



The Pandemic's Effects on Early Educators' Employment and Well-Being

Findings from the [District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership](#)

Fernando Hernandez-Lepe, Heather Sandstrom, Michelle Casas, and Erica Greenberg

May 2022

The early care and education workforce experienced extraordinary challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 60 percent of child care programs across the US closed and were not serving children at the onset of the pandemic, according to nationwide survey data.¹ In April 2020, child care employment fell nationwide by 34 percent.² By May 2021, child care employment nationwide was still down nearly 17 percent compared with February 2020, making this industry one of the hardest hit by the pandemic.³ Women—especially women of color—already facing wage inequality before the pandemic have been disproportionately affected (Austin et al. 2019).

This brief summarizes early educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, including changes in employment and wages, supports they received, and challenges they faced. The findings come from a survey of early educators working in licensed child care facilities in the District of Columbia in early 2021. The survey is part of the larger DC Child Care Policy Research Partnership study with DC's Office of the State Superintendent of Education. This brief is part of a series sharing other survey findings, including virtual training experiences during the pandemic, job satisfaction and workplace culture, and perspectives on DC's new quality rating and improvement system.⁴ Key findings in this brief include the following:

- **Many licensed child care facilities physically closed at the onset of the pandemic, yet one year later most had reopened.** Fewer than 1 in 5 early educators worked in a child care program that provided in-person services in spring 2020. Through February and May 2021, more than 4 in 5 worked in a child care program providing in-person services. District-wide, 79 percent of all

licensed facilities were open in May 2021 and most closures were temporary (79 percent of closures), according to administrative data on facility closures.

- **Most respondents were back to work at the time of the survey, although closures had been widespread and the COVID-19 vaccine was not yet universally available.** About 78 percent of respondents indicated they were currently working, and 18 percent planned to return to work. The small group of respondents who resigned from their child care jobs reported doing so primarily because they lacked child care for their own children.
- **Some early educators lost work hours and job earnings during the pandemic.** Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated the number of hours they worked each week decreased, and 36 percent experienced a decrease in their job earnings.
- **Some early education programs did not pay certain employees during pandemic closures.** Twenty percent of respondents indicated they received no pay while their program was closed. Further, a few respondents explained in an open-ended survey item that they could not access federal pandemic relief supports because of their immigration status.

BOX 1

DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey Methods

This brief presents highlights from the DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey fielded from February 24, 2021, through May 3, 2021. This voluntary, web-based survey was emailed to all lead and assistant teachers in licensed child development centers in the District of Columbia that participate in the Capital Quality rating and improvement system. The survey was also sent to all home caregivers and associate home caregivers in Capital Quality-participating child development homes and expanded child development homes in DC. Lead home caregivers whose names appear as directors or owners on the child care license were eligible to respond to some, but not all, survey sections, as they receive direct support from Capital Quality and have a different perspective than instructional staff members.

We obtained user account data from the Quorum e-learning database, maintained by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, to identify early educators eligible for the survey. Of the 6,865 staff members in the Quorum data, 2,613 met our survey eligibility criteria. We conducted a census, emailing each of these 2,613 educators a study invitation and unique survey link. Then we removed 94 people on the recruitment list whose email addresses were not active.

The survey asked early educators about their knowledge of and experiences with Capital Quality, their experience with virtual training during the COVID-19 pandemic, training topics they would benefit from and their preferred training format, and more sensitive questions related to the effects of the pandemic on their employment, physical and mental health, and economic well-being (box 2).

A total of 417 early educators responded to the survey, either partially or completely, for a total response rate of about 17 percent. Of these 417 educators, 387 (93 percent) worked at child development centers, 17 (4 percent) worked at child development homes, and 13 (3 percent) worked at expanded child development homes. A total of 200 (48 percent) participants were center lead teachers, 188 (45 percent) were center assistant teachers, 13 (3 percent) were associate home caregivers, 10 (2 percent) were lead home caregivers, and 6 (1 percent) were eligible directors from child development homes or expanded child development homes.

Also, of the 417 respondents, 344 consented to have their survey data linked with administrative data variables (e.g., facility quality designation, facility type, and educator position) we obtained from our study partners at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. We used these administrative data to generate estimations for different subgroups.

We developed two survey weights to adjust for survey nonresponse. *Partial response* weights were used when a significant share of the full sample (two-thirds or more), including partial respondents, responded to the question at hand. *Complete* weights were used when the nonresponse rate for the question was high and responses were primarily from those who completed the full survey. Neither weight changes estimates of the mean. Instead, we applied the correct weight for more accurate estimation of standard errors and future inferential work.

See the associated technical report^a for full details on survey motivation and methods; response rates; characteristics of the survey sample; steps taken to weight, clean, and analyze survey data; and a copy of the survey instrument.

^a Heather Sandstrom, Peter Willenborg, Fernando Hernandez-Lepe, Timothy Triplett, and Erica Greenberg, *District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership Study: Early Care and Education Workforce Survey* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2022), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/district-columbia-child-care-policy-research-partnership-study-early-care-and-education-workforce-survey>.

Work and Earnings Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Early educators reported whether their programs remained open in early spring 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced widespread closures, and the current operational status at the time of the survey during April and May 2021. The data suggest a strong recovery of facilities, although closures had a lasting impact on respondents' earnings and continuing attachment to the early care and education workforce.

Facility Closures

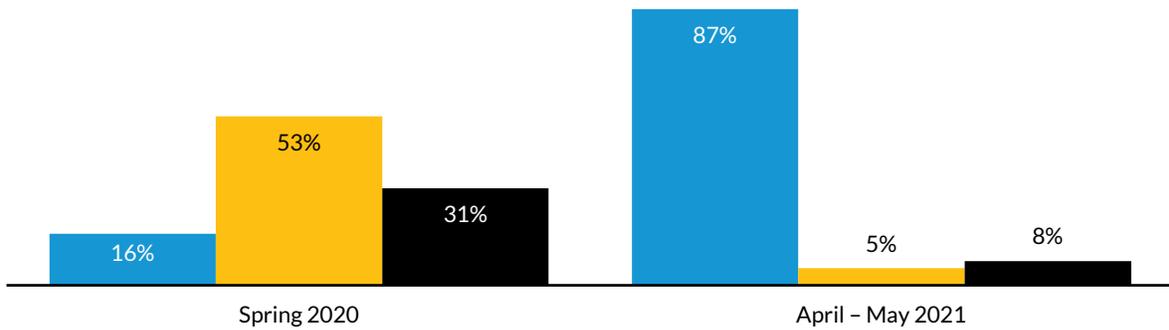
Few early educators reported that their programs provided in-person services at the onset of the pandemic (16 percent of survey respondents). More than half (53 percent) reported that their programs offered virtual learning opportunities for enrolled children and families, a common program response to support continuity of early learning and family engagement. More than a year later, most early educators reported that their programs were offering in-person child care services (87 percent). Figure 1 shows the facilities' statuses as reported by early educators in spring 2020 and at the time of survey during April and May 2021. Because more than one respondent could be employed in the same program, the figure captures the workforce's experiences and whether their employers were operational at these times.

FIGURE 1

Shares of Early Education Facilities Fully or Partially Operational, by Date

Status in spring 2020 (start of pandemic) compared with spring 2021 (survey administration date)

- Yes, we were open for child care services
- No, physically closed, but offering virtual programming for children and families
- No, completely closed; no in-person or virtual services offered



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey.

Notes: Figure 1 is a combination of two questions asked to all survey respondents. Of 417 respondents, 314 answered the first question, “Did your center or home stay open during spring 2020 when most businesses shut down in the District because of COVID-19?” and 312 answered the second question, “Is the center or home currently open and serving children (April–May 2021)?” Partial weights were used in this analysis.

Impacts on Employment and Work Hours

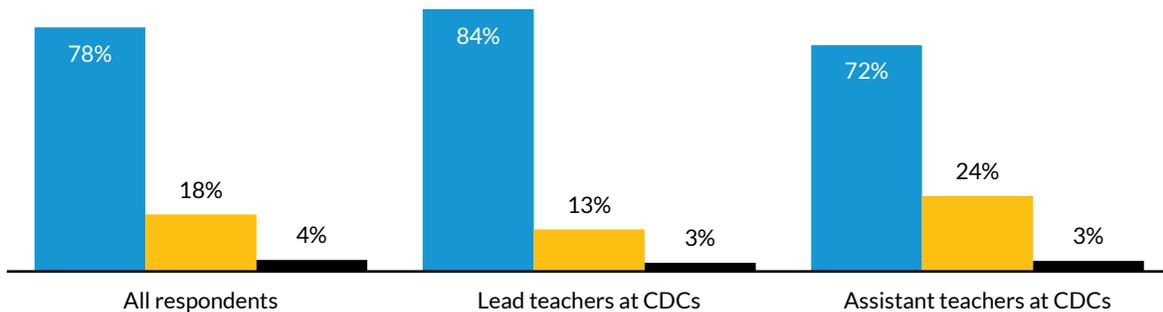
As figure 2 shows, many respondents remained in some way attached to the child care labor market (96 percent) despite the initial drop in employment at the beginning of the pandemic closures. At the time of the survey, 78 percent remained working at the child care facility on record, while 18 percent were not working but planned to return to their position. Compared with all staff members, more lead teachers at child development centers (CDCs) were still working (84 percent) but fewer assistant teachers were still working (72 percent).

FIGURE 2

Shares of Early Educators Employed at Time of Survey, by Staff Position, April–May 2021

Are you currently working as an early childhood educator in a child care facility in the District?

- Yes, currently working
- No, not currently working but plan to return to work
- No, not working at this job and do not plan to return



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to identify staff position.

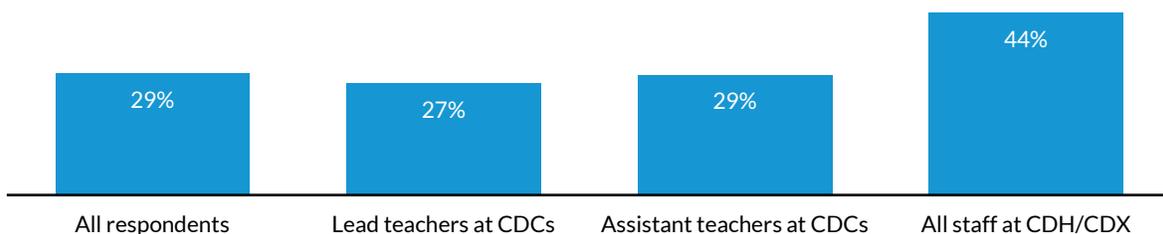
Notes: All 417 survey respondents were asked this question, but only 369 provided valid responses. There were 339 responses from CDC staff members (172 lead teachers and 167 assistant teachers) and 27 responses from CDH/CDX respondents, which were suppressed in the breakout analysis by facility and position because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell) but included in the total. Three respondents did not consent to connect their survey data with their administrative data to know their position and facility type. Partial weights were used in this analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home.

Nonetheless, some early educators (29 percent) reported being laid off, even if temporarily, at some point since the pandemic began (figure 3). Lead teachers and assistant teachers at CDCs reported similar rates of experiencing layoffs. A higher share of staff members in child development homes and expanded child development homes (CDHs/CDXs) reported layoffs (44 percent).

FIGURE 3

Shares of Early Educators Laid Off during the Pandemic

Since the start of the pandemic, were you ever laid off, even temporarily?



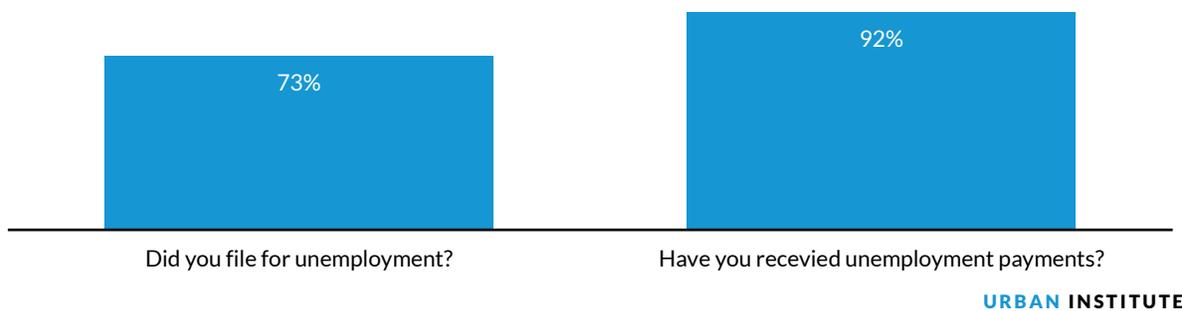
URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to identify staff position.

Notes: All 417 survey respondents were asked this question; 300 educators responded, of which 276 worked at CDCs (144 lead teachers and 132 assistant teachers) and 23 worked at CDHs or CDXs. One respondent did not consent to connect their survey data with their administrative data to know their position and facility type. Partial weights were used in this analysis. CDC = child development center; CDH = child development home; CDX = expanded child development home.

Among the respondents laid off during the pandemic, about three-quarters filed for unemployment benefits (73 percent). Of those who filed for benefits, nearly all indicated they received unemployment payments (92 percent; figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Shares of Early Educators Filing for and Receiving Unemployment Payments during the Pandemic
Among staff members who were laid off



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey.

Notes: The question “Did you file for unemployment?” was asked to the 77 respondents who indicated in a prior question that they had been laid off during the pandemic, and 76 responses were received. The question “Have you received unemployment payments?” was asked to the 55 respondents who indicated they filed for unemployment benefits, and 48 responses were received. We do not break out the analysis by any position type because of small cell sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell). Complete weights were used in both analyses.

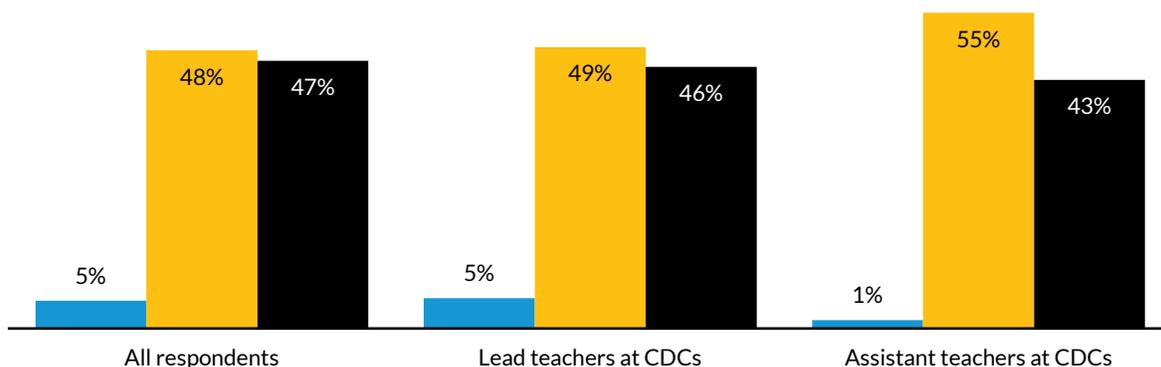
The pandemic also had an impact on the hours early educators worked (figure 5). About half of respondents (47 percent) indicated their number of work hours decreased, although a similar share indicated their work hours stayed the same (48 percent). Lead teachers had experiences similar to survey respondents’ overall. Yet assistant teachers were more likely to have their hours stay the same than have their hours decrease (55 percent versus 43 percent) compared with lead teachers (49 percent versus 46 percent).⁵

FIGURE 5

Shares of Early Educators Experiencing Changes in Number of Work Hours during the First Year of the Pandemic

Since the pandemic began, did the number of hours worked each week increase, stay the same, or decrease?

■ Hours increased ■ Hours stayed the same ■ Hours decreased



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to identify staff position.

Notes: All 417 respondents were asked this question, and in total, 303 educators responded: 280 educators at CDCs and 23 educators at CDHs/CDXs. We omit subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members from the figure because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Partial weights were used in these estimates. CDC = child development center; CDH = child development home; CDX = expanded child development home.

At the time of the survey, respondents typically worked 40 hours a week (median number of hours) but on average 33 hours a week. Across facility types and staff positions within CDCs, some respondents reported working more than 40 hours a week (table 1).

TABLE 1

Numbers of Hours Early Educators Worked per Week

Approximately how many hours per week do you work at your job as an early childhood educator?

	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
All respondents	33	40	13	6	65
Centers	33	40	13	6	65
Lead teachers at CDCs	33	40	14	6	65
Assistant teachers at CDCs	33	40	13	8	65
Homes	31	32	14	12	65

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to identify staff position.

Notes: This question was asked to respondents who indicated they were working as an early educator in a licensed child development facility at the time of the survey or were not currently working but planned to return to their position; 192 total educators responded, including 101 lead teachers and 79 assistant teachers at CDCs and 12 educators at CDHs/CDXs. To minimize the impact of misreported data, we top-coded the number of hours worked at no more than 65 hours a week. Complete weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home, SD = standard deviation.

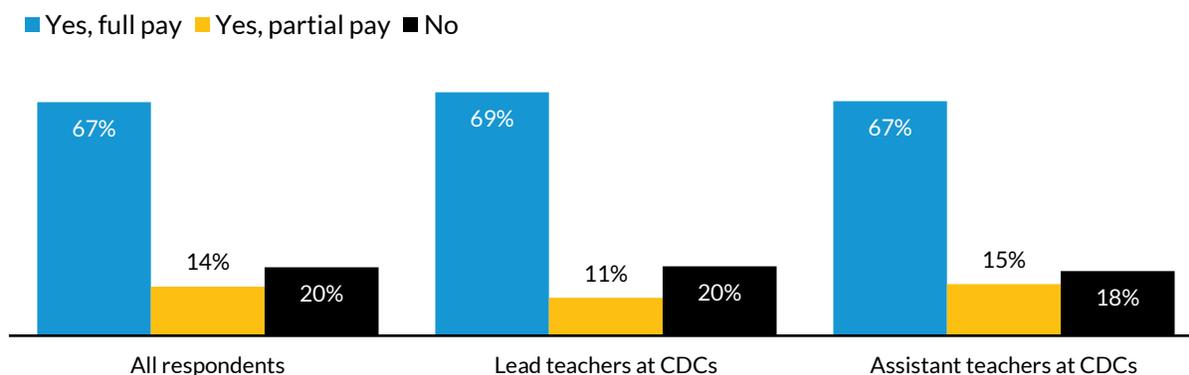
Impacts on Job Earnings and Household Incomes

The COVID-19 pandemic also decreased early educators' earnings and household incomes. Most, but not all, respondents received some pay when their employers closed. Most reported receiving full pay (67 percent) and some received partial pay (14 percent) during the closure. One in five respondents (20 percent) indicated they did not receive pay (figure 6). Comparing CDC staff members across positions, lead teachers (69 percent) and assistant teachers (67 percent) received full pay at similar rates.

FIGURE 6

Shares of Early Educators Receiving Pay during Program Closures, by Staff Position

Did you receive pay during this time when your program was closed or operating with reduced enrollment?



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to identify staff position.

Notes: This question was asked to 365 survey respondents whose facilities remained closed or provided limited services to families and children; 257 responses were collected, with 240 working at CDCs (120 lead teachers and 120 assistant teachers) and 15 working at CDHs or CDXs. Two respondents did not consent to connect their survey data with their administrative data to share their position and facility types. We omit separate estimates for CDH/CDX staff members because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Partial weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home.

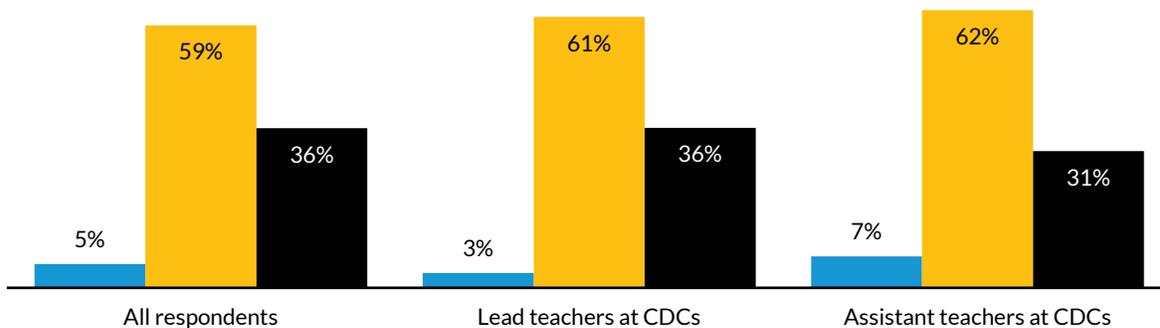
Responses to open-ended survey questions revealed possible pay inequities among early educators lacking legal documentation. At least one respondent noted that because of her documentation status she had not been paid in her last three months of working before the pandemic shut down businesses, unlike the rest of her colleagues. Her comment raises sensitive issues about the employment and treatment of some early educators: many face obstacles to claiming their rights as employees because they do not have a permanent residency or citizen status in the United States.

About one-third of respondents indicated they saw a decrease in their job earnings since the pandemic began (figure 7). A slightly larger share of lead teachers at CDCs saw a decrease in their earnings (36 percent) compared with assistant teachers (31 percent). Most survey respondents, however, saw no change in their job earnings (59 percent), a finding consistent across CDC lead teachers (61 percent) and assistant teachers (62 percent).

FIGURE 7

Shares of Early Educators Experiencing Changes in Job Earnings during the First Year of the Pandemic
Since the pandemic began, did your job earnings stay the same, increase, or decrease?

■ Increased ■ Stayed the same ■ Decreased



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to identify staff position.

Notes: This question was asked to all 417 survey respondents, but only 291 educators responded. A total of 268 responses were from educators at CDCs (140 lead teachers and 128 assistant teachers) and 22 were from CDHs/CDXs. We omit subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members in the figure because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Partial weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home.

We calculated an hourly wage equivalent for each respondent who provided a valid wage, a pay frequency, and usual work hours per week. This process also involved removing outliers and misreported wage data. We were thus able to obtain an hourly wage estimate for 173 respondents.⁶ Estimated hourly wages at the time of the survey ranged widely across all staff members and within CDCs and do not necessarily reflect DC’s minimum wage requirement of \$15 an hour. Some respondents reported a pay frequency other than hourly (e.g., biweekly earnings) and worked more than 40 hours a week, driving down their equivalent hourly wage.

The average wage for educators who responded to the survey and provided wage information is \$18.62. Yet about half of respondents made \$16.96 or less per hour (table 2). This means a few respondents with high wages are driving up the average wage. These high earners are more likely to be lead teachers at CDCs, whose wages are somewhat more varied than assistant teachers’.

TABLE 2

Early Educators’ Payment before Taxes and Deductions, by Staff Position

Hourly wage equivalent, US dollars

	Mean (\$)	Median (\$)	SD (\$)	Min (\$)	Max (\$)
All respondents	18.62	16.96	5.85	5.75	49.83
Respondents from CDCs	18.47	17.00	5.75	5.75	49.83
Lead teachers	19.43	17.75	6.45	8.43	49.83
Assistants	17.04	16.00	3.50	5.75	24.52

Sources: 2021 DC Early and Care Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data obtained from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education to identify staff positions.

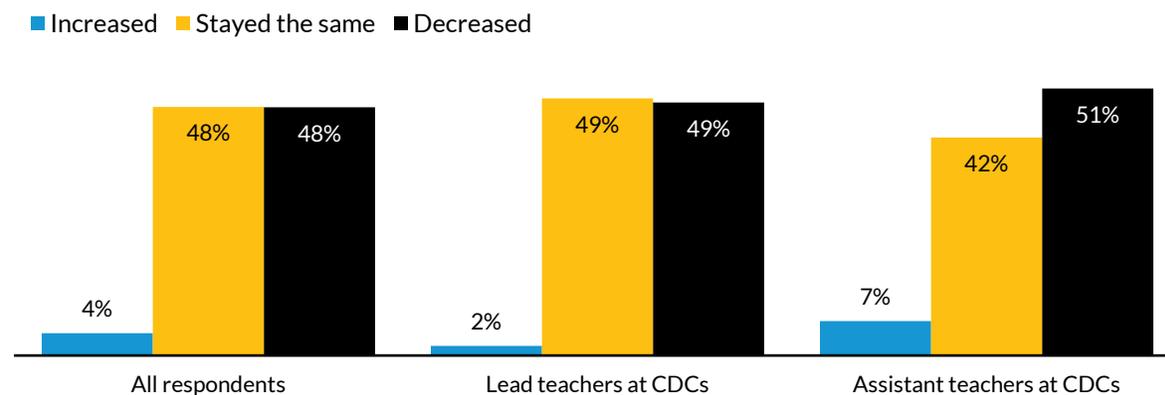
Notes: This question was asked to 358 respondents who indicated that they were working at the time of the survey or were not currently working but planned to return to their position. A total of 173 respondents provided valid wage information. This includes 166 respondents from CDCs (96 lead teachers and 70 assistant teachers) and 7 from CDHs/CDXs. We calculated an hourly wage equivalent for each respondent who provided a valid wage, a pay frequency, and usual hours worked per week. We omit subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members from the table because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Complete weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home, SD = standard deviation.

The pandemic’s impact on earnings exacerbated the existing stress of working in a low-wage job. Respondents described being “worried about the pandemic, because I only earn minimum wage and it is not enough to make ends meet all the time, which then leads to other problems such as anxiety.” They also described the pressures of exhausting personal savings during unemployment bouts and facing unstable housing and material hardship. “The pandemic has left us poorer...Our savings are running out. I feel very frustrated as a parent.” About half of survey respondents indicated their total household income fell. CDC lead teachers and assistants reported similar rates of decreased income (figure 8).

FIGURE 8

Shares of Early Educators Experiencing Changes in Total Household Income During Pandemic

Since the pandemic began, did your household income stay the same, increase, or decrease?



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to determine staff position.

Notes: This question was asked to all survey respondents and we received 286 responses, of which 263 (137 lead teachers and 126 assistant teachers) were from CDCs and 22 respondents from CDHs/CDXs. One respondent did not consent to connect their survey data with their administrative data. We omit subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members from the figure because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Partial weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home.

Working Conditions during the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic upended Americans' lives. Early educators faced a new reality, balancing work with the personal risk of contracting COVID-19. In this section, we describe survey respondents' working conditions during the pandemic, including their perceptions of working during a health emergency and employee benefits such as health insurance and paid time off.

Concerns about Personal Health and Safety

Respondents who had or intended to return contended with health and safety concerns related to the pandemic. At the time of survey administration, vaccines were not yet widely available. Many indicated they felt anxious, nervous, or scared about the pandemic and contracting COVID-19. Some respondents also felt uneasy about using masks, social distancing, and their employers' ability to implement health measures: "I have been masking and taking precautions, but it will be scary to expand my social circle. I am also nervous that my workplace does not have the ability to keep everyone safe. For example, we don't have windows in our center to let fresh air in." Other respondents were concerned about putting the health and safety of their families at risk if they contracted COVID-19 at work: "I am scared I will get sick and pass it down to them."

Access to Employee Benefits

The survey also asked about employee benefits (table 3). Most, but not all, respondents (86 percent) reported having health insurance coverage, whether through their employer or another source. A large share reported being ineligible to receive health insurance through their employer (44 percent).

The survey asked if respondents could take extended time off with pay, given COVID-19 quarantine policies at the time for sick and exposed individuals (a recommended 14 days). A high share of respondents (ranging from 71 percent to 89 percent, depending on leave type) reported having access to some form of paid leave. However, less than half (43 percent) reported being able to take two weeks of paid time off to care for their own illness or that of a family member. A similar dynamic is found across lead and assistant teachers.

TABLE 3

Early Educators' Employee Benefits, by Staff Position

Percentage of staff

	Total (%)	CDC teachers (%)	CDC assistants (%)	All CDH/CDX staff (%)
Insurance coverage				
Currently has health insurance coverage	86	85	91	73
Eligible to receive health insurance through employer	56	55	63	—
Paid leave				
Has sick paid leave	71	73	75	—
Has paid vacation or personal leave	83	89	81	—
Has paid holidays	89	89	95	73
Would have at least 2 weeks of paid leave if family member gets sick	43	43	46	—

Sources: 2021 DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data obtained from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education to identify staff positions.

Notes: Sample sizes for these survey items ranged from 216 to 218. Cells with a value less than 10 are suppressed. Complete response weights were used in this analysis. CDC = child development center; CDH = child development home; CDX = expanded child development home.

Hardships and Assistance during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Food insecurity and financial hardship increased for early educators during the pandemic, and not all were able to access pandemic-related assistance. In open-ended survey questions, early educators noted that rent, food, and other necessities are expensive, and “we need help, but no one helps.” Early educators who were parents of young children noted schools and their own child care providers were not fully open. They needed to work to make ends meet, but “it is very difficult to live like this.”

Food Insecurity and Financial Hardship

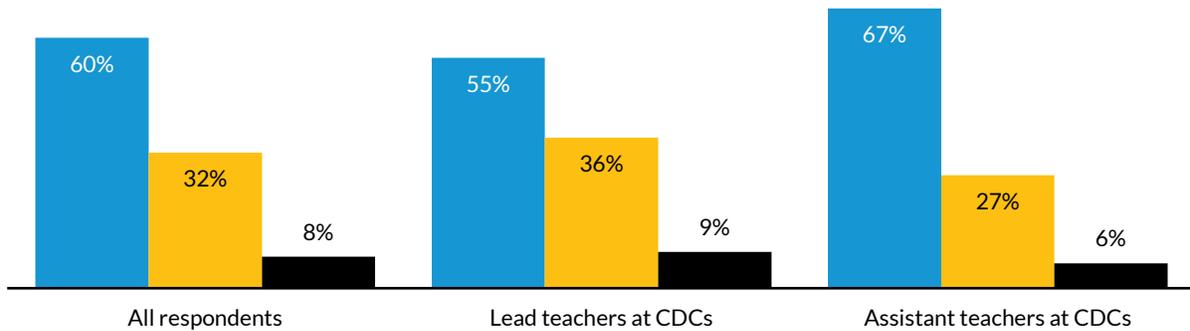
A large percentage of respondents were at risk of food insecurity, with 32 percent reporting they were *sometimes* worried about running out of food before they had money to buy more and 8 percent saying this is *often* true (figure 9). Rates of potential food insecurity were higher for lead teachers at CDCs and CDH/CDX staff members than for CDC assistant teachers.

FIGURE 9

Shares of Early Educators Experiencing Food Insecurity during the Pandemic

Within the past month, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more

■ Never true ■ Sometimes true ■ Often true



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to determine staff position.

Notes: This question was asked to all survey respondents; 214 educators responded, of which 199 worked at CDCs (112 lead teachers and 87 assistant teachers) and 14 at CDHs/CDXs. One respondent did not consent to connect their survey data with their administrative data. We omit from the figure subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but these staff members are included in the total. Complete weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home, SD = standard deviation.

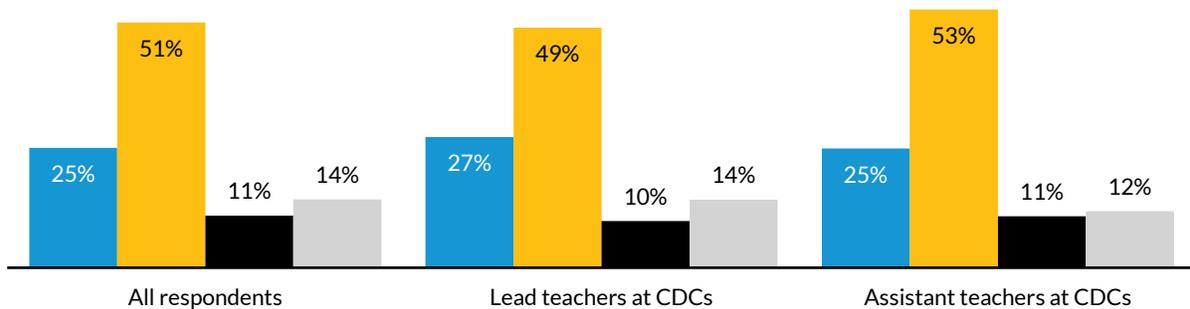
Most respondents indicated that they had some difficulty meeting their monthly bill payments since the beginning of the pandemic, with only 25 percent reporting that this was “not difficult at all” (figure 10).

FIGURE 10

Shares of Early Educators Experiencing Economic Insecurity during the Pandemic

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), how difficult has it been for you to meet monthly payments on your bills?

■ Not difficult at all ■ Somewhat difficult ■ Difficult ■ Very difficult



URBAN INSTITUTE

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to determine staff position.

Notes: This question was asked to all respondents; 214 educators responded, of which 199 respondents worked at CDCs (112 lead teachers and 87 assistant teachers) and 14 worked at CDHs/CDXs. One respondent did not consent to connect their survey data with their administrative data. We omit subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members from the figure because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Complete weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home, SD = standard deviation.

Assistance during the Pandemic

Our survey also explored the financial and material supports early educators received during the pandemic (table 4). The most common support was a stimulus check from the federal government (84 percent), and some respondents received help accessing food through grocery assistance (24 percent) or free meals (17 percent). Few respondents received rent or mortgage relief assistance (7 percent).

TABLE 4
Early Educators' Receipt of Economic and Nutritional Assistance during the Pandemic, by Type of Assistance
Percentage of staff

	Total (%)	Lead teachers at CDCs (%)	Assistant teachers at CDCs (%)
Grocery assistance	24	26	24
Free meals	17	14	20
Rent or mortgage relief assistance	7	4	13
Stimulus check from federal government	84	79	93
Other relief	5	4	6

Sources: DC Early Care and Education Workforce Survey and Quorum administrative data to determine staff position.

Notes: These questions were asked to all survey respondents. Sample sizes by question varied: grocery assistance ($N = 211$ for all staff members, $N = 111$ for lead teachers, and $N = 86$ for assistant teachers at CDCs), free meals ($N = 211$ for all staff members, $N = 111$ for lead teachers, and $N = 85$ for assistant teachers at CDCs), rent or mortgage relief assistance ($N = 210$ for all staff members, $N = 109$ for lead teachers, and $N = 86$ for assistant teachers at CDCs), stimulus check from the federal government ($N = 211$ for all staff members, $N = 110$ for lead teachers, and $N = 86$ for assistant teachers at CDCs), and other relief ($N = 210$ for all staff members, $N = 111$ for lead teachers, and $N = 85$ for assistant teachers at CDCs). We omit subgroup estimates for CDH/CDX staff members from the table because of small sample sizes (fewer than 10 observations per cell), but they are included in the total. Complete weights were used in the analysis. CDC = child development center, CDH = child development home, CDX = expanded child development home, SD = standard deviation.

A larger share of assistant teachers than lead teachers at CDCs reported accessing housing and nutritional supports during the pandemic. And, despite the ubiquity of the federal stimulus payments, a smaller share of lead teachers reported receiving these supports than assistant teachers at CDCs. Observed differences by staff position could be caused by differences in household income or other eligibility criteria. Several respondents indicated in open-ended questions that they could not access public safety net supports such as the federal stimulus check payments because they lack permanent residency or citizen status in the United States.

Conclusion

These experiences collected from early educators one year into the pandemic represent a reality before vaccines were widely available and before District-wide school reopenings. We collected data before implementation of the child tax credit that offered critical financial support to families with children, including many early care educators. Many early educators struggled with temporary unemployment, loss of hours and pay, and unstable income caused by facility closures. Many respondents also expressed their frustrations regarding pay, benefits, and working conditions.

Most survey respondents received some support through unemployment and federal stimulus payments. However, some could not access these supports because they lacked permanent residency or US citizen status or for other reasons. These respondents and their families indicated conditions of financial hardship and despair caused by lack of support during this far-reaching public health crisis.

Since the time of survey administration, the pandemic has improved, but the Delta and Omicron waves of the virus also caused additional school and child care facility closures. These changing circumstances likely affected the outcomes reported in this brief.

Overall, the data suggest a strong recovery of the child care and education workforce in DC; however, as we describe, the recovery in facility closures and employment may not have been the same across all workers. Further, we note that the many eligible early educators who did not respond to the survey may be facing additional barriers that we cannot account for in our data, so the findings we share may be underestimating the true impacts of the pandemic on this workforce.

Notes

- ¹ Data on the early care and education workforce are from a nationally representative survey of employed parents with children younger than age 5 whose child care arrangements were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted between March 31, 2020, and April 30, 2020, and was commissioned by the Bipartisan Policy Center in 2020 (“Nationwide Survey: Child Care in the Time of Coronavirus,” April 10, 2020, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/nationwide-survey-child-care-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>).
- ² Authors estimated the nationwide decrease in child care employment using Current Employment Statistics survey data on the number of people working in the child day care services industry (seasonally adjusted, series CES6562440001), collected using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Data Viewer: <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES6562440001> (accessed April 26, 2022). About 1,023,000 people were employed in March 2020, whereas in April 2020 679,600 people were employed. This results in a one-month rate of change of 33.6 percent.
- ³ Monthly employment data are from the Current Employment Statistics survey data on the number of people working in the child day care services industry (seasonally adjusted, series CES6562440001), collected using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Data Viewer: <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES6562440001> (accessed April 26, 2022).
- ⁴ This brief series covers topics related to staff training and professional development (Sandstrom, Casas, Willenborg, et al. 2022), job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Sandstrom, Casas, Hernandez-Lepe, et al. 2022), and early educators’ perspectives on quality improvement (Willenborg, Sandstrom, and Greenberg 2022).

- ⁵ We estimate that about 65 percent of respondents in CDHs/CDXs lost work hours. We omit estimates for increased or unchanged work hours because of small cell sizes.
- ⁶ As part of our data-cleaning process, we fixed misreported wages. The difference between the 193 total respondents with some wage information and the 173 responses that we use to calculate the equivalent hourly wage is due in full to the inability to estimate an accurate hourly wage based on the respondent's survey data. Misreported data that were corrected may include wages reported in Spanish (which uses periods as separators for thousands) or respondents who reported an hourly wage but reported being paid weekly or biweekly.

References

- Austin, Lea J. E., Bethany Edwards, Raul Chavez, and Marcy Whitebook. 2019. "Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment." Berkeley: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.
- Sandstrom, Heather, Michelle Casas, Fernando Hernandez-Lepe, and Erica Greenberg. 2022. "Early Educators' Work Experiences and Job Satisfaction: Findings from the District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Sandstrom, Heather, Michelle Casas, Peter Willenborg, Cary Lou, and Erica Greenberg. 2022. "Early Educators' Virtual Training Experiences and Preferences: Findings from the District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Willenborg, Peter, Heather Sandstrom, and Erica Greenberg. 2022. "Early Educators' Perspectives on Quality Improvement: Findings from the District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

About the Authors

Fernando Hernandez-Lepe is a research analyst in the Center for Labor, Human Services, and Population at the Urban Institute, where his work focuses on child care and early education, and food and nutrition policy. He is experienced in quantitative and qualitative methods, including econometric analysis, program and impact evaluations, and survey design.

Heather Sandstrom is a senior fellow in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population and principal investigator of the District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership. Her research focuses on child care access and quality and issues related to the early childhood workforce.

Michelle Casas is a research assistant in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population, primarily focused on research into child care and early education. Her research interests include early childhood education, immigrant families, and supporting the well-being of low-resourced families.

Erica Greenberg is a principal research associate in the Center on Education Data and Policy at the Urban Institute and coprincipal investigator of the District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership. Her research spans early childhood and K-12 education, focusing on programs and policies such as public prekindergarten, Head Start, child care subsidies, and home visiting. She also investigates the causes, consequences, and measurement of educational inequality.

Acknowledgments

This brief was prepared with grant funding from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS; Grant No. 90YE0221-01- 00) for the District of Columbia Child Care Policy Research Partnership Study totaling \$1.6 million, with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, ACF/HHS, or the US Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website. We are grateful to ACF/HHS and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute’s funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.

We thank the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Division of Early Learning, for engaging in the partnership. We are especially grateful to Kathryn Kigera, the division’s Director of Quality Initiatives, who has been our primary point of contact since the study’s conception, and Sara Mead, Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning, for her support and guidance.

Finally, we thank the DC Child Care Policy Research Partnership community of practice, including other grantees, program officers, and technical assistance experts who have enriched our work.



500 L’Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20024

www.urban.org

ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people’s lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.

Copyright © May 2022. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.