

Early Childhood Educator Compensation in the Washington Region

Highlights from a Research Report

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High-quality early learning environments that support children's development depend on the knowledge and competencies of those who work with young children. The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council articulated the need to transform the currently fragmented early care and education (ECE) workforce into one with adequate compensation and opportunities for professional development in their 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. To facilitate state and local efforts to transform the workforce to better serve young children, it is important to understand the ECE workforce and systems, including the compensation landscape, at a regional level.

This fact sheet highlights findings from an Urban Institute study of early childhood educator compensation in the Washington, DC, region (the District of Columbia and areas of Virginia and Maryland), one of several studies commissioned by the Washington Region Early Care and Education Workforce Network to inform and support its efforts to help realize the recommendations in the *Transforming the Workforce* report. More generally, this report speaks to the ongoing debate over addressing persistently low ECE compensation as part of a broader move to professionalize the workforce and improve quality across diverse early learning settings.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

"Early childhood educator" is a relatively new term for professionals working with children ages 8 and younger across a variety of settings. National surveys report wages separately for "preschool teachers" and "child care workers." Drawing on these data, we report on compensation for the following types of early childhood educators:

- center-based educators coded as preschool teachers
- center-based educators coded as child care workers
- family child care educators
- school-based educators (in before- and after-school programs)

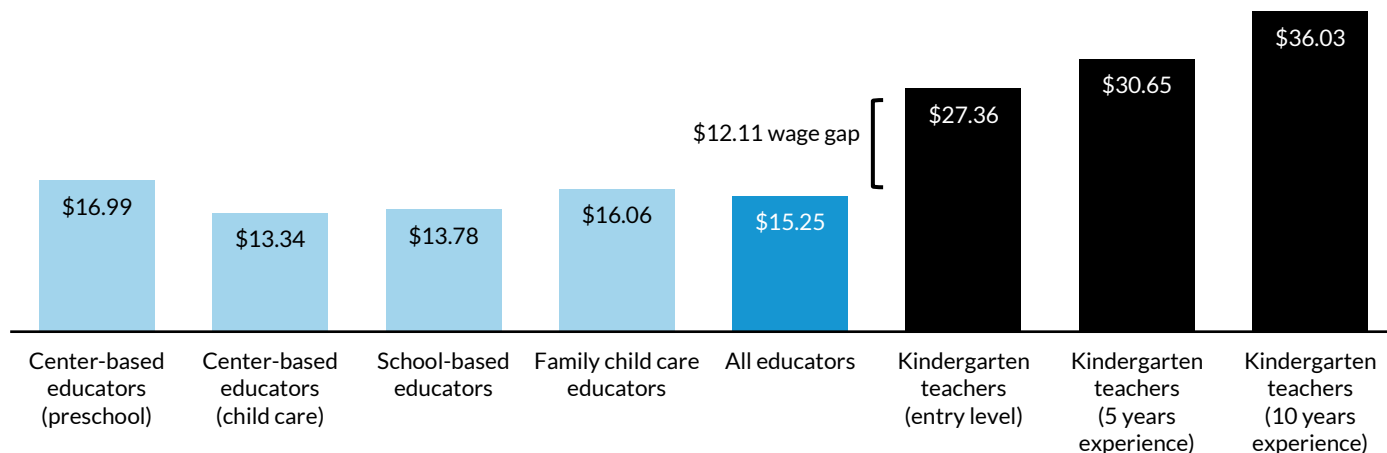
Because of data limitations, we do not include educators working in prekindergarten programs in elementary and secondary schools.

WHAT ARE THE AVERAGE HOURLY WAGES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN THE WASHINGTON REGION?

Early childhood educators in the Washington region earn approximately \$15 an hour on average, considerably less than public school kindergarten teachers. Even entry-level teachers with no experience and no education beyond a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$27 per hour. Center-based educators coded in the American Community Survey data as preschool teachers and family child care educators have higher hourly wages than center-based educators coded as child care workers and school-based child care educators.

Comprehensive compensation packages include wages as well as benefits such as paid leave, paid planning time, retirement, and insurance benefits. Our analysis focuses primarily on wages because data on benefits were limited, but we also found that 52 percent of early childhood educators in the region have health insurance from their employer or from their spouse's employer. Center-based educators have the highest rate of employer-sponsored health insurance coverage (approximately 60 percent), and those in family child care have the lowest (37 percent).

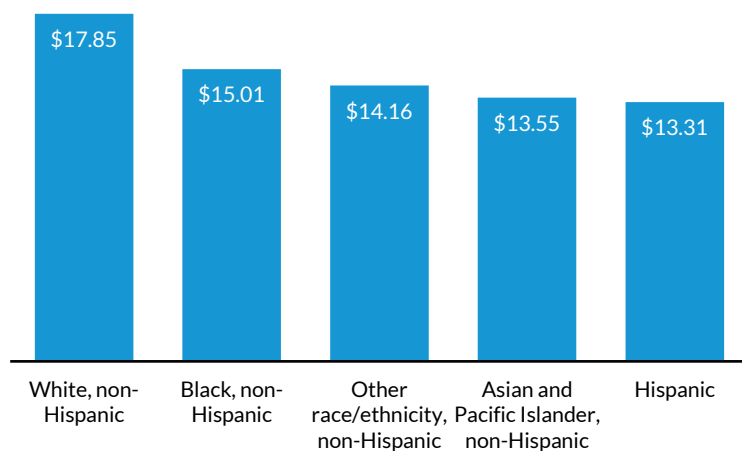
Average Hourly Wages in the Washington Region, by Setting and Occupation



Sources: Early childhood educator wages based on tabulations of the American Community Survey 2011–15 five-year sample. Public school kindergarten teacher wages based on analysis of regional public school pay plans.

Notes: Hourly wages are in 2016 dollars. The Washington region includes Washington, DC; Arlington County, VA; Alexandria, VA; Fairfax County, VA; Prince George's County, MD; and Montgomery County, MD.

Average Hourly Wages by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Authors' tabulations of the American Community Survey 2011–15 five-year sample.

COMPENSATION VARIES SHARPLY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Hispanic educators make \$4.30 per hour less, on average, than white educators (\$13.55 versus \$17.85). Black educators (\$15.01) make more than Hispanic educators but less than white educators. In other words, Hispanic educators earn just 75 cents on average for every dollar earned by their white counterparts, and black educators earn 84 cents to the dollar. We also found gaps in employer-sponsored health insurance coverage, with higher coverage among white educators than their black and Hispanic colleagues. There are an estimated 12,674 white educators, 13,720 black educators, 9,646 Hispanic educators, 5,240 Asian educators, and 1,135 educators of other races and ethnicities.

HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST TO ACHIEVE PARITY WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS?

There is an estimated \$12 gap between hourly wages for early childhood educators and entry-level public kindergarten teachers with no experience. The gap is larger for educators coded as child care workers (\$13 per hour) than for educators coded as preschool teachers (\$10 per hour). The gap averages \$10 for white educators, \$12 for black educators, \$14 for Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander educators, and \$13 for educators of other races and ethnicities. Achieving parity between educators and public-school kindergarten teachers would involve very large increases in hourly wages. Wages for Hispanic educators, for example, would more than double from \$13 to \$27 per hour (on average).

Increasing the wages of the nearly 30,000 educators in the Washington region from \$15 to \$27 per hour would cost \$464 million, assuming no change in the number of educators and hours worked. Costs would be considerably higher if the benchmark for parity were kindergarten teachers with 5 or 10 years of experience. The full cost of closing the compensation gap would be even higher because it would also entail increasing access to benefits such as health insurance and pensions.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CLOSING THE GAP?

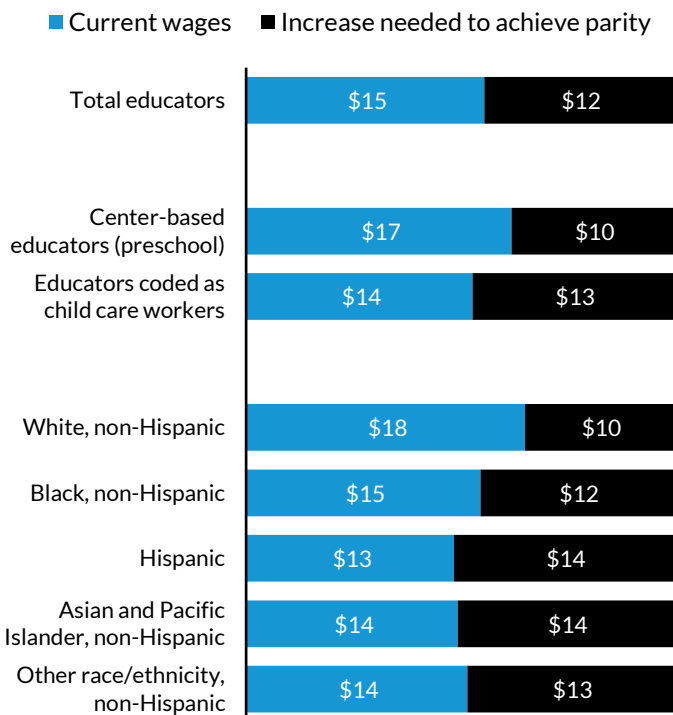
Closing compensation gaps would have short-, medium-, and long-term benefits. Better compensation would allow ECE programs to attract more skilled educators and reduce turnover, promoting continuity of care for young children. Children would benefit from higher-quality programs with a more stable and competent workforce. Improved child outcomes would have long-term economic benefits, including increases in children's educational attainment and higher local economic growth driven by a more educated workforce.

At the same time, the economic conditions of early childhood educators and their families would improve, and the resulting decreases in their poverty and use of public benefits would mean savings for taxpayers.

For more information, see the full report: [Early Childhood Educator Compensation in the Washington Region](#) by Julia B. Isaacs, Daniel Kuehn, and Shirley Adelstein, with Pamela Loprest, Devon Genua, and Semhar Gebrekristos.

This project is supported by Washington Area Women's Foundation and was conducted for the Washington Region Early Care and Education Workforce Network, a collective partnership of local governments, higher education, and non-profit groups from across the Washington region who are committed to developing a regional competency-based career pathway for early childhood educators that is linked to quality and compensation.

Gap between Early Childhood Educators and Kindergarten Teachers



Source: Authors' tabulations of the American Community Survey 2011–15 five-year sample.

Notes: Entry-level teacher wages (\$27 per hour) assume the teacher has only a bachelor's degree, has no years of experience and no pay supplements or bonuses, and works 10 months (1,733 hours) per year. Estimates are shown in 2016 dollars.

Benefits of Closing the Wage Gap

Short-term benefits

- Attract a more skilled workforce
- Reduce turnover and hiring costs
- Increase the income of educators
- Reduce family poverty
- Increase access to benefits
- Reduce use of public benefits

Medium-term benefits

- Higher quality early care and education
- Better child outcomes
- Savings for taxpayers

Long-term benefits

- A more educated future workforce
- Higher local economic growth