

Research Notes

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A Tale of Two States: Turnover in Illinois and California

For more than a decade, research has documented the relationship between compensation and the quality and stability of the early childhood workforce.¹ Compensation levels for teaching staff have consistently surfaced as a strong predictor of staff turnover.² Recent research conducted in Illinois and California provides additional insight into the nature of turnover and possible remedies to reduce the alarmingly high rate of turnover in the field.

Defining Turnover

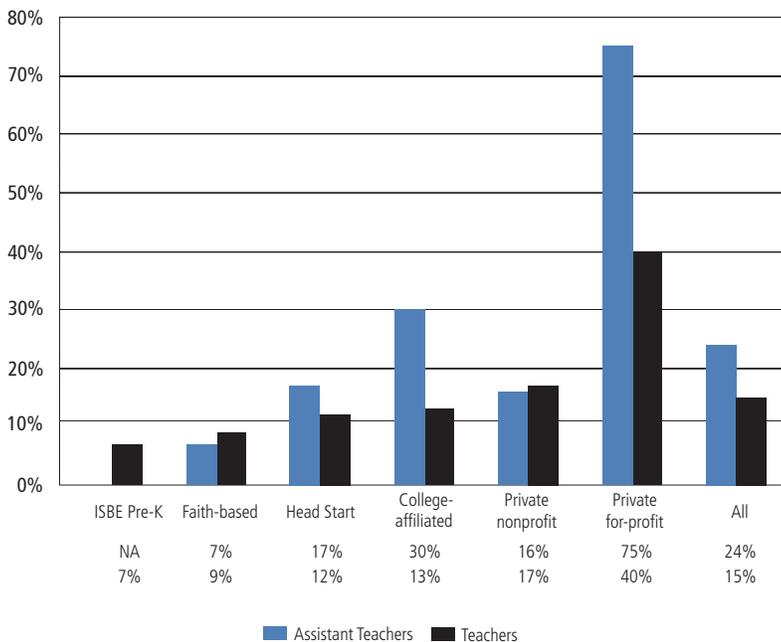
There are three types of turnover in early childhood settings. **Job turnover** occurs when a teacher leaves a center to take a position in another early childhood program either voluntarily or involuntary; **Position turnover** occurs when a teacher takes a different position within the same center either through a promotion or because of staff changes; and **Occupational turnover** occurs when a worker leaves the early childhood field altogether. While job turnover and position turnover do not involve a loss of talent to the field, all three types of turnover can have a detrimental effect on children by undermining the stability and consistency so important in caregiver relations.

The Illinois Picture

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) recently conducted research on the status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois.³ The results published in the final report *Who's Caring for the Kids?* provide turnover data on more than 1,100 early childhood programs in the state.

Turnover of teaching staff varies by both program type and position. Overall, annual turnover rates average 24% for assistant teachers and 15% for teachers. These averages, however, mask the enormous variation that exists among programs. Some programs are very stable and experience no turnover during the course of a year, while other programs have a constant influx of new staff and experience 150% turnover of staff annually. Turnover in Illinois is lowest in ISBE State-funded Pre-K programs.

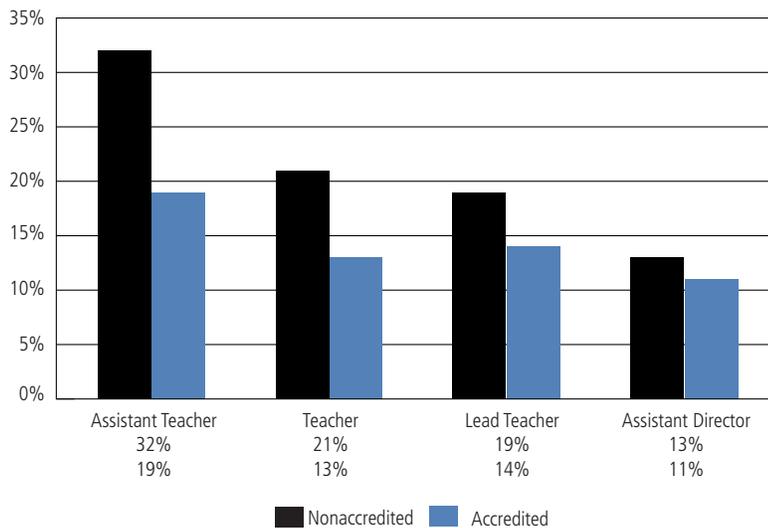
Annual Turnover of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers and Teachers by Program Type



An analysis of the Illinois turnover data reveals that the least qualified and lowest paid staff leave the field in higher numbers than more qualified staff receiving higher salaries. Teachers tend to make a commitment to the field if they have at least an associate's degree, but will leave for better paying jobs within the field as they obtain higher degrees and credentials. For example, a classroom teacher who pursues and acquires a bachelor's degree may leave a Head Start program to seek employment in an ISBE Pre-K program.

In Illinois, programs that have achieved accreditation experience lower levels of turnover than nonaccredited programs. Turnover of assistant teachers in accredited programs is 13% lower than in nonaccredited programs. For teachers, the difference in turnover between accredited and nonaccredited programs is 8%. This differential may be related to compensation levels. Lead teachers in accredited programs make 10% more than those with similar positions and credentials in nonaccredited programs.

Turnover in Accredited and Nonaccredited Early Childhood Programs by Role



The California Picture

A recent report published by the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) examined the effects of the staffing crisis on efforts to improve and maintain center-based quality.⁴ *Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000* summarizes longitudinal data collected in 75 child care centers in three California communities over several years.

The researchers found that the average turnover rate between 1999 and 2000 was 30% for all teaching staff. Even more alarming, 76% of all teaching staff employed in the centers in 1996 were no longer on the job in 2000 and new teaching staff as a whole were significantly less well educated than those they replaced. Not surprising, wages were found to be a significant determinant of teacher turnover. Among all teachers who had completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood, there were significant differences in the wages of those who stayed and those who had left. This difference translates to over \$6,000 per year for full-time staff.

The California study found that between 1996 and 2000, NAEYC-accredited programs continued to demonstrate higher overall quality than other nonaccredited programs. However, unlike in Illinois, accredited programs in California did not experience significantly lower turnover among staff nor did they pay higher levels of compensation.

One of the goals of the *Then & Now* study was to determine which variables predict whether or not a program will be able to sustain a high level of quality over time. The researchers concluded that programs that have a greater percentage of highly trained, consistent staff are better able to sustain high levels of program quality. The authors conclude highly skilled teachers are more likely to remain at their jobs if they earn higher than average wages, and work with a higher percentage of well-trained teaching staff who also remain on the job.

Lessons Learned from Illinois and California

The Illinois study provides a panoramic snapshot of the status of the early childhood workforce in the state; the California study provides a close-up picture of a select group of programs over time. Together, both studies provide compelling evidence as to why turnover exists and how it can be reduced.

- There are wide disparities in the qualifications required and the compensation paid for comparable work in different early childhood settings. These disparities, fueled by funding and regulatory inequities, are major contributors to turnover.
- Centers paying higher wages are better able to retain qualified teachers and sustain higher levels of program quality.
- Accreditation has a positive impact on overall program quality by reducing staff turnover and creating a more stable workforce provided that the staff is paid higher than average wages.
- Training incentives and salary bonuses can help expand the pool of qualified personnel who work with children in the same program over an extended period of time.

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- Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. A. (1990). *Who Cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America*. Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project.
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3. Krajec, V. D., Bloom, P. J., Talan, T., & Clark, D. (2001). *Who's caring for the kids? The status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois*. Wheeling, IL: The Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University.
4. Whitebook, M., Sakai, L., Gerber, E., & Howes, C. (2001). *Then & now. Changes in child care staffing, 1994-2000. Technical report*. Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce.

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