

**WHO'S CARING FOR THE KIDS?:
The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce in Illinois
Valerie Krajec, Paula Bloom, Teri Talan, Douglas Clark, 2001**

Overview

Regardless of the program type, philosophy, or setting, the single most important factor impacting a child's experience in an early childhood program is the quality of adult-child interactions. It is therefore important to consider exactly what qualifications, demographics and compensation are associated with the early childhood workforce in Illinois. The big picture in our state is one of contrasts – large and small centers that may or may not be regulated, well funded or struggling, with highly-trained or minimally trained staff – all presenting both encouraging and discouraging predictions for the future.

Discussion-some facts and figures

- a. Labor shortages have gotten worse because wages in the child care industry have not kept pace with inflation. This article argues that early care and education requires complex skills and long hours, but the pay is very low and the career track is a dead end. As a result, many competent and motivated workers leave the field to seek advancement elsewhere, or avoid the field entirely.
- b. 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 the staffing crisis that negatively impacts the well-being of children.
- c. Accreditation has a positive impact on overall program quality by reducing staff turnover and creating a more stable workforce.
- d. Director qualifications are directly related to program quality. Directors' ability to effectively address the staffing crisis in their own programs and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education and specialized training in leadership and management.
- e. Illinois lacks a coherent system of initial preparation, ongoing professional development, and career counseling for teaching, administrative, and support staff in early childhood programs.
- f. Fewer than 10% of child care programs in Illinois have achieved center accreditation by voluntarily meeting the standards for high-quality programming established by the profession.

Conclusion

These findings represent the basis of a call to action to improve early childcare in Illinois. Everyone from practitioners, teachers, policymakers, corporate leaders and parents needs to get involved and take action to improve the education for Illinois youngest citizens.

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