

INCENTIVES TO BUILD QUALITY AND REDUCE TURNOVER IN THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Few incentives exist for Iowa's early care and education workforce

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Inadequate wages and benefits drive knowledgeable and highly motivated child development professionals out of the early care and education field, even though many of these professionals see this type of work as a calling.

- Susan Hegland, Ph.D.
Iowa State University



Children thrive in early learning environments that include stable relationships with the adults who care for them.

High employee turnover and overhead costs are limiting the ability of early care and education programs to continue providing quality early care and education (ECE) to Iowa's families. Children learn best in ECE environ-

ments where they are able to develop lasting, caring relationships with a practitioner.

Salary levels in Iowa's ECE programs are lower than those for custodial workers and animal caregivers. Less than one third of Iowa's child care centers offer health insurance benefits. A similar percentage offer a retirement program. Yet early ECE practitioners tell researchers that wage supplements, health insurance, and retirement benefits would significantly increase their ability and willingness to remain in the profession.

Practitioners who own Iowa's family (in-home) child care programs experience similar limitations. The majority have care through their spouse's employer. However, more than 45% report they lack health insurance that meets their family's needs. One in five (22%) family child care

practitioners works a second job in order to make ends meet.

Research points to a strong connection between the education level of an ECE practitioner and the quality of care provided. Yet Iowa offers few incentives to enhance education levels for their workforce. In the words of one respondent, "A quality caregiver applies for a job at a beautiful new center. They want experience and prefer a degree. It sounds great until they offer \$6 an hour. I believe many [practitioners] turn down jobs because they must survive themselves."

To increase the quality and availability of child care, Iowa must take steps to motivate practitioners to enter and remain in the field and to achieve education levels that are associated with quality care. However, parents who are already struggling to manage child care costs, cannot be expected to share in costs associated with increased quality and availability.

Early care and education services are vital to Iowa

Six of every 10 Iowa children under age 5 are in some type of child care arrangement while their parents(s) work. For years, Iowa has ranked in the top five states for the percentage of children under 6 with all children in the workforce. Approximately half of Iowa's children under 5 years

are cared for by a family (in-home) practitioner. More than 50,000 are in center care.

Quality early care and education (ECE) services allow parents to be more productive in their workplace. Quality early care benefits Iowa businesses by preparing the next genera-

tion of our workforce. The early care and education industry also contributes more than \$400 million dollars in receipts with \$660 million additional financial impacts on Iowa's regional economies. Clearly, quality early care and education services benefit all Iowans—parents, children, communities, and businesses.



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- Iowa child care practitioner

Four recommendations to achieve high quality, widely available early care & education services in Iowa

Four recommendations, resulting from this study of incentives for the early care and education (ECE) workforce will lead to higher quality and available ECE services for Iowa’s children.

I. Increase the number and size of financial incentives for the ECE workforce.

Recommendation I proposes offering incremental hiring bonuses for center practitioners and business start-up loans for family practitioners. Expansion of the Iowa TEACH® program will offer more slots for participants and expand support for bachelors degree study. In addition, wage supplements, tied to competency and experience are suggested.

Health insurance and retirement benefits, such as those

II. Make health insurance and retirement planning available to the ECE workforce.

now provided for teachers working in Iowa’s public education system would serve as recruitment incentives, attracting new individuals to the workforce.

III. Expand availability of business practices training and technical assistance for center administrators. Offer similar training for family practitioners.

Recommendation III advises the use of rewards for administrators and practitioners who have completed business training and suggests the addition of training on how to de-

velop and maintain cost-effective employee benefit packages for centers.

IV. Create public awareness that early care and education is a highly respected and important profession.

Initiating public discussions to build consensus on a professional development ladder for an early care and education system will create a professional system that practitioners can identify with, and that will be recognized by Iowa parents. This system is especially needed for practitioners working as staff in Iowa’s child care centers.

Together these four recommendations will lead to a growth in Iowa’s professional ECE workforce.

Best practice programs experience little turnover

Directors of centers nominated as “best practice” facilities report they have very little turnover. This low level is attributed to the center’s ability to offer hiring bonuses, competitive wages, health and retirement benefits, and professional development support. Professional development expenses often include paid salary while in

training, paid training fees, and reimbursement for travel expenses.

Other program features, which encourage staff retention included lower adult to child ratios in classrooms and administrators with leadership abilities. These administrators used small gifts, verbal encouragement, and recognition to motivate employees.

Administrators spoke often of the need for public recognition of the ECE profession

Best practice family child care practitioners interviewed for the study were a highly motivated group. These practitioners echoed the responses of center directors as they discussed the need for public recognition of the profession as important and challenging.

Iowa’s early care & education workforce

Iowa’s ECE workforce consists of practitioners working in centers, preschool programs funded by public schools, federal Head Start funding, Iowa Shared Visions funding, and in family (in-home) child care businesses. Excluding care provided through informal arrangements where money is not exchanged for services, the state currently

has more than 12,000 programs offering ECE to its more than 570,000 children under the age of 13 years. Excluding preschool programs housed in public schools and informal child care arrangements where there is no reported exchange of money, Iowa’s ECE workforce alone employs more than 17,000 persons.

In Iowa, nearly 1,500 centers

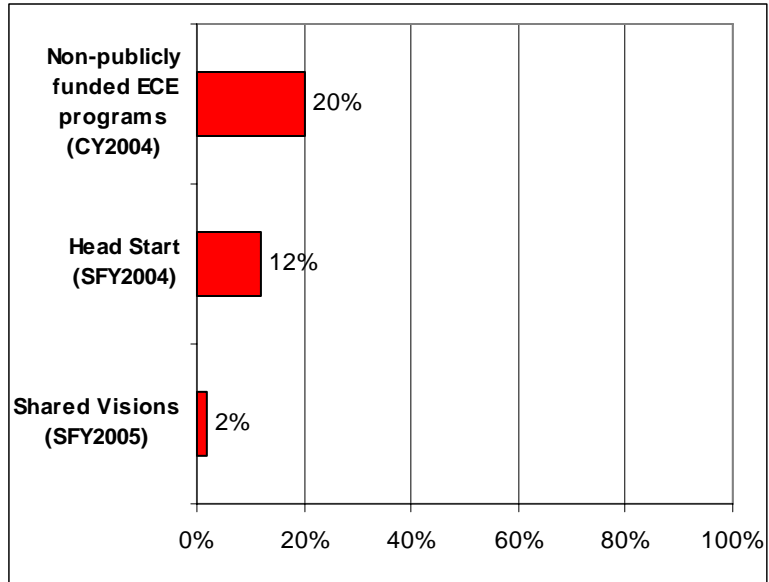
are licensed by the Iowa DHS while approximately 5,700 family practitioners are registered with the DHS. A recent study from Iowa State University estimates that there are between 3,800 and 4,300 non-registered family child care businesses operating in the state. In addition, about 500 preschool programs operate in public schools.

Reducing turnover in ECE programs is important

Turnover is important because it affects child outcomes by facilitating a lasting relationship between the child and educator or care practitioner. Reduced turnover assists in more efficient use of training funds and enhances the availability and accessibility of community child care.

Teacher turnover in Iowa's publicly funded programs such as Head Start and Shared Visions is much lower than in non-publicly funded early care and education programs.¹ When a child leaves a publicly funded program, funding for that child remains with the center supporting the center's infrastructure until another child replaces the leaving child. The remaining funding provides a stable resource to maintain appropriate staff qualifications, staff/child ratios, and overhead expenses such as rent and utilities. However, when a child leaves a non-publicly funded program, the parent fees and subsidies for the child go with the leaving child resulting in unstable funding, which affects staffing levels and other aspects of quality in these programs.

¹ Note that staffing configurations vary in non-publicly funded programs. Teachers may have responsibility for more than one classroom, while the number of assistant teachers can vary from none to several in a classroom.



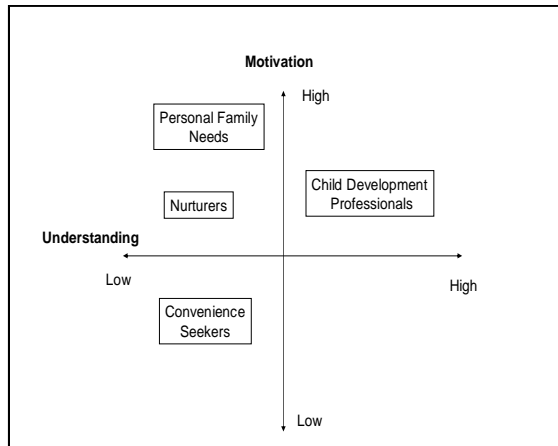
Teacher turnover in Iowa's non-publicly funded early care and education programs is much higher than in publicly funded programs such as Head Start and Shared Visions

Four ECE practitioner types

Qualitative analysis from this study suggests there are four types of child care practitioners offering care to Iowa's children. Child Development Professionals see child care/early care and education as a career or profession and tend to stay in the field longer than they had initially planned. Of the four types, the Professional is most knowledgeable and highly motivated to provide quality care.

The Nurturer enters the field because she loves to work with children. She sees child care as her calling, and intends to remain in the field. Only a catastrophe, such as her own health crisis or that of a family member forces her to leave the field. Nurturers who must leave their in-home child care business because of a move often have difficulty establishing a business in a new community where they lack social connections with residents

Personal Family Needs Practitioners temporarily leave another profession to work in early care and education while their own children are young. This provider will sometimes open a family child care business to spend more time with her own children; then, finds the business demands do not afford her



Child care practitioners vary based upon their individual motivation to offer quality care and their understanding and knowledge in how to provide quality educational and care experiences

this time and closes the business. She may also work in a center. If she has a degree in another field, she is likely to leave the ECE field earlier than she had planned.

The Convenience Seeker is looking for the easiest, most lucrative way to earn a living. She is typically found in family child care and resents limits put on her income-earning potential by state regulations that

require training or that limit the number of children in care. This type indicates a lack of awareness that additional training would help her be more successful at recruiting and maintaining clients.

The task for a recruitment, retention, and professional development incentive system is to increase the understanding of the Nurturer and the Personal Family Needs practitioner, while maintaining the motivation of the Nurturer, Personal Family Needs, and Child Development professional. Some professional development in the areas of business practices, including recruitment and marketing, negotiating and maintaining contract with clients and parent relationships is also essential. At the same time, the incentive system needs to help the Convenience Seeker increase both her understanding and motivation to provide high quality care, or to guide her out of early care and education to a job that she sees as more convenient.

Due to data limitations, it is not possible to estimate the percentage for each of these practitioner types in the ECE workforce.

*Full report available on the Web
www.extension.iastate.edu/cd-dial*

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 & EDUCATION**

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About this study

Researchers at Iowa State University analyzed data from telephone interviews and paper surveys with current and former ECE practitioners. Center directors, center staff, and family (in-home) child care practitioners were also included as respondents to the study. Data from two previous randomly sampled surveys of all family practitioners in the state and Iowa's non-publicly supported center programs were also used. The study was conducted during the fall of 2005 and was funded by the Iowa Department of Management, with oversight by the Iowa Empowerment Board.

A framework for thinking about ECE incentives

Recruitment incentives	Professional development incentives	Retention incentives
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health insurance Dental insurance Life/disability Retirement Flexible paid time off (sick pay, vacation) Reduced/free child care 	<p>Career development support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counseling 	<p>Rewards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wage supplements Year-end bonuses Cost of living or merit increases Program equipment
<p>Rewards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living wage Respect for profession Alternate degree routes Above entry-level placement Hiring bonuses Scholarships Forgivable tuition loans Program equipment 	<p>Training support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paid release time for training and conferences Conference and training fees paid Program equipment 	<p>Recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificates Public recognition Infrastructure changes that recognize the role of practitioners working in centers
	<p>Education support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition & fee reimbursement Books reimbursement Paid release time for class and study 	<p>Career development support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low adult/child ratios Low class size Formal mentoring and support <p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other practitioners to talk to

...and justice for all

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