVID-era policies regarding being sick.

**Table 3.2. Lingering Impacts of COVID-19 on ECE Programs**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Sites, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=92)	Center Directors (N=108)
I have noticed more children with challenging behaviors than what was normal in my program	39%	66%
Children's development is still lagging behind what was normal in my program	16%	45%
I lost some of my families and have not been able to get new ones	27%	31%
I had to delay repairs and upgrades and have not been able to do them	36%	24%
Families are not comfortable placing their younger children in child care	16%	24%
I changed my policies related to being sick and have not changed them back	30%	22%
I still do not let parents inside my building	24%	13%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Shifting Enrollment and Staffing

While only a subset of site leaders in **Table 3.2** mentioned families leaving their program during COVID and being unable to get new ones to enroll, there are other shifts taking place with enrollment. Statewide, ECE enrollment fell sharply in 2020 and rebounded only partially. As families were beginning to trickle back in, California also enacted a broad expansion to transitional kindergarten starting in the fall of 2021. Each year since 2021, an increasing share of four-year-olds became eligible for TK, and it will be a universal option for all four-year-olds by Fall 2025. Other ECE offerings for four-year-olds technically contribute to California's universal preschool strategy, but only TK is funded to be universal (Powell et al., 2024).

**Table 3.3** shows the share of San Mateo Country site leaders reporting increased enrollment of infants, toddlers, and three-year-olds, as well as a decline in four-year-olds. While relatively few sites reported an increase in serving younger children, 52 percent of FCC providers and 61 percent of center directors reported serving fewer four-year-olds

since the previous year. This finding demonstrates that other ECE programs are feeling the effects of TK expansion, and they are still working to tap into other sources of enrollment.

**Table 3.3. Shifts in Enrollment in the Past Year**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Sites, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=88)	Center Directors (N=110)
<b>All respondents</b>		
Accepting more infants and toddlers	25%	7%
Began accepting infants or toddlers	12%	9%
Serving more three-year-olds	12%	36%
Serving fewer four-year-olds	52%	61%
<b>Detail: Sites serving more three-year-olds</b>		
FCC providers		
Small FCC providers	4%	
Large FCC providers	21%*	
Centers		
Title 5 centers		34%*
Title 22 centers		36%
<b>Detail: Sites serving more four-year-olds</b>		
FCC providers		
Small FCC providers	32%	
Large FCC providers	73%*	
Centers		
Title 5 centers		60%*
Title 22 centers		65%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

## Recruiting Staff

**Chapter 1** provided a snapshot of staffing in centers and homes in San Mateo County. Staffing shortages predate the arrival of the pandemic, but they became more intense with

the overlapping effects of COVID-19 and TK expansion (Powell et al., 2024). **Table 3.4** reports that most sites currently face recruiting challenges, including 82 percent of FCC providers (among those who reported having an assistant) and 93 percent of center directors. Most often, the greatest challenge was finding a candidate with the desired qualifications, particularly for centers: 83 percent of directors reported this challenge.

**Table 3.4. Program Leaders Reporting Recruitment Challenges**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Sites, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=58)	Center Directors (N=97)
<b>Any recruitment challenge</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>93%</b>
Difficulty finding staff with desired qualifications	53%	83%
Difficulty finding staff due to the compensation we are able to offer	53%	50%
Difficulty finding staff available for the hours we need	36%	38%
Difficulty finding staff with desired language skills	23%	17%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: The FCC provider sample is smaller for this table because many FCC providers do not recruit paid assistants.

## Future Plans of Early Educators

### Looking Ahead Three Years

In the remaining tables, we examine data on the stability of educators in their career paths. First, in **Table 3.5**, we report the job that early educators imagine they will hold three years into the future. Approximately 62 percent of FCC providers planned to continue operating their program. Very few respondents planned to work in a center or in transitional kindergarten. The second most common answer was “don’t know” (21 percent).

More than one half of center teachers and assistants envisioned being in a different job in three years. Only 33 percent of lead teachers and 38 percent of assistants planned to stay on at their current center. Another common option was working in a TK classroom, selected by 13 percent of teachers and 16 percent of assistants, but center staff members were somewhat more likely to select “don’t know” (19 percent of teachers and 28 percent of assistants).

**Table 3.5. Early Educator Job Plans in Three Years**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=82)	Center Teachers (N=134)	Center Assistants (N=69)
Still working in my program	62%	33%	38%
Working in a different center/ at a center*	4%	5%	0%
Starting an FCC program	N/A	6%	6%
Working in a TK classroom	0%	13%	16%
Working in a K-12 classroom	1%	6%	4%
Working in a different job in ECE or TK-12	4%	7%	1%
Working in a job outside of ECE or TK-12	2%	7%	3%
Retired	6%	4%	4%
Don't know	21%	19%	28%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

\*This item was phrased differently depending on the respondent's current role: for center teaching staff, the option was "working in a different child care center," and for FCC providers, the option was "working in a child care center."

The educators who planned to continue at the same program were asked an additional question: "What are the reasons you are likely to stay?" **Table 3.6** reports common reasons for staying. While FCC providers most often indicated "I enjoy running my own business" (73 percent), this option was not available to center teaching staff. Instead, center teaching staff most often identified positive working relationships. For instance, 57 percent of teachers and 74 percent of assistant teachers reported they "get along with co-workers." Fewer respondents stayed because they "couldn't leave these kids/these families" or due to adequate pay or benefits. These findings illustrate the importance of the work environment and time spent with colleagues.

**Table 3.6. Top Factors Keeping Early Educators at Their Site**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=52)	Center Teachers (N=44*)	Center Assistants (N=27*)
Enjoy running my own business	73%	N/A	N/A
Get along with my co-workers	N/A	57%	74%
Feel respected by co-workers/supervisor	N/A	43%	56%
Get along with my supervisor	N/A	39%	48%
Feel supported at work	N/A	36%	48%
Couldn't leave these kids/these families	31%	34%	44%
Good benefits	4%	45%	33%
Wages allow me a decent living	25%	57%	30%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: The sample for this table is smaller than **Table 3.5** because the question was only posed to respondents who planned to keep working at the same site in three years.

\*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

## Opportunities for Changing Jobs Due to TK Expansion

Finally, our survey probed how transitional kindergarten may reshape job opportunities for the ECE workforce. We posed two hypothetical questions. First, we asked current teachers of four-year-olds in centers what they would do if their job no longer included teaching that age group. Respondents could select as many options as they wanted.

As reported in **Table 3.7**, teachers were most interested in working with three-year-olds or pursuing a job or preparation program for TK (49 and 48 percent, respectively). Very few center teachers expressed an interest in a possible infant-toddler room position (16 percent). Assistants were similarly likely to be interested in working with three-year-olds (45 percent), but were far less likely than teachers to pursue a job or prep program for TK. Instead, they were just as likely to be interested in TK as working with infants and toddlers (28 percent each).

**Table 3.7. Top ECE Jobs Preschool Teachers Would Consider**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	Center Teachers (N=95)	Center Assistants (N=55)
Job in a three-year-old classroom	49%	45%
Job or prep program for TK	48%	28%
Non-classroom job in a center (e.g., coach or supervisor)	23%	12%
Job in an infant-toddler classroom	16%	28%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Our survey described the new opportunity to obtain a PK-3 Early Education Specialist Credential, which authorizes its holder to teach TK. To ensure educators understood the process, we stated, “To attain the credential, candidates must have a bachelor’s degree and either complete a traditional teacher preparation program or qualify with a combination of coursework, assessments, and experience teaching four-year-olds in child care centers.” We then asked what they would need to do to pursue this credential (**Table 3.8**).

**Table 3.8. Early Educators Thoughts on How to Pursue a PK-3 Credential**

San Mateo County Early Care and Education Workforce, 2024

	FCC Providers (N=86)	Center Teachers (N=149)	Center Assistants (N=74)
I would keep my job and pursue the credential at night	33%	49%	45%
I would quit my job to pursue the credential	2%	3%	0%
I can't: I do not have the time	13%	9%	9%
I can't: I do not have the money	10%	12%	5%
I am not interested	24%	15%	18%
Don't know	17%	12%	23%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

The most common choice was to pursue the credential in the evenings while they continued in their job by day. Approximately one half of center teachers and assistants chose this option, along with only one third of FCC providers. FCC respondents were more likely than center-based teachers and assistants to respond “I am not interested” (24 percent, 15 percent, and 18 percent, respectively). Some early educators indicated that pursuing a PK-3 Credential would not be feasible due to time constraints (for instance, 9 percent of center teachers) or financial constraints (12 percent of center teachers). Center assistants were the group most likely to select “don’t know” (23 percent).

These findings align with data showing that early educators frequently pursue additional degrees or credentials while continuing to work. Pathways that require reducing current work hours or quitting work all together are typically not feasible (Copeman Petig & McLean, 2019).

# Conclusion

Early educators in San Mateo County have a deep sense of connection to and fulfillment through their work. At the same time, they do not always feel respected, and they face challenges making ends meet. These experiences are not unique to San Mateo County, where wages are, in fact, higher than elsewhere in California—unfortunately, the local cost of living may more than offset their slightly higher pay. Center-based educators in the county are more likely to have insufficient access to the right kinds of food, and they are slightly more likely to enroll in public assistance programs like Medi-Cal.

Focusing on wages can help improve well-being and reduce turnover for the ECE workforce. Directors agree that improving wages would be the most impactful strategy for addressing teacher shortages. State-level subsidy rate reform may help bring more funding to increase wages, but these dollars will only reach a portion of the ECE workforce. Local action may be necessary to increase wages across all settings serving young children.

The data in this report point to additional strategies that San Mateo County can explore to support early educators. Challenging behaviors among children have surged since the pandemic. San Mateo County could provide professional learning opportunities or resources to help educators respond to this need. Early educators also frequently report high levels of stress. Although this finding is likely related to more than one factor, San Mateo County could assist programs in understanding the drivers of work-related stress (for instance, by reviewing the [Model Work Standards](#)).

Finally, whichever strategies San Mateo County draws on to support the ECE workforce, it is essential to design initiatives in consultation with early educators. By working in partnership with individuals from different roles and settings, the county can incorporate their expertise to build strong, effective programs.

# Appendix

The American Community Survey, or ACS, provides an imperfect source of data on the early care and education workforce. While it does not clearly distinguish family child care and center-based educators, we can identify the ECE workforce using pairings of occupation and industry codes. **Table A.1** shows the pairings we include in our definition of the ECE workforce.

**Table A.1. American Community Survey Occupation–Industry Pairings**

Industry Code	Occupation Code
7860 Elementary and Secondary Schools	4600 Child Care Workers
8470 Child Day Care Services	4600 Child Care Workers
9160 Religious Organizations	4600 Child Care Workers
9290 Private Households	4600 Child Care Workers
8470 Child Day Care Services	2300 Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers
8470 Child Day Care Services	2545 Teaching Assistants
8470 Child Day Care Services	0230 Education and Child Care Administrators

Source: The U.S. Census specification for the ECE workforce aligns with the 2024 *Early Childhood Workforce Index* (McLean et al., 2024).

Note: Occupation “0230 Education and Child Care Administrators” includes very few individuals and does not bias the data.

**Table A.2** provides the race and ethnicity of the ECE workforce using this approach, and **Table A.3** provides the breakdown of age groups.

The samples available in the ACS are comparable in size to our study sample, but they do not readily distinguish family child care educators from center-based educators. To provide a proxy for family child care providers within the group, we use the variable for self-employment. It is possible that a small number of center teacher-directors who own their program are counted in this group.

**Table A.2. Race and Ethnicity of Early Educators in San Mateo County**

2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Sample

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers/ Assistants	All ECE Workforce
<b>San Mateo County</b>	<b>N=64</b>	<b>N=165</b>	<b>N=229</b>
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	<1%
Asian	27%	22%	24%
Black	4%	1%	2%
Latina*	52%	44%	46%
White	14%	29%	25%
All other single race/ethnicity	3%	<1%	1%
Multiracial	1%	4%	3%
<b>California</b>	<b>N=2,195</b>	<b>N=7,173</b>	<b>N=9,368</b>
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	<1%
Asian	10%	11%	11%
Black	8%	7%	7%
Latina*	53%	45%	47%
White	26%	32%	31%
All other single race/ethnicity	1%	<1%	<1%
Multiracial	3%	4%	3%

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Data: Authors' analysis of American Community Survey public use microdata, retrieved from IPUMS USA (<https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0>).

\* Because the early care and education workforce is overwhelmingly composed of individuals who identify as women, we use the gender-specific term "Latina" to describe members of the ECE workforce who identify as part of the Latin American diaspora. However, we know that data collection has not always accounted for gender diversity beyond a male/female binary. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of early educators who identify as men, nonbinary, or another gender identity and recognize that the gendered oppression of women in the ECE workforce is related to the gender-based oppression of nonbinary, trans, and genderqueer educators.

### Table A.3. Ages of Early Educators in San Mateo County

2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Sample

	FCC Providers	Center Teachers/ Assistants	All ECE Workforce
San Mateo County	N=64	N=160	N=224
18 to 29 years	10%	34%	27%
30 to 39 years	6%	15%	13%
40 to 49 years	21%	19%	20%
50 to 59 years	39%	21%	26%
60 years or older	23%	10%	14%
California	N=2,173	N=7,108	N=9,281
18 to 29 years	19%	32%	29%
30 to 39 years	16%	21%	20%
40 to 49 years	22%	18%	19%
50 to 59 years	24%	17%	19%
60 years or older	19%	12%	13%

Chart: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Data: Authors' analysis of American Community Survey public use microdata, retrieved from IPUMS USA

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