



2023

A Critical Need: The Importance of the Early Care and Education Workforce



The Early Care & Education (ECE) workforce is as crucial to the state economy and business sector as it is to children and families. Sustainable investments in recruitment and retention of this workforce must be made in order to grow early childhood program capacity and continue to bolster the greater economy and workforce.

Seventy-six percent of families with children under age 6 have a potential need for ECE programs while they work.¹ Unfortunately, there are not enough early childhood educators to meet the need of those seeking ECE program options. As a result of these workforce shortages, classrooms and programs are closing, leaving families with limited, or no options, which contributes to shortages in the broader Minnesota workforce.

In the first few years of life, brain development is at its most rapid pace, with more than 1 million new brain connections forming every second. Exposure to rich language, experiences, and reciprocal relationships are essential for maximizing brain growth and development at this stage. Access to high quality early childhood programs is critical because they reinforce the brain development of children. The quality of those programs begins with highly competent and skilled providers who can effectively support each child's unique qualities including their abilities, and their cultural and linguistic identities.

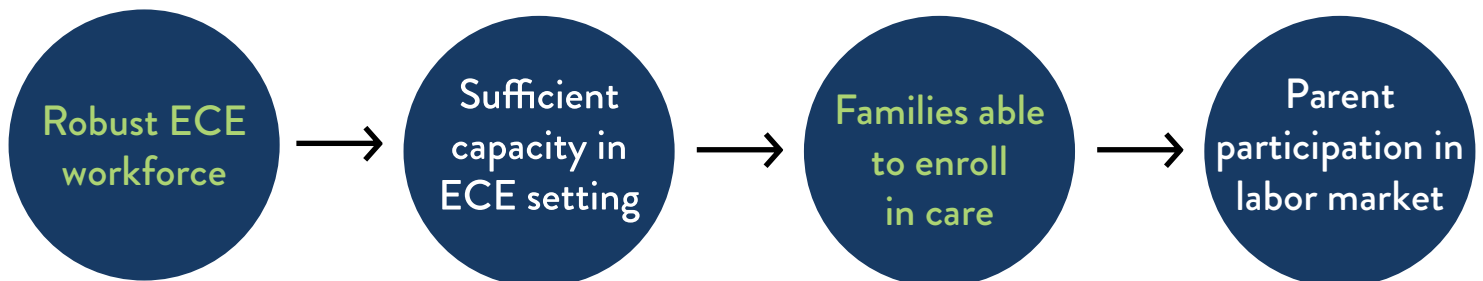
Staffing and Program Supply

Prior to COVID-19 there were approximately 221,000 licensed child care seats in the state of Minnesota available to serve the 350,000 children ages birth to five in the State of Minnesota.² As of June 2022, this number fell to approximately 195,000 seats.³

26% of Minnesota's young children live in areas that severely lack child care.⁴ This refers to census tracts with more than 50 children under age five that either contain no child care providers or have more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.⁵ Staffing shortages contribute to a lack of available slots: for example: the ABC123 Child Enrichment Center in Dilworth, Minnesota has capacity to serve 173 children but can only accept 143 children due to staffing issues.

“It’s very difficult to try to just keep the doors open. That’s what we’re doing right now. It’s just putting out fire after fire.”

~ Nicole Flick, Center Director at ABC123 Child Enrichment Center



¹ United States Census Bureau. "DPO3-Selected Economic Characteristics." American Community Survey. 2021. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=DPO3&g=040XX00US27>.

² Child Care Aware of America. "2019 State Child Care Facts in the State of Minnesota." 2019. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/State%20Fact%20Sheets%202019/Minnesota%202019.pdf?_hstc=122076244.030a830b94d-9d17e8cfd46c3a572f1c.1670256614435.1670256614435.1681134367901.2&_hssc=122076244.13.1681134367901&_hsfp=2824027994&hsCtaTracking=f17993e7-e65a-44aa-875f-48e85f58d059%7Cce9f9aed-4ea1-4040-af2b-6c3c85d78155.

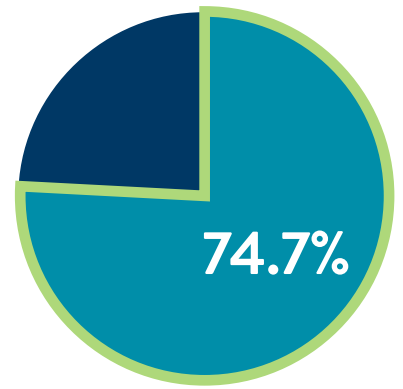
³ First Children's Finance. "Child Care Need Summary." Minnesota Data Resources. 2020. <https://www.ruralchildcare.org/data>.

⁴ Center for American Progress. "Early Learning Factsheet: Minnesota." 2019. https://americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Minnesota.pdf?_ga=2.213699795.670399378.1680643340-1317865759.1669833836.

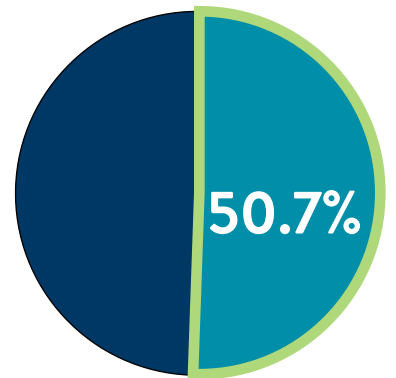
⁵ MPR News. "Child care staff shortage forces some Minnesota centers to consider shutting doors." 2022. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/11/16/child-care-staff-shortage-forces-some-centers-to-consider-shutting-doors>.

ECE Workforce in Minnesota: A Snapshot

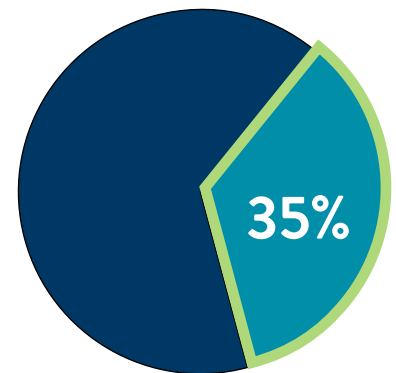
- ◇ Data from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Fall 2022 survey of early childhood educators in Minnesota shows that **50.7% of respondents were experiencing a staffing shortage**.
- ◇ **37.8% reported they are serving fewer children than pre-pandemic.**
- ◇ **35.1% reported longer waitlists.**
- ◇ Nearly three-quarters of respondents, **74.7%**, said **burnout and exhaustion contributed to retaining teachers.**
- ◇ Of respondents in the field for five or less years, **one third (35%) say they are considering leaving the field**; which if comes to fruition, would have dramatic consequences for the greater workforce and economy. The number one thing listed as needed to stay in the field was competitive wages.⁶
- ◇ **Wages for ECE providers in most early childhood programs are lower than the cost of living** making it increasingly more difficult to recruit and retain qualified people. The average wage of \$15.72/hour puts this career on par with those that require much less formal training and vastly below careers with similar educational requirements.⁷
- ◇ Turnover rates in ECE are higher than most other industries. **The annual turnover rate was 14.4% in 2018.**⁸
- ◇ While the ECE workforce is more diverse than the general workforce,⁸ the majority of the ECE workforce is made up of white women and could better reflect the diverse demographics of children in Minnesota.



Experiencing burnout and exhaustion



Staffing shortage



Considering leaving the field

Supporting Early Childhood Educators

Recruit and Retain

1. **Increase compensation and employee benefits** so this work becomes a viable career. The economics of child care and programs operating on thin margins don't allow programs to pay their workers sufficient wages. For this reason, federal and state investment is needed to support this essential sector.
2. **Offer career and technical education courses and entry level credentials** to high school students interested in pursuing early childhood education to draw people into the field.

⁶ National Association for the Education of Young Children. "Uncertainty Ahead Means Instability Now." 2022. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/minnesota-naeyc_2022_fall_survey.pdf.

⁷ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. "Labor Market Information." 2022. <https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/lmi/oes/>.

⁸ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. "Early Care and Education: Profile of an Industry Crisis." <https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/september-2020/early-care-education.jsp>.

3. ***Develop and support peer mentorship/coaching models*** to help people stay in the field as they begin to practice on their own.

Career Advancement

1. ***Create a path for support staff, like classroom assistants, to become teachers*** (Grow Your Own initiative) while increasing their knowledge and advancing their career.
2. ***Develop and fund alternative educational pathways*** such as [apprenticeships](#) and residency programs to support people who enter the field without a credential and wish to advance their career while continuing to work.
3. ***Ensure people can access the higher education they want to pursue*** without spending extra time or money and losing credits if they transfer from one post-secondary school to another.

Ensure Systems Support the Workforce

1. ***Implement the workforce recommendations of the*** [Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force](#) report and work to build a system envisioned by the broader task force recommendations that ensures all families to have access to affordable, high-quality early care and education that enriches, nurtures, and supports children and their families.
2. ***Replace the early childhood teacher licensure standards with national standards*** developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to better align to the Early Childhood Special Education teacher licensure standards, which have recently undergone revision to align to special education national standards informed by the NAEYC standards.
3. ***Align program requirements*** such as professional development, background check, and health and safety requirements to allow for ease in collaboration between programs.
4. ***Ensure well-funded and supported early childhood and child development programs*** at institutions of higher education so they can maintain degree offerings while compensation reform efforts continue and enrollment demand increases.
5. ***Implement an ongoing comprehensive ECE workforce study*** to provide accurate data for policy and decision making.

Resources

Visit [Transforming Minnesota's Early Childhood Workforce](#) and the [Great Start for All Minnesota Children](#) webpages to learn more.