

The Early Care and Education Workforce of Ventura County

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Introduction

Ventura County is home to approximately 55,000 children under age six, many of whom enroll in early care and education (ECE) programs (KidsData, 2023). The ECE workforce provides vital learning and growth for these children, complex work that demands energy and expertise. Around 140 child care centers operate in the county, along with 540 family child care (FCC) providers operating in their homes.

Building on the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), this report offers a snapshot of the licensed ECE workforce in Ventura County.¹ In **Chapter 1**, we provide a profile of its core members: FCC providers and center-based educators (directors, teachers, and assistants).² In **Chapter 2**, we describe the state of educator well-being; and in **Chapter 3**, we explore current headwinds affecting the field.

About the Study

The Ventura County Workforce Study was conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) in Spring and Summer 2023. The study sample included 339 educators across three groups: 141 family child care providers, 73 center directors, and 125 center teachers and assistants. The FCC sample includes a mixture of small and large FCC providers—a distinction in licensure that corresponds to the maximum group size (up to eight children for “small” providers, and up to 14 for “large” providers). The educators in our center-based sample work at more than 90 different sites throughout the county. The specific title of center directors varied, with about one half of respondents working in another administrator position such as site supervisor or teacher-director. In our teaching

¹ The California Early Care and Education Workforce Study is a long-term project begun in 2006, with the most recent surveys conducted in 2023. The 2023 edition, which provided the structure for the Ventura County study, focuses on educator and community well-being.

² Transitional kindergarten (TK) is a growing offering for four-year-olds in California’s public schools. Its workforce, however, was not included in the scope of the Ventura County Study. For preliminary findings on this burgeoning new arm of the ECE workforce, refer to CSCCE’s statewide report (Montoya et al., 2022b).

staff sample, we reached 88 lead teachers and 36 assistants. Among them, 79 percent of center teachers were employed full time, compared to 74 percent of teacher assistants.

The survey took place online in English and Spanish. We recruited study participants through email and/or text message invitations to all program leaders (center directors and FCC providers) through contact data furnished by Child Development Resources (CDR). The Ventura County Office of Education and CDR conducted additional waves of outreach, including through the Workforce Registry.

All program leader data is weighted by First 5 service region (see **Figure 1.1**). Center directors are also weighted by infant and toddler licensure, and FCC providers are weighted by small and large licensure. We use CDR's list of licensed and active programs in the county to calculate weights.

In this report, we present findings by **provider type**: FCC provider, center director, and center teacher and assistant. We also disaggregate findings for a closer look, using dimensions such as **FCC size** (small or large license), **center funding type** (Head Start and State Preschool, versus all other centers), site **Quality Counts participation**, and educator **tenure** (years of experience in early care and education). Quality Counts participation was determined using site data from the Ventura County Office of Education.

Core Findings

Workforce Profile

- Latina³ educators comprise the largest groups of FCC providers and center teacher assistants. Additionally, one half of the ECE workforce speaks Spanish (excluding center directors, of whom only 20 percent speak Spanish).

³Because 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 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

- Around one half of FCC providers and center directors are age 50 or older, along with one fifth of center teachers and assistants.
- FCC providers and center directors skewed toward more years of experience, with many reporting more than 20 years since they joined the field (38 percent of FCC providers and 47 percent of center directors).
- We estimate that 23 percent of FCC providers have a bachelor's degree or higher, along with 80 percent of center directors and 44 percent of center teachers and assistants.
- FCC providers' earnings fell in a median range of \$32,300 to \$40,000 per year. Center directors earn \$68,000 per year on average.
- Center teachers earn between \$19 and \$23.50 per hour, and assistants earn between \$16.50 and \$18.50 hourly. The pay range is higher in Head Start and State Preschool programs.
- Three quarters of centers offer health insurance to teaching staff, and more than one half offer retirement benefits. Benefits diverged sharply depending on program funding type, with Head Start and State Preschool sites much more likely to offer them.

Professional and Economic Well-Being

- The majority of educators "very often" felt they were "making a difference" (89 percent of FCC providers, for instance). They were less likely to "very often" feel respected (65 percent of FCC providers). Educators with more years of experience felt respected more frequently.
- Educators with longer tenures or working in Head Start and State Preschool were more likely to feel they had choice in their professional development.
- Most educators shared worries about their bills and routine healthcare costs, including center directors. FCC providers and center teachers and assistants were even more likely, however, to worry about losing pay if they fell ill.
- Around one third of FCC providers and center teachers experience food insecurity, along with nearly two thirds of assistant teachers.

recognize that the gendered oppression of women in the workforce is related to the gender-based oppression of nonbinary, trans, and genderqueer educators.

- About one half of FCC providers and center teachers and assistant teachers use some form of public assistance. Medi-Cal is the most common of these: for instance, 26 percent of center teaching staff access health care through Medi-Cal.

Headwinds in the Field

- COVID-19 ushered in losses to program revenues, particularly for FCC providers: around one half of providers are still experiencing lower earnings.
- Meanwhile, TK expansion has disrupted enrollment across the county. One third of FCC providers and three quarters of centers have experienced a drop in enrollment among four-year-olds.
- The ECE workforce is interested in learning more about the PK-3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction Credential, but many early educators feel they lack the time and/or money to pursue it (or they need more information before forming an opinion).
- Most centers experienced staff turnover between 2021 and 2023. In particular, nearly all sites with assistant teachers had positions turn over. Average assistant turnover somewhat exceeded the number of assistant positions per site: for instance, in sites that were not Head Start or State Preschools, average employment is 3.6 assistants and mean turnover for assistants was 3.7.
- Most members of the center-based workforce remained in similar job roles in 2021 and 2023. A few educators experienced job “advancement” by 2023: for instance, 7 percent of directors in 2023 had been teachers in 2021, and 8 percent of teachers had been assistants in 2021.
- Three quarters of FCC providers planned to still be open three years in the future. One half of center teachers planned to keep working at the same site, along with 39 percent of assistant teachers. Many assistants were uncertain of their plans (21 percent).

Chapter One: Workforce Profile



Sample Overview

Demographics

Table 1.1 provides the demographics of Ventura County early educators, including age, race, and ethnicity. Latina educators comprise the largest groups of FCC providers and center teachers and assistants. The table also estimates the proportion of educators born outside the United States, though some respondents declined to answer this question. Among the 71 educators who identified their specific birthplace outside the United States, 48 were born in Mexico.

Table 1.1. Demographics

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider	Center Director	Center Teacher/ Assistant
Age	N=141	N=73	N=125
29 years or younger	5%	1%	26%
30 to 39 years	19%	18%	34%
40 to 49 years	29%	35%	22%
50 to 59 years	31%	27%	14%
60 years or older	16%	20%	5%
Race/Ethnicity	N=110	N=58	N=113
Asian	5%	9%	4%
Black	0%	3%	2%
Latina	60%	24%	56%
White	25%	50%	34%
Multiethnic	6%	8%	3%
All other	3%	6%	2%
Language Fluency	N=115	N=60	N=116
English	78%	100%	98%
Spanish	53%	20%	49%
All other	8%	9%	6%
Additional Characteristics	N=104-118	N=58-63	N=113-117
Female	97%	96%	97%
Born outside the United States	43%	18%	25%
Married or living with partner	75%	73%	50%
Child in household under age 5	22%	9%	19%
Child in household age 6-17	49%	39%	41%

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

Note: Some participants opted not to disclose one or more characteristics such as country of birth.

Program Characteristics

Table 1.2 provides some program-level characteristics, including the site's region within the county. Figure 1.1 identifies the cities located in each of the three First 5 Service Regions.

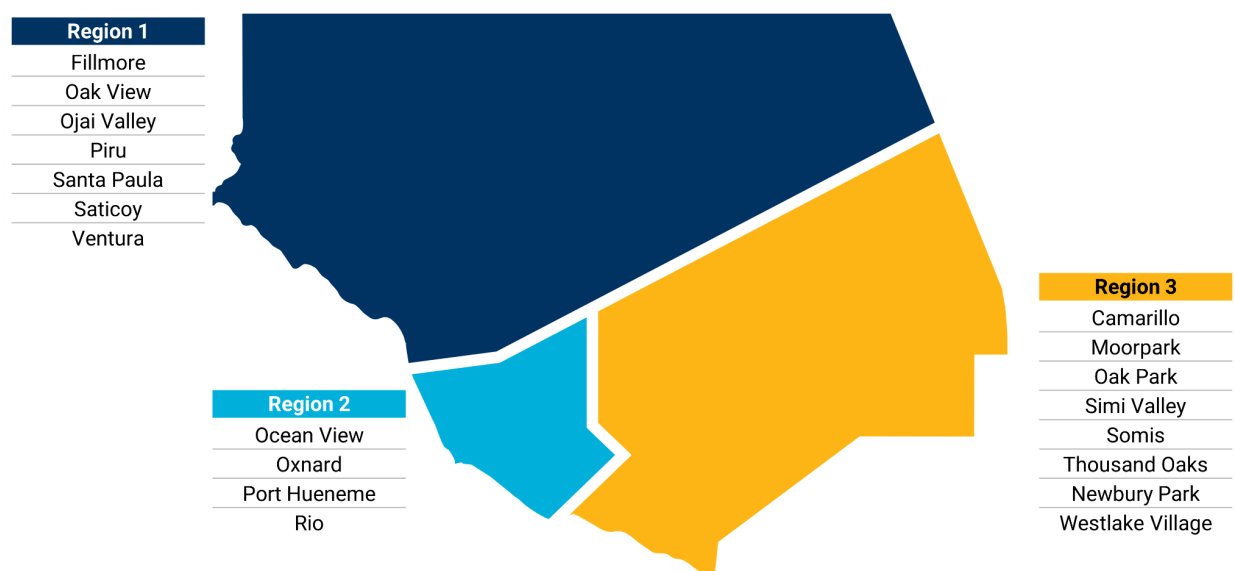
Table 1.2. Program Characteristics

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=140)	Center Director (N=71)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=125)
First 5 Service Region			
Region 1	17%	32%	32%
Region 2	59%	21%	36%
Region 3	23%	47%	32%
Site Characteristics			
Enrolls infants/toddlers	86%	55%	
Head Start/State Preschool		45%	62%
Quality Counts Participation	24%	52%	63%

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

Figure 1.1. Ventura County First 5 Service Regions



Source: Ventura County Office of Education

Union and Professional Association Membership

Table 1.3 reports on educator participation in unions and professional associations. About one quarter of FCC providers were members of a union, although large FCC providers were more likely to join (39 percent, compared to 19 percent). Center directors were more often members of professional associations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), while center teachers and assistants were rarely members of any group. Teaching staff working in a Head Start or State Preschool site were somewhat more likely to be members of a union (18 percent).

Table 1.3. Union and Professional Association Membership
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=105)	Center Director (N=59)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=115)
Union	26%	5%	14%
Professional association	14%	37%	9%
Informal network	13%	25%	10%
None of the above	47%	51%	60%
Don't know	10%	0%	12%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Columns do not sum to 100 percent because educators were able to select multiple memberships.

Education and Experience

Table 1.4 shows educators’ years of experience (tenure) in the field of early care and education. In our study sample, FCC providers and center directors skewed towards longer years of experience, with many reporting more than 20 years since they joined the field (38 percent of FCC providers and 47 percent of center directors).

Table 1.4. Median Tenure in the ECE Field

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=120)	Center Director (N=62)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=107)
Fewer than 2 years	10%	0%	5%
2 to 5 years	12%	4%	29%
6 to 10 years	12%	14%	27%
11 to 15 years	17%	12%	14%
16 to 20 years	10%	23%	5%
More than 20 years	38%	47%	21%

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

Table 1.4.1 shows details on the share of educators with more than 10 years of experience. Longer-tenured center teaching staff were more concentrated in Head Start or State Preschool centers and/or Quality Counts-participating sites.⁴ Center teaching staff with an associate degree were more likely to have worked at least 10 years in the field (51 percent).

⁴ Quality Counts California is a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) implemented in many counties, including Ventura.

Table 1.4.1. Educators With More Than 10 Years of Experience, By Program Funding Type, Quality Counts Participation, and Educational Attainment
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=115-120)	Center Director (N=61-62)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=94-107)
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		76%	45%
All other centers		88%	29%
Quality Counts			
Participating site	78%	76%	42%
Nonparticipating site	62%	90%	24%
Educational Attainment			
Some college or less	66%	*	35%
Associate degree	60%	*	51%
Bachelor's degree or higher	75%	80%	30%

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

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Throughout California, many early educators have an associate or bachelor's degree (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2022). In our sample, approximately 23 percent of FCC providers had a bachelor's degree or higher, along with 80 percent of center directors and 44 percent of center teachers and assistants (see **Table 1.5**). Most of the early educators with bachelor's degrees had majored in early childhood education or child development.

Table 1.5.1 shows the share of the ECE workforce with a bachelor's degree or higher in various settings. Educators in Head Start or State Preschool centers were more likely to have a bachelor's degree, along with educators in sites participating in Quality Counts (although these two groupings heavily overlap). Educators with longer tenures in the field were not necessarily more likely to hold a bachelor's degree. In fact, among center directors, respondents with more than 15 years of experience were much less likely to have a bachelor's degree (74 percent), compared to center directors with 5 to 15 years of experience (93 percent).

Table 1.5. Educational Attainment

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=115)	Center Director (N=62)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=118)
High school or less	25%	0%	2%
Some college	34%	9%	21%
Associate degree	18%	11%	33%
Bachelor's degree	20%	52%	37%
Graduate degree(s)	3%	28%	7%

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

Table 1.5.1. Educators With a Bachelor's Degree, By Program Funding Type, Quality Counts Participation, and Educational Attainment

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=115-116)	Center Director (N=61-62)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=104-118)
All respondents	23%	80%	44%
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		90%	49%
All other centers		71%	37%
Quality Counts			
Participating site	20%	85%	43%
Nonparticipating site	24%	75%	45%
Tenure in ECE			
Fewer than 5 years	16%	*	43%
5 to 15 years	24%	93%	46%
More than 15 years	25%	74%	41%

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

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

For early educators with some higher education or completed degrees, early childhood education was the most common major or course of study across job roles, though FCC providers with an associate degree most often majored in child development. **Table 1.6** shows the prevalence of majors, and **Table 1.6.1** disaggregates the findings by degree type.

Table 1.6. Major of Highest Degree or Course of Study

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=84)	Center Director (N=62)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=117)
Early childhood education	48%	60%	67%
Child development	36%	33%	36%
Psychology	12%	10%	9%
Elementary education	9%	9%	4%
Special education	3%	2%	3%
Other	26%	18%	9%

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

Note: Excludes respondents with a high school diploma or less.

Table 1.6.1. Major of Highest Degree or Course of Study, By Degree Level

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider	Center Director	Center Teacher/ Assistant
Associate Degree	N=22*	**	N=38*
Early childhood education	56%	**	65%
Child development	63%	**	49%
Psychology	21%	**	5%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	N=26*	N=50	N=51
Early childhood education	36%	54%	62%
Child development	13%	33%	20%
Psychology	12%	12%	12%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Fewer than 10 respondents.

Center-based educators typically also hold a Child Development Permit, as do some FCC providers. **Table 1.7** shows the permit levels by provider type, and **Table 1.7.1** shows the share of educators with a Teacher Permit or higher in various settings. In our sample, centers operating with Head Start and/or State Preschool funding employed far more permit holders, especially at the teacher permit level or higher. Quality Counts sites, which overlap strongly with Head Start and State Preschool, showed a similar trend. A notable minority of educators without permits wrote that their permit had lapsed or that their current employer no longer required it.

Table 1.7. Highest Child Development Permit Level
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=97)	Center Director (N=60)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=117)
I do not have a permit	70%	27%	23%
Assistant Teacher	4%	0%	8%
Associate Teacher	6%	4%	13%
Teacher	4%	5%	25%
Master Teacher	2%	0%	6%
Site Supervisor	6%	39%	22%
Program Director	7%	25%	3%

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

Table 1.7.1. Educators With a Teacher-Level Permit or Higher, By Program Funding Type, Quality Counts Participation, and Educational Attainment
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=97)	Center Director (N=59-60)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=106-117)
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		96%	64%
All other centers		45%	44%
Quality Counts			
Participating site	35%	89%	63%
Nonparticipating site	14%	45%	46%
Tenure in ECE			
Fewer than 5 years	6%	*	5%
5 to 15 years	17%	61%	64%
More than 15 years	26%	72%	78%

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

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Some educators also held elementary school teaching credentials. For instance, among center teaching staff, about 6 percent held a Multiple Subject Credential and 7 percent held an Early Childhood Special Education Credential.

Wages and Benefits

Although it is widely known that poor compensation is endemic in the ECE field (Montoya et al., 2022a), many respondents were reluctant to discuss their earnings. Our survey did not force providers to answer questions, so many of them chose not to answer. **Tables 1.8** and **1.9** reflect the wages among early educators who chose to respond.

Table 1.8 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 previous report on ECE compensation in California (Montoya et al., 2022a).

Table 1.8 Median Annual Earnings: Program Leaders

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Ventura County	Statewide
FCC Provider	N=70	N=230
All respondents	\$32,300 to \$40,000	\$36,000 to \$45,000
FCC Size		
Small FCC provider	\$25,500 to \$35,000	\$32,000 to \$42,000
Large FCC provider	\$36,000 to \$50,000	\$46,800 to \$58,800
Center Director	N=33*	N=357
All respondents	\$68,000	\$63,800
Program Funding Type		
Head Start/State Preschool	\$70,500	\$64,500
All other centers	\$64,500	\$63,800

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Table 1.9 provides the median hourly wages of center teachers and assistants in two formats: 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, without specifying whether individuals are clustered at the low or high end of the scale. Meanwhile, the self-reported estimate comes directly from the teaching staff who took our survey. Self-reported wages tend to fall on the high end of the director-reported pay range. The ranges themselves are narrow, which is typical in early care and education: for instance, the assistant teacher range is only \$2 per hour from lowest to highest wage. For Head Start and State Preschool staff, the range is a bit broader (for instance, \$7 per hour for lead teachers).

Table 1.9 Median Hourly Wage: Center Teaching Staff

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Director-Reported Wage Range	Self-Reported Wage	Self-Reported Wage (Statewide)
Lead Teacher	N=58	N=51	N=281
All respondents	\$19.00 to \$23.50	\$23.00	\$25.00
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool	\$20.00 to \$27.00	\$23.50	\$26.40
All other centers	\$17.50 to \$23.00	\$19.00	\$23.00
Assistant Teacher	N=40*	N=15*	N=51
All respondents	\$16.50 to \$18.50	\$18.50	\$19.70
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool	\$17.00 to \$21.00	\$18.50	\$19.50
All other centers	\$16.00 to \$17.50	**	\$20.00

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 reported their earnings directly.

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Fewer than 10 respondents.

Table 1.10 reports on benefits offered to full-time staff at centers in Ventura County, as reported by center directors. Health insurance benefits for lead teachers (78 percent of sites) were on par with the statewide average, though centers were slightly less likely to offer this benefit to assistants (73 percent). Assistants were also less frequently offered paid vacation days (57 percent, compared to 73 percent for lead teachers). Both health insurance and retirement benefits were much more likely to be offered at Head Start and State Preschool sites (**Table 1.10.1**).

Table 1.10 Centers Offering Benefits to Full-Time Teaching Staff

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Sites With Lead Teachers (N=52)	Sites With Assistant Teachers (N=26)*
Health insurance	78%	73%
Paid vacation	73%	57%
Retirement	63%	62%
Recruitment bonus	11%	7%
Retention bonus	12%	7%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Table 1.10.1. Centers Offering Benefits to Full-Time Teaching Staff, By Program Funding Type

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Sites With Lead Teachers (N=52)	Sites With Assistant Teachers (N=26)*
Offering Health Insurance		
Head Start/State Preschool	90%	84%
All other centers	65%	53%
Offering Retirement Benefits		
Head Start/State Preschool	77%	80%
All other centers	48%	26%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Many educators access benefits through a spouse or public assistance like Medi-Cal. Below, we show the share of educators who reported having health insurance (Table 1.11) and retirement savings (Table 1.12) from any source. Table 1.11 shows

that center-based educators were similarly likely to have health insurance, even when they didn't work in a Head Start or State Preschool site. For retirement savings, however, the gap persisted by program funding type (**Table 1.12**). For FCC providers, health insurance coverage showed little difference by beneficiary age. Retirement savings showed only modest increases for older beneficiaries: namely, 30 percent of early educators age 60 or older reported having any savings, compared to 72 percent of center directors in the same age group.

Table 1.11 Educators With Health Insurance From Any Source

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=89)	Center Director (N=51)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=95)
All respondents	87%	96%	94%
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		96%	94%
All other centers		96%	93%
Age			
39 years or younger	87%	*	95%
40 to 59 years	88%	97%	91%
60 years or older	85%	100%	*

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

Note: Sources include public assistance such as Medi-Cal or coverage under the policy of a spouse.

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Table 1.12 Educators With Retirement Savings From Any Source

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=89)	Center Director (N=51)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=95)
All respondents	25%	71%	58%
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		77%	61%
All other centers		66%	53%
Age			
39 years or younger	22%	*	56%
40 to 59 years	25%	67%	56%
60 years or older	30%	72%	*

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

Note: Sources of savings include previous jobs.

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Chapter Two: Professional and Economic Well-Being



Professional Well-Being

This chapter looks at Ventura County early educators' well-being, both at work and at home. The first section addresses professional well-being, which is anchored in the deep pride and connection educators feel to their work.

Job Rewards

The majority of educators felt statements about “making a difference” and “helping children grow and develop” were “very often” true for them (see **Figure 2.1**). They were less likely, however, to “very often” feel respected or receive praise from parents. For the latter two statements, FCC providers were more likely to select “very often” than center-based educators.

Table 2.1. Job Rewards

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=98)	Center Director (N=56)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=104)
I see that my work is making a difference with a child	89%	91%	76%
I feel like I am helping the children grow and develop	88%	90%	79%
I feel the satisfaction of knowing that I am helping parents	85%	80%	69%
I feel respected for the work that I do	65%	57%	54%
I get praise from the parents for the work that I do	62%	51%	45%

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

Note: Table shows the proportion of educators who selected the frequency of “very often” for each statement. Response options included “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.”

Tables 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 examine some of these statements more closely. Longer tenure in early care and education corresponds to higher levels of agreement among center-based educators, with only smaller differences among FCC providers (**Table 2.1.1**). For instance, only 39 percent of center teachers and assistants who have worked in the ECE field for five years or less report that they “get praise from the parents,” compared to 54 percent of those who have worked in the field more than 15 years.

Table 2.1.1. Job Rewards, By Tenure

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=98)	Center Director (N=55)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=93)
I feel like I am helping the children grow and develop			
Less than 5 years	87%	*	78%
5 to 15 years	83%	84%	68%
More than 15 years	91%	93%	96%
I get praise from the parents for the work that I do			
Less than 5 years	61%	*	39%
5 to 15 years	54%	50%	45%
More than 15 years	66%	54%	54%
I feel respected for the work that I do			
Less than 5 years	60%	*	50%
5 to 15 years	60%	41%	50%
More than 15 years	69%	64%	65%

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

Note: Table shows the proportion of educators who selected the frequency of “very often” for each statement. Response options included “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.”

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

When examined by center funding type, we find opposing trends for directors compared to teachers and assistants (**Table 2.1.2**). While directors who work in Head Start or State Preschool sites are less likely to feel respected or receive praise, the opposite is true for teachers and assistants at these centers.

Table 2.1.2. Job Rewards, By Center Funding Type

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Center Director (N=56)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=104)
I feel like I am helping the children grow and develop		
Head Start/State Preschool	87%	87%
All other centers	93%	65%
I get praise from the parents for the work that I do		
Head Start/State Preschool	25%	47%
All other centers	74%	42%
I feel respected for the work that I do		
Head Start/State Preschool	41%	57%
All other centers	71%	49%

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

Note: Table shows the proportion of educators who selected the frequency of “very often” for each statement. Response options included “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often.”

Teaching Challenges

FCC providers and center teachers and assistants responded to a set of questions on challenges in their daily practice. **Table 2.2** shows the proportion of educators who selected each item as a challenge. The top two greatest challenges were challenging behaviors and finding time for planning. FCC providers were less likely than center-based educators to select one or more challenges. For instance, only 25 percent of FCC providers selected “working with children with challenging behaviors” as a challenge, compared to 59 percent of center teachers and assistants.

Table 2.2. Teaching Challenges

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=87)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=91)
Working with children with challenging behaviors	25%	59%
Finding time for planning	29%	42%
Turnover among assistant teachers, teacher aides, and other teachers		25%
Spending time with individual children	12%	24%
Finding ways to communicate with families	9%	24%
Conducting student assessments	16%	20%
Finding time for observing children	8%	20%

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

In **Tables 2.2.1** and **2.2.2**, we disaggregate some of the items by educator tenure in the field and the site's participation in Quality Counts. Among FCC providers, educators with longer tenure were somewhat less likely to see planning time or child observation as challenges, but challenging behaviors were no less of a concern (**Table 2.2.1**). Meanwhile, more center teachers and assistants identified challenges with behavior and finding time for planning as challenges. **Table 2.2.2** shows that educators in QCC-participating sites were more challenged by children's behavior and finding time for planning; however, they were much less likely to see family engagement as a challenge.

Table 2.2.1. Teaching Challenges, By Teacher Tenure

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=87)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=91)
Working with children with challenging behaviors		
Less than 5 years	22%	53%
5 to 15 years	26%	60%
More than 15 years	26%	65%
Finding time for planning		
Less than 5 years	39%	35%
5 to 15 years	38%	38%
More than 15 years	23%	42%
Finding time for observing children		
Less than 5 years	16%	29%
5 to 15 years	9%	15%
More than 15 years	5%	15%

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

Table 2.2.2. Teaching Challenges, By Quality Counts Participation

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=87)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=92)
Working with children with challenging behaviors		
Participating site	36%	68%
Nonparticipating site	22%	51%
Finding time for planning		
Participating site	45%	44%
Nonparticipating site	24%	37%
Finding ways to communicate with families		
Participating site	5%	14%
Nonparticipating site	10%	43%

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

Professional Support

Table 2.3 shows the share of the ECE workforce who felt they had a choice in their professional development in the previous 12 months. More than three quarters of educators in each provider type agreed with this statement. Among center teachers and assistants, the more experienced educators more often agreed that they had a choice in their professional development (for instance, 87 percent of educators with more than 15 years of experience, compared to 69 percent with fewer than five years in early education). QCC participation also strongly correlated with having a choice in professional development. Among FCC providers, for example, 96 percent of participating providers said they had a choice in their professional development, but only 75 percent of nonparticipating providers agreed.

Table 2.3. Choice in Professional Development

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=75)	Center Director (N=53-54)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=87-98)
All respondents	81%	76%	80%
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		86%	86%
All other centers		67%	69%
Educator Tenure			
Less than 5 years	*	*	69%
5 to 15 years	78%	82%	79%
More than 15 years	79%	76%	87%
Quality Counts Participation			
Participating site	96%	88%	82%
Nonparticipating site	75%	62%	73%

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

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Our survey also asked educators whether they had sufficient contact with other adults during the workday. **Table 2.4** collapses the options of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” and “somewhat disagree” into one category, since these responses were rarely selected. About one third of FCC providers and center directors chose “strongly agree,” indicating that they had sufficient contact with other adults during the workday, compared with only 24 percent of center teachers and assistant teachers. In **Table 2.4.1**, we disaggregate responses by site QCC participation. Educators at QCC sites more often selected “agree” than “strongly agree,” compared to those at nonparticipating sites.

Table 2.4. Sufficient Contact With Other Adults
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=90)	Center Director (N=55)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=102)
Disagree	14%	9%	11%
Somewhat agree	13%	16%	32%
Agree	39%	40%	33%
Strongly agree	33%	35%	24%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: “Disagree” combines any responses between “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “somewhat disagree.”

Table 2.4.1. Sufficient Contact With Other Adults, By Quality Counts Participation

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=90)	Center Director (N=55)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=93)
Participating site			
Disagree	8%	13%	14%
Somewhat agree	25%	12%	32%
Agree	53%	45%	28%
Strongly agree	14%	31%	26%
Nonparticipating site			
Disagree	16%	4%	6%
Somewhat agree	10%	22%	31%
Agree	35%	34%	39%
Strongly agree	39%	41%	25%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: “Disagree” combines any responses between “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “somewhat disagree.”

Economic Well-Being

In Chapter 1, we discussed educators’ wages and benefits. This section describes the state of educators’ economic well-being, beginning with their financial worries.

Financial Worries

Table 2.5 estimates the share of the ECE workforce that indicated they “somewhat agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree” with statements describing worries about their bills, food security, and more. In general, center directors were less likely to agree with the statements, but even this group reported high levels of worry (apart from worries about food). For FCC providers and center teachers and assistants, the greatest number of educators worried about lost pay due to an illness. Among FCC providers, small FCC providers were somewhat more likely to be worried about housing than large FCC providers (61 percent, compared to 54 percent).

Table 2.5. Financial Worries

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=99)	Center Director (N=58)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=109)
I worry about having enough to pay my family's monthly bills	63%	64%	70%
I worry about paying for routine healthcare costs for myself and my family	72%	63%	67%
I worry about having enough food for my family	45%	25%	50%
I worry about paying my housing costs	58%	62%	65%
I worry about being able to take time off from my job to take care of family issues	81%	58%	71%
I worry about losing pay if I become ill or if someone in my family becomes ill	85%	62%	73%

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

Food Security

To expand on the worries about food in **Table 2.5**, we provide an estimate of food security in **Table 2.6**. Our survey replicated a question from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, which defines food security as having “enough of the kinds of food we want to eat” (Flood et al., 2023). By this measure, center teachers and assistants had the lowest food security (59 percent). They were also most likely to fall short on food entirely: 13 percent of center teaching staff sometimes or often did not have enough to eat.

Table 2.6. Food Security
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=92)	Center Director (N=58)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=104)
We had enough of the kinds of food we wanted to eat	67%	76%	59%
We had enough but not always the kinds of food we wanted to eat	28%	24%	29%
Sometimes/often not enough to eat	5%	0%	13%

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

Table 2.6.1 shows how educators’ responses differed by center role and funding. Only 39 percent of center assistants were food secure; however, our sample size for this question is only 28 assistants, so readers should exercise caution in their interpretation. Meanwhile, among lead teachers, we find a small boost to food security for educators working in Head Start or State Preschool programs. Their jobs typically provide somewhat higher wages, as shown in **Table 1.9** (see page 20).

Table 2.6.1. Food Security, By Center Role and Funding Type
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Lead Teacher (N=76)	Assistant Teacher (N=28)*
All Respondents		
Enough of the kinds of food we wanted to eat	66%	39%
Enough but not always the kinds of food we wanted to eat	24%	43%
Sometimes/often not enough to eat	11%	18%
Head Start/State Preschool		
Enough of the kinds of food we wanted to eat	63%	40%
Enough but not always the kinds of food we wanted to eat	26%	40%
Sometimes/often not enough to eat	12%	20%
All Other Centers		
Enough of the kinds of food we wanted to eat	70%	**
Enough but not always the kinds of food we wanted to eat	21%	**
Sometimes/often not enough to eat	9%	**

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

**Fewer than 10 respondents.

Public Assistance

To make ends meet, many educators turn to one or more forms of public assistance (see **Table 2.7**). In Ventura County, 51 percent of FCC providers and 43 percent of center teachers and assistants used one or more forms of public assistance, most commonly Medi-Cal (33 percent of FCC providers and 26 percent of center teachers and assistants). In keeping with the findings on food security, 10 percent of FCC providers and 12 percent of center teachers and assistants use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Table 2.7. Public Assistance
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=86)	Center Director (N=50)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=94)
One or More Forms of Assistance	51%	18%	43%
Medi-Cal for self	33%	4%	26%
Medi-Cal for child	19%	9%	17%
SNAP	10%	2%	12%
WIC	6%	0%	6%
Food pantry	5%	4%	10%

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

Housing

Our survey included several questions about educators’ status of housing. First, in **Table 2.7**, we show the proportion of educators who own their home. FCC providers often own their home, since operating a child care program as a renter can be challenging. However, Ventura County FCC providers are somewhat less likely to be homeowners than the statewide average of 71 percent (Powell et al., 2022). Center teachers and assistants were least likely to own their home (37 percent).

Table 2.8. Homeownership

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=99)	Center Director (N=56-57)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=95-106)
All respondents	65%	71%	37%
Educator Tenure			
Less than 5 years	52%	*	11%
5 to 15 years	63%	65%	33%
More than 15 years	72%	75%	64%
Program Funding Type			
Head Start/State Preschool		58%	33%
All other centers		82%	43%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
*Fewer than 10 respondents.

To learn more about educators’ housing, we asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with their living conditions on a six-point scale from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied.” The majority of educators answered positively (**Table 2.9**), though FCC providers were somewhat less likely to do so. There was virtually no difference by FCC provider size; however, we did find small differences by QCC participation and educator tenure. This phenomenon occurred across provider types, with even larger gaps among center-based educators. For instance, 68

percent of teachers and assistants working at QCC-participating sites were satisfied with their living conditions, compared to 82 percent working at nonparticipating sites.

Table 2.9. Satisfaction With Living Conditions

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=104)	Center Director (N=58-59)	Center Teacher/Assistant (N=101-112)
All respondents	69%	77%	76%
Quality Counts Participation			
Participating site	62%	64%	68%
Nonparticipating site	71%	92%	82%
Educator Tenure			
Less than 5 years	62%	*	67%
5 to 15 years	61%	68%	75%
More than 15 years	75%	80%	86%

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

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Chapter Three: Headwinds in the Field



Lingering Effects of COVID-19

Shortly before our survey entered the field in Spring 2023, Governor Newsom issued an end to the COVID-19 State of Emergency (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2023). For child care programs, this announcement signaled an end to a heightened state of vigilance. Under current guidance from the California Department of Public Health, for example, “child care providers should consider providing masks to children and staff who want to use one,” though “providers have the right to establish internal policies requiring face masks in their centers and family child care homes” (California Center for Infectious Diseases, 2023). Positive COVID-19 cases, however, still require isolation for both children and teachers.

In practice, COVID-19 continues to impact child care programs: not only has reduced revenue been slow to recover, but providers also continue to see the destabilizing effects of the pandemic in their classroom.

Business Challenges

Table 3.1 reports business challenges that FCC providers and centers are currently experiencing. The most prevalent challenge was maintaining sufficient income (61 percent of FCC providers and 51 percent of centers). About one third of FCC providers identified maintaining desired enrollment as a current challenge, along with 45 percent of center directors. Regarding staffing, 30 percent of center directors reported challenges paying staff. Directors were much more likely to report struggling with recruiting and retaining qualified staff (78 percent and 56 percent, respectively).

Table 3.1. Programs Experiencing Business Challenges

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=105)	Center (N=66)
Maintaining sufficient income	61%	51%
Maintaining desired enrollment	31%	45%
Paying staff	32%*	30%
Recruiting qualified staff	24%*	78%
Retaining qualified staff	17%*	56%

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

*Among FCC providers with paid assistants (N=51).

In **Table 3.1.1**, we compare findings by site Quality Counts participation. For FCC providers, we find participating providers were less likely to report challenges with maintaining either income or enrollments. For center directors, however, the reverse was true: participating sites were somewhat more likely to struggle.

A similar phenomenon plays out for centers by funding type in **Table 3.1.2**: Head Start and State Preschool sites were somewhat more likely to see maintaining income and enrollment as challenging, similar to Quality Counts participants. (Most Head Start and State Preschool sites participate in QCC.)

Table 3.1.1. Programs Experiencing Business Challenges, By Quality Counts Participation

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=105)	Center (N=66)
Participating Site		
Maintaining sufficient income	52%	56%
Maintaining desired enrollment	22%	51%
Paying staff	48%*	28%
Recruiting qualified staff	36%*	73%
Retaining qualified staff	24%*	66%
Nonparticipating Site		
Maintaining sufficient income	64%	45%
Maintaining desired enrollment	34%	39%
Paying staff	27%*	32%
Recruiting qualified staff	17%*	83%
Retaining qualified staff	13%*	47%

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

*Among FCC providers with paid assistants (N=51).

Table 3.1.2. Programs Experiencing Business Challenges, By Center Funding Type

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Head Start/State Preschool (N=31)*	All Other Centers (N=34)*
Maintaining sufficient income	57%	47%
Maintaining desired enrollment	52%	38%
Paying staff	29%	32%
Recruiting qualified staff	72%	85%
Retaining qualified staff	72%	43%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Reduced Revenue

Table 3.2 estimates the share of sites whose revenues have suffered and not recovered since the start of the pandemic, as reported by program leaders. Head Start and State Preschool programs were largely sheltered, while around one half of other centers and FCC providers reported reduced revenue. Large FCC providers were somewhat more likely to be impacted than small FCC providers (56 percent, compared to 47 percent).

Table 3.2. Programs With Reduced Revenue Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, By FCC Provider Size, Center Funding Type, and Quality Counts Participation
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=119)	Center (N=59)
All respondents	50%	33%
FCC License Size		
Small FCC provider	47%	
Large FCC provider	56%	
Center Funding Type		
Head Start/State Preschool		9%
All other centers		53%
Quality Counts Participation		
Participating site	49%	11%
Nonparticipating site	51%	58%

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

Reflections From Educators

Our survey also included an open-ended question on the lingering effects of COVID-19. The following quotes represent themes in educators' responses.

Educator Reflections on the Lingering Effects of COVID-19

On **staffing**:

"I have been covering classrooms when my staff is out, and then I am working long hours to make up for the time I am not in my office doing my tasks. Being short-staffed has also caused a lot of stress. There were many days and nights where I felt I couldn't do this job anymore."

— Center director

On **children's development**:

"My classroom has a majority of children who were born during COVID. Most of our students lack social-emotional awareness [...] along with many students having tough behaviors, and teachers aren't given many resources to help them."

— Center teacher

On **rising costs**:

"The very high costs of food and utilities has made it not possible to build any savings. We used savings to cover dramatic loss of income in 2020 during the four months of strict lockdown, and then so many families still had one parent home, they didn't need child care, especially when on half incomes for many."

— FCC provider

On **low enrollment**:

"Our numbers went from 130 to 20 during the pandemic, and we have had to slowly rebuild. We have suffered loss of income and have to deal with high payroll costs."

— Center director

On **mental health**:

"Stress and anxieties within myself have progressed, and I feel sad a lot."

— FCC provider

On illnesses:

“Our staff is weary. There has been a lot of staff sickness since the mask mandate has been done. We are seeing more behavior challenges in the students and even some parents. We are also seeing our school community coming together to support each other.”

— Center director

Transitional Kindergarten Expansion

COVID-19 challenges overlap with another change in the ECE ecosystem: the expansion of transitional kindergarten (TK). Beginning in Fall 2022, all elementary school districts in California were required to begin offering TK enrollment to four-year-olds, culminating in universal eligibility for the age group by 2025-2026. Most child care centers and FCC providers draw enrollment from this same population, presenting a new challenge for filling spaces.

Enrollment Impact

Our survey asked FCC providers (**Table 3.3**) and centers (**Table 3.4**) how they have fared in the shifting child care market in Ventura County. Almost one half of large FCC providers reported enrolling fewer four-year-olds, compared to one third of small FCC providers. Meanwhile, three quarters of centers reported drops in their enrollment of four-year-olds. Losses in enrollment likely reinforce the poor revenue recovery shown in **Table 3.2**.

Troublingly, 28 percent of FCC providers also reported a decline in enrollment of three-year-olds. Around 22 percent were accepting more infants and/or toddlers. Meanwhile, few centers experienced reductions in three-year-old enrollment, and few centers were accepting more infants and/or toddlers. The latter is unsurprising, since centers must maintain a separate license for this younger age group with a pre-determined capacity. FCC providers have a bit more flexibility to shift between age groups as long as they maintain their adult:child ratio.

Table 3.3. Impact of TK Expansion on Enrollment, By FCC License Size

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Small FCC (N=63)	Large FCC (N=52)	All Respondents (N=115)
Fewer four-year-olds	34%	45%	38%
Fewer three-year-olds	28%	27%	28%
Now providing before/after care for TK students	11%	10%	11%
Accepting more infants and/or toddlers	22%	24%	22%
Began accepting infants and/or toddlers	9%	7%	8%

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

Table 3.4. Impact of TK Expansion on Enrollment, By Center Funding Type

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Head Start/State Preschool (N=29)*	Other Centers (N=31)*	All Respondents (N=60)
Fewer four-year-olds	71%	77%	74%
Fewer three-year-olds	10%	12%	11%
Now providing before/after care for TK students	12%	4%	8%
Accepting more infants and/or toddlers	3%	6%	5%
Began accepting infants and/or toddlers	0%	3%	2%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Interest in the PK-3 Credential

Some members of the ECE workforce are already pursuing jobs in TK classrooms; however, they represent a trickle of departures in a larger wave of exits from the field (see **Table 3.7**). A new teaching credential presents the potential for more staff leaving from centers and FCC programs: the PK-3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction Credential.

While enrollment in a credential program was not yet available at the time of our survey, we included a description of the forthcoming opportunity and asked educators to describe their interest. **Table 3.5** shows their responses. Center teachers and assistants were most likely to be interested, particularly if they held a bachelor’s degree or higher (58 percent); however, many individuals felt they had “no time or money” to pursue the credential (29 percent of bachelor’s degree holders). Across provider types, many educators needed “more information” before forming an opinion, including one third of FCC providers and center teachers.

Table 3.5. Interest in Pursuing the PK-3 Credential, By Highest Level of Education

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	FCC Provider (N=114)	Center Director (N=62)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=116)
All Educators			
Yes, as soon as it was available	17%	18%	25%
Yes, but no money or time	24%	27%	28%
No, I am not interested	26%	36%	16%
Not sure/Need more information	33%	20%	30%
Associate Degree			
Yes, as soon as it was available	19%	*	21%
Yes, but no money or time	30%	*	32%
No, I am not interested	23%	*	21%
Not sure/Need more information	29%	*	26%

	FCC Provider (N=114)	Center Director (N=62)	Center Teacher/ Assistant (N=116)
Bachelor's Degree or Higher			
Yes, as soon as it was available	10%	20%	29%
Yes, but no money or time	26%	32%	29%
No, I am not interested	34%	34%	12%
Not sure/Need more information	31%	15%	31%

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

*Fewer than 10 respondents.

Program Leader Reflections

Our survey included open-ended questions for program leaders to describe the impact of transitional kindergarten. In the box below, we provide quotes that align with the major themes across their responses. While some providers offered tentative support for expanded ECE offerings, the majority saw serious challenges on the horizon.

Program Leader Reflections on TK Expansion

On volatile enrollment:

"I lost children without notice because the TK cannot guarantee aftercare until weeks before the program starts. Children leaving makes a gap in our enrollment. Having one less child reduces our income by 15 percent. It appears no one knows this simple enrollment math, and it is very disturbing that there is no understanding of how losing children in September, but gaining them as they age up, leaves large gaps in enrollment that cannot be avoided other than only accepting children born in a certain month. The length of the contract is the only way to mitigate the enrollment problem, so shortening the possible enrollment by taking the four-year-olds impacts us greatly. It also makes our more advanced materials useless."

— FCC provider

On the cost of care:

"I cannot find enough clients. I have a lot of interested families, but they cannot afford it or get subsidies. I also lost two clients when TK opened. If the state continues to expand to three-year-olds I may need to close."

— FCC provider

On feeling overlooked:

"I don't understand why they are not using preschools that already have qualified teachers. They could give family stipends or tax breaks for preschool instead of hiring credentialed teachers who have no experience in teaching four-year-olds."

— Center director

On low respect and low earnings:

"I am experiencing a significant loss of children and income. With my hard work, schooling, and training, I have struggled to change the view of how some parents see home [child care] providers as 'babysitters' and not professional educators. And that's why they choose to take them to schools offering TK. I personally run a well-balanced learning program. In the near future, if the situation doesn't change, I will sadly be forced to close my [child care] of 14 years and go look for a job that will provide a steady income that will help my family."

— FCC provider

On parent confusion:

"There are fewer children, and parents are confused about which is best for the children. Also, there are children who need this type of program, but parents decide to take them to TK because it is more convenient for them, but some children do not benefit from this change."

— Center director

On developmentally appropriate practice:

"I support TK and UPK if it is developmentally appropriate and play-based, research-driven curriculum. However, we see the academic push down and students receiving homework, worksheets, and expected to sit for long periods of time with little outdoor play. As someone who is passionate about child development, it is heart-breaking that some of our former students (especially those who are low income) are entering these public school programs that are not developmentally appropriate."

— Center director

Turnover and Job Changes

Worker turnover is endemic in child care centers (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). FCC providers also routinely open and close based on their personal and financial circumstances. While these phenomena are not new, our survey included a series of questions that help illustrate the current state of turnover and job changes.

Staff Turnover in Centers

In **Table 3.6**, we describe the state of staff turnover between 2021 and 2023 as reported by center directors. In this case, turnover can be for any reason, ranging from quitting to layoffs. The majority of sites (78 percent) experienced turnover among lead teachers, with a mean of 2.8 positions per site in just over two years. A smaller majority of sites (60 percent) experienced assistant teacher turnover in the same period, with a mean of 2.2 positions.

Table 3.6. Staff Turnover From 2021 to 2023, By Center Funding Type
Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Head Start/State Preschool (N=33)*	Other Centers (N=33)*	All Respondents (N=66)
Lead Teachers			
Any turnover	80%	76%	78%
Mean turnover	2.9	2.8	2.8
Assistant Teachers, All Sites			
Any turnover	60%	59%	60%
Mean turnover	2.0	2.4	2.2
Assistant Teachers, Among Sites With Assistants in 2023			
Any turnover	92%	100%	96%
Mean turnover	2.1	3.8	2.9

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

Note: Chart compares January 2021 to Spring 2023.

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Some sites, however, do not employ assistant teachers at all. If we restrict the sample to directors who currently have one or more assistants on staff, we estimate 96 percent of sites experienced assistant turnover, with a mean of 2.9 positions per site. Sites that were not Head Start or State Preschools reported a mean of 3.8 assistant positions. For both types of programs, average assistant turnover somewhat exceeded the number of assistant positions per site in 2023.

Center Job Progression

From the worker's perspective, job changes are sometimes a positive transition. For instance, pursuing a position with higher earnings or better working conditions could help them stay in the field. Some turnover may also be the result of career advancement. In centers, this advancement would include moving from an assistant to a lead teacher position, or from a lead teacher to a director or administrator position.

Our survey not only captured job role in 2023; we also asked educators what position they held in January 2021. **Table 3.7** reports on center-based educators' job roles, comparing the role they held in 2021 to their current role in 2023. The table does not imply educators remained in the same site, but describes their progression through job levels or positions. Most respondents experienced "continuity" in employment: their position was the same in both time points. For instance, 83 percent of our 2023 director sample reported being employed as director in 2021. A few educators experienced job "advancement" in the period: for instance, 7 percent of directors in 2023 were teachers in 2021, and 8 percent of teachers were assistants in 2021. Very few educators took a "step back" to a lower position. Meanwhile, about 10 percent of all center-based educators were in some other role entirely in 2021, including jobs outside of early care and education.

Table 3.7. Center Job Progression From 2021 to 2023
 Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Director, 2023 (N=73)	Teacher, 2023 (N=88)	Assistant, 2023 (N=36)*
Director, 2021	83%	3%	
Teacher, 2021	7%	78%	3%
Assistant, 2021		8%	86%
Other, 2021	9%	10%	11%

Legend

Advancement

Continuity

Step Back

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
 Note: Chart compares January 2021 to Spring.
 *Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents).

Job Plans

Our survey asked educators where they would “most likely” be working in three years. Unlike the data in **Table 3.7**, this question was site specific. As shown in **Table 3.8**, center-based educators’ responses varied somewhat, depending on their job role: directors were most likely to see themselves working at the same center (59 percent), followed by teachers (51 percent) and assistants (39 percent). The remainder of educators were spread thinly across other options such as “working in a different center” or “working in a TK classroom.” Seven percent of both directors and teachers planned to leave the ECE field, along with 11 percent of assistants. Twenty-one percent of assistants were unsure of their plans.

Table 3.8. Center-Based Educator Job Plans in Three Years

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Center Director (N=53)	Center Teacher (N=72)	Center Assistant (N=28)*
Working in my current center	59%	51%	39%
Working in a different center	0%	4%	7%
Operating a FCC program	0%	6%	0%
Working in a TK classroom	5%	6%	7%
Working in support of children/families but not providing care	8%	8%	7%
Working in a job outside of the early childhood field	7%	7%	11%
Retired	5%	4%	0%
Other job in ECE	11%	6%	7%
Don't know	3%	8%	21%

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

*Only 28 assistant teachers completed this question. Readers should interpret the results with caution.

By contrast, three quarters of FCC providers planned to continue operating their programs (**Table 3.9**). Small FCC providers were somewhat more likely than large FCC providers to envision retiring (13 percent, compared to 4 percent) or to be unsure of their plans (11 percent, compared to 6 percent). No FCC providers expected to be working in a TK classroom in three years.

This finding, however, contrasts with FCC providers' interest in the PK-3 Credential (**Table 3.4**). Around 10 percent of FCC providers with a bachelor's degree would be interested in pursuing the new credential once it became available. In their write-in comments, however, some providers appeared to interpret the credential as a new type of certification to boost their current business, instead of an avenue to a job in a public school. This finding underscores the need for a clear information campaign that helps the ECE workforce understand the new credential's purpose and pathway.

Table 3.9. Family Child Care Provider Job Plans in Three Years

Ventura County Early Care and Education Workforce Study, 2023

	Small FCC Provider (N=50)	Large FCC Provider (N=37)*	All FCC Providers (N=87)
Continuing my FCC program	68%	83%	74%
Working in a center	2%	0%	1%
Working in a TK classroom	0%	0%	0%
Working in support of children/families but not providing care	0%	3%	1%
Working in a job outside of the early childhood field	4%	0%	3%
Retired	13%	4%	10%
Other job in ECE	2%	2%	2%
Don't know	11%	6%	9%

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

*Interpret with caution (fewer than 50 respondents)

Conclusion

Ventura County's licensed ECE workforce brings a wealth of personal and professional strengths to their work. They see their work as meaningful for themselves and their community, and they withstand numerous challenges to their well-being. The programs in which early educators work were profoundly destabilized when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the rising presence of transitional kindergarten may further erode their financial stability.

Looking to the future, few members of the ECE workforce plan to stop working with children entirely. Nonetheless a notable share of center-based educators are eyeing job changes, perhaps to another site, a TK program, or a nonclassroom position. This finding suggests churn and staffing shortages will likely continue. However, policy changes on the horizon may help some corners of the ECE ecosystem: state adjustments to reimbursement rates could increase educator earnings in the next few years.

As Ventura County considers current and future mechanisms for supporting the workforce, local leaders should:

- Seek long-term sources of public funding for county-led initiatives and continue advocacy for early care and education in the state budget. A “compensation first” strategy is vital.
- Engage deeply with both centers and FCC providers in efforts to support a thriving mixed-delivery system.
- Support programs outside the Head Start and State Preschool universe in securing stronger wages and job stability.
- Help the ECE workforce learn about and navigate the PK-3 Credential as it becomes available.
- Support programs in pivoting to serve more three-year-olds and/or infants and toddlers.
- Design new initiatives in consultation with early educators.

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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.

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