

Child Care Staff Wages: What Is Needed for Retention and Recruitment?

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The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) worked with a state conducting an alternative rated methodology for their child care subsidy. The sustainability of the child care system depends on wages that attract and retain qualified staff. However, information is limited regarding the necessary wage levels. This work involved directly engaging child care workers to gather information about the wages they consider adequate to maintain high-quality care and the rationale behind why these wages are necessary.

Data and Methods

The state wanted to gather data on the current salaries and needed salaries of child care staff and focused on the following research questions:

- What are the current salaries and benefits of child care staff, categorized by position, for licensed center and family child care home (FCCH) providers?
- What do child care providers consider to be an adequate salary?
- What factors do child care providers consider when determining an adequate salary?

The difference between reported current and adequate salaries was between 6% and 108%.

Child care centers			
	Current salary	Adequate salary	Difference
Director	\$47,997	\$55,381	\$7,384
Assistant director	\$41,845	\$44,431	\$2,585
Lead teacher	\$31,415	\$36,337	\$4,922
Teacher	\$24,912	\$31,183	\$6,270
Teaching assistant	\$23,371	\$29,030	\$5,658
Substitute	\$18,231	\$25,116	\$6,884
Family child care homes			
Director ^a	\$24,782	\$51,579	\$26,797

^aFamily child care home directors typically serve as both director and lead teacher because they are typically the only staff.

Survey Participants and Data Collection



743

Total providers responded



483

Child care center providers



260

FCCH providers

Responses were spread across the state



96%

county representation for centers



72%

county representation for FCCH

Summary and Implications

What are the implications of these findings?

- Current child care salaries for child care center providers and FCCH providers are below what providers consider to be adequate.
- Estimates for adequate salaries were most commonly based on salaries from other skilled jobs in the same field of work.

What considerations are needed for child care staff retention and recruitment?

- The results of this investigation are unique because both center and FCCH providers were asked to directly report what they believe is an adequate salary.
- Providers may be the best “judge” of adequate salary rates.
- Provider estimates may best represent the true cost of care regarding personnel costs.
- Higher salaries may decrease provider turnover and increase stability for children and families.
- An increase in child care staff wages would require systemic change to make child care equitably accessible to all working families.

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