

---

# Economic Policy Institute

---

1660 L STREET, NW • SUITE 1200 • WASHINGTON, DC 20036 • 202/775-8810 • FAX 202/775-0819



**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL:** Thursday, September 15, 2005 at 12:01 a.m. Eastern time

**CONTACT:** Nancy Coleman, Stephaan Harris, or Karen Conner at 202-775-8810 or [news@epi.org](mailto:news@epi.org)

## QUALIFICATIONS DECLINE AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS

### Less than One-Third Now Have College Degrees; Low Pay and Benefits Lie Behind Decline; Educational Quality in Jeopardy

Since the early 1980s, there has been a large and unsettling dip in the qualifications of the center-based early childhood workforce nationwide, with 30% of teachers and administrators now having just a high school diploma or less, according to a comprehensive new report published today by the Economic Policy Institute, the Keystone Research Center, and the Foundation for Child Development.

***Losing Ground In Early Childhood Education*** – authored by researchers Stephen Herzenberg, Mark Price and David Bradley -- finds that declining qualifications have resulted, in part, from persistent low wages and benefits. As more educated women have enjoyed expanding opportunities in other fields, low pay has made it hard for the early childhood education (ECE) field to hold onto experienced teachers with proper training and educational background. As a result, more teachers are entering ECE without a college degree. Home-based early childhood educators (for which consistent data exist only since 2000) have even lower education levels than those who are center-based.

The national report, released together with a table on qualifications and pay in 39 states and companion reports for seven states (CA, FL, MA, NJ, NY, PA, WI), uses a unique new data set from the 1979-2004 Current Population Survey to examine trends in ECE qualifications and pay. The authors emphasize that these educational trends can reduce the effectiveness of these ECE programs and the long-term academic outcomes of preschool children nationwide.

“To succeed in school and life, children need quality early education. But some of them clearly are not getting it,” said Herzenberg, executive director of the Keystone Research Center in Harrisburg, Pa. “Although some states have high-quality preschool, we’re losing ground in center-based ECE overall. Students and the community as a whole will ultimately pay the price for low teacher quality.”

Some of the report’s major findings include:

- The share of U.S. center-based teachers and administrators with at least a four-year college degree averaged 43% from 1983 to 1985, but only 30% from 2002 to 2004. The share of these educators with a high school education or less rose from less than 25% in 1983 and 1984 to 30% in recent years.
- Since 2000, only about one in nine home-based early childhood educators has a college degree. And less than half of home-based ECE teachers have any education beyond high school.
- Twenty-one percent of home-based early childhood educators have less than a high school diploma; for center-based staff, the figure is 12%.

-More-

- In 2002-2004, female college graduates earned \$19.23 an hour on average, while center-based teachers and administrators (over 95% of whom are women) earned only about \$10 per hour. Even those with a college education earned only \$13.35 an hour, or less than \$28,000 annually.
- Just one-third of center-based teachers and administrators receive health care through their jobs, while a quarter of them have incomes below 200% of the poverty line, roughly the minimum necessary to pay for basic necessities without public assistance.

“The lack of educational standards is one problem. In addition, some ECE educators are stuck at the bottom of the barrel in terms of wages and quality of life,” said co-author Mark Price, a Keystone labor economist.

*Losing Ground* shows that for the past 25 years, the ECE industry has been living off college-educated teachers and directors who entered the field in the 1960s and 1970s and stayed with it. By 2004, a third of center-based, college-degree holders were 47 or older. But because many other higher-paying opportunities are available in and beyond the field of education, some current ECE workers don’t have a background and skills comparable to their predecessors.

The authors have also looked in-depth into seven states – California, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin – to examine trends in home-based and center-based ECE centers. The results in those states often mirror the downward trend of ECE qualifications and pay.

In California for example, only a quarter of center-based teachers and administrators had a college degree by the year 2000. In Los Angeles, San Diego, Sacramento, and San Jose, one in six or less of all center-based early childhood educators (this group includes assistant teachers and teacher aides as well as teachers and administrators) had a college degree. Wisconsin followed a similar pattern. In 2000, about one in five of all center-based early childhood educators in the Milwaukee area and one in six in the Madison area had a college degree or more. And Florida exemplifies ECE’s problem of low salaries as the median pay for center-based early childhood educators in that state remains \$8 per hour – less than \$17,000 per year for a full-time worker, and below the federal poverty level for a family of four.

To combat the problems of declining ECE pay and qualifications, the authors suggest phasing in higher standards for educators, with more research as standards rise to find the most effective mix of formal education and structured work-based learning. One recommended model is pairing experienced college-educated head teachers with new, less-educated workers. But the authors also emphasize that improving standards will fail unless pay is raised to attract quality teachers.

“Our current policy is penny wise but pound foolish,” said co-author David Bradley, now a policy analyst with the State Fiscal Project at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, DC. “Society can’t afford not to pay more for well-qualified ECE teachers. We need public investment to turn around these trends, improve early childhood education across the board, and deliver benefits that research demonstrates will far exceed the cost.”

#####

*The Economic Policy Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute – or “think tank” – that researches the impact of economic trends and policies on working people in the United States and around the world.*