

A LIVING WAGE IS A FLOOR, NOT A CEILING: A COMPARATIVE CASE
STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE SALARY SCALES IN THE
UNITED STATES AS SEEN THROUGH A FEMINIST ECONOMICS LENS

by

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For the early childhood workforce. I see you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin my acknowledgments by noting that this moment in history, marked by violence and injustice, has illustrated both the absence of care and its abundance, demonstrating the critical role care can and should play in all our lives. Caring for one another, family and friends, neighbors, communities, states, and countries is the most important work we can do in the world. For my readers, take good care of yourselves and those around you.

Another acknowledgment I would like to make is that I am a white middle-class woman looking at the issue of compensation for the early childhood workforce, and I recognize this lens is one of privilege.

In terms of gratitude, first, thank you to the early childhood workforce for the care and education you provide. Also, thank you to those advocating for this work to be recognized and valued as essential in all our lives. Thanks to those who shared their stories with me for this paper. Thank you to my family, both those who have come before me and those who have come after. I feel grateful to belong amongst you. Also, thank you to my chosen family for your support. It's all love. Lastly, thank you to the women in my life: my colleagues, my dissertation committee, my closest friends, and my mother, whose kindness, care, and encouragement enabled me to complete this work.

Jennifer Harris

PREFACE

She had just accepted a new position as a lead preschool teacher in a beautiful school, and she was thrilled. She had worked in the field as an assistant teacher for the last 10 years, and this was her first time leading a classroom. She and her husband had two children, both in elementary school. Her teaching position was in a center-based program that had five preschool classrooms. She was passionate about early childhood education and loved watching her students grow and learn. She worked hard to create a warm and welcoming classroom for her students and their families. As a lead teacher, she held a bachelor's degree and had the knowledge and competencies she needed to be a great teacher, and she loved her work. She and her family lived a good life, and she was happy. So happy, in fact, that she was able to overlook some serious financial truths.

Her teaching position included an annual salary and health care benefits for her and her family (the first job she had held to offer them). Her family lived in a modest Midwestern town. Her annual salary was \$32,000, which was about \$2,600 a month. After taxes (an estimated 12% or \$312) and her family's health care premium (\$810 a month for a family of four), this amounted to a net monthly income of \$1,478. Her husband worked part-time as a delivery driver while attending college and studying to be a nurse; together with her husband's part-time income (\$960 a month after taxes), that totaled \$2,428 a month for other expenses. After their rent and utilities (\$900 + \$300/average), they were left with \$1,228. They owned their cars outright but still needed to insure and refuel them, leaving them with about \$828 a month for all other expenses, including groceries, clothing, shoes, household goods, and anything beyond, for which

there was never anything left. In fact, they went into debt each month, gradually adding to their credit card balances, her husband picking up extra weekend work when he could to chip away at the balance. They were grateful for uneventful years without emergency expenses and were able to scrape by and still live a wonderful life while her husband was in school. But is that really what they deserved? Is scraping by what anyone deserves?

The level of stress and worry about meeting one's own basic needs and those of one's family is so high for so many in the early childhood workforce. And because of who they are as professionals, they might not share that stress with you. You might only see the smile on their faces when they see your child at the door in the morning; you might only see the joy in their eyes when they share with you a story of your child when you pick them up at night; you might never know the real struggles in the lives of our early childhood workforce, because they love the work they do and the children and families they serve. Yet, this does not mean that the struggle is not there.

ABSTRACT

A LIVING WAGE IS A FLOOR, NOT A CEILING: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF SALARY SCALES FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE AS SEEN THROUGH A FEMINIST ECONOMICS LENS

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The early childhood workforce does some of the most critical work on the planet: caring for and educating the next generation. Not only does this work lay the foundation for lifelong learning in children, but it also occurs during a critical developmental period that shapes the relationships they form with others. Given the pivotal outcomes that rest on this work, it would seem that the field of early childhood education would be a prized profession, recognized not only with respect but also with commensurate compensation; however, this is not the case.

The reality is that the early childhood workforce has served children and families, and subsequently employers and economies, since its inception, without proper respect or compensation. Decades have passed, and the early childhood workforce has pleaded its case. Movements have been launched, and organizations have been formed to dedicate the time, energy, and resources needed to shift the dominant narrative toward recognizing that early childhood education is a public good and should be regarded as essential infrastructure.

To fully realize this shift, our field has taken several steps to ensure its success. These steps include acknowledging the current realities of the early childhood workforce (they are underpaid, and often do not have access to benefits like health care, sick days, retirement, and tuition reimbursement), and understanding what the early childhood education system needs to be sustainable (total funding needed to compensate, at a minimum, at a living wage with full benefits). Using true-cost fiscal modeling, experts have developed tools such as salary scales to help programs and policymakers understand how the early childhood workforce should be compensated and how much funding is required, without burdening families or programs.

This dissertation, a review of salary scales across the United States, examines their focus on living wages and their design with respect to stakeholder involvement, wage determination, funding, and policy. This research also aims to synthesize the existing literature, gather the work of salary scale development from all states across the country, and look specifically at their designs, to make recommendations for the future—a future in which early childhood education is recognized as a public good and the early childhood workforce is compensated, at a minimum, with a living wage.

Keywords: early childhood workforce, salary scales, compensation, living wage

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACF	Administration for Children & Families
AES	Alliance for Early Success
ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
BI	Build Initiative
CCAA	Child Care Aware of America
CDC	Child Development and Care
CCSA	Child Care Services Association
CELFE	Center for Early Learning Funding Equity
CSCCE	Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
EC	Early Childhood
ECE	Early Childhood Education or Early Care and Education
ECIC	Early Childhood Investment Corporation
ECW	Early Childhood Workforce
EEIC	Early Educator Investment Collaborative
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MiAEYC	Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCSL	National Convention of State Legislatures
NECEWC	National Early Care and Education Workforce Center
PttP	Power to the Profession
ZTT	Zero To Three

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges facing the early childhood education (ECE) system is workforce compensation (BI, 2021; CCSA, 2019). Low wages impact the system in numerous ways: high turnover rates, low numbers of youth choosing ECE as a career, much of the ECE workforce living in poverty, and many ECE teachers needing to work a second job (BI, 2021; CCSA, 2019; Gould & Blair, 2020; ZTT, 2024). Early childhood is the most important period of human development, yet our society still does not regard early childhood education as essential infrastructure (McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2018). High-quality early childhood education experiences, facilitated by trained early educators, lay the foundation for lifelong learning (Heckman, 2011; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

With more working families needing child care (MLPP, 2024) and more child care providers closing their doors (Andrews, 2023), the need for change within the early childhood education system is evident. Yet, how do we simultaneously raise wages for the early childhood workforce while keeping costs affordable for families? I posit that the systematic improvement of compensation could be achieved by understanding the historical influences, addressing current inadequacies, and developing salary scales anchored in living wages for the early childhood workforce. Only when the early childhood workforce is adequately compensated will there be sufficient attraction and retention in the field, thereby ensuring sufficient care for all families who need it.

Positionality

Compensation for the early childhood workforce has been a topic of interest for me since I began working in the field over 20 years ago. I struggled for years with wages that did not reflect the education, dedication, or skills required to lead an early childhood classroom. When I transitioned into school administration, I was better positioned to effect the change I understood was needed in the field to retain high-quality early educators in classrooms; however, my hands were tied by funding limitations. As an early childhood consultant, 22 years into my professional career, the problem of low wages in my field still existed. I observed this clearly while working alongside childcare business owners who operate at reduced capacity due to insufficient staffing. As a former project manager at the Child Care Initiative (CCI) at North Central Michigan College (NCMC), I was responsible for developing a living-wage salary scale for the EC workforce in our new on-campus child care program. The creation of a living wage salary scale was one of two innovations the CCI tested in Phase II (employer engagement strategies being the other) that addressed the five areas of impact we identified in Phase I, our first year of research: 1) affordability of care; 2) accessibility of care; 3) capacity of the local child care network; 4) workforce opportunities and increased wages for new/existing child care workers; and 5) quality of care for all children. This work with the CCI, which developed a salary scale anchored in living wages, informed much of this study.

As a researcher, I am most interested in addressing critical issues in the early childhood education system, namely compensation. I am passionate about reform not only to improve compensation for the early childhood workforce in Michigan, where I

live and work, but across the country. This dissertation is the culmination of four years of research and work, centered on funding and focused on how a salary scale anchored in living wages for early childhood professionals could catalyze the sustainable change the early childhood system so desperately needs.

Background to the Issues

Throughout much of history, low wages for the early childhood education workforce have negatively impacted the capacity of early childhood education programs in the State of Michigan (Andrews, 2023; BI, 2023; McLean et al., 2024), contributing to high turnover rates, which result in lower program quality due to instability (Capito et al., 2023). Recent funding allocations, such as MI Stabilization grants, temporarily increased wages for the early childhood workforce but were not intended for long-term use (Andrews, 2023). We need continued investment, both at the federal and state levels, to build sustainability within the early childhood system, as well as a comprehensive compensation framework that supports this goal.

Michigan is not alone in its struggles. Low wages for the EC workforce are a problem all states have faced at some point, and most still do. In fact, the subject of compensation for the early childhood workforce is being tracked by several national-level organizations, including The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, the Early Care and Education Workforce Center, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Build Initiative, the Alliance for Early Success, as well as several state-level organizations.

One systematic solution to address the problem of compensation is the implementation of state salary scales for the EC workforce. Salary scales are tools that

address workforce compensation needs and program quality by contributing to attraction and retention in the field. The purpose of this study is to examine states' efforts to improve compensation for the EC workforce using salary scales and then better understand how they have been able to make progress.

Theoretical Frameworks

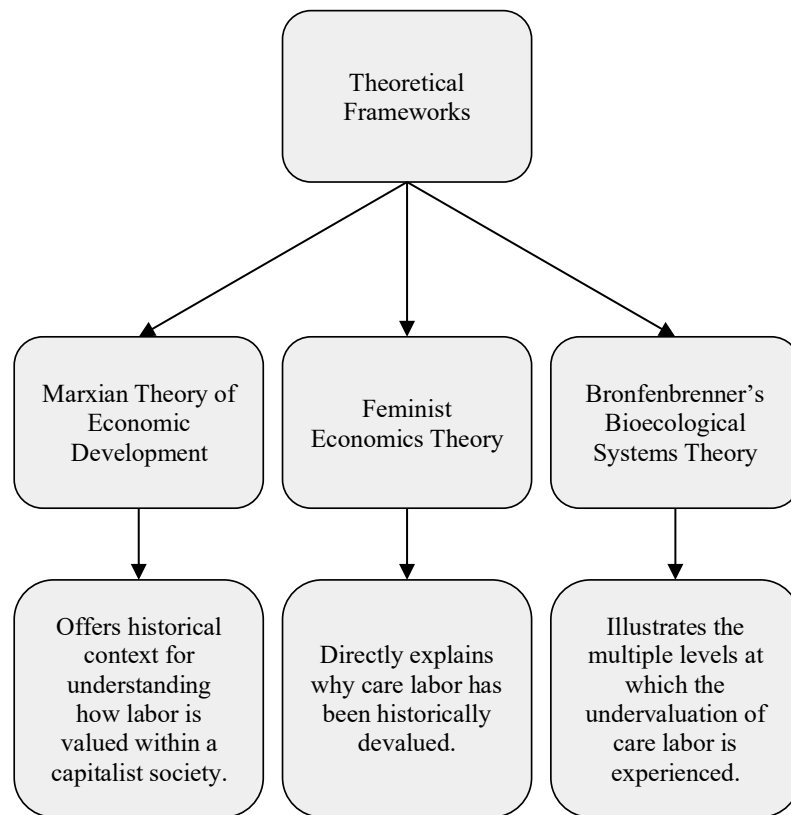
The main theoretical lens I will use in this paper is Feminist Economics Theory, but in order to understand the relationship between labor and value, I will start by describing Marxian Theory of Economic Development, and end with a description of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory. Together, these lenses provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical influences and systemic factors shaping compensation in the early childhood workforce today. All three are meaningful contributors to the shape of this work. Still, Feminist Economics Theory serves as the primary critical lens, as it directly addresses the undervaluation of care labor and the heavily gendered economic structures that have shaped the early childhood education system. While Marx's theory adds historical grounding/tone and Bronfenbrenner's theory adds contextual depth/urgency, Feminist Economics Theory explains why we still see compensation inequities in the early childhood workforce today.

In my early research on funding mechanisms to support early childhood education programs, I was faced with the glaring reality that funding for what could be construed as a labor of care is still being influenced by sexism and capitalism, and needs to be fully understood as such before we can move forward. Over the last five decades, we have had numerous opportunities to invest in early childhood education and the professionals who provide it, but our culture has chosen not to do so. Why have we not already made

significant and lasting investments in early childhood education? I would argue that those decisions were made to preserve a sexist, racist, and capitalistic economy.

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Framework: Rationale



What follows is a description of each of the three theories that frame how the early childhood education system has arrived at this point, what needs to be done to make the system sustainable, and the recognition that now is the right time to effect change.

Though Feminist Economics is the primary critical lens, I will start with the Marxian Theory of Economic Development, which sets the stage.

The Marxian Theory of Economic Development

Karl Marx was a 19th-century social scientist and philosopher whose ideas profoundly influenced the development of modern economics (McLellan, 1995). Central to the Marxian Theory of Economic Development is the role of labor in economic development, which holds that an object is worth the amount of labor it takes to produce it, or that the value of labor is equal to the resources required for the laborer to perform the work. Marx wrote that in a capitalist society, the working class is exploited through the dissociation of price and value. This theory distinguishes between paid and unpaid labor. We know that much of the unpaid labor is that of the labor of care and that it is traditionally, and still prominently, carried out by women (Folbre, 1982). Understanding the influence of this system on the dynamics of the economy clarifies the undervaluation of the early childhood workforce (Federici, 1975; Folbre, 1982; Waring, 1988).

The work of Karl Marx and his influence on society, economics, and politics cannot be understated. His thinking has shaped the way we use terms such as labor and capital today and, in essence, how many structures and systems of the economy, policy, and politics are organized (McLellan, 1995; Marx & Engels, 1848). Marxian Economics can be defined as a school of thought, both economic and political, that critically examines key components of economic theory and practice, including capitalism, the production and value of goods, class and class struggle, and economic evolution. Marx is best known for his works *The Communist Manifesto* and the three volumes of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (McLellan, 1995; Marx & Engels, 1848; Marx, 1867), where he outlines the downfall of capitalism (in simple terms) as:

- There are two classes: the bourgeoisie (the ruling class) and the proletariat (the working class)
- The working-class wages are determined by subsistent levels of living
- The labor theory of value posits that labor is the primary source of value
- Production of value is owned by capitalists (the ruling class)
- Capitalists exploit workers
- This exploitation continues until production reaches its peak
- A concentration of capital leads to a fall in profit
- This decline reduces the rate of investment as well as economic growth
- The decline leads to a high rate of unemployment
- High unemployment, in turn, leads to conflict amongst classes and ultimately to
- A downfall of capitalism and a rise of socialism
- And, the rise of socialism leads to a rise of communism, where
- Social classes and class struggles cease to exist

As stated above, Marx wrote that the working class is exploited through the dissociation of price and value. The Marxian theory of economics posits that two features of capitalism lead to exploitation: the free market and surplus labor. Furthermore, it is the careful way in which institutions within a society are structured to maintain a class system (wealthy and poor) and then socialized to remain either wealthy or poor that leads to exploitation (McLellan, 1995; Marx & Engels, 1848; Marx, 1867). In addition to maintaining a class system, institutions have also been structured to maintain a sexist

system that perpetuates men earning more than women (Barker, 2005; Folbre, 1982; Folbre & Nelson, 2000).

Feminist Economics Theory

Building on the influence Marxian Economics has had on our society, Feminist Economics seeks to identify and highlight these inequalities in the economic system and to catalyze change to improve the well-being of women, children, and men in local communities, as well as at national and international scales (Waring, 1988). Feminist Economics Theory is particularly important in this dissertation research, as it challenges the traditional economic model in our country. This lens is critical to understanding why compensation for the early childhood workforce remains inadequate.

Care work is defined as a subset of work performed through care in the service of others and can include services that help others develop their capabilities, or their ability to pursue what they value in life (Folbre, 2012; Folbre, 2014; Schmitt et al., 2018). Care work includes child care, education, health care, and domestic work. To emphasize the importance of care work in our societies, Feminist Nancy Folbre (2012) wrote, “I believe that human skills that are enhanced by education and experience have played a crucial role in economic development and that heterodox economists influenced by the Marxian tradition have underestimated their importance” (p. 283).

Earlier in my doctoral program, I watched a TEDxChristchurch talk given by Dr. Marilyn Waring, a prominent New Zealand economist, feminist, public policy scholar, and former politician, called “The Unpaid Work that the GDP Ignores and Why it Really Matters.” In this talk, Dr. Waring clearly articulated the definition of unpaid care labor, the definition of Gross Domestic Product or GDP, why care labor does not fit into GDP,

why that matters, and what to do about it. When we speak of unpaid care labor, we include domestic labor, caregiving for adults, caregiving for children, and child-rearing. When we talk about the GDP, it consists of the market value of the goods and/or services a nation produces. Because care labor is not traded in the marketplace, it is not included in GDP, which Dr. Waring noted she was glad about. As she stated, it is a system that “counts oil spills and wars as contributors to economic growth, while child-rearing and housekeeping are deemed valueless” (Waring, 2019). Caring could not and should not be reduced to a product that can be bought or sold; its value is much deeper than that, as is its relationship to society. It matters that it is not a part of the GDP only in that this omission further limits the respect and validity our capitalistic society gives to other labor, and in turn, limits the compensation to the care labor workforce, which limits the supply of the care labor workforce and the money that could be put forth into the development of the care labor workforce. From my perspective, as an advocate for access to high-quality early care and education for all young children, I see this omission of “care work” as one of the primary reasons the field of early childhood education has been devalued. I believe the early childhood workforce needs to be recognized for who they are: professionals.

Economist Kathryn Anne Edwards (2023) has written several papers on the economics of the child care industry, including its market failure. In a September 2023 testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Economic Policy, she elaborated on this point (Edwards, 2023):

A market failure has no single definition, marker, or indicator. It describes a situation in which the market fails to efficiently deliver a good or service.

Childcare exhibits four features of market failure. First, it is expensive and has seen unsustainable price increases...The second feature of market failure exhibited by childcare is that it is inadequately supplied...The third feature of market failure exhibited by childcare is that it has almost no capacity for market-based improvement...The fourth feature of market failure exhibited by childcare is that its provision does not reflect its immediate economic value: it enables the labor supply of parents. Nor does it reflect its long-term value: high-quality early childhood education is enormously beneficial to children in both childhood and well into adulthood. (p. 6)

Feminists argue that Marx limits the definition of exploitation to labor-market exploitation, thereby excluding many roles performed by women (Folbre, 1982). Feminists also argue that this strict division between public and private spheres neglects domestic labor, or “non-productive” labor performed primarily in the private sphere by women, leaving only “productive” labor, performed mainly in the public sphere by men, thereby creating a wage-earning discrepancy. Furthermore, feminists post that Marxist exploitation focuses on exchange value and the wage, which are not linked to unpaid domestic labor or to many forms of care work (Barker, 2005; Folbre, 1982; Folbre & Nelson, 2000). Folbre (1982) wrote, “While many Marxists are sympathetic to the political perspective of socialist feminism, most cling to an interpretation of Marxian theory which effectively excludes the very possibility that exploitation could take place within the family” (p. 317).

The exploitation of women through capitalism can only be righted by the dismantling of the capitalistic systems that allow much of the labor of women to go

uncompensated. In their essay analyzing the consequences of mixing both the care work involving relationships and emotion, as well as paid labor, feminist economists Folbre and Nelson (2000) see

Women's traditional caring activities being done more and more in relationships that include the explicit movement of money. For evaluating the effects of this change, it is not sufficient to compare idealized conceptions of home and market, nor of love and money. Intelligent evaluation involves a more detailed analysis of the actual structures of caregiving and the level of support caregiving receives. (p. 134)

A gender-aware approach to the study of economics and economies includes a focus on topics that have been neglected in the past, such as paid and unpaid labor, care work, and violence caused by intimate partners. Among these topics, feminist economists have drawn attention to the way we define economics and economic life, advocating for a broader scope of study and understanding that includes family economics, connections, and emotions. Feminist Drucilla Barker (2005) wrote,

Although it may seem appropriate to commodify many things formerly produced in the household, other things, such as child care, elder care, and caring for the emotional needs of family, friends, and colleagues, are not amenable to complete commodification. Whether paid or unpaid, the quality of care received depends in part on the quality of the relationships connecting the givers and the receivers of care. (p. 2198)

In summary, in a market that is dominated by women, wages have remained low because society has yet to see the value in care work, until now.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

The COVID-19 global pandemic shaped the world today in many ways, including the light it shone on the importance of child care in our economy. Urie Bronfenbrenner was a 20th-century psychologist whose thinking focused on the environmental contexts in which a child develops and on the relationship between those contexts and how a child develops (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge et al., 2017; Tudge et al., 2022). Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) can be used to examine the early childhood education system operating within multiple interacting environments and to see the interconnectedness of society. The theory also offers an opportunity to leverage environmental context as a catalyst for change, indicating that it is now time for multi-level efforts to improve workforce compensation. Below is a summary of the interdependence by way of Bronfenbrenner's five systems:

- Microsystem: Any setting in which the developing persons of interest are situated, in which they have face-to-face interactions with other individuals, objects, and symbols. Proximal processes occur here. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)
 - The persons of interest are members of the early childhood workforce; therefore, the setting may include family, workplace, and/or children.
 - Low wages create stress at work, impacting educator well-being, and retention.
- Mesosystem: This deals with the linkages between microsystems. Mesosystem analyses examine the relationships among two or more microsystems in which developing persons typically spend time. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

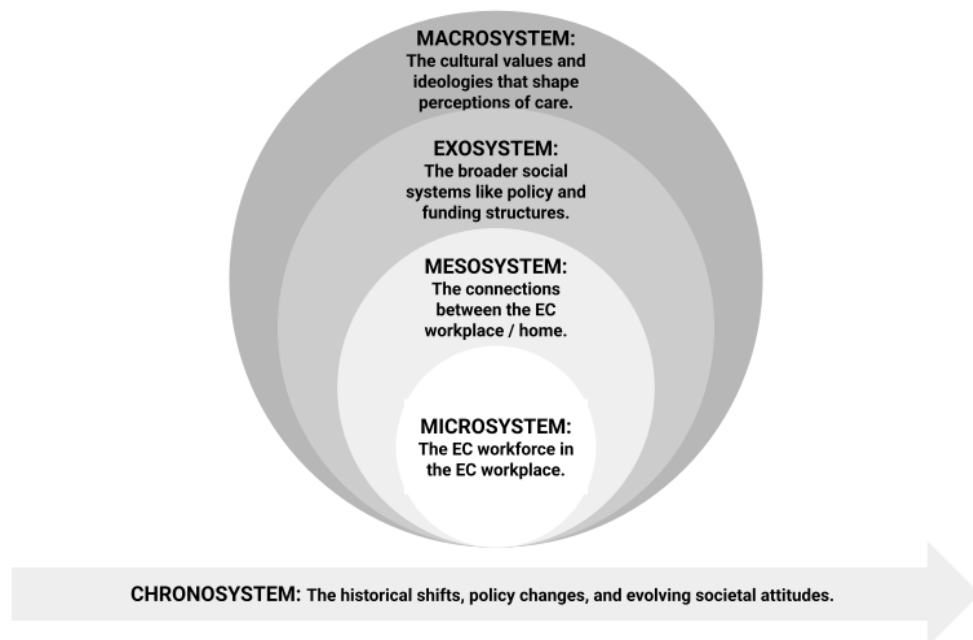
- Examples include the connection between home and the workplace.
 - Staff stability depends on fair pay, which influences their ability to be present at home with their families and at work with their children.
- Exosystem: A microsystem that affects the developing person of interest indirectly through one or more of the person's microsystems. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)
 - Examples include the broader social systems that affect the early childhood workforce, such as policies, funding structures, and economic conditions.
 - State funding allocations, or the undervaluing of care, shape both compensation and working conditions.
- Macrosystem: Any socio-cultural group sharing values, beliefs, access to resources, a sense of identity, etc. This can be a society or groups within a society. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)
 - Examples include cultural values and ideologies (such as capitalism and patriarchy) that shape attitudes and perceptions of care and, therefore, compensation.
 - Care is predominantly seen as "women's work" in a patriarchal culture and therefore unpaid or low-paid labor.
- Chronosystem: This system speaks to time. For an individual, this system may encompass the major milestones and events of one's life. For a group of

individuals, it might be understood as environmental, social, or historical events that impact the group. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

- Examples include historical shifts, policy changes, and evolving societal attitudes.
 - The early childhood workforce remains underpaid, but there is general recognition of its value; therefore, new policies and funding initiatives make change possible.

Figure. 1.2

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory Model



If we begin with the lived experience of an early childhood professional and use the life-altering experience of the COVID-19 pandemic to understand that child care is essential infrastructure (chronosystem) and a key driver of economic development in any society, we can see the use of this social ecological systems theory model as a means for

creating change. Additionally, we can use this bioecological systems theory model to justify comparisons across the United States, as we all experienced the pandemic and its subsequent impacts.

The following example illustrates the relationship between systems: When the public perception of both the value and need for child care are understood (Macrosystem), that applies pressure to the governing bodies that build policies for the child care system (Exosystem), which affects the workforce (Microsystem) that supports the child care system, and the parents who use it

In sum, I agree with feminist economists who say that care labor should be recognized for its true value, but not in the same way as other forms of labor. I also understand that the Marxist Theory of Economics explains why care labor is not recognized for its true value, and that this has had lasting effects on the care system as a whole. Additionally, in light of a better understanding that the child care industry is indeed a market failure, I believe that applying Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory to examine the relationship between this failure and society as a whole strengthens the case for societal change now. Furthermore, my research aims to influence two of the systems Bronfenbrenner outlined (the Macrosystem and the Exosystem), as you will see in the next section.

Problem Statement/Research Questions

In addition to examining historical influences, this study sought to address current inadequacies. In short, I aimed to answer the question of how we can use salary scales anchored in living wages to sustainably and systematically ensure that the entire early childhood workforce is compensated fairly. To answer that question, I conducted a

comparative case study that included a document review of several sources tracking statewide EC workforce compensation practices and policies, followed by interviews with stakeholders from states that have made progress in developing a living wage salary scale for the EC workforce.

In my preliminary research, I identified over 30 states/districts that have successfully raised wages for the EC workforce, over 20 states/districts that have developed salary scales for the EC workforce, and over 20 states/districts that have made policy changes to improve compensation. The research questions I aim to answer in this study are as follows:

- 1) Which states have raised wages for the EC workforce?
- 2) Which states have developed salary scales for the EC workforce?
- 3) Which states have built policies to improve compensation?
- 4) Which states have made progress implementing a salary scale?
- 5) How were these states successful?

Significance of the Study

The challenges within the child care system: the fact that there is not enough care, the available care is not affordable for those who need it, nor do the EC workforce providing the care earn enough to stay in the field, are all widespread challenges, and well-understood. As a result, the challenges underpayment presents are heavily researched. The solutions to those challenges are less known and certainly less researched. Some solutions implemented have been short-lived, and others have been unsustainable. The idea that compensation for the early childhood workforce could be addressed systematically, using a salary scale with a living wage as the floor (not the

ceiling), is only now being recognized as a mainstream solution. Information about who has done this work and how they accomplished it is just emerging, and because of that, the literature is located in several different places, either within the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) or the Early Care and Education Workforce Center (ECEWC), and also within the state Departments of Early Childhood Education across the country. There is not yet a substantial body of research in academic databases showing how salary scales can be used to address the challenges of the child care system. This study aims to contribute to that growing body of work by recognizing the work states are doing and examining how they have made progress.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Search Strategies

In order to explain my complete and systematic search of existing literature, let me begin by articulating that there were two parts to my search strategies. The first part took place at the Oakland University research library using recommended databases, and the second part was conducted using the websites of organizations working on issues related to compensation in the field of early childhood education.

The first part of my search began with a visit to the Oakland University (OU) library, where I consulted the Subject Guide for Early Childhood Education (ECE). The guide recommended three relevant databases for ECE: ERIC, JSTOR, and PsycINFO, so I began there. I used the search terms “salary scale” and “early childhood,” and I limited the search to the last 10 years (knowing that salary scale development and implementation are relatively new in the history of the field of early childhood education). Criteria for inclusion were 1) the articles had to be focused on salary scales for the EC workforce, and 2) they needed to be developed at the state/district level. Articles were excluded if they contained duplicate or repetitive information.

On ERIC, using the search terms above, my search yielded 33 results. I reviewed the titles and abstracts and included one of the 33 reviewed. On JSTOR, using the same terms/parameters, my search yielded 217 results. I reviewed all the titles and abstracts and selected five for review. I included three of them in my literature review. In PsycINFO, using the same search terms and parameters, my search yielded 17 results.

Again, I reviewed all titles and abstracts and found no mention of salary scales in any of them.

In total, across these three databases, my search yielded only four sources, and two were ultimately included in this review of literature. Both were specific to the District of Columbia's salary scale for the early childhood workforce and to the Pay Equity Fund supporting its implementation.

Even more helpful were the suggestions of a colleague and Oakland University's research librarian. I compiled a list of organizations that operate in the early childhood education system, regularly produce articles, reports, or briefs, and have researched workforce compensation or salary scales. I visited each organization's website and searched for "salary scale" (omitting "early childhood" from the terms, as I was already searching a website specific to the field), which yielded the majority of the resources I included in my review. This list of organizations included: the Alliance for Early Success, the Build Initiative, the Center for Early Learning Funding Equity, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Child Care Aware of America, Child Care Services Association, the Children's Funding Project, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, Early Educator Funding Collaborative, First Children's Finance, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center, the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, P-5 Fiscal Strategies, Prenatal-to-3-Policy Impact Center, Start Early Consulting, and Zero to Three. Fifteen of the sources used in my literature review came from searching these websites.

As noted earlier, the majority of new research on early childhood education workforce compensation and/or salary scales appears outside of academic databases and is therefore distributed differently than empirical research in academia. This difference in distribution demanded that I use any and all search techniques to find sources. In addition to database and website searches, I also used the Google search engine for literature related to “salary scales + early childhood,” and systematically used them to look for state-specific literature by adding the name of the state to the search terms (“state” + “early childhood + salary scale”). I also played with combinations of keywords like “early childhood” (preschool, child care, Pre-K) and “salary scale” (salary schedule, wage scale, career lattice) in order to find what I was looking for. In addition to trying different combinations of words, I also tried reordering, moving the state name to the front or back of the search terms, and placing the keywords “salary scale” before or after “early childhood.” This search strategy yielded 12 sources specific to the states I included in my review.

At the conclusion of all searches and after reading and analyzing all of the included literature—articles, briefs, reports, and webpages—two themes emerged:

- 1) Compensation for the EC Workforce Must Improve
- 2) Salary Scales Are a Tool for Compensation Reform

Operationalizing Terms

Before I continue, I want to include a few key terms and their definitions.

Although self-explanatory to some, it is important for the reader to fully understand what

I mean by the terms compensation, early childhood education, living wage, salary scale, sustainability, and workforce.

Compensation

For this paper, I will use the term compensation to describe both the hourly wage and/or annual salary of a member of the early childhood workforce. The term compensation also includes benefits like access to employer-sponsored health care, child care benefits, and paid sick leave.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education (ECE) is generally understood to encompass birth through age eight. For this work, I use the term “early childhood education” to refer to a period of care and education for a child before their school years begin (in Michigan, this starts in Kindergarten). For this paper, ECE includes licensed center-based and home-based care. As the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2019) states that within the broader early childhood field, an early childhood educators is defined as:

An individual who cares for and promotes the learning, development, and well-being of children birth through age 8 in all early childhood education settings, while meeting the qualifications of the profession and having mastery of its specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies. (p. 52)

Early childhood education encompasses care and education provided across settings. Early Care and Education (ECE), as well as Early Care and Learning (ECL), are synonymous with ECE, but are designed to soften the language to help stifle preconceived notions of education leaning toward a much more academic focus as

opposed to the respect, care, and rich, prepared learning environments that meet the developmental needs of young children (Wuori, 2024). In this literature review and in my research, when I use the term Early Childhood Education (ECE or EC), I convey my position that the field performs critical work caring for and educating young children in communities and should be appropriately compensated.

Living Wage

This term refers to the wage required to cover the minimum cost of living (Glasmeier, 2026). This wage reflects an analysis of the cost of living in a specific area. It includes estimated expenses for food, childcare, medical, housing, transportation, civic, internet and mobile services, other necessities such as apparel and services, and annual taxes. It does not, however, account for savings, leisure expenditures, emergency expenses, or any other categories beyond basic needs (Glasmeier, 2026). For this paper, I will refer to a living wage as one defined by the Living Wage Calculator at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Glasmeier, 2026). As suggested in the title of this paper, a living wage should be considered the floor, not a ceiling, for all members of the workforce in the field of early childhood education (and beyond), and by floor, I mean bare minimum.

Salary Scale

A salary scale is a tool communities use to determine appropriate compensation for a workforce (CCSA, 2021). Salary scales define expected earnings uniformly, are typically comprised of a number of levels, with beginning and end points, and have clearly defined criteria (such as education and role responsibilities) that promote

transparency and equity. Salary scales can be based on cost-of-living data in the area and are therefore tailored to the geographic location.

Workforce

For this paper, the EC workforce is defined as all roles (Aide/Floater, Substitute, Associate Teacher, Lead Teacher, Specialist, and Administrator) working with children from birth through school age, across all settings, including home- and center-based.

Main Themes

In my review of the literature, I identified two main themes: 1) Compensation for the EC Workforce Must Improve, and 2) Salary Scales Are a Tool for Compensation Reform. Notice how these issues, illustrated in Figure 2.1, build on each other to tell a story and solve a problem.

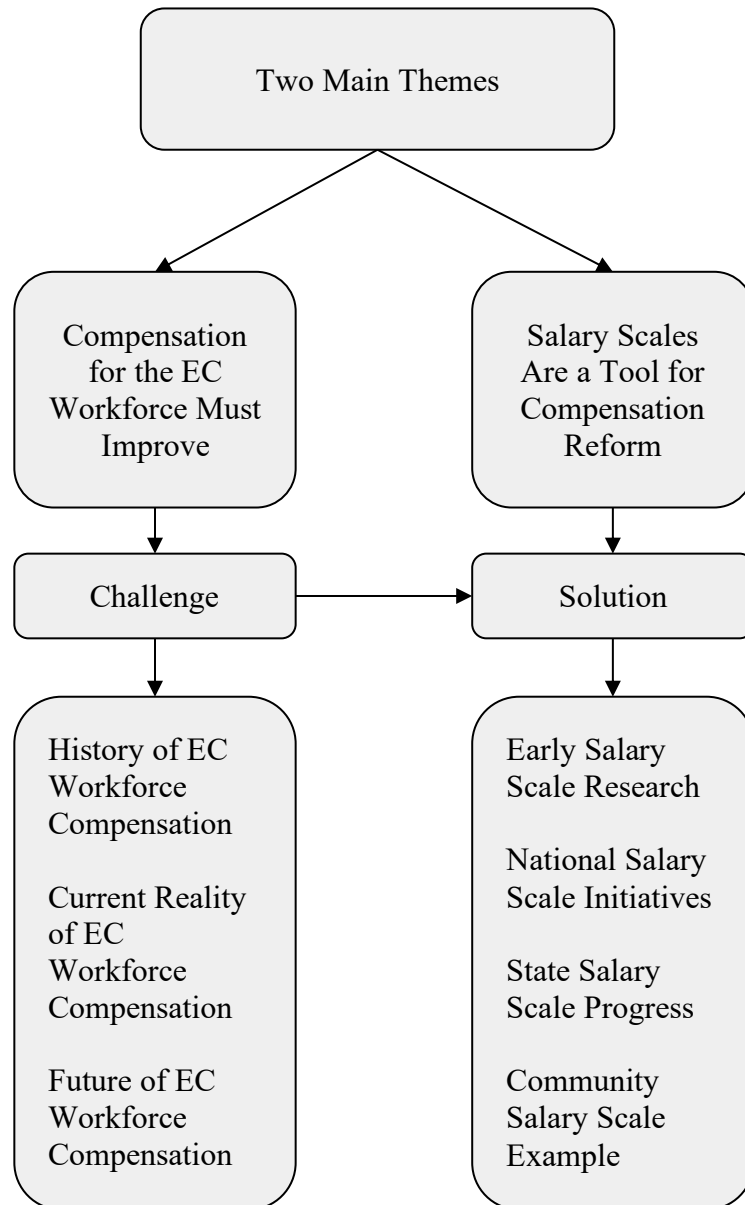
I see it as a story of hope, and I aim to help my readers feel that, too. There are many professionals in the field of early childhood education and beyond who are working to develop solutions to strengthen the system, both for the workforce and for the children and families they serve.

Theme One: Compensation for the EC Workforce Must Improve

Compensation is the challenge explained in this section. I have chosen to explain it in three subsections: 1) the History of EC Workforce Compensation, 2) the Current Reality of EC Workforce Compensation, and 3) the Future of EC Workforce Compensation. Together, these resources tell the story of where we started, where we are right now, and where we could go.

Figure 2.1

Review of Literature: Two Main Themes Storyline



History of EC Workforce Compensation

The history of compensation for the early childhood workforce is a long and winding road, with an emphasis on long. In their seminal piece “Working for Worthy Wages: A Lived History of the Child Care Compensation Movement, 1970-2022,”

Whitebook et al. (2024) tell the story of over three decades of work to improve compensation for the EC workforce, divided into three phases.

The first phase covers the years between 1970 and 1985, when the problem of wages was identified, and movements were built to address it. Looking at the sociopolitical context at the time, we see the first phase of the movement beginning in 1970, and soon thereafter, President Richard Nixon changed the course of child care in the U.S. forever, when he vetoed the 1971 Comprehensive Child Care and Development Act. Nixon's decision reinforced a prevailing ideology at the time (one that feminists are still fighting today), that women belonged at home caring for children and the household. Whitebook et al. (2024) raised this event because it shaped a public perception of child care that was deeply damaging to the field: that mothers who left their children with others to be cared for were somehow less than. Interestingly, when mothers entrusted their young children to be cared for in child care centers during World War II so they could go to work while their husbands were deployed, women in the workforce were seen as patriotic and appropriate. So much so that the federal government paid for childcare. In fact, it is the only time in history that the federal government has provided universal federal funding for child care centers, as outlined in the Lanham Act of 1943 (Ertman, 2019). As I described in Chapter One, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) in their bioecological systems theory showed how public perception in the Macrosystem affects policy and funding structures in the Exosystem, which is exactly what happened during this timeframe.

The second phase was the decade between 1985 and 1995, when the research community helped demonstrate the effects of low wages on the quality of the system, and

public awareness campaigns increased. Contextually, more and more women entered the workforce in this second phase of the movement (Whitebook et al., 2024), and therefore, more care was needed. In terms of the global and national contexts, the Child Development Block Grant was started in 1990. It is a federal law that appropriates funds to states to subsidize child care for low-income working families. Family child care was recognized as a significant sector of child care.

In the third phase, between 1995 and 2001, the child care crisis was acute, and so the movement gained greater visibility (Whitebook et al., 2024). One point of interest in this research is how Whitebook et al. (2024) described the settings of each phase, providing historical context for the movement. During the third phase, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliations Act was passed. This legislation imposed time and employment-related expectations on recipients, thereby reducing the number of recipients. But it also increased the need for more child care, as parents were forced to enter the workforce to receive support. Which is how many women became child care providers. It was also during this time that Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was introduced, designed to help with the transition off welfare and to be used for child care. Per Whitebook and colleagues (2024), it was then that we saw the family child care sector really grow. Coupled with a shortage of teachers in early elementary grades, namely due to state efforts to reduce class size, created a shortage of teachers in community-based child care centers (Whitebook et al., 2024).

In the Whitebook and colleagues' (2024) epilogue, the researchers addressed the last two decades of work on compensation (2002 to 2024) and argued that, finally, there was a unified understanding that compensation was a problem. Also, in almost every state,

quality rating and improvement systems emerged, thus increasing demands on the EC workforce. Another idea that was brought to the forefront of the movement was race and racial injustice, both the history of exploitation and current disparities in compensation. Lastly, the idea that the global pandemic has shone a light on the importance of the early childhood education system, pointing out both its necessity and its structural flaws. The authors end with this question, “Will educators work in a sufficiently resourced system that values them as workers, regardless of the sector in which they work or the ages of the children they serve?” (Whitebook et al., 2024, p. 74).

Current Realities of EC Workforce Compensation

The early childhood workforce is underpaid, and that is a well-documented fact (McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2018). While the field of early childhood education has known this for decades (as told in the previous subsection), research from the last 10 years (and particularly post-pandemic) has painted a disturbing and detailed picture that underpayment is not an isolated issue seen in just a few states, but a deep structural issue affecting the whole of the early childhood education system. Low wages for the early childhood workforce persist across all geographic regions, demographic groups, levels of experience, and roles within the system, contributing to challenges with retention and recruitment (McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2018). Together, these findings suggest the undervaluation of the EC workforce is persistent and prevailing, weakening the stability and sustainability of the entire early childhood education system. Every two years since 2016, except during the pandemic (when there was no Workforce Index 2022), the CSCCE has regularly published what they term the *Early Childhood*

Workforce Index (or “Workforce Index”). This publication has become the authority on the current state of the early childhood workforce, including the conditions under which they work and the policies that influence those conditions. The Workforce Index is highly detailed but broad in scope, covering everything from who the early childhood workforce is to the challenges they face and the actions states are taking to address them. The two main sections of the Workforce Indexes are 1) The Early Childhood Educator Workforce, that includes datasets 1a) About the Early Childhood Workforce, and 1b) Early Educator Pay & Economic Insecurity Across the States, and 2) State Policies to Improve Early Childhood Educator Jobs, which includes datasets on 2a) State Policies Overview, and 2b) Early Childhood Educator Workforce Policies. The data in each index are complex and deep, though nested in an accessible way, with interactive maps, easy-to-read tables, and clearly laid-out appendices.

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) defines its purpose as follows on its website (2026):

CSCCE provides research and analysis on the preparation, working conditions, and compensation of the early care and education workforce. We develop policy solutions and create spaces for teaching, learning, and educator activism. Our vision is a publicly-funded early care and education system that secures racial, gender, and economic justice for those whose labor is the linchpin of quality services for working families. In this system, teaching and caring for young children is a good job.

For this literature review, I wanted to pull data from each Workforce Index (2016, 2018, 2020, and 2024) to support the main finding that compensation for the EC workforce

must improve. The three data points for comparison are: Median Hourly Wages by Occupation, Mean Annual Salaries of Teachers in Comparison to Other Fields, and Percentage of the Workforce Participating in Public Support Programs.

Before reviewing each of those data points across the four Workforce Indexes, I want to bring to the forefront of our minds that when we talk about the EC workforce, we are talking about a workforce that is almost 98% women in the United States (McLean et al., 2024), and of those women, almost 40% are women of color; more specifically, 3% Asian, 17% Black, 17% Hispanic, 60% White, and 3% Other (McLean et al., 2024), which differs from K-12 educators which is majority White. Race and Ethnicity distributions similar to this one are present in broader labor markets, so this is not necessarily isolated. However, it is within fields like early childhood education, which are shaped by both racial and gendered assumptions about caregiving being the work of women, that we see those demonstrations so pronounced (Barker, 2005).

Median Hourly Wages by Occupation. In Table 2.1, we see the median hourly wages of the EC workforce, broken down by occupation within the system: Child Care Workers, Pre-K Teachers, K Teachers, Elementary Teachers, and All Workers (outside of this particular labor market). Table 2.1 presents median hourly wages for five occupational categories across the four publication years of the Workforce Index: 2016 (Whitebook et al.), 2018 (Whitebook et al.), 2020 (McLean et al.), and 2024 (McLean et al.). Over this span of eight years, Child Care Workers experienced gradual (but small) wage increases, rising from \$9.77 in 2016 to \$10.72 in 2018 and \$11.65 in 2020, reaching just \$11.81 in 2024. While the growth is consistent, the overall increase is less than

modest, amounting to just over \$2 across eight years. Among all occupational categories, Child Care Workers have the lowest median hourly wage.

Table 2.1

EC Workforce-Median Hourly Wages by Occupation (McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2018)

	2016	2018	2020	2024
Child Care Workers	\$9.77	\$10.72	\$11.65	\$11.81
Pre-K Teachers (average of all settings + in schools)	\$17.08	\$20.41	\$20.81	\$13.74 (Preschool teacher)
K Teachers	\$24.83	\$31.29	\$32.80	NPD
Elementary Teachers	\$26.39	\$32.98	\$34.43	\$31.80 (Elementary + Middle School Teacher)
All Workers	\$17.40	\$18.12	\$19.14	\$22.92

Note: Data are from McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; and Whitebook et al., 2018. Not Present in the Data (NPD); 2016 data are from 2015; 2018 data are from 2017; 2020 data are from 2019; 2024 data are from 2019-2022.

Folbre (2001) wrote that “the work of caring for others has been treated as a labor of love rather than a labor of economic value.” (p. 4). This idea is often used to promote the narrative that the work of the early childhood workforce is one of love and, therefore, does not require proper compensation. It reinforces the idea of poverty-level wages (Folbre, 2001).

Pre-K Teachers show a slightly different pattern, though their median hourly wage increases from \$17.08 in 2016 to \$20.41 in 2018, and \$20.81 in 2020, which is fairly in line with the rate of increase of Child Care Workers. In 2024, the category was

restructured to reflect the earnings of Pre-K Teachers and K Teachers across all settings. Before the restructuring, K Teachers consistently reported higher wages from \$24.83 in 2016 to \$31.29 in 2018 and \$32.80 in 2020 (McLean et al., 2020). Similarly, McLean et al. (2020) noted that Elementary Teachers' wages increased from \$26.39 in 2016 to \$32.98 in 2018 and then \$34.43 in 2020. This category was also restructured in the 2024 Workforce Index, where the combined category of Elementary + Middle School Teacher earned \$31.80.

The All Workers category provides a lens into the broader labor market, showing slow but steady growth from \$17.40 in 2016 to \$18.12 in 2018, \$19.14 in 2020, and then \$22.92 in 2024 (McLean et al., 2024). Across all years, median wages for Child Care Workers fell well below the median for All Workers, while wages for K and Elementary Teachers consistently exceeded the median for All Workers. Overall, the table illustrates upward trends over time, but substantial differences in compensation levels across occupational roles.

Mean Annual Salaries of Teachers in Comparison to Other Fields. In Table 2.2, we see the mean annual salary of teachers with a Bachelor’s degree or higher by occupation (within the field of early childhood education), and, for comparison, the mean annual salary of women and men, respectively, in the civilian labor force.

Table 2.2

Mean Annual Salary of Teachers with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Occupation & for the Civilian Labor Force

	2016	2018	2020	2024
--	------	------	------	------

ECE Teachers 0-3	\$27,248	\$27,248	NPD	\$27,700
ECE Teachers 3-5	\$28,912	\$28,912	NPD	\$35,600
Pre-K Teachers Outside of School (average of Head Start + Other public Pre-K)	\$33,384	\$33,384	NPD	\$41,400
Pre-K Teachers School Sponsored	\$42,848	\$42,848	NPD	\$56,500
Kindergarten Teachers	\$53,030	\$53,030	NPD	NPD
Elementary Teachers	\$56,130	\$56,130	NPD	NPD
Civilian Labor Force- Women	\$56,174	\$56,174	NPD	NPD
Civilian Labor Force- Men	\$88,509	\$88,509	NPD	NPD

Note: Data are from McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; and Whitebook et al., 2018. Not Present in the Data (NPD); 2016 are data from 2012; 2018 are data from 2012; 2020 is NPD; and 2024 are data from 2019.

ECE Teachers working with children ages 0-3 earned \$27, 248 in 2016/2018, with a slight increase to \$27,770 reported in 2024. Similarly, ECE Teachers serving children 3-5 earned \$28,912 in 2016/2028 with a slight increase to \$35,600 in 2024. These figures show that educators working with the youngest children earn the lowest salaries, even when holding a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Pre-K Teachers' salaries varied by setting. Those working outside school-sponsored environments (including Head Start Teachers and other public Pre-K programs) earned \$33,384 in 2016/2018, rising to \$41,400 in 2024. In contrast, Pre-K teachers in the school-sponsored settings earned \$42,848 in 2016/2018, with a substantial increase to \$56,500 in 2024. Kindergarten Teachers and Elementary Teachers reported higher salaries than the ECE and Pre-K teachers, with \$53,030 and \$56,130, respectively.

These differences highlight how institutional context shapes compensation, even among educators with comparable educational attainment.

Compared with the broader civilian labor force, the disparity is clear: women in the civilian labor force earned a mean annual salary of \$56,174 while men earned substantially more, at \$88,509—a difference of over \$30,000 (McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; and Whitebook et al., 2018). When the mean annual salary of a man in the civilian workforce is compared with the mean salary of an infant toddler teacher, there is a \$61,261 difference. These data demonstrate that early childhood educators, especially those serving infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children, earn significantly less than educators of older students and the broader workforce, even when they hold equivalent levels of education.

The fact that the EC workforce has had to contend with wages below the cost of living is unconscionable. It is a clear depiction of the devaluation of care (Folbre, 1982). The broader fact that many fields face the same reality is not only a clear failure of our society but also exemplifies the influence of Marxian economics (Marx & Engels, 1848) on our business models, which exploit labor for capital gain. In fact, it is a call to action to set minimum wages at living wages, and to standardize business practices and models that compensate employees with wages that allow them to meet their cost-of-living expenses and build good lives for themselves and their families.

Folbre (2001) wrote that “markets do not reward care work fairly, even though it is essential to the well-being of future generations” (p. 18). This systematic undercompensation for care work, despite its importance to the economy and society as a whole, certainly explains the problem of low wages and insufficient care. Low wages

also create a need for public support. In Table 2.3, we see the participation rates in public support programs for different occupations within the field of education and outside it.

Table 2.3

Participation Rates in Public Support Programs

	2016	2018	2020	2024
Child Care Worker	46%	53%	NPD	43% (ECE Workforce)
PreK & K Teachers	34%	43%	NPD	NPD
Elementary Teachers	13%	21%	NPD	19% (Elementary + Middle School Teachers)
All Workers	26%	21%	NPD	28%

Note: Data are from McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016; and Whitebook et al., 2018. Not Present in the Data (NPD); 2016 are data averaged from 2009-2013; 2018 are data averaged from 2014-2016; 2020 is NPD; and 2024 are data from 2021. The percentages in 2024 are for participation in one or more programs (e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit, Medicaid for Adults, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or Medicaid/CHIP for Children).

Participation Rates in Public Support Programs. In 2016, 46% of Child Care Workers participated in one or more public support programs, increasing to 53% in 2018. Although 2020 data are unavailable, the 2024 figure of 43% of Child Care Workers participating in programs indicates that a substantial share of the workforce continues to rely on public assistance. Across all reported years and occupations, Child Care Workers show the highest participation rates.

PreK and K Teachers demonstrate lower participation rates, but still show a notable reliance on public assistance. In 2016, 34% participated in one or more programs, increasing to 43% in 2018. Elementary Teachers report lower rates: 13% in 2016, then 21% in 2018, with the data being restructured in 2024 to include Middle School Teachers, who together reported 19% participation. While these rates are the lowest in

education, they still signal an inability to provide compensation that meets economic needs.

In the All Workers category, 26% of workers participated in public support programs in 2016, decreasing to 21% in 2018. This percentage increased to 28% in 2024, which is again a substantial share of the broader labor workforce. When viewed alongside the educational occupations data, however, it is clear that Child Care Workers, as well as PreK and K Teachers, consistently participate in public support programs at rates well above those of the All Workforce, and Elementary Teachers participate at rates either at or below those of the All Workforce.

Across each of these data points of comparison—Median Hourly Wages by Occupation, Median Wages in Comparison to Other Occupations, and Percentage of Workforce Participating in Public Support Programs, the literature (McLean et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2024, Whitebook et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2018)—is consistent: the early childhood workforce is woefully underpaid. I posit that these low wages are not the result of individual choices or local conditions, but instead a larger structural flaw in how the early childhood education system is funded, valued, and compensated. Care is simply not valued, and this must change (Folbre, 2001). Building on these challenges, it is clear that we must address compensation systematically.

Future of EC Workforce Compensation

In terms of the future of EC Workforce Compensation, three frameworks set the tone: the “Model Work Standards: For Teaching Staff in Center-Based Child Care,” (CSCCE & AFTEF, 2019), the “Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood

Profession” (Power to the Profession, 2020) and the “Introduction to the ECE Workforce Systems Change Framework” (Douglass et al., 2025).

The collaboration between the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) and the American Federation of Teachers Educational Foundation (AFTEF) generated a powerful framework entitled “Model Work Standards: For Teaching Staff in Center-Based Child Care” (CSCCE & AFTEF, 2019). This document is organized into nine sections that articulate the details of each of the standards as they relate to the following topic areas: 1) wages, 2) benefits, 3) employment policies & practice, 4) payment for professional responsibilities, 5) professional development, 6) staffing & teaching supports, 7) communication & team building, 8) decision making & problem solving, and 9) health, safety & physical setting. The document begins with an acknowledgement from CSCCE and AFTEF (2019) on page 1:

- The complex role of early childhood educators, it is a job that requires knowledge of child development; competence in putting that knowledge into practice; skill in observing, assessing, and documenting children’s learning; emotional strength and physical endurance; intense human interaction; compassion for self and others; a high level of self-esteem and self-confidence in order to instill the same in children; and a commitment to engage families, and
- The responsibility and challenge of recognizing the vital impact early educators have on young children and their families, both for today and for our future.

The Model Work Standards (MWS) were developed (CSCCE & AFTEF, 2019) during the third phase of the Working for Worthy Wages movement (described in the last section). The MWS are designed to assess quality in the work environment for the EC

workforce, just as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) are designed to assess quality in the learning environment for children. The MWS are meant to ensure quality careers for adults and assure quality care for children. The MWS are designed to be used as a self-assessment tool for programs, either as a group or as an administrator. In the assessment, each standard is ranked 1-5 (1-not met, 2-in planning stage, 3-in progress, 4-near completion, and 5-consistently met). Reviewing the assessment can generate a plan for change (CSCCE & AFTEF, 2019).

Though all of the work standards are important, for this review, I will focus on the first of the nine topic areas: Wages. Per CSCCE and AFTEF (2019), there are 10 standards in this topic area on page 9:

1.1 Salary scales for all positions are provided to every employee in a written format, either online or in a printed program policy document.

1.2 Salary scales identify different levels of pay for educators according to their levels of education and years of experience and are not based on the ages of the children with whom they work (e.g., if an infant-toddler educator and a preschool educator have the same credentials, they are both on the same wage scale).

1.3 Earning an early childhood degree or specialized credential is immediately rewarded with an increase in compensation.

1.4 Salary scales assure a living wage for all. The establishment of salary scales leads to the ultimate goal of achieving salary and benefit parity with K-3 teachers when education and experience are equivalent.

1.5 Until salaries reach target levels, salary scales are reviewed annually and revised as additional funds become available (e.g. subsidy rate increases or other new public or private investments are made). Minimally, an annual cost of living adjustment is provided to all employees.

1.6 Wages are paid in full when the program has an unexpected closure (e.g. inclement weather days) or when teaching staff are released due to low enrollment.

1.7 There is no differential in pay for work that includes direct care of children and that which fulfills professional responsibilities beyond direct care (e.g. planning time, staff meetings, recordkeeping, etc.).

1.8 Any staff member who is qualified to perform a higher-paid position and is assigned to work in that position for two consecutive weeks or more is paid at the higher rate of pay for all hours worked in that position.

1.9 In a 40-hour work week, one paid 15-minute break for each four-hour period is scheduled, as well as an unpaid 30-minute lunch break.

1.10 As required by federal law, all work by teaching staff that is more than 40 hours per week is paid at the overtime rate of time and a half.

The wage-related standards listed above articulate a vision of compensation that is transparent and equitable. The vision recognizes professional knowledge and responsibility required of the early childhood workforce. Altogether, the 10 standards call for clearly written and available salary scales that differentiate wages by education and experience, but never by the ages of the children being served. The standards establish the expectation that all members of the EC workforce earn a living wage, with the long-term goal of parity with K-3 teachers, and therefore stipulate an annual review and cost-of-living adjustments as progress is made. The standards also protect compensation recommendations by ensuring wages are paid during unexpected fluctuations. In sum, these standards lay the foundation for the fair and consistent compensation needed to sustain a skilled early childhood workforce and build a high-quality early childhood education system.

In the Power to the Profession (PttP) Task Force’s (2020) “Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Profession,” 15 early childhood and educational organizations came together to draft a document that calls for professionalism in our field and articulates the steps needed to achieve it. The Power to the Profession Task Force included the following organizations and professionals: the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (Dalia Thornton, Assistant Director), the American

Federation of Teachers (Megan Stockhausen, Assistant Director, Educational Issues), the Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators (Debra Murphy, Past President), Child Care Aware of America (Lynette Fraga, Executive Director), the Council for Professional Recognition (Valora Washington, Chief Executive Officer), the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (Peggy Kemp, Executive Director), the Early Care and Education Consortium (Celia Sims, Past President), the National Association for Family Child Care (Louis A. Finney, President), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Rhian Evans Allvin, Chief Executive Officer), the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (Kelly Baker, Past President), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Earl Franks, Executive Director), the National Education Association (Shyrelle Eubanks, Senior Policy Analyst), the National Head Start Association (Yasmina Vinci, Executive Director), the Service Employees International Union (Kurstien Holabird, Executive Director, SEIU Education and Support Fund), and ZERO TO THREE (Matthew Melmed, Executive Director). Facilitated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Power to the Profession Task Force authors set the tone by outlining the history of the profession as well as their goals for its future. The authors describe their vision: Each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce across all states and settings (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020). The authors then outline the framework in four sections: Section 1: Defining the Early Childhood Education Profession; Section 2: Shared Responsibilities and Supports: An Overview; Section 3: Expectations and Compensation for the Early

Childhood Education Profession, 3a. Professional Standards and Competencies, 3b. Professional Licensure, 3c. Professional Compensation; and Section 4: Resources, Structures, and Supports to Advance the Early Childhood Education Profession, 4a. Professional Preparation Programs, 4b. Employers and Owners, 4c. Professional Governance Body, 4d. State and Federal Governments and Agencies.

It is in Section 3c, where Professional Compensation is fully detailed and discussed. It begins by outlining four goals and recommendations (PttPTF, 2020, p. 23):

- Compensation will be comparable for early childhood educators with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities, regardless of the setting of their job.
- Compensation will include the provision of an adequate benefits package.
- Compensation will increase commensurate with increased preparation and increased competency.
- Compensation will not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of the children served.

Section 3c continues with a brief description of comparability regarding wage determination. The Unifying Framework makes clear that compensation for the EC workforce, regardless of education or training, should, at a minimum, earn a living wage (PttP, 2020). And then further recommends that the early childhood profession “look to the public schools as the minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities” (PttP, 2020, p. 24). The Unifying Framework then continues with a clear distinction between setting the minimum at a living wage (meaning the wage necessary to cover basic living standards),

and fair compensation, saying instead that the field of early childhood education being rooted in science and research, “is not a minimum-wage job, and a self-sufficiency standard must be considered the floor and not the ceiling.” (PttP, 2020, p. 24). The section closes by recommending that salary and benefit packages for the early childhood workforce should not be determined solely by other roles within the education system, but also by those outside it, such as nurses, school psychologists, librarians, speech and language therapists, among others.

Again, looking at Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), we can see that the call to examine compensation models beyond education underscores the ways in which compensation can be shaped by nested, interacting systems.

The National Early Childhood Education Workforce Center (NECEWC) is “a joint research and technical assistance center that equips state and local leaders to drive change in ECE workforce policy. This center uses a research-to-practice model to strengthen compensation and career advancement for early educators” (NECEWC, 2026).

In their brief entitled "Introduction to the ECE Workforce Systems Change Framework," Douglass et al. (2025) explained how the three aims of the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center can support states. The aims are as follows (Douglass et al., 2025, p. 2): Aim 1: Competitive and Fair Compensation, Aim 2: Clear and Accessible Career Pathways, and Aim 3: Positive Working Conditions. For each aim, Douglass et al. (2025) describe the current challenge (that serves as the catalyst for the change) and the desired change. The National ECE Workforce Center built a framework as a system-level approach to achieving the aims. They drew on research, policy, and practice in systems

change to develop the three drivers (or levers) for change. The primary drivers Douglass et al. (2025, p.5) identified are: 1) Practice Driver, 2) Infrastructure Drivers, and 3) Principles Drivers.

For this review of literature, I will focus on Aim 1: Competitive and Fair Compensation. The current challenge articulated in the brief included the ECE profession's low pay, which makes it difficult to retain and recruit quality staff. The lack of structure around compensation systems contributed to a wide salary variance across the system. Some states have offered stipends or supplements, but sometimes those efforts do not make the difference they need to. (Douglass et al., 2025). The desired change articulated in the brief is competitive and fair compensation for all early educators across all settings. According to Douglass and colleagues (2025, p. 2), “this may involve strategies such as establishing wage scales that take into account roles, qualifications, experience, or education levels,” as well as guaranteeing benefits and securing sustainable funding.

Using a systems change approach to achieve competitive and fair compensation requires a number of drivers (primary and secondary) to address issues within the system. Douglass et al. (2025) identified the primary (Practice) drivers as Policy-Specific Promising Practices, Targeted and Aligned Policies, and Data-Driven Decision Making. First, policy-specific promising practices established a structured wage scale that ensures competitive pay for K-3 roles based on qualifications, experience, and responsibilities, alongside a comparable benefits model. This driver also called for financial relief structures, in the interim, hiring and retention bonuses, tax credits, child care benefits, etc. Next, targeted and aligned policies connected compensation to educational

attainment and years of experience. These policies also prioritized a robust data infrastructure to support data collection, sharing, and usage. Lastly, data-driven decision making reinforced these efforts by monitoring implementation and progress. Douglass et al. (2025) also suggested reviewing and analyzing compensation trends and investments to inform continuous systems improvement and ensure continued funding.

Douglass et al. (2025) identified the primary (Infrastructure) drivers as Leadership & Governance, Multi-Sector & Multi-Partner Collaboration, Data Infrastructure, and Sustainability. Leadership and governance ensure that leaders across state and local agencies, across the ECE sector, and beyond, collaborate and apply best management practices to support competitive compensation. Multi-sector partnerships and coalitions coordinate planning, implementation, and evaluation of compensation initiatives. Their partnerships are defined by shared goals and a vision to guide them. A robust data infrastructure collects and stores compensation-related data, making it easy to access across programs to inform decision-making. Sustainability is reinforced through dedicated, flexible, and coordinated funding sources. There is a system that holds the history of financing compensation initiatives, and all policies, regulations, or written documents are accessible and available.

Douglass et al. (2025) then identified the primary (Principles) drivers as Engaging Educators in Systems Change and Culture & Narrative Shift. Educators from diverse backgrounds were actively engaged as leaders, charged with shaping and implementing compensation initiatives. They were supported by outreach, capacity-building, and information strategies that enabled meaningful participation and helped with decision-making. At the same time, a cultural and narrative shift raised awareness among

policymakers, the public, and the early childhood education sector about the necessity of sustained funding to achieve compensation goals. This awareness included the recognition that interim financial relief strategies are temporary, not long-term strategies to achieve competitive compensation (Douglass et al., 2025).

From a feminist economics theory perspective (Barker, 2021; Waring, 1988), empowering educators (those most directly affected by compensation decisions) to participate in determining their pay is a clear positive shift in power and a recognition of the value of care.

Douglass et al. (2025) concluded the brief with practical suggestions for using the framework, both for change leaders and for applied research. For change leaders, Douglass et al. (2025) suggested reflecting on the aims to better understand what is most relevant to the group. Then, reflecting on the primary drivers to assess the ways their efforts are addressing the drivers. Lastly, reflecting on the secondary drivers to see which, if any, are in place. For researchers, Douglass et al. (2025) suggested reflecting on the ways the drivers are being accounted for in the studies, and whether they were being considered as interrelated. They also asked researchers to reflect on opportunities to share findings with others related to early childhood education systems change.

One solution from the reading I have done is to address the challenge of systematic compensation reform by paying early childhood professionals using a salary scale, using living wages as a floor, not a ceiling. Salary scales offer transparency and provide financial equity while creating clear pathways for professional growth. All three of the previously reviewed sources in the preceding Future of EC Workforce Compensation section underscore that salary scales are a solution. To understand how salary scales like

this can be developed and implemented, I examined national and state-level research, as well as geographically localized solutions.

Theme Two: Salary Scales Are a Tool for Compensation Reform

Salary scales are a solution to address systemic compensation reform in ECE. To fully understand how the development and implementation of a living wage salary scale for the early childhood workforce could be a solution to the aforementioned challenge (Compensation for the EC Workforce Must Improve), I presented the next set of literature in four different subsections: Early Salary Scale Research, National Salary Scale Initiatives, State Salary Scale Progress, and lastly Community Salary Scale Example. I chose to review this body of literature to capture recent research and current efforts to develop and implement salary scales to improve compensation for the EC workforce. To quote Folbre (2001) again, we must

...develop and strengthen ways of rewarding the work of care. Care is not just another commodity. Personal, face-to-face, emotionally rich relationships are crucial to the delivery of high-quality child care, education, health, elder care, and many other social services. Whether they take place in families, communities, corporations, or other places of work, the services of care deserve public recognition and reward. (p. 232)

The solution of salary scales needs broad social support, whether implemented at the community, state, or national scale. Using Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), we can see the importance of societal values and policy changes in improving compensation for the EC workforce. The first perspective, being national, helps us identify best practices in development, while the second, state,

helps us be responsive to the realities of our state economies, regulatory bodies, and workforce needs. Whether at the national or state level, salary scales anchored in living wages provide a clear solution to improve compensation, build workforce stability, and strengthen the system as a whole.

Early Salary Scale Research

The four articles I reviewed here were most important to me as a researcher when I first began examining salary scales for the EC workforce and how to develop one for the CCI. Not only did they share points of consideration for development, both in terms of construction and wage determination, but also actual examples from states doing the same work.

In their article entitled “Minnesota Early Care and Education Wage Scale,” Casale and Noel (2021) began by restating the fact that the EC workforce in Minnesota, as well as across the country, is underpaid. In fact, it reported that the median wages for the EC workforce fall well-below the cost of living (Casale & Noel, 2021). They continued by stating that the EC workforce in MN is racially and ethnically diverse, citing the fact that 23% of the workforce are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Casale & Noel, 2021). They present an analysis of an equitable wage scale for the industry, which “recruitment and retention and incentivizes human capital development within the profession” (Casale & Noel, 2021, p. 1). They also note that their analysis is limited to the scale itself, which is not representative of a complete compensation package (health insurance, retirement benefits, etc.), but only the wage. They also preface the introduction of the scale by saying that, to implement, there must be increased funding, as raising wages for the EC workforce cannot be borne by programs paying teachers more or by parents paying

programs more. Regarding the scale's construction, MN consulted with the TEACH Early Childhood National Center and learned from other states with early childhood salary scales, including Illinois, Nebraska, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington. The first scale they developed was for the entire state of Minnesota.

Casale and Noel (2021) provide an overview of the wage scale and the rationale. The Proposed Minnesota ECE Professional Wage Scale uses the Power to the Profession model with three levels of ECE professional: ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III. The levels vary by professional training, roles, and responsibilities. To that, MN added a base level for an early educator with a high school diploma and no other training. The wage set when the scale was created was \$15 an hour, aligned with the basic cost of living for a single person. When an early educator earns a CDA certificate and moves to level ECE I, their pay increases to \$18.20 an hour, which is aligned with the basic cost of living for a family living wage (family of three with one adult working full time, one adult working part time, and one child). This family model is the most common in MN. The wage for ECE II is then set at 1.25% of the rate of ECE I (\$22.75 an hour), and the wage for ECE III is set at 1.25% of that rate (\$28.44 an hour). The 1.25% wage increase between levels is used in other comparable fields. More importantly, this wage structure creates wage parity with public school PreK and K teachers (Casale & Noel, 2021).

However, this goal of wage parity highlighted the challenges of benefits and their costs, as well as the calendar attached to the scales. Most of the EC workforce receive yearly salaries, unlike public PreK and K teachers, who typically work nine or ten months. Casale and Noel (2021) cite the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers, and its Model Work Standards

(CSCCE & AFET, 2019) as providing guidance for the analysis of benefits. They concluded that wage scales “have been identified as a necessary strategy for improving compensation in the early care and education industry...however, additional resources for the industry are a necessary first step” (Casale & Noel, 2021, p. 6).

In the white paper entitled “A Look at Salary/Wage Scales for the Early Childhood Educator Workforce,” the Child Care Services Association (CCSA, 2021) articulates how to build a salary scale for early childhood professionals by offering information on the components of a salary scale, the benefits, key decision points to consider, and data needed to move forward with development. The components of a salary scale include a series of levels, education/credentialing requirements, hours worked, and sometimes roles and responsibilities. The benefits of using a salary scale include transparency that can lead to equitable practices, a tool that can be used for attracting and retaining staff, a stepped path to higher quality, a budget planning tool for early childhood education businesses, and an advocacy tool for financing. Key decision points to consider when building a salary scale for early childhood professionals include answering the following questions (CCSA, 2021, p. 3):

- Eligibility: Who qualifies for participation?
- Levels or Steps: What criteria will be used to define the levels?
- Benchmarking: How have states determined wage amounts on the scale?
- Parity (or Equivalency): For whom?
- Implementation Strategies: Will the scale be implemented in phases or all at once?
- Professional Growth: How will individuals progress across the scale?

All are important points to remember when constructing, which is the intent of the paper: to provide “a sample of state planning efforts aimed at improving wages across the field...though the complexity of financing early childhood education has left almost all states at the planning phase” (CCSA, 2022, p. 6). The CCSA referenced a number of states' planning efforts in developing salary scales, including Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington. It offered a look at eight different salary scale efforts as they related to their overall vision, goals, and guiding principles, recommendations and strategies, scale features, proposed eligibility, parity recommended Y/N, benefits recommended Y/N, legislation (put forward and enacted). In four of the eight states, we see legislation enacted related to the salary scale being implemented (for specific) state-funded preschool programs: Connecticut, Illinois, Oregon, and Washington (CCSA, 2021), though at the time of publication, these scales were not implemented statewide. The researchers recognized this as progress but said there was much work yet to be done.

Lastly, the CCSA (2021, p. 6) offered the following recommendations: 1) Engage a group of stakeholders that represent the early childhood workforce and its allies; Be certain that the membership represents the diversity of the community and represents all voices equitably; 2) Work with state and municipal leaders to determine how a wage scale fits into new or existing funding streams, how it will be administered and how it will be rolled out (regionally, incrementally, etc.); 3) Work with economic development departments and tax experts, among others, to look at financing options to take the next steps forward; 4) Importantly, be aware of potential unintended consequences; 5) Once the salary scale is in its final draft, vet it across the state to ensure buy-in, identify any last

minute concerns and confirm that the scale's levels and increments are appropriate. This paper was very practical and surfaced often as a resource for salary scale consideration and construction.

In the article "Salary Scales," Portillo (2022) stated that in order to create a robust ECE system, the system "needs a highly qualified workforce of early educators that is valued and supported through access to higher education, professional development, and most fundamentally, compensation commensurate with their skills and responsibilities" (p. 3). She recognized the workforce shortage, "still 8.4% below employment levels from what it was in February 2020, pre-pandemic" (p. 3) and posited that salary scales could address this shortage by raising wages and increasing participation in the workforce. She continued with simple steps for how to create a salary scale: "Create a working group, set guiding parameters, conduct background research, create a table shell, review with relevant stakeholders, and design an implementation plan" (Portillo, 2022, p. 4).

Next, Portillo (2022) outlined the considerations for the following key decision points for stakeholders, as well as some questions to be tabled in discussion (Portillo, 2022, p. 5):

- Parity: Does the scale aim to meet equivalency with any other systems/entities?
- Economic Indicators: How will the system be anchored to or responsive to the current and future economy?
- Years of Experience: Should the scale address years of service? Should the scale cost out yearly adjustments?
- Geographic Boundaries: Will the scale serve the entire boundary, or will there be geographic distinctions?

- Eligibility: Who will qualify? Will the scale apply to both center-based and home-based providers?
- Additional Specializations: Will the scale have any adjustments for additional qualifications?

Portillo (2022) walked through each of these indicators and offers different considerations for each, which offers those constructing salary scales some concrete tools for decision-making. The economic indicator section of the paper was of particular interest to my research as Portillo (2022) addressed the various anchors constructors can use: ALICE (Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Essential Index, living wage, and minimum wage. Portillo (2022) then reported that both North Carolina and Minnesota used living wages as an economic indicator, while Oregon, Washington, DC, and Rhode Island used minimum wage as an economic indicator. The paper concluded with Portillo (2022) offering state examples for salary scales from North Carolina, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, DC, and Rhode Island.

Similarly, Hong and Teng (2022), in their paper titled “In Pursuit of Equitable Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce: Considerations for States,” researched how four states (Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington State, and the District of Columbia) had started their journey to both develop and implement better compensation for the EC workforce. The authors identified five themes (Hong & Teng, 2022): 1) Ensure transparency at every major decision point; 2) Identify a comprehensive framework that supports the current workforce; 3) Consider multiple mechanisms for implementation; 4) Use short-term solutions while building long-term approaches and infrastructure; 5) Employ an inside-outside approach (p. 4).

Hong and Teng (2022) continued by reporting on the compensation strategies at work in Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington State, and Washington, DC. For example, in Oregon, the Early Learning Division (ELD) built a salary scale for preschool teachers for their mixed delivery preschool model called Preschool Promise (which serves 3- and 4-year-olds living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In their legislation, they stated the salaries of these preschool teachers would be commensurate with local K teacher salaries, but discovered a wide variation of K teacher salaries across the state. Instead, the ELD decided to set salary scales with region and educational attainment, but then later simplified the scale to account for all regions, and highlighted the importance of competencies as opposed to degrees. The latter decision was made to increase equity, as the ELD recognized “a stronger system needed to be in place for individuals of color to receive their credentials, before the requirement of a bachelor’s degree would be equitable” (Hong & Teng, 2022, p. 9).

Another point raised by Hong and Teng (2022) related to the compensation efforts in Rhode Island and the success they have experienced, was “bringing together all early childhood sectors to avoid siloes and competition within the industry, pushing for K-12 parity, and advocating on all fronts-not just in legislation but also through regulatory actions, including through state contracts” (Hong & Teng, 2022, p. 12). A similar point was raised in relation to Washington State and its approach to coalition building and stakeholder involvement. Hong and Teng (2022) stated:

While there is currently no adopted wage scale, the state has continued to lead in equitable workforce supports through the implementation of other strategies-

community involvement and a co-design approach, an increase in benefits and more equitable supports for professional growth. (p. 15)

The co-design approach they referenced is significant. Washington has developed a salary scale, though as of 2022, it had not been implemented. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families chose to follow a more equity-focused approach to advance, which meant an intentional shift to share power with the community the change aimed to serve. The provider-led group has joined forces with Child Care Aware of Washington, a more appropriate partner in power-sharing, and the overarching aim using this liberatory approach to “design-out racism” (Hong & Teng, 2022, p. 14).

The researchers concluded with a few thoughts on the progress Washington, DC, was able to make, reporting they have achieved “remarkable successes in equitable compensation, from building an understanding of DC’s economy and the intersection with the workforce to creating and maintaining a united coalition,” (Hong & Teng, 2022, p. 18) which will carry them well into the future. The last point about a united coalition is one worth remembering, and one we will hear in the next section focused on addressing compensation on a national scale, by bringing states together.

National Salary Scale Initiatives

Here, I focused on three main national compensation/salary scale initiatives: the Moving the Needle Project (Russell et al., 2019), the Bold on Early Educator Compensation Learning Community project (Dade & McLean, 2023), and the Compensation Capacity-Building Community of Practice (EEIC, 2026), all designed to bring states together to talk about compensation for the EC workforce nationwide, and how to address the challenge at the state level.

Moving the Needle on Early Childhood Workforce Compensation. There was much to learn from the Moving the Needle on Early Childhood Workforce Compensation Project (Russell et al., 2019), which brought together eight state teams to assess EC workforce compensation systems and identify strategies for reform. The eight states included: Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. The report was divided into five sections: Introduction and Background, About the Project, Principles for Moving the Needle on Early Childhood Workforce Compensation, Project Evaluation, and Summary of Results.

Russell et al. (2019) reported that early childhood teachers are paid very low wages, often under \$11 an hour, and often without consideration of benefits. With wages so low, it makes it hard to retain and recruit skilled educators. Solving this problem will require improvising compensation, which means building stronger policies and identifying new funding strategies. They continued by reporting that some states are implementing strategies that address part of the problem: TEACH Early Childhood scholarships for educational attainment, and Child Care WAGES salary supplements are two such examples. Yet, more are needed.

The Moving the Needle project objective was: “Raising the awareness of childhood workforce compensation issues and creating new or significantly expanding existing policy, advocacy, and funding strategies to improve compensation within participating states.” (Russell et al., 2019, p. 3). The TEACH Early Childhood National Center provided program oversight and support, including: 1) funds to support state team participation in two Moving the Needle on Compensation summits, 2) group technical assistance, and 3) individual technical assistance. States participated for a variety of

reasons, including engaging in a team process, naming the problem, being a part of a national conversation, and learning new strategies (Russell et al., 2019). In order to participate, states agreed to assemble a diverse team of 8-10 members who would be committed to the work; develop a draft (as well as a final) advocacy, funding, and policy state action plan; work as a team to implement the state action plan; participate in all Center-provided summits, webinars, and technical assistance opportunities; provide documentation of teamwork in the form of quarterly reports; and, finally, disseminate findings in conjunction with the Center. Additionally, the states expressed the following principles as critical for the work (Russell et al., 2019, p. 4):

- Public respect and recognition for the work that early educators do,
- Public support for the work early educators do,
- Compensation parity and benefits equitable with K-12 educators and/or like careers with equivalent qualifications, and,
- Financing and funding available to meet nationally researched workforce educational standards.

Throughout their time together over the 18 months of the project, the states learned a number of important lessons. The key lessons are grouped into sections: group process, policy/advocacy/outreach work, data research/funding development.

Related to the group process, Russell et al. (2019) learned that change requires a dedicated group that is willing to stay engaged for the long haul and work closely with partners before putting plans into action. Groups should regularly assess who is at the table, ensuring representation. Because of the broad scope of work, choosing group members who can commit time and effort is crucial. Clear roles and defined leadership

also matter. Additionally, it is important to keep the work moving forward by setting short, manageable goals. Overall, the expectation is that a team needs to remain flexible, building small wins along the way helps momentum, and keeps the group focused on progress (Russell et al., 2019).

Related to policy, advocacy, and outreach work, states learned that progress depends on clear, focused requests, as well as building long-term relationships across systems. Policy change takes time, and understanding of how systems work independently and together, and engagement, over time, with policymakers. Groups can play a powerful role in advancing advocacy when they have strong leadership and resources. Engaging with the EC workforce itself must be done intentionally and regularly, as building meaningful relationships takes time and effort. Some groups also found value in engaging unlikely partners and framing the project to bring greater visibility and focus to the issue of compensation of the EC workforce, which is key to progress. While the public may not fully understand the realities the EC workforce faces in terms of compensation, they are generally supportive of wage increases. Presenting compensation reform as a critical piece of strengthening the system helps build understanding (Russell et al., 2019).

Related to data research and funding development, the groups learned the importance of being well-informed about the multiple funding streams that support the early childhood system. Additionally, using feedback from the EC workforce itself provides valuable direction for future efforts and should inform planning. Groups also recognized that some feedback from the EC workforce might be resistant to change, particularly as it related to how compensation increases would be financed. Using clear

information around practical funding strategies, concerns can be assuaged. Also, the idea that even with limited resources, funding can be leveraged to make forward progress. One thing that helps with that is clear, consistent, reliable data collection, as it is critical to guiding decisions, measuring progress, and strengthening the case for investment (Russell et al., 2019). This call for clear data is echoed in the section below.

Bold on Early Educator Compensation Learning Community. The Bold On Early Educator Compensation Learning Community (Dade & McLean, 2023) was another rich resource I found in my research. This initiative was led by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, which brought together seven states: Illinois, Massachusetts, New Mexico, North Carolina, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. The group convened 15 times in the first year of 2022 and three times in the second year of 2023. The project concluded in 2024. There was a series of learnings from that work articulated in Dade and McLean's (2023) brief entitled "Bold on Early Educator Compensation Learning Community 2022: Lessons from State Actions." These learnings included: 1) Act Now and lay groundwork for compensation reform; 2) Dedicate funds; 3) Center educator voices; 4) Build data and evaluation capacity; and 5) Take a holistic approach (Dade & McLean, 2023).

In terms of the first learning, Act Now and Lay Groundwork for Compensation Reform, many of the state leaders participating used ARPA funding to support the EC workforce through stabilization grants, and they then built infrastructure to continue payments after funding had been exhausted (like Vermont and New Mexico). Some states built salary scales, and those ARPA funds gave them an opportunity to test them (like North Carolina). Washington state used ARPA funds to pay for healthcare premiums of

child care workers, and this was planned to continue. Washington, DC, also offered healthcare to its EC workforce, and Kentucky used some of its ARPA funds to ensure the EC workforce was automatically eligible for child care subsidies, regardless of household income (Dade & McLean, 2023).

Next, for the second learning, Dedicate funds, Washington, DC, and New Mexico, both secured dedicated funding streams for their compensation improvement initiatives, the Early Educator Pay Equity Fund and the Land Grant Permanent Fund, respectively. Additionally, they leveraged their cost models, which New Mexico used to increase its subsidy rates and Washington, DC, used to implement its salary scale for early educators (Dade & McLean, 2023).

In terms of the third learning, Center educator voices—states engaged stakeholders through a number of means, including partnership with state agencies and community-based organizations, like WECAN in Wisconsin, or the Shared Services Alliance in New Mexico during the pandemic, or Strategies for Children in Massachusetts. In Washington, Child Care Aware of Washington engaged stakeholders using a liberatory design framework, which centers the voices of early educators (Dade & McLean, 2023).

Build data and evaluation capacity was the fourth learning—Illinois improved access to the application for pandemic relief funding, and North Carolina collected data on their ARPA funds distributed in order to track how much was spent on compensation improvement. Similarly, Delaware instituted an annual workforce study, which ultimately will help it implement their salary scale (Dade & McLean, 2023).

Lastly, in terms of the fifth learning, Take a holistic approach—Washington, DC, passed the Birth to Three Act, which called for pay parity between early educators and public K-6 teachers. It also required reimbursement rates to providers to be set at a rate that incorporated the cost model, done by the District, that included the salary scale. We see a similar approach in the next project (Dade & McLean, 2023).

Compensation Capacity-Building Community of Practice. The Compensation Capacity-Building Community of Practice (EEIC, 2026) is the joint project of The Early Educator Investment Collaborative and the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. From 2023 to 2024, the EEIC was awarded over \$20M to implement compensation improvement activities for the early childhood workforce that would lead to sustained reform. The grantees of these funds included Colorado, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Tarrant County, Texas. The CSCCE will facilitate four convenings from January 2025 to December 2026, a community of practice (CoP), where they will provide technical assistance to the group of grantee teams. Additionally, the CSCCE will host individual meetings with each of the teams to better understand how the needs and priorities of the teams are being addressed (EEIC, 2026).

As of February 2026, the grantee team from Colorado has been exploring funding sources in order to implement reports and plans, such as a study they conducted on benefits. The District of Columbia team is studying the Pay Equity Fund and its health care initiative, HealthCare4ChildCare. They are trying to better understand how provider and educator data can project funding needs. Illinois is focused on the new Department of Early Childhood Education and building up its apprenticeship program, while the team in Louisiana is actively implementing compensation initiatives in local communities as

demonstrations or proof of concepts to advance policy. Minnesota is problem-solving how to implement their wage scale for early care and education professionals, specifically looking for funding sources that do not put additional weight on families or the providers themselves. And lastly, Tarrant County, Texas, is researching both early educators and new financing models to use in early childhood businesses, again with the goal of advancing policy (EEIC, 2026).

In the last newsletter, from February 2026 (EEIC, 2026a), teams discussed the subject of benefits with leaders from Colorado, the District of Columbia, Maine, and Michigan. Colorado reported on their findings from their benefits studies that demonstrated healthcare, paid time off, and retirement were the top three most desired benefits of early educators. Some of the solutions brought forward were providing employers with tax credits to provide healthcare, a retirement savings program that the EC workforce can access called SecureSavings, and the substitute fund that CO has been piloting has been successful in helping early educators receive paid time off. The District of Columbia walked through HealthCare4ChildCare, which is locally funded and available to employees. They reported 80% of facilities have enrolled, but funding uncertainty is challenging. Maine's Child Care Employment Award is designed to offer child care staff affordable child care. It has shown improvements in both recruitment and retention, and they are hoping to make it permanent. Lastly, Michigan talked about Nurture Benefits, a grant-funded pilot that provides health, dental, vision, disability, and retirement plans to the EC workforce (EEIC, 2026a).

These three national compensation/salary scales initiatives are important for a number of reasons, chief among them being the opportunity for states to learn from each

other. In the next subsection, I review the salary scale progress of a series of states and highlight the critical role that stakeholders play in compensation reform.

State Salary Scale Progress

From my review of the early salary scale research (Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022), I had a list of states (and districts) that had developed salary scales. It was through this early list that I was able to find more specific information related to the state's own salary scales, which ultimately helped to inform the list of states I was interested in interviewing for this study. I explain this in greater detail in Chapter 4: Findings, where I further share the rationale for inclusion, details about the salary scales, and more about the state's efforts.

For clarity, I have included literature on Washington, DC, and the following seven states—Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington—all of which have made progress toward implementing a salary scale for the EC workforce. These seven represent a wide range of efforts at the state level to improve compensation for the EC workforce in a systematic way. At the same time, no state (with the exception of New Mexico) has made as much progress as DC, which has fully implemented a salary scale for the EC workforce through the Pay Equity Fund (ECEECTF, 2022). For this reason, I included DC in this review as an example of a fully implemented model.

From my early salary scale research referenced above (Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022), I identified several attributes of progress in salary scale development and implementation, including stakeholder involvement, wage determination, funding, and policy. I used them as points of

comparison in this study, which is explained in greater detail in Chapter 3. For this section of the review of literature on state salary scale progress, I chose to isolate stakeholder involvement as an organizing theme, as it appeared consistently across nearly every state salary scale report or brief I reviewed.

When I write about stakeholder involvement in relation to salary scale development and implementation, I aim to discuss who was at the table when decisions were made about what the early childhood workforce needs, and how best to design the system so it works for those who work in it. This attribute, in my mind, is the most important piece of compensation reform. And one that fits well with the Feminist Economics theoretical framework I have chosen for this study.

Fundamentally, Feminist Economics examines how gender, race, and class shape who benefits and who is left behind in economic systems (Barker et al., 2021; Folbre, 2001; Waring, 1988). The theory identifies who has the power in any given system and then seeks to catalyze change to shift power and improve the well-being of those in the system it is designed to serve. Ideally, those who will be most impacted by decisions are leading the decision-making process to ensure needs are met. While that is not always possible when making state-level decisions about increasing compensation for an entire workforce, there are many states that have made this commitment.

Stakeholder Involvement. With the District of Columbia leading the pack in terms of salary scale implementation, I started there with stakeholder involvement. While the scales themselves were required to be developed by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), this was completed by OSSE's Division of Early Learning (DEL). In response to Mayor Bowser's Birth to Three For All Act of 2018

(OSSE, 2021), the Early Childhood Educator Compensation Taskforce was established to make recommendations on how to implement the scales. In its report to the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia (ECEECTF, 2022), the Early Educator Equitable Compensation Task Force gave its recommendations, outlining both short-term and long-term mechanisms (e.g., supplemental payments, direct to educators, and then a new salary scale via program-level funding). The Task Force was comprised of 14 members, including professionals from DC Action, DC Family Child Care Association, Ward 7 Education Council, DC Directors Exchange, the Multicultural Spanish Speaking Providers Association, the District of Columbia Association for the Education of Young Children, American University, Building Pathways, Senate Employees' Child Care Center, BlueSkyEd Consulting, Boston Consulting Group and the Bainum Family Foundation, who also sought perspectives from the field in public testimony and conversations with researchers and practitioners. The national experts the Task Force consulted included professionals from the Urban Institute, Education Counsel, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education, Bank Street College of Education, Home Group, and Opportunities Exchange (ECEECTF, 2022). Additionally, the task force drew on many of the previously mentioned works in this paper, demonstrating a commitment to stakeholder engagement at all levels.

New Mexico has implemented its salary scale for the early childhood workforce, but not without consulting the very people it was designed to serve. In the report “Wage Scale and Career Lattice Framework and Implementation Recommendations,” the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (NMECECD, 2025) described

the process of developing their wage scale and career lattice. The researchers conducted a number of focus groups over two weeks. Over 200 individuals participated from all sectors of the early childhood system and across all geographic regions of the state (NMECECD, 2025). Focus groups were conducted in both English and Spanish to ensure participation. Additionally, NMECECD (2025) collected written feedback from 150 individuals via an online form. All levels of stakeholder involvement informed the construction and implementation of the scale (NMECECD, 2025).

The State of Washington has been working to develop and implement a salary scale for the early childhood workforce for the last decade (Hong & Teng, 2022; WSDCYF, 2019; WSDCYF, 2025) and has committed to an equity approach to compensation reform. They have chosen to center the lived experience of the early childhood workforce, as well as the families they serve, in the development of compensation reform and policy (WSDCYF, 2025). Through work with both the Washington Communities for Children, a network of 10 regional coalitions of providers and parents as well as community members, and other DCYF partners, Washington has built an Early Care and Education Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan that ensures families will not pay more than 7% of their household income for child care, and child care providers will earn at minimum a living wage for their work (WSDCYF, 2025).

Minnesota articulated equity as one of the three decision-making principles guiding the development of the Child Care and Early Education Professional Wage Scale and Comparable Competencies (MNDCYF, 2025). In section IV, MN described the collaborative development process and the workgroup behind the salary scale design. In

it, the researchers described the direct engagement with the early childhood education workforce, including the recruitment of diverse representation in race, ethnicity, language, geography, and program type. The recruited group of child care providers was almost 500 total members, with 51% from family child care and 40% from center-based care (MNDCYF, 2025, p. 9). From this recruitment pool, a number of focus groups were held to offer input for the creation of pathways and levels on the scale, as well as the corresponding wages. One of the main focuses in these groups was conversation around educational attainment, and comparable competencies that included skills, experience, and training (MNDCYF, 2025).

In Michigan, the salary scale introduced in the Balancing the Scales report (Andrews, 2023) was guided by the Task Force for Equitable Educator Compensation, which included three early childhood business owners representing both home-based and center-based care providers and four parent leaders, as well as members from early childhood, workforce, and economic development organizations. MI's salary scale was piloted by two child care providers and then studied by the Michigan Taskforce for Early Care and Education Workforce Compensation (MiTECEWC, 2025). The researchers described the purpose of the project: to engage a wide range of stakeholders that would advise the development of a wage scale (building on the prior wage scale developed by TalentFirst; Andrews, 2023, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4), pilot that scale, conduct an evaluation, and make recommendations (MiTECEWC, 2025). The researchers cited the positive impacts on teaching staff not only in retention but also because the additional funding allowed for professional development and career growth. MiTECEWC (2025) concluded that continuing to engage early childhood stakeholders is essential, as

“ECE business owners and administrators will implement the scale and have the lived experience to determine which factors are most important” (MiTECEWC, 2025, p. 21), underscoring an awareness of the importance of stakeholder involvement.

Similarly, North Carolina’s model salary scale was drafted by a number of agencies across the state, but was first informed with input from child care providers and parents, as well as early childhood experts (NCECCC, 2021). The model salary scale was then presented to child care programs across different quality levels, permit types, and geographic locations. This feedback, gathered through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, was used to inform the next iteration of the model salary scale (NCECCC, 2021). There is more on stakeholder involvement in both Michigan and North Carolina in Chapter 4, as well as information on wage determination, funding, and policy for those two states.

In Illinois, the stakeholder involvement in the literature was much the same; prioritizing feedback from the early childhood workforce is a vital piece of implementation success. This study, in particular, was conducted to further inform the salary scale implementation in Illinois, to listen to those who are accessing it. Researchers (TEACH+PLUS, 2024) explored two different salary scales (one state-wide and one Chicago-specific) as part of the SMART START Illinois plan. They gathered feedback on the proposed scales from early educators working in community based organizations and offered recommendations to the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Early Childhood (DEC). Teach Plus Illinois partnered with the IDHS, DEC, and the Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) to host 10 focus groups with 55 early educators working in CBOs. The researchers reported that turnover

rates among early childhood teachers were driven, largely, by dissatisfaction with wages or benefits. Additionally, they revealed that teachers are often unaware of how centers are funded or when new funding is available. Researchers (TEACH+PLUS, 2024) also learned that early educators want a salary scale that exceeds a livable wage and reflects both experience and education. Looking forward, early educators want to be able to see predictable pay and advancement opportunities, leading the researchers (TEACH+PLUS, 2024) to conclude that the drafted scale is “a step in the right direction as it provides a framework for fairly compensating teachers and teacher assistants throughout Illinois” (TEACH+PLUS, 2024, p. 10).

Lastly, Rhode Island, in the “2023 Early Childhood Educator Compensation Study: Final Report and Recommendations Prepared by Public Consulting Group for the Rhode Island Department of Human Services,” (RIDHS, 2024), we see another example of prioritizing stakeholder involvement in the process of developing a salary scale and planning to implement it. The report (RIDHS, 2024) began with the acknowledgement that Public Consulting Group (PCG) worked alongside the members of the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Compensation Study Advisory Group which was comprised of three family child care providers and ten child care center providers, as well as staff from state offices and agencies like RIAEYC, RI Department of Education, DHS, and Higher Ed. Additionally, PCG used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather and include stakeholder feedback, essentially asking about current wages and benefits as well as desired wages and benefits (RIDHS, 2024). In terms of response rates, of the 1,162 survey respondents, 1,050 were center-based providers, and 112 were family child care providers (RIDHS, 2024, p. 9). The center-based providers identified 69% White-non

Hispanic, and 16.1% Hispanic-any race, while the family child care providers identified 75% Hispanic, and 16.1% White-non Hispanic (RIDHS, 2024, p. 11). Similar to New Mexico, all surveys, interviews, and focus groups were conducted in both English and Spanish.

Moving from the national level to the state level brought a difference in scope and scale, though the intent remained the same: to improve early childhood workforce compensation to retain and recruit quality staff and build quality programs. This intent was also true for the community example I share next.

Community Salary Scale Example

Returning to the previous section on positionality, in the white paper entitled “Building a Sustainable Child Care System: Implementing a Salary Scale for Early Childhood Professionals,” we outlined the process we used to build a salary scale anchored in living wages for the Early Learning Center on the campus of North Central Michigan College (CCI, 2025).

First, we needed to determine the cost of living specific to our county. We selected the Living Wage Calculator from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which calculates basic needs: food, child care, medical, housing, transportation, civic, internet and mobile, other, and taxes. The calculator then provides an hourly rate that an individual or member of a household needs to earn to meet those basic needs. The calculator shows wages for 1 adult, 2 adults (1 working), and 2 adults (both working), as well as 0 children, 1 child, 2 children, and 3 children. Next, we used the cost estimations provided by MIT, as well as the minimum hourly wage of \$20.00 needed to support 1 adult with 0 children living in Emmet County (MIT, 2026), though in Table 2.6, we can

also see \$18.00 an hour (for high school students working at the ELC). Then, we confirmed the data we found using the calculators from MIT by reaching out to the Regional Chambers of Commerce and North Central Michigan College, both of which collect regional data on the cost of living. We also consulted regional reports, including the Bowen Research Institute and Housing North's Housing Needs Assessment (2022) report and the Michigan League for Public Policy's 2017 report titled "Making Ends Meet."

We modeled the salary scale after one used in a study from Minnesota conducted in 2021 by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (Casale & Noel, 2021), which focused on developing a salary scale for ECE professionals in the state. Their study detailed a comparison table they built that referenced other states implementing salary scales, using a template we adopted. The template uses the NAEYC Power to the Profession: One Profession, Three Designations Framework (NAEYC, 2019), ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III. To that, we added a Beginning or entry-level position for the EC workforce coming from High School into the field. These levels correspond with the Michigan Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (MPSCECE, 2025), a set of nine competencies for the profession that include: 1) Child development and learning in context; 2) Family-teacher partnerships and community connections; 3) Child observations, documentation, and assessment; 4) Developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching practices; 5) Knowledge, application, and integration of academic content in the early childhood curriculum; 6) Professionalism as an early childhood educator; 7) Promoting children's health and wellness; 8) Leading high quality early childhood programs; and 9) Promoting

the well-being of early childhood professionals. These competencies are accompanied by four indicators that can help determine where an early childhood professional is in their proficiency:

- The Beginning Level indicates a need for Information/Education.
- The Developing Level incorporates Knowledge and Comprehension.
- The Achieving Level incorporates Application and some Analysis.
- The Extending Level incorporates Analysis and Synthesis.

We can see the NAEYC framework and the MPSCECE indicators across the top row of Table 2.4 below, and directly beneath them, the corresponding educational attainment. Down the far-left column, we see the different roles of the EC workforce. Lastly, the four main roles are listed along the left side of the scale: 1) Associate Teacher, 2) Assistant Teacher, 3) Lead Teacher, and 4) Administrator.

Table 2.4

Living Wage Salary Scale for the Early Learning Center at North Central Michigan College (CCI, 2025)

Competency Level	Beginning	ECE I: Developing	ECE II: Achieving	ECE III: Extending
Educational Attainment	High School Diploma	CDA or ECE/CD Associate	CDA or ECE/CD Associate - ECE/CD/ED Bachelor's or Master's	ECE/CD/ED Bachelor's or Master's
Associate Teacher	\$18-20/hr	\$20-22/hr		
Assistant Teacher		\$46k-\$54k	\$52k-\$58k	
Lead Teacher		\$50k-\$58k	\$56k-\$62k	\$62k-\$70k

Administration			\$60k-\$67k	\$67k-\$75k
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Unlike using a quantitative growth structure for the lanes (e.g., years worked), this living wage salary scale allows for a qualitative growth structure based on the Michigan Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (MiAEYC, 2025). Using these standards and competencies, we also developed an accompanying evaluation/self-evaluation tool to determine where an early childhood professional identifies on the career pathway. As of March 2026, it can be found on the webpage for the Child Care Initiative at North Central Michigan College (CCI, 2026).

The fact that the early childhood workforce is underpaid has serious implications for the early childhood system. The solution of implementing a salary scale for the early childhood workforce that reflects, at a minimum, a living wage is a good place to start. A salary scale could be a systematic way to improve compensation for the entire EC workforce. Salary scales could be a reference when setting reimbursement rates for CDC subsidy, or funding allocations at the state or federal level, for budgeting purposes when building EC business models, all of which would ensure that the EC workforce's need to (at minimum) be earning a living wage was considered at every point of system contact. Compensating the EC workforce with a wage that would allow them to at least meet their cost of living expenses, as well as recognize their importance and encourage their competency, could stabilize the system, support recruitment and retention efforts, as well as establish clear pathways for professional growth.

The resources I included in the review of literature illustrated that compensation for the EC workforce must be improved, and that salary scales for the EC workforce are a

valuable tool for compensation reform. The literature also illustrated the complexity of the work, requiring research and planning, data-driven decision-making, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Together, these papers provided frameworks for designing scales, ideas for strategic implementation, and reports on how these approaches might play out in real-world contexts.

Gaps in the Literature

The gaps in the literature that are particularly significant are on the solution side of the problem. As stated before, the underpayment of the Early Childhood workforce is well documented. The gaps in research show a clear lack of implemented and studied salary scales for the EC, mainly because there have not been many. Though I imagine we will begin to see more, with DC further evaluating its Pay Equity Fund, New Mexico raising its minimum EC workforce salary, and Illinois developing a dedicated funding source specifically for systemically raising wages for the EC workforce. Additionally, with other states getting ready to launch initiatives like Michigan testing out its new Early Childhood Educator Wage Initiative and North Carolina focused on identifying a permanent funding stream to fully implement its model salary scale, more research related to systematic solutions for improving compensation for the EC workforce will be conducted in the near future.

Summary

This study aimed to fill the above-mentioned gaps in the literature by synthesizing various states' efforts and strategically examining which states are making progress toward implementing salary scales and what has made their progress possible. While this study was a small sample of what could be conducted, examining stakeholder

involvement, wage determination, funding, and policy alongside state efforts can help reveal patterns of progress. Looking at attributes of success can help state-level stakeholders and policymakers alike understand the benefits of not only including the EC workforce in decision-making but also supporting them to have a leadership role in the process.

Salary scales anchored in living wages are not only financial adjustments to be made in business models, but also a systemic solution to some of the early childhood education systems' most pressing challenges: quality of care, capacity of care programs, and respect for caregiving professions. To show that salary scales are a tool for compensation reform, and that systematic wage improvement is possible and scalable, I sought to examine states that have demonstrated progress in developing salary scales and building policy to support implementation. My research contributes to the growing body of work that shows state policymakers what is possible and shares lessons learned from states presently doing the work.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Research Design

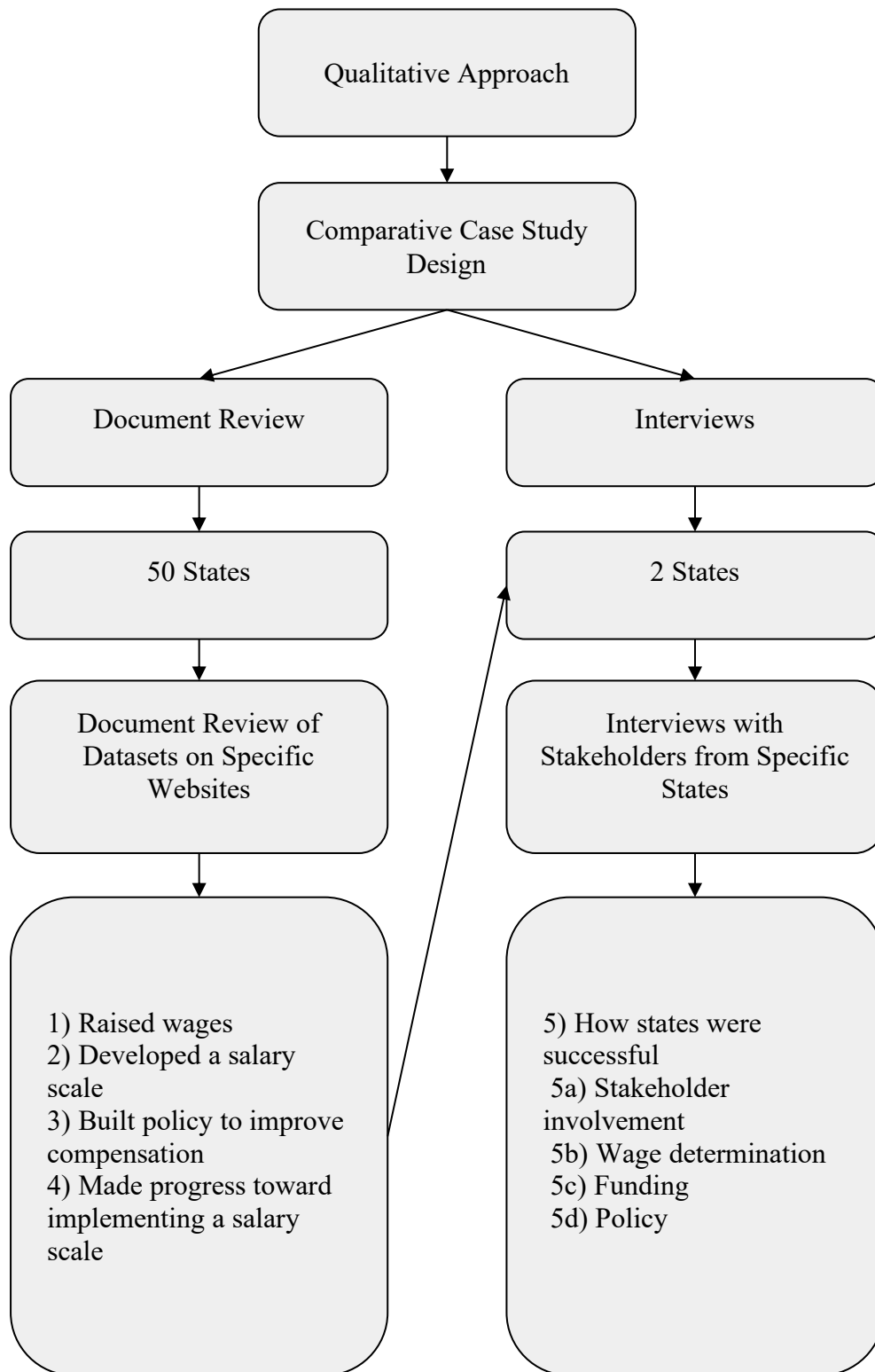
For this research, I utilized a Comparative Case Study methodology as outlined by Vavrus and Bartlett (2017) to understand how states have made progress toward implementing a salary scale for the EC workforce. I looked at all 50 states to determine which two states to focus on, and then looked at each of the two states as a separate case. I compared these two states to learn what worked and what did not work, and why. I wanted to shed light on both the barriers and opportunities for improved compensation for the EC workforce. This approach allowed me to examine both the problem and the proposed solution in a systematic way, while looking for patterns (both similarities and differences, as well as challenges and successes).

I mapped my research design, which I will walk through briefly here, but is clearly articulated in the figure following. For this research, I used a qualitative approach, as I was interested in the lived experience of the state-level stakeholders as they related to raising wages for the early childhood workforce using salary scales anchored in living wages. As stated above, a Comparative Case Study design allowed me to consider two separate states alongside one another to examine common characteristics that might lead to success in other states. To conduct my Comparative Case Study, I used two data collection methods: a document review and interviews. To identify the two cases that

made up my case study, I used document review, and to learn what factors influenced each case's success, I used interviews.

Figure 3.1

Mapping My Overall Research Design



This research was based on constructivist epistemology, or the understanding that knowledge comes from the experiences and perspectives of people. This acknowledges that different people see and understand compensation for the EC workforce in their own ways, each of which is important. To clarify further, in the Comparative Case Study, each state was treated as a separate case. Each state represented a unique context where policies, advocacy, and social conditions came together to shape improved compensation efforts. Therefore, the bounds of each case fell within the state itself: i.e., the stakeholders working on behalf of the state, the state's EC workforce, and the EC workforce compensation policies in effect within the state. The bounds were at the state-level and included current efforts, meaning active compensation improvement, as I was most interested in what is being done today to solve the problem.

The document review aimed to identify and map relevant evidence of raising wages for the EC workforce, developing salary scales for the EC workforce, building policies to improve compensation for the EC workforce, and determining which states were making progress towards implementing a salary scale anchored in living wages. The interviews focused on the states that had made progress. After describing the role of the researcher, I will divide this chapter into two parts: Part 1 will focus on the document review, and Part 2 will focus on the interviews, each with its own subsections.

Researcher Role

In this study, I have been both an active participant and an external participant. First, I was an active participant, as I was working for North Central Michigan College to develop a living wage salary scale for the new early childhood learning center on campus. When I began this study, I was actively engaged in the topic of my research.

Later in the study, my professional work shifted, and I was no longer working on salary scale development, so I concluded this research as an external participant. I conducted interviews with two state-level stakeholders and interacted virtually with study participants on a one-on-one basis. The data I gathered have been deidentified for publication. I do not work for any of the states selected for comparison. My approved IRB application included an email message for recruitment, a consent form that described the research in depth, and the interview protocol.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, as an early childhood consultant, I believe that addressing compensation for the EC workforce is the first piece of the (failing) business model that needs to be addressed, and could be addressed with salary scales. I believe that creating a framework for EC workforce compensation reform that is rooted in the idea that a living wage should be a floor, not a ceiling. Also, within this framework, there are clear pathways articulated for growth and increased compensation based on competency, which is a way to stabilize the system by retaining and recruiting dedicated staff.

Part 1: Document Review

Setting

The document review included the following websites: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), Child Care Aware of America (CCAA), Alliance for Early Success (AES), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). It also included a systematic search of each state's agency of early childhood and utilized the Google search engine to find documents relevant to the study on state salary scales.

Sample

For the overall document review, I started the study by including all 50 states in the United States as well as the District of Columbia. I wanted to understand what was being done at the state level in terms of increasing compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce, so I included all states/districts. I was most interested in using the state-level data I found to inform future work done at the state level. The nature of my research began with a broad view of all states, and, using data sources, collection, and analysis (described in the next section), I narrowed my focus to just seven states.

Data Sources

I reviewed five different organizations tracking EC workforce compensation and policies that support advancement: 1) The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE); 2) Child Care Aware of America (CCAA); 3) Alliance for Early Success (AES); and 4) National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); and 5) National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) website.

On the CSCCE website I looked at the Early Childhood Workforce Policies, specifically Compensation and Financial Relief Strategies which include a) Salary parity for publicly funded pre-K teachers; b) Compensation standards required; c) Compensation guidelines or plans to develop; d) Dedicated public funding for compensation; e) Financial relief: Stipend or tax credit; f) Financial relief: Bonus. Additionally, I consulted the Raising Wages for the EC Workforce in Percentage map, the Median Wage of the State's EC Workforce map, the Gap Between Average and Living Wage of the State's EC Workforce in Percentage map, the Evidence of Compensation and Financial Relief map, and Appendix Table 3.4, all in the Workforce

Index (CSCCE, 2024). I also consulted the ECE Workforce Compensation Policy Database (CSCCE, 2025). Regarding the scope of these documents, I reviewed seven documents/tables in total.

On the CCAA website, I looked at the ECE State Policy Dashboard, specifically at ECE ballot measures 2020-2024, and the state's funding for workforce supports. In terms of the scope of this document review, I used five different filters (which generated five different datasets). I then reviewed the individual states in each dataset. For accuracy, I also reviewed each of the 50 state profiles to ensure I recorded all relevant data.

On the AES website, I reviewed the State Early Childhood Policy Landscape summaries, specifically Policy Progress and Permanent State Funding Streams. For this specific review, I selected two sections from the 50-state profiles.

On the NAEYC website, I examined the 2025 Annual Workforce Surveys, titled "An Unsustainable Status Quo: We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System," and included key data points and reflections from survey participants. This scope was also 50 different state workforce summaries.

Using the NCSL website, I researched the Early Childhood Legislation Database. I specifically looked at policies pertaining to Teachers and Workforce, which includes legislation on teacher training requirements, certification, compensation, professional development, and workforce matters (NCSL, 2025). In the scope of this review, I selected the aforementioned relevant filters and applied those to all 50 states, then reviewed one dataset.

On each state’s early childhood-specific agency webpage, I looked for evidence of a published salary scale for the early childhood workforce. Additionally, I utilized the Google search engine to run specific searches on the state’s efforts. Doing so included conducting multiple searches for each of the 50 states and the review of three documents per state (on average, as some states had no documents to review, while others had many). This specific search allowed me to find evidence of published salary scales.

Notably, the existing data that I used from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Child Care Aware of America (CCAA), the Alliance for Early Success (AES), and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) all were presenting data from different years. The CSCCE Workforce Index from 2024 uses survey data from two sources: the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), published every two years (last in 2019), and the American Community Survey (ACS), published annually (last in 2024). NAEYC publishes its workforce surveys annually (last in 2025), the most recent of which is titled “An Unsustainable Status Quo-We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System.” CCAA includes data in the ECE Policy Database from 2019 to the present day (i.e., 2026). The AES published its State Policy Landscape Profiles in 2024, while the NCSL published ECE policies from 2019 to the present day. I acknowledge that the data I analyzed from different sources are from different years. However, by using the same comparison process for each state, I was able to address the different dates, meaning the inequality in dates was present across all states. The fact that I used multiple datasets with multiple dates reflects the current reality in the field: there is no single dataset that captures the full picture of compensation for the EC workforce.

Data Collection Instruments

Two large tables were used as the data collection instruments. The first instrument was a table contained in a spreadsheet that included all 50 states and the District of Columbia in rows, with five columns marked data from 1) CSCCE, 2) CCAA, 3) AES, 4) NAEYC, and 5) NCSL (see previous section for descriptions of data I collected from each site). The second instrument was a table contained in a spreadsheet that included all 50 states and the District of Columbia in rows, with columns marked 1) evidence of raising wages; 2) evidence of developing salary scales; 3) evidence of building policy; and 4) evidence of published salary scale.

Table 3.1

First Step of the Document Review: Determining What Information to Track

State	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Developing a Salary Scale	Evidence of Building Policy
Alabama			
Alaska			
Arizona			
Arkansas			
California			
Colorado			
Connecticut			

Note: Table only shows the first seven states for demonstration purposes, though a full table was created.

Document Collection Procedures

The first step of my Document Review was determining what information I wanted to track. As my research focus was on improving compensation for the ECW

using salary scales, I looked for data sources that articulated the following information: 1) Evidence of raising wages for the EC workforce; 2) Evidence of salary scale development or implementation; and 3) Evidence of policy to improve compensation.

The next step in my Document Review was determining where I would gather information. I used multiple sources to find information for each category. The website and categories under which they provide relevant datasets can be found in Table 3.2. Moreover, as seen in Table 3.2, several of the websites provided information across multiple categories, such as the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, which stores datasets related to raising wages, salary scale development, and policy changes.

Table 3.2

Second Step of the Document Review: Determining Where to Track Information

State	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Developing a Salary Scale	Evidence of Building Policy
CSCCE-Center for the Study of Child Care Employment	•	•	•
CCAA-Child Care Aware of America			•
AES-Alliance for Early Success			•
NCSL-National Conference of State Legislatures		•	•
Other Sources		•	
NAEYC-National Association for the Education of Young Children			

Note: Other Sources included: CCSA, 2021; BI, 2021; CELFE, 2022; ACF, 2024; Andrews, 2023, as well as the state sources found using the Google search engine.

As indicated in Table 3.2, NAEYC did not provide evidence for raising wages, but it did provide evidence of the voices of the EC workforce affected by them. CCAA and the AES provided evidence of policies to improve compensation. AES also provided information on permanent funding streams in each state. The NCSL provided information regarding state policies that were early childhood specific and, more importantly, related to teachers and the workforce. Lastly, I included another line listing the additional sources I used for information, mostly related to the development and implementation of salary scales. These additional sources included papers and briefs that outlined the processes different states used, as well as other sources listed in the reference lists or appendices.

These sources yielded a variety of data, which I determined how to use in the next step of my document review. I examined the states for which I had found evidence of raising wages for the ECW. I included the percentage of increase from Over 0% - Over 10%, which includes small, moderate, and large increases from 2019 to 2022, as calculated by the CSCCE in the Workforce Index (CSCCE, 2024). Also, I looked at the states that had shown evidence of either developing or implementing a salary scale. Then, I identified the states that had shown evidence of policy to improve compensation. Lastly, I tracked the states' advocacy organizations and their priorities to see how many showed evidence of raising wages for the ECW or developing salary scales (see Table 3.3).

The fourth step of the document review was using the information I had gathered to determine which states to include in the case study. I reviewed all 50 states and the District of Columbia across the following categories: Evidence of Raising Wages for the

ECW; Evidence of Salary Scale Development or Implementation; and Evidence of Policy to Improve Compensation.

Table 3.3

Third Step of the Document Review: Determining How to Use the Information

Criteria	Specific Dataset
Evidence of Raising Wages	From CSCCE Map (Early Educator Pay - Percent Change in Wages, 2019-22) From CSCCE Map (Median Wage 2022) From CSCCE Map (Early Educator Living Wage Gap 2022) From CSCCE Map (Living Below the Federal Poverty Level 2022)
Evidence of Developing a Salary Scale	From CSCCE Table 3.4 (2024) From CSCCE Policy Database From Other Sources
Evidence of Building Policy	From CSCCE Table 3.1 (2024) From CCAA From AES From NCSL, 2025 Database (Teachers & Workforce) From AES, 2025 Database (Policy Progress, Permanent Funding Sources)

Note: Other Sources included: CCSA, 2021; BI, 2021; CELFE, 2022; ACF, 2024; Andrews, 2023, as well as state sources found using the Google search engine.

I then added a fourth column to document Evidence of a Published Salary Scale, as shown in Table 3.4. To gather evidence of a published salary scale, I identified and then examined the webpage of each state agency of early childhood, then utilized the Google search engine to discover evidence of a published salary scale for the EC workforce.

Though I report my full findings in Chapter 4, for the sake of a clear procedural description, I first looked at how many states showed evidence of developing a salary scale to come up with a short list of 24 states/districts. When I added the filter to show evidence of a published salary scale, I had 22 states/districts.

Table 3.4

Fourth Step of the Document Review: Using the Information to Determine the Cases

State	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Developing a Salary Scale	Evidence of Building Policy	Evidence of Published Salary Scale
Alabama				
Alaska				
Arizona		•		•
Arkansas			•	
California	•			
Colorado				•
Connecticut				

Note: Table only shows the first seven states for demonstration purposes, though a full table was created.

Because I wanted to focus on state-level work, I excluded the District of Columbia from the case study, leaving me with 21 states. I then went through the potential cases to identify points of interest within their salary scale development, and I had seven states: Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington.

Utilizing the connections of two early childhood professors at Oakland University, I was able to obtain contact information/support in contacting state-level contacts from those seven states. I then sent IRB-approved recruitment emails to the aforementioned states and received responses from three. Illinois was initially interested in participating, but was unable to follow up. I then conducted interviews with state-level stakeholders from Michigan and North Carolina.

Thus, the Case Study focused on these two states (MI and NC) that have mapped both evidence of developing a salary scale for the EC workforce and evidence of building policy to improve compensation for the EC workforce.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the Document Review was to understand what states are doing to improve compensation for the EC workforce and to identify which states have made progress implementing salary scales. To analyze the documents and datasets, I used a structured approach that allowed me to organize information across all 50 states (and the District of Columbia) and then compare patterns.

Throughout the Document Review, I used charting and categorization to sort, organize, and interpret the data I collected. I used a single master spreadsheet to track evidence from multiple sources and support comparisons across states. My analysis focused on three main pieces of evidence, aligned with my research questions: 1) evidence of raising wages for the EC workforce; 2) evidence of salary scale development; and 3) evidence of policy to improve compensation. As mentioned above, I also looked at evidence of a published salary scale. I reviewed documents from each of the data sources listed above for all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and for each state, I recorded whether there was evidence. Doing so allowed me to develop a broad picture of state-level efforts to improve compensation for the EC workforce.

Question 1: Which states show evidence of raising wages for the ECE workforce? To answer Research Question 1, I analyzed the wage change data I collected from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment's Workforce Index (CSCCE, 2024). I used the CSCCE's categorization (Over 10%, 5-10%, 1-5%, No Increase, and

Decrease) to organize states. I included states that showed an increase of more than 0% as demonstrating evidence of wage growth. States meeting this threshold were highlighted in the spreadsheet to make patterns easier to see across the dataset. Additionally, I used data from the Median Wage 2022 Map, the Early Educator Living Wage Gap 2022 Map, and the Living Below the Federal Poverty Level 2022 Map, all from the Workforce Index (CSCCE, 2024), to gain a clear understanding of wages across states.

Question 2: Which states have developed salary scales for the ECE

workforce? To answer Research Question 2, I reviewed the data I collected from seven separate sources: the CSCCE Workforce Index Table 3.4 (McLean et al., 2024), the CSCCE ECE Workforce Compensation Policy Database (CSCCE, 2025), the Child Care Services Association (CCSA, 2021), the Build Initiative (Dichter & LiBetti, 2021; BI, 2023), the Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (Portillo, 2022), the Administration for Children and Families (ACF, 2024) and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation in partnership with TalentFirst (Andrews, 2023). These sources track compensation frameworks and/or have published recent papers or briefs on salary scale development. States were identified as having developed salary scales when documents showed clear evidence of a formal scale, articulated framework, or structured compensation model. Some of these examples had only been developed, some piloted, and only a few implemented. Because there were so many sources, I compared information across them and highlighted all states where evidence was present (some states were highlighted in multiple sources). Additionally, I conducted searches for state salary scales using the Google search engine.

Question 3: Which states have built policies to raise wages for the EC

workforce? To answer Research Question 3, I reviewed legislative and policy documents related to EC workforce compensation. I included policies that directly raised wages, as well as policies that improved compensation in other ways, like offering the EC workforce health care benefits, tax credits, or additional funding for educational pursuits. States showing evidence of policy action were highlighted separately in the spreadsheet. I included policies that had been enacted and policies that failed to move forward, as well as policy-driven dedicated funding streams.

Question 4: Which states have made progress implementing a salary scale?

To answer Research Question 4, I originally planned to examine the first three analyses to identify states where efforts overlapped, and then focus on states that showed layered activity (raising wages, developing a salary scale, and building policy). However, this approach pivoted upon learning more during the earlier phases of the analysis. I decided to start by examining states that had developed salary scales. I then searched to ensure states had published salary scales and further reviewed the documents for points of interest (detailed in Chapter 4).

The final outcome of this analysis was a comprehensive spreadsheet that captured state-level efforts related to improving compensation for the EC workforce. This analysis informed the selection of Michigan and North Carolina (and five other states) as potential cases for the comparative case study. This analysis also helped shape the interview phase's focus, allowing me to provide context for my questions.

Part 2: Interviews

Setting

The virtual interviews were held on the Zoom platform and included two states: Michigan and North Carolina. Communication to the state-level stakeholders from both MI and NC to arrange interviews was sent via email, as were member-checking interview answer summaries. After the interviews were conducted, both the MI and the NC state-level stakeholders were sent a copy of the interview transcript via email, as well as answer summaries I prepared. More details on the interviews follow in Chapter 4.

Participants

To briefly review the process of identifying participants, I sent interview requests via email to multiple state-level stakeholders in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington. I received an initial response from three states—Illinois, Michigan, and North Carolina—and was able to interview state-level stakeholders from both Michigan and North Carolina. Though I will say more about this in my limitations section, I do think the time of year (just before the holidays) and the tight timeline I was working with affected state-level stakeholders' capacity to respond to my interview requests. The state-level stakeholders I interviewed from both Michigan and North Carolina are experts in their fields, with a wealth of experience in the early childhood system and comprehensive knowledge of its inner workings. My interviews were deidentified, and so any other information related to their identity has been protected.

Data Sources

To identify state-level stakeholders in the states I wanted to interview, I reviewed the prime papers, briefs, reports, and playbooks on constructing salary scales for the EC

workforce at the national level. Additionally, I consulted with two early childhood professional contacts who regularly work with state-level stakeholders across the country.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instrument I used for the interviews was a spreadsheet with the state I interviewed in each row, and 10 columns labeled with the interview questions. Additionally, I used the platform Zoom, which allowed me to record the virtual interviews and have them transcribed.

Through interviews, I examined these states' processes for development and implementation to better understand what the success can be attributed to. I crafted the questions for the interview protocol (as seen in Table 3.7) after identifying the attributes earlier in my research, which were a combination of patterns other states reported as important, and also what I was reading about from states that had built salary scales. The following attributes were compiled after reviewing the early research (ACF, 2024; Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Dichter & LiBetti, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022), which seemed to effectively propel the development and implementation of salary scales forward. The following four attributes or indicators were identified: 1) stakeholder involvement, 2) wage determination, 3) funding sources, both short and long term, and 4) policy changes when embarking on the work of improving compensation for the EC workforce using salary scales.

Table 3.5

Interview Protocol Questions

-
1. How did the idea of improving compensation for the EC workforce come about in your state?
 2. How were the decisions made about how much to pay the EC workforce?
 3. Who was involved in making those decisions? Was the EC workforce involved?
 4. Was there short-term funding for the early work around improving compensation?
 5. Do you have a long-term funding strategy for implementing the compensation improvement? If so, please describe it.
 6. What has been the most significant force behind the headway your state has been able to make? What has been the most significant challenge?
 7. What role has stakeholder involvement played in your success? On a scale of 1 to 10, how important has stakeholder involvement been?
 8. What role has funding played in your success? On a scale of 1 to 10, how important has funding been?
 9. What role has policy played in your success? On a scale of 1 to 10, how important has policy been?
 10. For other states just starting this work, what advice would you give?
-

Table 3.6 shows how I organized the data collected for each attribute. By examining the role that stakeholder involvement played across the case of two states, I aimed to better understand how important that attribute might be to other states undertaking the same work.

Table 3.6

First Step of Interviews: Arranging the Information

S	W	F	P
---	---	---	---

State	Q1,3,7	Q2,3	Q4,5,8	Q9
-------	--------	------	--------	----

Note: S=Stakeholder Involvement, W=Wage Determination, F=Funding, and P=Policy

Utilizing a structure like this gave me both the opportunity to assess common factors that have led to the successful implementation of initiatives and to record factors specific to the state and their success. I should note here that Q10 was designed to gather other factors that may have influenced the state's success, or advice they would give to states just embarking on the work. I will discuss the analysis below, but structuring the interviews in this way allowed me to analyze the data both deductively and inductively. Though this work focused mainly on two states, the findings are applicable to all professionals interested in the topic, at the national, state, regional, or local level.

Data Collection Procedures

Once I had responses, I set up interviews. I conducted two interviews on Zoom (with state-level stakeholders from MI and NC), each lasting approximately 60 minutes. I recorded the interviews via Zoom and then transcribed them for analysis. After transcription, I coded each answer, then prepared bulleted summaries for each question to send via email to the state-level stakeholders I interviewed for member-checking. I asked them to reply to my email within a week to confirm that the answers were accurate. In the email, I also included a copy of the transcript so the stakeholders could refer back to the interview. The state-level stakeholders agreed to this process and completed the review. I received no other feedback from MI, but it said the answer summaries were accurate. NC replied to my email, provided a few more details for clarification, then thanked me for representing the answers so accurately.

Data Analysis

During the interview phase of this study, I focused on the experiences of two states, Michigan and North Carolina, both of which have developed salary scales anchored in living wages. The purpose of the interview data analysis was to better understand how these states made progress and what factors contributed to their success. I asked the interviewees to rate three (stakeholder involvement, funding, and policy) of the four attributes on a scale of importance, leaving wage determination to be described as an answer to one of the interview questions, as it is more of a fundamental attribute (design description), as opposed to one that can be rated (not important to important). To analyze the data I collected during the interviews, I used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Doing so allowed me to examine the success attributes I had identified earlier in the research, while remaining open to new ideas and patterns that emerged from participants' responses.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, I analyzed the data in several steps (Saldaña, 2021). First, I reviewed each transcript in full to become familiar with the data. Then, I coded the interviews line by line, highlighting all portions of participants' responses that were relevant to the research question. These highlighted segments served as initial codes. Next, I grouped the coded segments into broader categories based on the larger ideas they represented. Many of these categories aligned with the attributes of success identified earlier, while others reflected new ideas that emerged from the data. From these categories, I developed themes that captured the main points across both participants' responses. See Appendix F for Data Analysis-Inductive Sheet.

Additionally, I analyzed the data deductively, starting with the attributes I was most interested in assessing: 1) stakeholder involvement, 2) wage determination, 3) funding, and 4) policy. I selected phrases relevant to each attribute from each interview answer, and used a deductive analysis sheet to track the responses. See Appendix E for Data Analysis-Deductive Sheet.

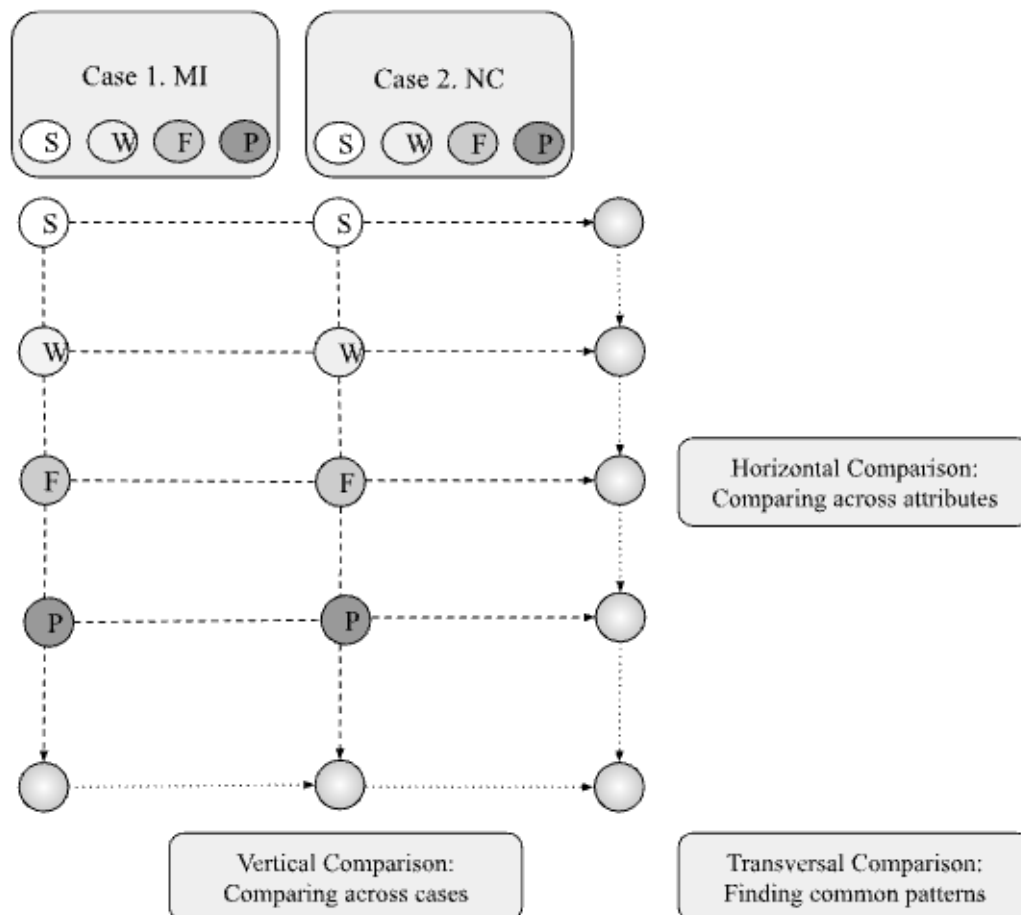
Question 5: How were these states successful? To answer Research Question 5, I used the process articulated above, moving from codes to categories to themes. The themes that emerged reflected both shared patterns across the two states and differences shaped by state-specific circumstances. To further analyze the data gathered during the interviews, I used a comparative case study design that included vertical, horizontal, and transversal comparison with the framework outlined by Vavrus and Barlett (2017).

First, I conducted a vertical comparison, examining each case (i.e., state) individually to understand how stakeholder involvement (S), wage determination (W), funding (F), and policy (P), as well as any other factors, operated within that specific context. Doing so allowed me to preserve the unique story of each state's work. Next, I used a horizontal comparison to examine each success attribute across both states. This step allowed me to compare stakeholder involvement, funding strategies, and policy efforts across Michigan and North Carolina. Lastly, I used transversal comparison to identify broader patterns that cut across both cases. This approach allowed me to identify common themes that emerged regardless of state context or circumstance, as well as lessons relevant to other states beginning similar work. Together, these steps supported a deeper understanding of the processes, strategies, and conditions that contributed to

progress toward implementing living-wage salary scales for the early childhood workforce.

Figure 3.2

Mapping the Cases Using Cross Case Comparison Design



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The results of the document review and interviews are organized by research question. Under each of the following headings, I report the findings to the numbered questions:

- 1) Which states have raised wages for the EC workforce?
- 2) Which states have developed salary scales?
- 3) Which states have built policies?
- 4) Which states have made progress implementing a salary scale?
- 5) How were these states successful?

Question 1: States That Raised Wages for the EC Workforce

Table 4.1

Evidence of Raising Wages for the EC Workforce - Snapshot (Full Table is Appendix H)

States	Evidence of Raising Wages for the EC Workforce in Percentage	Median Wage of the State's EC Workforce	Gap Between Average and Living Wage of the State's EC Workforce in Percentage	Early Educator Pay - Living Below the Federal Poverty Line
AL	0.1%	\$10.93	26%	16.6%
AK	-5.2%	\$13.08	19%	9.5%
AZ	9.2%	\$12.98	22%	12.0%
AR	-2.9%	\$11.04	23%	17.1%
CA	9.6%	\$15.66	22%	11.8%

Note: All data from CSCCE-Map, data from 2022, published in 2024

The data sources I consulted, namely the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, which has both an interactive map and a series of tables in the Appendix of the 2024 Workforce Index (Appendix Table 2.5) that charts Early Educator Pay - Percent Change in Wages from 2019-2022, showed which states were making progress in raising wages for the EC workforce. In Appendix 1: Data Sources & Methodology the CSCCE (2024) defines the EC workforce as “those responsible for learning, education, and care activities of young children” and who are employed in “usually school-based or otherwise institutionalized for a group of children,” which can include center-, community-, or home-based care, but often excludes private family-based arrangements like nannies or care provided by friends, family, or neighbors. Additionally, the change in median wage data comes from the American Community Survey (ACS), and the data were adjusted for inflation to 2022 using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CSCCE, 2024, p. 209). I expected to find that almost all states had made an effort to raise wages for the EC workforce, but that was not the case. My assumption was that all states face challenges in attracting and retaining the early childhood workforce, and that improving compensation would help address both. However, what I found was a pretty wide variation in how states approached compensation, with some demonstrating considerable investment and therefore gains, while others remained stagnant, and a few even fell.

Ten states/districts showed wage increases of 10% and over (as calculated in the Workforce Index, CSCCE, 2024) in recent years: Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

The next group of 10 states, those showing increases between 5% and 9.9%, included Arizona, California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington. These states are making progress, meaning they have seen a level of increase in their compensation systems, but not as robust as others, which have shown an increase of over 10%.

The 17 states that saw an increase of between 1% and 4.9% included: Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Additionally, three states experienced wage changes of 0-1%. This group of states includes Alabama, Georgia, and Hawaii (0%). Finally, according to CSCCE data, 11 states experienced wage decreases. These states include Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Vermont.

I gathered additional data that did not necessarily indicate wage increases, but did provide a clearer picture of wages across the states. From the CSCCE Map Early Educator Pay - Median Wage 2022, I calculated the average Median Wage Across the States was \$12.79 per hour. From the CSCCE Map, Early Educator Pay - Early Educator Living Wage Gap 2022, I calculated the average Living Wage Gap was 21%, and from the CSCCE Map, Early Educator Pay - Living Below the Federal Poverty Line 2022, I calculated the average Percentage Living Below the FPL was 13.6%. Again, for full evidence on raising wages, see Appendix H. I also reviewed all four of the published Workforce Index 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2024, and noted that the median hourly wages for a child care worker (in all settings) were reported as the following:

- \$9.77 in the 2016 Workforce Index (Whitebook et al., 2016),
- \$10.72 in the 2018 Workforce Index (Whitebook et al., 2018),
- \$11.65 in the 2020 Workforce Index (McLean et al., 2020), and
- \$11.81 in the 2024 Workforce Index (McLean et al., 2024).

The increase from 2016-18 was \$0.95 per hour, from 2018-2020 was \$0.93 per hour, and from 2020-2024 was just \$0.16 per hour. The total increase, therefore, over the course of eight years is only \$2.04. Table 4.2 articulates reflections from the NAEYC EC Workforce Survey (NAEYC, 2025). More specifically, it shows that even though we have raised wages by over 10% in 10 states, those raises still fall short of the actual needs of the EC workforce.

Table 4.2

10 Voices from the 2025 NAEYC EC Workforce Survey (NAEYC, 2025)-We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System (Voices from All States/Districts are in Appendix L)

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
CO	“It is difficult finding qualified individuals to work in our program. Applicants walking through the door have little to no experience. A lack of qualified applicants is a real problem in early childhood education.” - Early Childhood Educator from CO
DE	“While salaries have increased, the amount staff is paying for benefits has increased; therefore, showing a net gain of zero for many.” - Director/Administrator from DE
DC	“We have benefitted from DC Pay Equity and Healthcare4Childcare, which have increased salaries and provided free health insurance. However, my program suffers from under-qualified staff and difficulties in hiring. An influx of workers with little experience and little education in child development has hurt our quality.” - Early Childhood Educator from DC
ID	“Our program is a glasshouse just waiting to crumble, one big unexpected financial mishap and we will close. This is extremely dependent on our fundraising lift. We are a non-profit and funds to support 80 percent of our families are fragile.” - Early Childhood Educator from ID
NM	“We are currently under-staffed and have been for the last four and a half years. This is due to a lack of funds to pay for an assistant and not finding people who are qualified for the position given the pay.” - Early Childhood Educator from NM

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
NY	“The cost of living on Long Island is so high that our wages are simply not enough to sustain the living expenses. In ECE, we work long hours, year-round and in a job that is extremely challenging. Teachers and staff are expected to not only understand each developmental stage but provide an environment that supports that development while also caregiving. People do not understand how high pressure this job is. Staff are under high stress due to the expectations and liability. Earnings matter!” - Director/Administrator from NY “It is incredibly stressful. We have multiple staff call out just about every day, and we cannot find good staff because the work is challenging and the pay in the ECE field in general is terrible. I worry every single night about paying my bills and furthering my education. I want to start a family and can’t, largely due to the insultingly low pay ECE teachers get. It’s heartbreaking.” - Early Childhood Educator from RI “The current economy is making things harder to buy and pay for. Insurance and food prices are crazy! I can’t keep passing the bill with higher rates, but I might have to.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator from SD “Our revenue has decreased and because we had to raise wages while lowering our hiring requirements just to get any staff the last two years, our costs have skyrocketed while quality has suffered. We’re barely keeping our doors open. Help needs to come soon.” - Director/Administrator from UT “Food costs, utilities and overall costs have steadily gone up and it is impacting the quality of care we can provide.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator from WY

Again, while these 10 states have shown the largest increase in wages, the EC workforce in those states still have needs that are not being met.

Question 2: States That Developed Salary Scales for the EC Workforce

Table 4.3

Evidence of Salary Scale Development - Snapshot (Full Evidence Table is Appendix I)

States	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from CSCCE Table 3.4 LINK	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from CSCCE 2025 Policy Database	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from Other Sources	Published Salary Scale
AL		Salary Scale		
AK				
AZ	Salary Scale		Salary Scale	
AR	Salary Scale			
CA				

Note: From Other Sources (ACF, 2024; Andrews, 2023; Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Dichter & LiBetti, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022)

Across several national datasets, clear evidence emerged that many states are beginning to develop, or have already developed, salary scales for the early childhood workforce.

Utilizing the two datasets from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (McLean et al., 2024), and a few other sources, namely independent paper/briefs authored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF, 2024), Child Care Services Association (CCSA, 2021), The Build Initiative (BI, 2023; Dichter & LiBetti, 2021), I was able to find evidence that efforts to establish structured compensation using salary scales is underway in at least twenty states.

Using the Workforce Index Table 3.4 (McLean et al., 2024), I identified 19 states that have made progress towards creating salary scales for the early childhood workforce. Those states include: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia. The second dataset, also from the CSCCE, was the ECE Workforce Compensation Policy Database (CSCCE, 2025), with the key search term “Full Salary Scale” used for distillation. For reference, this policy database does not define the ECE workforce, and it is crowdsourced, meaning states can contribute the most accurate information in real time. This format means that the search is not limited to any one type of care or care provider. This search yielded nine states: Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Washington. These states, though articulated in different ways, all indicated the use of a salary scale.

Data from other sources, including the Administration for Children and Families, The Build Initiative, and Child Care Services Association, showed that 15 states demonstrated the development of salary scales: Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington. These examples included both statewide salary scales developed and some smaller pilot projects, including the Michigan Early Childhood Educator Wage Initiative (as described below in the section labeled Question 5: Attributes of Success, Individual Cases).

I took the three sets of states (which totaled 25 states at varying degrees of salary scale development from mention to fully developed) from the three aforementioned sources and overlaid them to come up with a list of states that had not only mentioned “salary scales” in State Policies on the CSCCE-Appendix Table 3.4 (McLean et al., 2024) and mentioned "full salary scale" in CSCCE ECE Workforce Compensation Policy Database (CSCCE, 2025), but also provided concrete examples of their fully developed salary scales using the other sources (ACF, 2024; Andrews, 2023; Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Dichter & LiBetti, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022; and/or Google), complete with positions and wages. This group of 22 states/districts included Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.

To ensure accuracy, I also launched a full search for salary scales from each state and district using both the state/district's early childhood agency and then the Google

search engine. I researched and visited each of the early childhood agencies and used the keywords “salary scale” or “wage scale” to look for relevant information on each website. Then, I used the Google search engine and the keywords “early childhood salary scale.” To exhaust efforts, I also used a second set of keywords, as well as rearranging the word combinations, as described in Chapter 3. This search allowed me to look at all the salary scales across the states and review each scale for points of interest. This systematic search resulted in the selection of seven states for interview inclusion. These steps included Step 1: Mapping the Evidence, Step 2: Verifying Evidence of Published Salary Scale; Step 3: Examining Published Salary Scales for Points of Interest; and Step 4: Examining the Selected States Salary Scales in Depth.

Table 4.4

Selected States and Progress Toward a Fully Implemented Salary Scale for the EC Workforce

State/District	Developed	Piloted	Studied	Implemented
IL				
MI				
MN				
NM				
NC				
RI				
WA				Implementation Plan

Enlisting the help of another faculty member at Oakland University and a colleague working in early childhood research at the national level, I invited state-level

stakeholders from the following seven states to an interview: Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington.

As we see in Table 4.4, and as I have described in previous chapters, each of the seven states selected for interview is at a different point in its progress toward full implementation. I included the following seven salary scales from my research to highlight states that have developed a salary scale for the EC workforce and have made progress toward implementation. Washington is included despite not having piloted its scale. This is a result of Washington having a clearly articulated implementation plan (WSDCYF, 2025). Of the seven selected and contacted for an interview, only three responded to the request: Illinois, Michigan, and North Carolina. More about my interviews with Michigan and North Carolina will follow later in this chapter.

Illinois

Illinois has developed a salary scale for the EC workforce, piloted it, studied the pilot, and is now implementing it (TEACH+PLUS, 2024). The development of the salary scale was informed by the cost model done by the Illinois Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ILECECS, 2021). There are two main reasons I included Illinois in my selection: Paying attention to living wages and accounting for regional differences in cost of living.

As shown in Table 4.5, the state of Illinois has developed a salary scale for the EC workforce. In the far left column, we see the position; in the top row across the scale, we see the educational attainment, and then the corresponding target salary, hourly and annually (including notes on the amount).

Table 4.5*Illinois Draft Salary Scale / Balance of the State (TEACH+PLUS, 2024)*

Position	Credential Level/Degree Attainment	Target Salary Hourly	Target Salary Annual	Notes
Teacher	Bachelors + PEL	\$23.81	\$49,522	Minimum salary set at parity with K-12 (12-month, BA teacher)
Teacher	Bachelors + ECE Level 5	\$22.75	\$47,320	Minimum salary set at 20% above AA
Teacher	Associates + ECE Level 4	\$19.00	\$39,520	Minimum salary set at 10% above Level 1
Teacher	ECE Level 2 or ECE Level 3	\$18.00	\$37,674	Minimum salary set at 5% increment above Level 1
Teacher	DCFS minimum or ECE Level 1	\$17.25	\$35,880	\$1.25 pay differential between Teacher/Assistant Teacher
Assistant Teacher	Associates + ECE Level 4	\$17.50	\$36,608	Minimum salary set at 10% above Level 1
Assistant Teacher	ECE Level 2 or ECE Level 3	\$16.75	\$34,944	Minimum salary set at 5% increment above Level 1
Assistant Teacher	DCFS minimum or ECE Level 1	\$16.00	\$33,280	Minimum salary set at 35% above IL minimum wage or 23% above the Balance of the State's living wage. Approximate \$5/hour increase from the current average wage

Note. Illinois developed two salary scales, the one above this text, which pertains to most of the state, and one for the city of Chicago (as the cost of living is much higher). Illinois accounted for regional differences in living expenses and, therefore, compensation by creating two scales. To see the city of Chicago scale, see the TEACH+PLUS paper (TEACH+PLUS, 2024).

Michigan

Michigan developed a salary scale, piloted it, and studied the pilot (Andrews, 2023; MiTECEWC, 2025). In terms of why I included Michigan, there were a few points of interest in its scale: Paying attention to the living wage, paying attention to pay parity with K-12 educators, and accounting for regional differences. Table 4.6 shows

Michigan’s salary scale. Down the left column, we see the instructional roles, followed by the current wages (both hourly and annual), next to the proposed base wage. Also included is the explanation for the proposed base wage.

Table 4.6

Michigan Base Wages for Early Childhood Educators of Preschool-aged Children (Andrews, 2023)

Instructional Roles	Current Median Wage: Hourly	Current Median Wage: Annual	Proposed Base Wage	Explanation for Proposed Base Wage
Lead Teacher	\$16.03	\$33,342	\$29.02	Median Hourly rate for Step 1 K-12 Teacher (\$48,761 a year)
Assistant Teacher	\$14.09	\$29,307	\$21.77	25% less than Lead Teacher
Aide/floater	\$12.45	\$25,896	\$16.33	25% less than Assistant Teacher
Substitute	\$15.04	\$31,283	\$21.77	Parity with Assistant Teacher, with similar responsibilities (10% increase for long-term assignments)

Note. For each professional/educational level after a CDA, the professional receives a 10% increase. Therefore, a lead teacher with a Bachelor’s degree would be paid \$31.92/hr, and one with a Master’s degree would be paid \$35.11/hr. In the Balancing Scales report, salary scales were also provided for Early Educators of Infant/Toddler Children and Administrators. For additional scales, please see the Balancing the Scales Report (Andrews, 2023).

Minnesota

Minnesota also developed a salary scale for the EC workforce, piloted it, and studied the pilot (Casale & Nole, 2021; MDCYF, 2025). In terms of why I selected to include Minnesota, there are three points of interest: Paying attention to living wages, recognizing years of experience (as well as incentivizing educational attainment), and accounting for regional differences. Table 4.7 shows the salary scale from Minnesota.

This scale is a bit more detailed than Michigan's. In the left column, we see the steps that correspond to educational attainment (further explained in the next paragraph), and across the rows, the years of experience.

Table 4.7

Minnesota ECE Wage Scale - Standard Parity (MNDCYF, 2025)

Step	Entry Level	1 yrs exp	2 yrs exp	3 yrs exp	5 yrs exp	10 yrs exp	15 yrs exp	20 yrs exp
Base	\$34,493	\$35,183	\$35,886	\$36,604	\$38,083	\$42,047	\$46,423	\$51,255
Step 1	\$36,920	\$37,659	\$38,412	\$39,180	\$40,763	\$45,006	\$49,690	\$51,255
Step 2	\$39,348	\$40,135	\$40,938	\$41,756	\$43,443	\$47,965	\$52,957	\$58,469
Step 3	\$41,776	\$42,611	\$43,463	\$44,333	\$46,124	\$50,924	\$56,224	\$62,076
Step 4	\$44,203	\$45,087	\$45,989	\$46,909	\$48,804	\$53,883	\$59,492	\$65,684
Step 5	\$46,631	\$47,563	\$48,515	\$49,485	\$51,484	\$56,843	\$62,759	\$69,291
Step 6	\$52,125	\$53,168	\$54,231	\$55,316	\$57,551	\$63,541	\$70,154	\$77,456
Step 7	\$57,620	\$58,772	\$59,948	\$61,147	\$63,617	\$70,239	\$77,549	\$85,620
Step 8	\$63,115	\$64,377	\$65,664	\$66,978	\$69,684	\$76,936	\$84,944	\$93,785
Step 9	\$68,609	\$69,981	\$71,381	\$72,809	\$75,750	\$83,634	\$92,339	\$101,950
Step 10	\$74,104	\$75,586	\$77,098	\$78,640	\$81,817	\$90,332	\$99,734	\$110,114

Note. I edited MN's scale down to fit in this paper. In its original version, there are columns for four years of experience and for experience between 5 and 10 years. One other note, the Steps along the side of the table correspond to either the highest education level or competency equivalence: Base-None, Step 1-CDA and equivalent, Step 2-Non ECE AA, Step 3-ECE-related AA, Step 4-ECE-specific AA, Step 5-Non-ECE BA, Step 6-Non-ECE MA+, Step 7-ECE-related BA, Step 8-ECE-related MA+, Step 9-ECE-specific BA, and Step 10-ECE-specific MA+. For the complete scale, see the legislative report from the MNDCYF (MNDCYF, 2025).

New Mexico

New Mexico developed a salary scale for the EC workforce, piloted it, studied the pilot, and is now implementing it (NMECECD, 2025a; NMECECD, 2025b). In terms of points of interest in their salary scale design, there are three that stand out: Paying attention to the living wage, recognizing years of experience, and using either educational attainment or competency-based assessment equivalency. In Table 4.8, we have the salary scale from New Mexico. In the left column, we can see the example positions (listed in the paragraph below); in the center column, the qualifications (both credentials and experience); and in the far right column, the minimum salary.

Table 4.8

New Mexico Draft Wage Scale - Lead Early Childhood Professional (NMECD, 2025)

Example Positions	Qualifications, Credentials & Experience	Minimum Salary
(see note)	Level 4 Master's Degree & 5+ years' experience OR Competency-Based Assessment Equivalency & 5+ years' experience	\$77,000
	Level 3 Master's degree & 0-5 years' experience OR Competency-Based Assessment Equivalency & 3+ years' experience	\$74,874
	Level 2 Bachelor's degree & 3+ years' experience OR Competency-Based Assessment Equivalency & 3+ years' experience	\$72,747
	Level 1 Bachelor's degree & 0-3 years' experience OR Competency-Based Assessment Equivalency & 0-3 years' experience	\$66,685
	Entry Associate's degree & 3+ years' experience OR Competency-Based Assessment Equivalency & 3+ years' experience	\$62,122

Note. The example positions given in the slides include Home Visiting: Lead Home Visitor, Home Visitor, Mentor, Nurse Home Visitor, and Clinical Home Visitor. The examples given for Child Care/PreK/Head Start include: Teacher/Lead Teacher, Family Child Care Provider, PreK Coordinator, and Early Head Start Home Visitor. And the last

group of example positions given are FIT, including: Dual Role Positions, Family Service Coordinator, and Developmental Specialist (II/III). Additionally, there are Draft Wage Scales for Early Childhood Professionals (not leads), Specialists, Support Staff, and Leadership. For more information related to New Mexico’s wage scales, see the reference slides (NMECD, 2025).

North Carolina

North Carolina has developed a salary scale for the EC workforce and has piloted it (NCECCC, 2023; NCICDP, 2023). In terms of why I included them in the interview pool, there were two main points of interest in their salary scale design: Paying attention to living wages and paying attention to parity with K-12 teachers. In Table 4.9, we see the Model Salary Scale from North Carolina. In the far-left column, we see the different levels of educational attainment, along with the corresponding wages (hourly, monthly, and annual, for both 10- and 12-month periods).

Table 4.9

North Carolina Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers-Drafted in 2017, Updated in 2023 (NCECCC, 2023)

Educational Attainment	Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (12 months)	Annual Salary (10 months)
B-K License Public School	\$21.35	\$3,700	\$44,400	\$37,000
BA/BS ECE/Child Dev.	\$20.28	\$3,515	\$42,180	
AAS ECE/Child Dev.	\$16.01	\$2,775	\$33,300	
Infant/Toddler or Preschool Certificate	\$14.92	\$2,586	\$31,034	

North Carolina’s model salary scale was developed as part of a broader system-building effort (Moving the Needle on Early Childhood Compensation) and was intended to serve as a guide for what equitable compensation could look like. One of the most important

aspects of this scale is the attention paid to making the minimum earned wage equal to the living wage in NC at the time of the scale’s creation, and the maximum earned wage on parity with public school teachers (NCECCC, 2023). The scale, originally drafted in 2017, requires updating, as is noted in my interview with the state-level stakeholder from North Carolina, as the current living wage in NC is above what a K-12 teacher earns on average.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island has developed a salary scale for the EC workforce and piloted it (OGRI, 2024; RIDHS, 2024). In terms of points of interest in its salary scale, there are two: paying attention to the state median income (SMI), and paying attention to parity with K-12 teachers. In Table 4.10, we have the salary scale from Rhode Island.

Table 4.10

Rhode Island Proposed Early Childhood Education Salary Scale (RIDHS, 2024)

	Entry Level Pre-service required by Licensing (HS Diploma)	ECE I Professional Training Program in ECE (CDA)	ECE II Associate Degree Program in ECE	ECE III Bachelor's Degree Program in ECE	ECE III Master's Degree Program in ECE
Classroom Aide/Family Child Care Assistant	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary			
0-2 years of experience	39% \$15/ \$31,200	41% \$16/ \$33,361			
3-5 years of experience	42% \$16.43/ \$34,175	44% \$17.21/ \$35,802			

	Entry Level Pre-service required by Licensing (HS Diploma)	ECE I Professional Training Program in ECE (CDA)	ECE II Associate Degree Program in ECE	ECE III Bachelor's Degree Program in ECE	ECE III Master's Degree Program in ECE
5 or more years of experience	45% \$17.50/ \$36,616	47% \$18.38/ \$38,243			
Teacher Assistant	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary			
0-2 years of experience	40% \$15.64/ \$32,548	43% \$16.82/ \$34,989			
3-5 years of experience	44% \$17.21/ \$35,802	47% \$18.38/ \$38,243			
5 or more years of experience	48% \$18.77/ \$39,057	50% \$19.56/ \$40,685			
Lead Teacher/Family Child Care			Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary
0-2 years of experience			51% \$19.95/ \$41,498	55% \$21.51/ \$44,753	59% \$23.08/ \$48,008
3-5 years of experience			60% \$23/ \$48,822	65% \$25.41/ \$52,890	69% \$26.99/ \$56,145
5 or more years of experience			70% \$27.38/ \$56,959	75% \$29.34/ \$61,027	79% \$30.90/ \$64,282
Master Teacher (with Teacher certification)				Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary	Salary Range SMI Hourly/Salary
0-2 years of experience				80% \$31.29/ \$65,096	89% \$34.80/ \$72,419
3-5 years of experience				90% \$35.20/ \$73,233	96% \$37.55/ \$78,115

	Entry Level Pre-service required by Licensing (HS Diploma)	ECE I Professional Training Program in ECE (CDA)	ECE II Associate Degree Program in ECE	ECE III Bachelor's Degree Program in ECE	ECE III Master's Degree Program in ECE
5 or more years of experience				97% \$37.94/ \$78,928	104% \$40.68/ \$84,624

In the far-left column, we have the position and the years of experience in that position.

Then, across the top row of the scale, we see educational attainment and the corresponding hourly and annual salaries.

Washington

Washington developed a salary scale for the early childhood workforce and has been very intentional about doing so (WSDCYF, 2109; WSDCYF, 2025). Some points of interest in its salary scale construction include accounting for the salary scale to be used in multiple settings, including home-based care, and advocating for a compensation package that included wages as stipulated by the salary scale, but also health and retirement benefits.

Table 4.11 shows the salary scale from the state of Washington. Down the far left column, we see the different positions. Across the top row of the scale, we see the educational attainment, then the corresponding hourly/annual salary.

Additionally, Washington has taken a very unique approach, intentionally leading the movement by the people who will be affected by the change, providers and families (WSDCYF, 2109; WSDCYF, 2025).

Table 4.11

Recommended Washington State Early Childhood Education Salary Scale (WADCYF, 2019)

Hourly/ Annual Wages	Step	Entry Level	Initial Certificate	State Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree
Aide	1	\$15.21/ \$31,764	\$16.11/ \$33,261	\$16.81/ \$34,965	\$18.01/ \$37,461	\$20.11/ \$41,829	\$22.71/ \$47,237
Assistant	2	\$17.56 / \$36,528	\$18.46/ \$38,397	\$19.16/ \$39,853	\$20.36/ \$42,349	\$22.46/ \$46,717	\$25.06/ \$52,125
Lead Teacher	3	\$20.22 / \$42,060	\$21.12/ \$43,932	\$21.82/ \$45,388	\$23.02/ \$47,884	\$25.12/ \$52,252	\$27.72/ \$57,660
Program Supervisor/ Assistant Director	4	\$22.04 / \$45,843	\$22.94/ \$47,715	\$23.64/ \$49,171	\$24.84/ \$51,667	\$26.94/ \$56,035	\$29.54/ \$61,443
Director and Family Home Provider	5	\$24.04 / \$50,004	\$24.94/ \$51,876	\$25.64/ \$53,332	\$26.84/ \$55,828	\$28.94/ \$60,196	\$31.54/ \$65,604

Note. For space and readability, I edited the original scale down, since there are additional steps between degrees that account for credits earned toward a degree. There are also additional provisions made for years of employment (\$0.15/year) that I did not include. For the full scale, see the paper (WADCYF, 2019, p. 11).

Comparison Across Seven State Salary Scales

Across these seven salary scales, there are a number of similarities and a few notable differences. First, the similarities; all seven states (IL, MI, MN, NC, NM, RI, and WA) link wages to educational attainment/credentials, recognizing that experience and skill development should be financially acknowledged. Next, all seven states, (IL, MI, MN, NC, NM, RI, and WA) prioritize a higher starting salary for lead roles. The salary scales of four states (MN, NM, RI, and WA) include experience-based adjustments, using step-based structures to reward professional growth. Also, four states (IL, MI, NC, and RI), in addition to recognizing a minimum living wage, also mentioned parity with K-12 teachers.

In terms of differences, some scales (like MN) are more detailed across multiple competency levels and years of experience than others. Both MI and IL salary scales adjust for the regional cost of living, but others do not. The RI salary scale is tied to State Median Income, in addition to consideration of living wages and parity with K-12 teachers. One thing they all have in common is a commitment to professional compensation, though they do vary in structure, level of detail, role focus, and responsiveness to regions of the state. Together, these findings (the seven scales above, but also the nineteen other states that are developing/have developed salary scales for the EC workforce) show that almost half of the states (26 in total) are actively engaged in the work of improving compensation for the EC workforce through salary scales.

Question 3: States That Built Policy to Improve Compensation

Utilizing the data from three sources, the Workforce Index Table 3.1 (CSCCE, 2024), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL, 2026), and the Alliance for Early Success (AES, 2024), I was able to gain an understanding of what policies had been put into place that aimed to improve compensation for the ECE workforce. In Table 4.12, we see evidence of these policies to improve compensation from a number of different sources. First, from the CSCCE Table 3.1, we see one state/district (Washington, DC) that is “Making Headway.”

Table 4.12

Evidence of Building Policy - Snapshot (Full Evidence Table is Appendix J)

States	CSCCE	NCSL#1 # of Bills	NCSL#2 # of Bills	CCAA 1=present	AES #1 1=present	AES #2 1=present

AL	Stalled					
AK	Stalled					
AZ	Stalled		1	1		1
AR	Edging Forward	1	2	1	1	1
CA	Stalled			1		1

Note. The CSCCE-from Table 3.1 of 2024 Workforce Index Policy Progress to Raise Wages (CSCCE, 2024), NCSL#1-from ECE State Legislation Database (2025, Teachers & Workforce, Enacted or Pending), NCSL#2-from ECE State Legislation Database (2025, Teachers & Workforce, Failed), CCAA-from State Policy Dashboard (ECE Ballot Measures 2020-24, States Funding Workforce Supports), AES #1-from the 50 State EC Policy Progress and Landscape Report (Policy Progress), and AES #2-from the 50 State EC Policy Progress and Landscape Report (Permanent Funding Streams).

We see 15 states that are “Edging Forward,” including Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Next, on the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) site, in the Early Childhood Legislation Database, I tracked policies related to Teachers and Workforce. This encompasses policy related to wages, benefits, and other social support services or financially related programs to support the early childhood workforce. There, I found 16 states that put forward 34 policy wins (either Pending or Enacted) that I shared in Table 4.13: Arkansas, DC, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Tennessee.

Table 4.13

States/Districts with Recent Policy Wins-Pending or Enacted (NCSL, 2025): 16 states / 34 policies

State	Policy Wins-Pending or Enacted
AR	AR S 148 2025 Teacher Retirement System Summary: Relates to the membership of the State Teacher Retirement System, establishes the Creating an Investment Opportunity for Early Childhood Workers Act of 2025, provides that a single nonprofit fiscal agent that is approved by the Board of Trustees of the State Teacher Retirement System may act as a pass through fiscal agent to facilitate the voluntary participation of an early childhood worker in the Teacher Retirement System.
DC	DC B 4 2025 Early Childhood Educator Pay Scales Summary: (Emergency Act) Amends the Day Care Policy Act of 1979 to update the minimum salaries child development facilities must pay assistant and lead teachers beginning in the specified month and year to participate in the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Program. DC R 17 2025 Early Childhood Educator Pay Scales Summary: Relates to the Early Childhood Educator Pay Scales Congressional Review Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2025. DC B 176 2025 Early Childhood Educator Pay Scales Summary: Amends the Day Care Policy Act of 1979 to update the minimum salaries child development facilities must pay assistant and lead teachers beginning in January 2025 to participate in the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Program.
HI	HI H 238 2025 Child Care Provider Subsidy and Bonus Program Summary: Establishes a child care provider subsidy and bonus program to adequately compensate and retain the existing early child care workforce in all licensed and registered child care provider settings, appropriates funds for the program to be expended by the Department of Human Services. HI S 426 2025 Early Learning Apprenticeship Programs Summary: Establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs, requires an annual report to the Legislature, appropriates funds. HI H 549 2025 Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program Summary: Establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs, requires an annual report to the Legislature, appropriates funds.
LA	LA H 466 2025 Teachers and Salary Summary: Relates to teachers and other school employees, requires public school systems to provide a salary increase to certain personnel, provides relative to the amount of the increase, provides relative to related benefits, provides for a funding mechanism, provides for definitions, requires professional development for certain math teachers.
ME	ME S 763 2025 Child Care Affordability Summary: Increases child care affordability and Early childhood educator stability.
MD	MD H 859 2025 Health Insurance for Child Care Professionals Outreach Status: Enacted - Act No. 679

State	Policy Wins-Pending or Enacted
	Summary: Requires the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to promote access to health insurance for child care professionals, requires the Exchange to conduct a certain survey, assists child care professionals who lose Medicaid coverage with finding alternative health insurance options.
MA	MA S 1822 2025 Retirement Security to Care Workers Summary: Provides retirement security to care workers.
NJ	NJ S 1968 2025 Subsidized Child Care Services Summary: Provides categorical eligibility for subsidized childcare services to certain childcare workers. NJ A 5951 2025 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Program Summary: Establishes Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Program in Department of Human Services.
NM	NM H 156 2025 Educational Salaries Summary: Increases the minimum salaries for teachers, school counselors, and school administrators, requires the science of reading to be taught in public post secondary teacher preparation programs so that level one applicants will be better prepared to teach public school students, provides that each teacher preparation program shall offer courses and student teaching sufficient for level one licensure that includes the science of reading, structured literacy, and scientifically based reading instruction. NM S 343 2025 Teacher Salary Rates Summary: Removes exceptions to level one, level two and level three A licensed teacher salary rates, provides that, except in exigent circumstances, a level one license shall not be extended beyond the initial period, provides that a level two license shall be issued to an applicant who has successfully taught a specified number of years as a level one teacher or an alternative level one teacher, or a combination of the two, or is granted reciprocity.
NY	NY S 164 2025 Child Care Professionals Loan Forgiveness Program Summary: Creates the childcare professionals loan forgiveness incentive program for applicants who agree to engage in employment in the childcare field, establishes the eligibility for such awards, establishes the amount and duration of such awards. NY A 241 2025 Child Care Professionals Loan Forgiveness Summary: Creates the child care professionals' loan forgiveness incentive program for applicants who agree to engage in employment in the child care field, establishes the eligibility for such awards, establishes the amount and duration of such awards. NY A 492 2025 Permanent Child Care Workforce Pay Equity Fund Summary: Establishes the Permanent Child Care Workforce Pay Equity Fund, provides that moneys in the fund shall be made available to the Commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services for activities to improve workforce conditions for employees of eligible child care services and programs, provides that in order to eligible to be awarded funding, a program must accept families paying for child care by means of the State Child Care Assistance Program, appropriates funds.
NC	NC S 647 2025 The Child Promise Act Summary: Fulfills North Carolina's promise to its children through comprehensive investment in Early childhood education and childcare infrastructure, ensures that every child has access to quality early learning opportunities regardless of geography or family income, strengthens the early childhood workforce, supports working families across the state.

State	Policy Wins-Pending or Enacted
	NC S 712 2025 Caring for Our Caregivers Act Summary: Enacts the caring for our caregivers act.
OH	OH H 484 2025 Workforce Investment Now for Child Care Pilot Program Summary: Creates the Workforce Investment Now (WIN) for Child Care pilot program to provide publicly funded child care to child care staff members.
OK	OK S 104 2025 Income Tax Summary: Relates to income tax, defines terms, provides credit for certain employer child care expenditures, provides refundable credit for qualified child care worker, provides credit limit, prohibits refundability for certain credit, allows credit to be carried forward for certain period, provides annual limit for certain tax years, prescribes procedures to enforce annual limit, provides for codification, provides an effective date.
	OK H 1849 2025 Children Summary: Relates to children, specifies that through Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness, shall ensure that any employee who is employed by a child care facility licensed pursuant to the Oklahoma Child Care Facilities Licensing Act shall have household income exempted from consideration when eligibility is determined for the Child Care Subsidy Program administered by the Department of Human Services.
PA	PA H 506 2025 Child Care Staff Recruitment and Retention Program Summary: Amends the act known as the Human Services Code, provides for Child Care Staff Recruitment and Retention Program.
	PA S 506 2025 Child Care Staff Recruitment and Retention Program Summary: Amends the act known as the Human Services Code, provides for Child Care Staff Recruitment and Retention Program.
	PA H 779 2025 Head Start Teacher Salary Supplement Pilot Program Summary: Amends the act known as the Public School Code, in professional employees, provides for Head Start Teacher Salary Supplement Pilot Program.
	PA H 780 2025 Early Childhood Educator Tuition Assistance Program Summary: Amends the act known as the Public School Code, establishes the Early Childhood Educator Tuition Assistance Program and the Early Childhood Educator Tuition Assistance Fund.
	PA H 781 2025 Infant and Toddler Care Professionals Summary: Amends the act known as the Human Services Code, in general powers and duties of the Department of Public Welfare, provides for infant and toddler care professionals' salary supplement, promulgates regulations.
RI	RI S 239 2025 The State Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act Summary: Directs the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education to work collaboratively to sustain and strengthen existing workforce development and compensation programs for educators working in licensed child care and early learning programs statewide.
	RI S 673 2025 State Early Educator Workforce Act

State	Policy Wins-Pending or Enacted
	Summary: Directs the department of human services and the department of education to work collaboratively to sustain and strengthen existing workforce development and compensation programs for educators working in licensed child care and early learning programs statewide, and would allocate at least \$1,000,000 to continue the Child Care WAGES model to help strengthen and sustain the child care workforce, takes effect upon passage.
TN	TN S 902 2025 Day Care Summary: Directs the commissioner of human services to develop a program to provide longevity payments to eligible child care workers and a program to provide child care assistance payments to certain early childhood educators. TN H 992 2025 Day Care Summary: Directs the Commissioner of Human Services to develop a program to provide longevity payments to eligible child care workers and a program to provide child care assistance payments to certain early childhood educators.

Also pronounced in the literature were the policy losses, or those that failed to be enacted. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports on nine policy categories, including Teachers and Workforce, which includes legislation on teacher training requirements, certification, compensation, professional development, and workforce matters. In 2025, there were 12 states that put forward 25 policies that failed, as seen in Table 4.14: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, and West Virginia. Despite the fact that the bills failed, I think it is important to note that even getting these bills to the floor is forward progress.

Table 4.14

States/Districts with Recent Policy Losses-Failed (NCSL, 2025): 12 states / 25 policies

States	Policy Losses-Failed
AZ	AZ H 2901 2025 Child Care Workforce and Scholarship Program Summary: Relates to child care workforce, relates to scholarship program.
AR	R H 1021 2025 Early Childhood Education Workforce Quality Incentive

States	Policy Losses-Failed
	Summary: Creates an income tax credit for certain early childhood education workers, allows an early childhood education workforce quality incentive credit against the income tax for qualifying early childhood education program directors, teachers, and instructional staff who, among other things, are employed in an early childhood education program that meets the requirements of the Better Beginnings quality rating system of the Department of Education and earn less than a specified salary. AR H 1023 2025 State Teacher Education Program Summary: Amends the eligibility requirements for loan forgiveness under the State Teacher Education Program, amends the loan repayment amounts, provides that to be eligible for the program, an applicant shall teach full time in, among others, a public early childhood education program that serves children whose ages may range from birth through prekindergarten, and hold a teachers license or a birth through prekindergarten teaching credential from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.
CT	CT S 1007 2025 Health Insurance Coverage for Early Child Care Workers Summary: Concerns health insurance coverage for Early child care workers, allows any Early child care worker to obtain health insurance coverage under the state employee health plan. CT H 5236 2025 Health Insurance Coverage for Child Care Providers Summary: Concerns health insurance coverage for child care providers under the state employee health plan, allows any child care provider, including, but not limited to, any home child care provider, to participate in the state employee health plan. CT H 5472 2025 Health Insurance Coverage for Child Care Educators Summary: Concerns health insurance coverage for child care educators, expands health insurance coverage for child care educators in this state. CT H 6336 2025 Time To Own Program Summary: Expands the time to own program and sets aside funds for teachers and early childhood and child care professionals. CT H 6899 2025 Early Educator Pay Equity Summary: Concerns early educator pay equity, increases the salaries of early childhood educators, establishes the early childhood care and education salary enhancement grant program.
KS	KS H 2383 2025 Health Services Pilot Program for Child Care Providers Summary: Relates to requiring the Kansas children's cabinet and the department of health and environment to implement a pilot program to offer health services, telehealth consultations and medication reimbursements to child care providers, while prohibiting stricter local regulations, allowing local registration of providers, increasing state funding for the child and adult care food program and providing free training and education materials to providers.
ME	ME H 855 2025 Pilot Programs Summary: Creates pilot programs to provide tuition assistance and grants for rural child care providers.
MD	MD S 611 2025 Health Insurance Access for Child Care Professionals

States	Policy Losses-Failed
	Summary: Requires the State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, to promote access to health insurance for child care professionals, authorizes a child care provider that receives a certain amount of funding from a unit of state, local, or federal government to participate in the State Employee and Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Program as a satellite organization.
MS	MS H 227 2025 Income Tax Credit Summary: Authorizes an income tax credit for certain taxpayers who incur child care expenses for a dependent child to attend a child care center that is qualified as a standard child care center or comprehensive child care center under the State Department of Human Services voluntary child care program, provides for the amount of the tax credit, authorizes a refundable income tax credit for a taxpayer who is qualified as a standard child care center or comprehensive child care center under the State department. MS H 544 2025 Income Tax Credit Summary: Authorizes an income tax credit for certain taxpayers who incur child care expenses for a dependent child to attend a child care center that is qualified as a standard child care center or comprehensive child care center under the State Department of Human Services' voluntary child care program, provides for the amount of the tax credit. MS H 1100 2025 Childcare Teachers Shortage Study Committee Summary: Creates the State Childcare Teachers Shortage Study Committee, provides that the committee is to study the State childcare worker shortage and how to increase the supply of affordable childcare seats while also recognizing educators for their ongoing efforts to improve State's early education and care system, provides the members of the committee, provides what the study committee shall review, requires the study committee to report to certain officials by specified date.
MO	MO S 650 2025 Certain Professions From Income Tax Summary: Exempts certain professions from income tax.
MT	MT S 321 2025 Children and Child Care Tax Credits Summary: Provides tax credits for children and child care, provides for a child tax credit, provides an income tax credit for child care workers, provides for an employer tax credit for dependent care assistance, provides that the credits are adjusted for inflation, provides that the specified tax credits must be reviewed during the specified biennium, including the child tax credit, the credit for child care workers, and the business supported dependent care credit.
OR	OR S 467 2025 Refundable Income Tax Credit Summary: Creates a refundable income tax credit for certain child care workers. OR S 567 2025 Child Care Provider Incentive Program Summary: Directs the Department of Early Learning and Care to establish and implement a child care provider incentive program. OR H 3008 2025 Fund Child Care Workforce Investments Summary: Appropriates moneys to fund child care workforce investments. OR H 3011 2025 Early Childhood Education Workforce Development Fund Summary: Establishes the Early Childhood Education Workforce Development Fund and appropriates moneys in the fund to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to provide

States	Policy Losses-Failed
	funding to community colleges and public universities in this state that offer Early Childhood Education degrees and certificates.
SD	SD H 1132 2025 Child Care Assistance for Child Care Employees (Vetoed by Governor) Summary: Provides that the Department of Social Services shall establish a child care assistance program to assist families with child care services, provides that in determining eligibility for payments from the Child Care Assistance Program, the department shall exclude all earned and unearned income of an applicant's household if the applicant is employed by a department licensed before and after school day care program, day care center or group family day care home, or family day care home.
WV	WV H 2474 2025 Increase for state School Service Personnel Summary: Provides a specified percent pay increase for state school service personnel.
	WV H 2519 2025 School Service Personnel Summary: Raises salaries for school service personnel.
	WV H 2606 2025 Birth to Three Summary: Provides an increase in salary to state birth to three contracted therapists and employees.
	WV H 3034 2025 Scholarship Program Summary: Establishes the State TEACH scholarship program.

As you can see in the Table 4.14, four states attempted to pass bills related to increasing wages for the early childhood workforce (AR, CT, OR, WV), three states attempted to pass bills related to providing health insurance for the early childhood workforce (CT, KS, MD), and three states had bills on the floor related to increasing scholarships for education for the early childhood workforce (AR, AZ, WV).

Next, from the CCAA site, looking specifically at the ECE Ballot Measures from 2020-2024, as well as the Workforce Supports, we see 24 states making progress. These states include: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.

Finally, using the Alliance for Early Success database, 2025 Database (Policy Progress 2025), we see 17 states making progress: Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Dakota (though vetoed by the governor), Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Also from the AES Database, 2025, we see 26 states (articulated in Table 4.15) with permanent funding streams for early childhood education. For full evidence of states building policy to improve compensation, see Appendix J.

Sifting through legislative websites to read through policies in various stages of development was simultaneously heartening and disheartening. One heartening aspect was counting the number of states/districts that had dedicated funding streams (defined as a state-level funding stream, outside of federal funding, that is harnessed for the express purpose of funding early childhood initiatives): there were 26. Despite the fact that these dedicated funding streams exist, it should be noted that most of them only fund a small portion of the early childhood education system in their state.

Table 4.15

26 States/Districts with Dedicated Funding Streams for Early Childhood Education (AES, 2024)

States/Districts	Funding Stream
DC	Wealth tax, the proceeds of the tax are allocated to the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund (a program to achieve parity between EC and K-12 educators)
AZ	Tobacco tax, dedicated to funding early childhood services and strategies that will result in improved education and health outcomes for young children

States/Districts	Funding Stream
AR	Children's Trust Fund that has earmarked fees from Medical Marijuana Taxes for the Food Insecurity Fund (feeding all children in public school breakfast)
CA	Cigarettes and tobacco tax (50-cent tax per pack) funds a variety of early care and education programs.
CO	Nicotine tax revenues fund the free preschool for 4-year-olds statewide. CO also allows special local taxing districts that can go directly to funding services for young children.
CT	The Early Care and Education Endowment was created in 2025 and will receive all unappropriated surplus at the end of the year (average of \$450 million). Also, CT has used funds from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement to expand Pre-K.
FL	Taxpayer property funds (in special districts) go to a local Children's Service Council that distributes them. Since 1946, FL state law has allowed for special local taxing districts; these funds go directly to child services and/or early childhood supports.
GA	Lottery allocations fund the GA preschool program.
KS	Payments from the Master Tobacco Settlement go towards the Kansas Endowment for Youth Fund and the Children's Initiatives Fund.
KY	25% of the annual settlement funds from the Tobacco Master Settlement are dedicated to ECE programs and used by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood.
LA	Early Childhood Education Fund receives 50% of revenue from the NBA Pelicans license plate, 25% of sports betting revenues up to \$20 million, and any non-dedicated tax revenue from fantasy sporting betting and industrial hemp-derived CBD sales. This fund matches dollar-for-dollar local investments for early care and education.
ME	Tobacco settlement fees support a number of early childhood programs, including home visiting, child care, and Head Start.
MD	Gambling fees go into the Maryland Education Trust Fund, which is used to support PreK programs in addition to K-12.
MA	Commonwealth Care for Children (C3) Grants support providers in covering operational costs, including workforce. (State funding in 2024 was \$475 million).
MO	Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement Funds (\$35 million annually) fund the Missouri Preschool Program, which makes grants to establish or expand early learning programming.
MT	With a \$10 million dollar appropriation (seed funding), Montana established an account for early childhood, available for various initiatives. The fund also accepts private donations.
NE	Sixpence Early Learning Fund-an early learning endowment, public-private venture (\$40million from the state and \$20million from the private sector). Disbursements annually total \$2-3million to community partnerships focused on high-quality learning for under-resourced communities to support infants/toddlers.

States/Districts	Funding Stream
NV	Birth and death certificate funds child abuse and neglect prevention. The Children's Trust Fund distributes \$1.5 million annually to primary and secondary prevention programs.
NM	New Mexico Early Childhood Trust Fund distributes \$500 million to P-5 services as well as the state's EC department. Though I am unsure of the specifics, it also looks like NM made a constitutional amendment that mandates a Land Grant Permanent Fund Distribution for ECE (equal to 1.25% of the total value of the fund, with 60 percent dedicated to ECE and 40 percent dedicated to public education). The ECE receives roughly \$100 million annually.
NC	Lottery proceeds (around 11% or almost \$79 million in 2020) are spent on PreK.
OH	Casino operators pay money to the state for licenses or fees that are then used to support early childhood programs like Step Up to Quality. The Ohio Department of Children and Youth received \$13 million in FY23.
OR	Lottery bonds (\$50 million initially created the Child Care Infrastructure Fund, designed to expand child care and preschool facilities). Nicotine tax (roughly \$160 million annually) funds health care for children on Medicaid. Corporate activity tax (of which 20% is allocated to programs for infants/toddlers/preschoolers).
RI	Payroll tax that funds temporary caregivers insurance (TCI) as part of a broader disability program. (unsure what other early childhood provisions it includes).
SC	Sales tax revenue (in 1984, the state instituted a 1% sales tax to improve education, with a portion of these funds going to improve school readiness and PreK services.
VT	Payroll tax (.44 percent pay tax, split between employers and employees) generates about \$80 million annually to fund expanded eligibility for subsidized child care and increased reimbursement rates, and support for the child care workforce.
WA	Capital gains tax dedicated to early childhood-a 7% tax on profits more than \$250k that result from the sale of stocks and bonds (excludes real estate and retirement).

These states use their dedicated funds to support vital early childhood programs and grantmaking for the early childhood community.

Question 4: States That Made Progress Implementing a Salary Scale

To arrive at a list of states that were making progress implementing a salary scale anchored in living wages, I analyzed the data I had collected around raising wages, developing a salary scale, and building policy to improve compensation for the

workforce, as seen in Table 4.16. There were 34 total states that showed evidence of raising wages, 23 states/districts that showed evidence of salary scale development, and 16 states that showed evidence of building policy to improve compensation.

Table 4.16

Interview Inclusion: Mapping the Evidence - Snapshot (Full Evidence Table is Appendix K)

States	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Salary Scale Development	Evidence of Policy	Published Salary Scale
AL				
AK				
AZ	•	•	•	•
AR				
CA	•			
CO	•			•
CT	•	•	•	•

I then determined which criterion to prioritize. Originally, I had planned to use raising wages, salary scale development, and then policy (in that order) as steps of elimination, but I realized I would eliminate states that had made valuable progress in developing salary scales and building policy to support improving compensation but had not yet raised wages. Since my work focused on states that have developed salary scales, I made the decision to start with states that showed evidence of salary scale development. Then the work of determining which of the states I could interview began. See Appendix K: Interview Inclusion: Mapping the Evidence for the full table.

Table 4.17*Interview Inclusion: Process of Inclusion Rounds 1-5*

Round	States
Round 1: Must have shown evidence of salary scale development AND be a state, not a district (22)	Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington
Round 2: Must have published a fully developed salary scale with details (19)	Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington
Round 3: Must have an element of interest (mention of living wages or accounting for regional differences in cost of living) (7)	Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington
Round 4: Must have a response from state-level stakeholder (3)	Illinois, Michigan, and North Carolina
Round 5: Must have the ability to participate in an interview within the timeframe (2)	Michigan and North Carolina

As you can see in Table 4.17, the first inclusion round came after I determined to include only states, not districts or cities, etc. Though there have been many examples of individual cities or districts demonstrating innovations that have dramatically improved compensation for the early childhood workforce, I was most interested in researching solutions that would be relevant to the majority of the EC workforce. Most states are challenged by similar factors, while smaller cities and districts are able to innovate in a different way; their challenges, though certainly present, are oftentimes easier to overcome, simply by operating on a smaller scale. After eliminating districts and cities (DC), there were 22 states left.

Moving from the list of 22 states I had after inclusion round 1, I determined which states had published fully developed salary scales (complete with details), and I had 19 states. Next, I determined which of the salary scales had elements of interest to me as a researcher. I selected seven salary scales. Of those seven states I contacted, three states responded to my request for an interview. I was able to interview Michigan and North Carolina within my timeframe (Illinois could not), and those interviews yielded rich data related to attributes of success, covered in the next section. For more detailed information on Rounds 1-5, please see Appendices N-Q, where I cover Step 1) mapping the evidence; Step 2) verifying the evidence; Step 3) examining published salary scales for points of interest; and Step 4) examining the selected state salary scales in depth.

Question 5: Attributes of Success, Individual Case Study Findings

Throughout this research, I have been focused on the attributes of success, focused on understanding what has enabled states to be successful in improving compensation for the ECE workforce. Early on in my research, I identified the following four attributes of success (which I describe in Chapter 3): stakeholder involvement, wage determination, funding, and policy changes. I was interested to see how states ranked the importance of each attribute in their success in improving compensation for the EC workforce using salary scales anchored in living wages. The attributes seemed perfect comparative points in my case study.

I asked the interviewees to rate three (stakeholder involvement, funding, and policy) of the four attributes on a scale of importance, leaving wage determination to be described as an answer to one of the interview questions, as it is more of a fundamental

attribute (design description), as opposed to one that can be rated (not important to important).

As you can see in Table 4.18, states scored each of the three attributes fairly similarly. For Michigan (MI), both stakeholder involvement and funding were the most important attributes of success at a 10, while policy was scored at a 9. For North Carolina (NC), stakeholder involvement and funding were also reported as the most important attributes, while policy was also scored at a 9. I will discuss these ratings in greater depth in the next section.

Table 4.18

*States Rated the Attributes of Success on a 1-10 Scale of Importance
(1=not important at all, 10=the most important)*

States	Stakeholder Involvement	Funding	Policy
MI	10	10	9
NC	10	10	9

What I found is encompassed in these three thoughts: 1) both states identified stakeholder involvement as critically important, and both have utilized the voices of multiple sector stakeholders, including the EC workforce themselves (providers), families, advocates, the state agencies, often non-profit advocacy organizations, higher ed, etc.; 2) both states identified funding as critically important to planning for or implementing any lasting systems-level change, and discussed in-depth the creative multi-pronged approaches they have used as well as their current state efforts, both in MI and NC, to build a dedicated funding stream for early childhood education; and, 3) policy

can affect systems change in multiple ways, some large, some small. Both states reported policy as very important, and had examples of recent policy wins, like MI raising the reimbursement rate for infants/toddler care to (almost) true cost, and NC investing in the cost-sharing initiative called Tri-Share.

The fourth attribute, wage determination, was a question I asked in the interview. I wanted to know how the amounts were determined and who was there making those decisions. Table 4.19 articulates the findings from my interviews with MI and NC.

Table 4.19

States Discussed Wage Determination (Another Attribute of Success)

States	Wage Determination
MI	• For the 10%-providers, respond to a market rate survey, which sets their reimbursement rate to what they are charging families. • For the 90%-advocacy group developing the salary scale in MI was intentional about including providers in the decision regarding wage determination. Not only providers at the table, but also surveyed providers to understand the true cost of the care they provide. • The living wage for the state was also a factor.
NC	• When the scale was first built, the MIT living wage calculator was used. It was the minimum on the scale. • The maximum on the scale was parity with entry-level K-12 teachers. • Since it was built, the cost of living has increased beyond what entry-level K-12 teachers are earning, and the scale now needs to be revised.

MI answered for two separate audiences, 10% of the child care providers in the state that rely on reimbursement rates from Child Development and Care (CDC) scholarship as their primary source of income, and the other 90% of child care providers who rely on parent pay or a combination of both parent pay/CDC scholarship. For the 10%, MI answered that wages (though not related to the proposed salary scale for MI

(Andrews, 2023) are determined by market rate surveys. In that way, the EC workforce was directly involved in setting the rates, as they report what they charge families. MI then reported that for the other 90%, they set their own rates, though typically those do not reflect the true cost of care (inclusive of living wages for the EC workforce).

Andrews (2023), in their proposed salary scale, determined those proposed wages based on cost-of-living data in different regions in MI, with input from the EC workforce themselves, as they were an integral part of the steering committee behind the report.

When I asked NC the same question regarding salary scale and wage determination, the answers were different. Originally, when the scale was built, it was designed to reflect the minimum wage being set at a living wage (as determined by the MIT Living Wage Calculator), and the maximum being set at parity with K-12 public school teachers just entering the field. NC was ready to launch the scale when the pandemic hit, which delayed and changed the rollout. Fast forward a few years, and the model salary scale they developed is now out of date. The wages they once set now do not make sense. The minimum wage on the scale was set to the MIT living wage for the state, which now exceeds the salary of an entry-level K-12 public school teacher (i.e., the maximum on the original model salary scale). This top-over-bottom shift has left NC needing to overhaul the scale completely. As previously stated, though in relation to different questions, NC was intentional about including the EC workforce in all decisions regarding improving compensation. The EC workforce was invited to the discussion, either as representatives who were a part of a steering committee or through feedback captured from surveys and interviews.

In the next section of the paper, I discuss the interviews conducted with key stakeholders from MI and NC. Below are the questions I asked:

1. How did the idea of improving compensation for the EC workforce come about?
2. How were decisions made about how much to pay the EC workforce?
3. Who was involved in making those decisions? Were the EC workforce involved?
4. Was there short-term funding for early work to improve compensation?
5. Do you have a long-term funding strategy for improving compensation?
6. What has been the greatest force behind your success? Greatest challenge?
7. What role has stakeholder involvement played in your success?
8. What role has funding played in your success?
9. What role has policy played in your success?
10. What advice would you give to a state just starting this work?

Michigan

The state-level stakeholder I interviewed from Michigan (who will now be referred to as MI) answered each of my questions thoughtfully. When asked about how the idea of improving compensation for the EC workforce came about, MI reported that compensation had been an ongoing issue for years and that the state saw a shift during the pandemic. This shift was punctuated by providers feeling like they had a voice and had points to raise, namely regarding their wages and what needed to be done to improve compensation. Providers reporting that they were having a hard time staying in the field coincided with the state's efforts to increase supply building to ensure families had access and choice.

Stakeholder Involvement. Much of the early efforts in MI, including those focused on drafting the proposed wage scale articulated in the Balancing the Scales report, were supported by a group of early childhood advocates, articulated in Table 4.20. Those advocates include the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, the Michigan League for Public Policy, Michigan’s Children, and the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children. Though there was no specific date given for when this collaboration or advocacy group started, MI indicated that they have been working together at a minimum since 2020. The stakeholder from MI shared that:

Prior to the pandemic, some funding through a grant from Think Babies and the Pritzker Initiative came to Michigan that really coalesced them all into a cohesive group—where they were engaging parents and providers and really creating priorities that they were bringing forward.

The group outlined in Table 4.20 engaged parents and providers and created priorities such as advocating for the true cost of care (which would increase wages) and for increased access to subsidies. As indicated in the Balancing the Scales (Andrews, 2023) report, the providers that were involved in the project came from a variety of backgrounds and care types. The group also included three child care center directors and four parent leaders.

Table 4.20

Michigan’s Advocacy Group: Mission Statements from Their Websites

Organization	Mission
Early Childhood	Created in 2005 to be a statewide leader in early childhood, ECIC

Investment Corporation	collaborates to increase public and private investment in the earliest years, to elevate issues affecting young children and their families, and continuously improve Michigan’s comprehensive early childhood system, ensuring every child has the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.
Michigan League for Public Policy	The League uses data to educate, advocate, and fight for policy solutions that undo historic and systemic racial and economic inequities to lift up Michiganders who have been left out of prosperity.
Michigan’s Children	Michigan’s Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career. We focus on influencing public policies that can reduce disparities in child outcomes, such as the academic achievement gap – disparities that are caused by economic hardships coupled with structural barriers by race or ethnicity.
Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children	The mission of the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children is to promote high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.
Child Care Providers	There were three child care providers.
Families	There were four family leaders.

Wage Determination. Depending on which group of child care providers we are talking about, wage determination is structured differently. In my interview with MI, three such paths of determination were raised. First, for child care providers who support the Child Development and Care fund (CDC) scholarship, wages or reimbursement rates are determined by a market survey that the state puts out, asking child care providers to report what they are charging families for the care they provide. Second, for child care providers who work outside of the confines of the CDC reimbursement rates, their wages are determined by what they charge families. Per the interview with MI, “What we see and what we hear...is providers are often charging what they think families can afford, not necessarily the cost of care...which then impacts their own compensation and the compensation of their employees or staff, if they have them.”

History has shown us that many providers charge families what they think they can afford, and not what it actually costs to provide the care. Third, in the Balancing the Scales report (Andrews, 2023), wages were determined by an alternative methodology-in this case, cost of living data, as well as knowledge and skills necessary to do the work. Regardless of the method, MI did acknowledge that “the challenge with the market rate survey or an alternate methodology is getting providers to respond and provide the data.”

Funding. When asked the question about short-term funding, MI described how federal dollars, particularly ARPA funds, create opportunities to pilot initiatives, like wage supplements (Early Educator Wages Initiative), scholarships (TEACH), and now a new benefits program (Nurture Benefits). These funds allowed the state to test strategies, demonstrate proof of concept, and collect impact data for future funding requests. MI was also clear that short-term funding alone is obviously not enough to sustain long-term change. While the aforementioned programs like the Early Educator Wages Initiative, TEACH Scholarship, and Nurture Benefits have made a positive impact on a part of the workforce, they remain limited in their reach. MI then emphasized that without a permanent, dedicated funding stream, these initiatives will function as partial solutions rather than system-wide change, noting “the Early Educator Wages Initiative is becoming [one of] our long-term strategies, with that public-private funding model. Our advocacy group is [also] working on a dedicated funding stream.”

Policy. When asked the question regarding the importance of policy in the state’s success, the MI state-level stakeholder initially scored it a 7, and gave the rationale that there have not been a lot of policy changes related to compensation. When asked a clarifying question of policy in relation to advocating for our legislature to allocate

funding for initiatives that will improve compensation, MI scored the level of importance at a 9, stating that approaching the legislature with a unified message has been effective in seeking funding: “When everybody's saying the same thing, you feel a little more confident.” When asked more specifically about which policies, MI stated those surrounding increasing reimbursement rates, those that promote reimbursement rates based on enrollment, not attendance, and those that promote preemptive payments (before care is provided) as opposed to traditional CDC payments (after care is provided).

Other Factors. When asked the question, “What has been the greatest force behind your success?” MI answered that the conversation about the critical need for child care that the pandemic forced was really helpful. In that time, there were more elevated conversations about compensation, “and when they were not deemed essential workers, that really lit a fire!”

Another force to improve compensation that MI identified was the development of a unified voice and a unified office supporting the system: “The coordinated effort of the advocacy group and the creation of MiLEAP - bringing together early childhood and higher education-has helped us with headway in terms of the conversation and the focus of what has been needed.”

To end the question, MI concluded that there has not been just one big force to improve compensation, but instead a small package of initiatives aimed to make a difference. In contrast, when asked the bookend question, what has been your greatest challenge, MI reported money. With federal and state funding that is awarded for initiatives like the Early Educator Wages Initiative (a total of \$16 million), that money, when distributed, will still only reach a fraction of the workforce. In a state with over

50,000 early educators (NAEYC, MI State Fact Sheet, 2025), the cost of giving everyone a \$4k wage supplement (the amount a part-time employee would receive through the Wages initiative) the total cost would be \$200 million. The challenge, MI reported, is securing the scale of funding required to implement the initiatives equitably and statewide. As the interviewee noted, the challenge is money: “It's really hard to make the argument when there are limited resources and multiple initiatives.”

North Carolina

The state-level stakeholder I interviewed from North Carolina (who will be referred to as NC) was thorough when asked how the idea of improving compensation for the EC workforce came about. NC reported that the state did a workforce study of the early childhood system in the late 80s that yielded three major findings: 1) the workforce was undereducated; 2) the workforce was very low-paid; and 3) the workforce had high turnover rates. NC wanted to address those findings, so they designed programs to meet the challenges. They created the TEACH scholarship program, a debt-free way to send people to school so they can get the education they need to work in the field. NC also created the WAGES salary supplement program, which awards additional income for staying in the field (which corresponds to educational attainment). As a result, they saw an increase in education as well as retention, but the programs were not reaching every provider across the state. NC knew it needed to do more. As it was, they were one of eight states invited to participate in the Moving the Needle Project, a collaborative effort to address one of the field's most pressing issues: compensation. It was in this cohort that NC was able to create its model salary scale (more on construction in the coming sections). The pandemic hit just as NC was getting ready to implement the salary scale,

so adjustments were made. The scale was tested using ARPA dollars. Child care programs were able to apply for stabilization grants to cover any and all operational costs (aside from staffing), and this process was unrestricted. NC also designed a separate grantmaking process for staffing funds, which was tied to using a salary scale to receive funding. Of note, child care programs needed to show they were implementing *a* salary scale to be eligible, not necessarily *the* salary scale the state had created. When ARPA funding ended, NC looked for other funding to increase reimbursement rates (to improve wages). Recently, NC has adopted the Tri-Share Child Care model (a cost-sharing initiative developed in MI whereby the cost of child care is shared equally between a participating employer, an eligible employee, and the state), which helps reduce the cost for working families, but allows child care programs to charge what it costs to provide care. The latter directly addresses a major funding issue in NC (and elsewhere) that a child care program's major source of funding is parent pay, and parents cannot pay enough for teachers to earn what they need.

Stakeholder Involvement. In terms of stakeholder involvement when constructing the model salary scale, NC reported many organizations that were brought together. In Table 4.21, we see NC's Stakeholder group comprised of: Higher Education, the Smart Start Initiative, the NC Child Care Resource and Referral System, the NC Department of Public Instruction, the NC Division of Child Development, as well as the voice of child care providers and families (through surveys, interviews, and focus groups).

Table 4.21

North Carolina's Stakeholder Group: Mission Statements from Their Websites

Organization	Description / Mission
Higher Education	The specific colleges and universities in North Carolina that were included in the conversations were not specified, but it was reported that Higher Ed was represented.
Smart Start Initiative	Advance a high-quality, comprehensive, accountable early childhood system that benefits each child in North Carolina, beginning with a healthy birth.
Child Care Resource and Referral System	To partner with the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and the 14 CCR&R regions to support a strong child care resource and referral statewide system by: 1) providing high-quality CCR&R services across the state, and 2) ensuring that families, child care providers, and communities have access to high-quality CCR&R services. This will, in turn, ensure that high-quality early childhood education programs with highly competent teachers are available for children and their families.
NC Department of Public Instruction	The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is charged with implementing the state's public school laws for pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade public schools at the direction of the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The agency provides leadership and service to the 115 local public school districts and 2,500+ district public schools, 200+ charter schools, lab schools, and a regional school. The areas of support include student standards, accountability, finance, teacher and administrator preparation and licensing, professional development, and school business support and operations. NCDPI develops the Standard Course of Study, outlining what students in NC public schools should know and be able to do, along with the assessments and accountability measures used to gauge success at the student, school, and district levels. NCDPI also manages approximately \$14 billion in state and federal public school funding each year and oversees the licensure of about 120,000 teachers and administrators serving NC's public schools.
NC Division of Child Development	The mission of the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) is to ensure the health and safety of children in child care programs, to promote quality child care by implementing evidence-based standards, and to increase access to quality child care to families and children across North Carolina.
Child Care Providers	The specific child care providers' names were not provided, but it was reported that their voices were represented.
Families	The specific family names were not provided, but it was reported that their voices were represented.

NC was intentional about including all stakeholders in the creation of the salary scale, as the interviewee stated:

I actually went out and got feedback from child care providers across the state. In rural areas, in urban areas, to ask them...what made sense. Then once we created the scale, we went back out and asked them to use it and to implement it. They gave us feedback about...what worked, what didn't work, and we were able to adjust accordingly. NC reported that some of the feedback they received from child care providers was that they did not have the funds to increase wages, despite the fact that they wanted to, which led the group to explore multiple strategies to raise the total dollar amount child care providers received, so they could address the higher cost of staff.

Wage Determination. When asked the question about how the decisions were made about how much to pay the EC workforce, NC answered that the bottom of the salary scale was derived using MIT's living wage calculator. NC went on to describe that the problem now is how to move the scale forward; it has not been updated in the last few years, as funding to implement it completely has not been secured. What they have observed is that the living wage for NC now is much higher than what their starting teachers make with a bachelor's degree. Originally, the scale was designed to have a living wage be the bottom, and parity with a public school, entry-level public school teacher be the top, but now average wages for both are below the average living wage in NC. One additional point NC wanted to make was that "wages" was an appropriate word to use, as they had still not figured out how to address the benefits that public schools are able to provide to their employees, noting "we are still working on trying to find a solution for that."

Funding. When asked about short-term funding to improve compensation, the answer NC provided was "There was a bit of seed money for the Moving the Needle

project, but nothing that went directly to providers.” When asked about long-term funding, NC shared they feel they are making progress: “In North Carolina, there is not a direct revenue stream that we've been able to identify like other states. For example, Nevada, with (their) oil and gas taxes....” Though there is not a direct revenue stream, they have identified multiple strategies: 1) increasing the subsidy reimbursement rate using an alternative methodology (not market rate); 2) creating an endowment; and 3) engaging the legislature (and businesses) to invest in the Tri-Share model. Additionally, there is an effort to harness the state corporate income tax, which would allow the state to reinvest economic dollars into the early care and education system.

Policy. When it came to the question regarding policy, NC shared a few thoughts. Before the pandemic, they were able to make great strides in advancing the system: finding ways to make Higher Ed more accessible through the TEACH scholarship, and finding ways to increase pay for the EC workforce through the WAGES initiative. However, right now in their legislature, they are seeing the deregulation of child care. They are seeing some policies going in the opposite direction of what is best for the early childhood system: “We've got to find a new strategy to get them moving in the other direction again...that's why economic development has become such a conversation starter.” To shift gears, they have found common ground in policy energy that is aimed at economic development in relation to child care (i.e., investment in initiatives like the Tri-Share Child Care program).

Other Factors. When asked about the greatest force behind the states’ success, NC responded, “having the data...documentation of the issues...and having a unified vision of where to go.” Additionally, NC shared that leadership at the state level has

played an important role: “What really put us over the top was leadership at the Governor’s level. I can’t underscore that enough. Jim Hunt really set the standard for North Carolina.”

The greatest challenge reported by NC was also political. NC spoke about the challenges in getting both the legislature and citizens of NC to understand that childcare is a public good, and therefore should not be just the responsibility of families. As the interviewee shared, one of the challenges is “child care doesn't apply to everyone. It only applies to families. And not everyone chooses to have children. How do you help businesses engage in some type of investment that doesn't benefit their whole workforce?” Further emphasizing that there is a challenge in helping the public understand the overall importance of early care and education, particularly the business sector, whose partnership is critical in solution-building.

Question 5: Attributes of Success, Cross-Case Comparison Findings

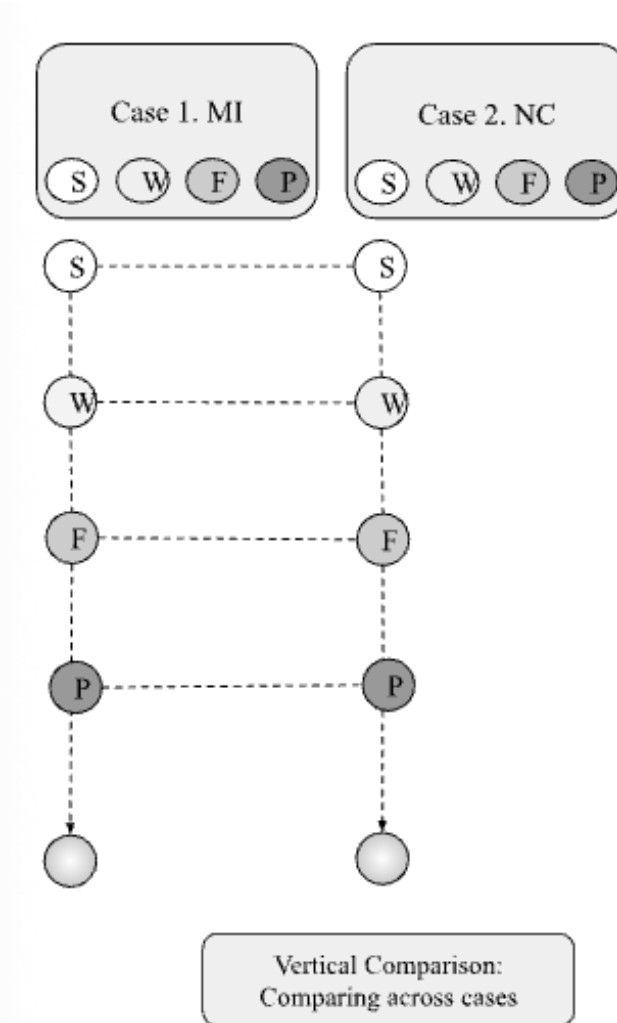
To examine the attributes of success and the different cases of the study, I employed a cross-case comparison. This approach entailed a thorough analysis of a vertical comparison (the data collected across the two cases), a horizontal comparison (the data collected across the four attributes), and a transversal comparison (identifying patterns in both horizontal and vertical comparisons).

Vertical Comparison

When I compared the data across cases, I found that states had more in common than not.

Figure 4.1

Vertical Comparison: Comparing Across Cases



Michigan. MI’s approach to improving compensation for the EC workforce has been incremental and multifaceted. The state has relied heavily on the efforts of the advocacy group, the impact of pilot programs, and small amounts of federal funding to move the work forward. A defining feature of Michigan’s case is the strong role that the advocacy group has played, which has helped to elevate provider voices as well as family choice, lobby for cost-of-care analyses, and articulate a vision for complete compensation reform like the Balancing the Scales report (Andrews, 2023). While the state of Michigan

has yet to implement a statewide salary scale for the EC workforce, much of the groundwork has been laid. MI spoke about the importance of building consensus, generating data, and testing compensation innovations.

North Carolina. North Carolina’s case (per the story provided by the NC state-level stakeholder) reflected a longer history of workforce investment. The state’s early efforts in 1989 to develop a workforce survey and subsequently act on the results led to the creation of programs that still support the workforce today (in NC and in other states across the country). NC programs like TEACH and WAGES have been elevated to the national stage, influencing conversations on the national stage about workforce development across the country. The state’s strength lies in its commitment to professionalizing the workforce through education and retention incentives. Similar to MI, NC sees the benefit of a data-driven approach to reform. The two states also face similar barriers, namely the absence of sufficient long-term funding to fully implement their salary scales and align wages with the current cost of living.

Table 4.22

Similarities and Differences Between Michigan and North Carolina

Similarities / Differences		Michigan / North Carolina
Similarities	● MI and NC articulated that funding is a challenge ● MI and NC both have strong data to support progress ● MI and NC both have strong stakeholder involvement ● MI and NC both have tested strategies for improving compensation	
Differences	● MI and NC arrived at compensation reform from two different starting points ● MI and NC used different processes for wage determination	

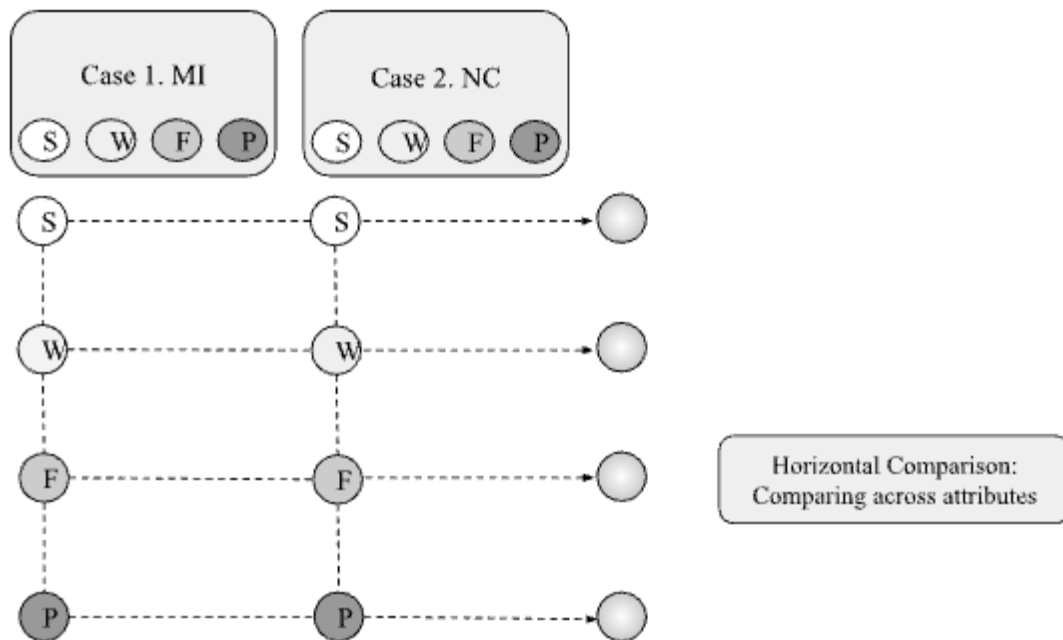
In summary, comparing across cases showed that while MI and NC arrived at compensation reform from two different starting points, they now face the same challenge: funding. Both states have strong data, stakeholder involvement, and tested strategies, but remain constrained by limited funding. Their experience suggests that progress is possible without fully implementing a salary scale anchored in living wages, but the sustainability of their systems depends on scaling pilots into fully funded programs with statewide reach.

Horizontal Comparison

When I compared the data across the four attributes: Stakeholder Involvement, Wage Determination, Funding, and Policies, I found similarities and differences in the ways that states reported on the impact they had on their success.

Figure 4.2

Horizontal Comparison: Comparing Across Attributes



Stakeholder Involvement. First, in terms of Stakeholder Involvement, both MI and NC rated the attribute a 10, or “Most Important,” and both states were intentional about engaging a group of stakeholders who represented the entire child care system. Additionally, both were adamant about the importance of involvement (both in terms of data and feedback) of families and child care providers. Where they differed was actually involving families and providers in the stakeholder groups themselves. MI had both families and child care providers at the table when decisions were being made, while NC brought the data and feedback from families and child care providers to the table.

Wage Determination. When it came to Wage Determination, though not scored, as it was much more of a fundamental attribute as opposed to an attribute that could or could not be used to advance the improvement of compensation for the EC workforce, MI and NC identified different processes. MI used a combination of parity with K-12

teachers and acknowledgement of a living wage to set the minimum, whereas NC used a living wage as its minimum (when designed), and a maximum of K-12 parity.

Funding. Next, in terms of Funding, both MI and NC reported the attribute as “Most Important” or a 10, and both MI and NC have struggled to secure the necessary funding to make a full change happen in their states. Funding for programs like TEACH or WAGES, as well as the Tri-Share Child Care program, is acknowledged as beneficial, and both states clearly state that the funding they have received for these programs does not reach all of the EC workforce, nor does that funding provide all the necessary support needed for full systematic change. Similarly, both MI and NC are working on creating a dedicated funding stream for Early Childhood education, and have been able to secure multiple funding opportunities to pilot new programs and initiatives. They both have also seen benefits in combining public/private dollars.

Policy. Lastly, when it came to policy, when I compared MI and NC, I found that they both have celebrated small policy wins related to reimbursement rates for subsidies (MI) or funding allocation for TEACH or WAGES initiatives, as well as investment in innovative funding strategies like Tri-Share. Additionally, I learned that both states have done cost analysis to see what it would take to fund the early childhood education systems using their salary scales, and neither currently has the funding to do that; however, both are working toward policy change and funding allocations that will support moving in that direction.

Table 4.23

Similarities and Differences Across Attributes

Similarities / Differences	Stakeholder Involvement / Wage Determination / Funding / Policy
Similarities	● Stakeholder involvement in both states has been inclusive of stakeholders from all parts of the early childhood system. ● Funding in both states has been multi-pronged. ● Policy advancement has been possible in both states with a clear, unified voice with a common mission, vision, and agenda.
Differences	● Wage determination in MI was a combination of parity with K-12 teachers and acknowledgement of a living wage to set the minimum, while wage determination (when designed) in NC was a living wage to set the minimum, and parity with K-12 teachers as the maximum.

In conclusion, comparing across attributes yielded more similarities than differences between MI and NC. The differences included the ways that MI and NC determined the wages on their salary scales. The similarities included the intention to include all those affected by the early childhood education system to be a part of the stakeholder involvement, using a multi-pronged approach to funding, and understanding that a unified voice, with a clear mission, vision, and agenda, is the best way to advocate for policy change.

Transversal Comparison

When I examined common patterns across both vertical and horizontal comparisons, three dominant patterns emerged. First, states that invest in data collection are better positioned to drive decision-making and policy development. Both MI and NC used workforce studies, cost-of-care analyses, and wage modeling to make the case for compensation reform. Data served as an internal planning tool, but also a key set of points to use in advocacy when engaging legislators, funders, and the public. In both cases, having those concrete numbers played a part in solution building.

Second, states that speak with a unified voice are more likely to be heard. In both cases, success was attributed to alignment amongst stakeholders-providers, advocates, state agencies, and business leaders. Both MI and NC emphasized the importance of shared mission, vision, and messaging, and talked about identifying common goals to coordinate advocacy. This unity that was built in both states served to strengthen their credibility and increase their influence, both in funding and policy conversations.

Third, even states with limited funding can move the work forward when used strategically; both MI and NC have proved that to be true. Neither state has secured the level of funding needed to fully implement a salary scale for the EC workforce. Yet, both have demonstrated that smaller, targeted investments like pilot programs, wage supplements, scholarships, and benefit initiatives can stabilize parts of the workforce and build momentum for systemic change. These steps benefit some early educators directly, but more broadly, provide evidence that larger investments are warranted. I will discuss these three patterns further in the conclusion.

Interview Conclusion

When I asked my final question of the interviews, “For other states that are just starting this work, what advice would you give?” Michigan and North Carolina had a lot to say. Michigan had the following thoughts:

- Engage your stakeholders. Invite them to the table. Do not make assumptions about what families or providers want or need.
- Have a clear plan: What is your ask? What is the cost of your ask? And having data to back it up. Be able to say: this is what we heard from stakeholders, this is what we learned about cost.

- Learn from other states. Many states have tried things, some successful, some not.

Invite the conversation; it will help you think about what fits best.

Additionally, North Carolina had this advice to give:

- Identify your champions, including those in state government, ideally your governor.
- Develop a shared vision, a shared voice, and a shared agenda.
- Involve unique partners, including business industries, chambers of commerce, and workforce development boards; everyone needs to be a part.
- Engage your stakeholders, namely families and child care providers.

Changemakers need clear lines of communication with families: we need to understand their needs. Child care providers need to be trained to collect and store data and to understand how that data fits into the big picture.

- Understand that making lasting change takes time and energy; “It’s not going to happen overnight...you just gotta keep moving forward...keep working on it.”

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine which states are improving compensation for the EC workforce by raising wages, developing salary scales, securing funding, and enacting policies. To examine the states, I used a number of different data sources, including datasets from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Child Care Aware of America (CCAA), the Alliance for Early Success (AES), and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

I aimed to identify the states that have made progress implementing salary scales and to better understand how they achieved this success. I looked critically at four specific attributes of success: stakeholder involvement, wage determination, funding, and policy (CCSA, 2021; Dichter & LiBetti, 2021; Portillo, 2022), and then interviewed stakeholders from two states to understand the importance of those attributes in their work.

What this study adds to the existing literature is not the identification of these attributes in isolation, but rather an understanding of how they operate together. The findings suggest that progress is rarely the result of a single policy change or funding allotment, but rather progress is made through coordinated efforts across attributes. States that have made the most progress have been able to do so by aligning stakeholder engagement, using data for wage determination, utilizing creative funding strategies, and advocating for policy change.

What follows next is a brief outline of the five research questions I answered in my study, including my findings and interpretations.

Question 1: States that Raised Wages

Findings

From the CSCCE 2024 Workforce Index (McLean et al, 2024), specifically from the interactive map titled Early Educator Pay - Percent Change in Wages, 2019 to 2022:

- Ten states/districts showed wage increases of over 10%: Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Idaho, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.
- Ten states showed wage increases between 5% and 9.9%: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington.
- Seventeen states showed wage increases of between 1% and 4.9%: Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.
- Three states showed wage increases of 0-1%: Alabama, Georgia, and Hawaii (0%).
- Eleven states showed a decrease in wages: Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Vermont. (McLean et al., 2024)

Interpretations

The increases (or decreases) in wages did not necessarily reflect the state's current action. For example, per McLean et al (2024), of the seven states I selected to interview, all of whom have made progress toward implementing a salary scale for the EC workforce, the wage increases/decreases were: Illinois (3.3%) Michigan (5.3%), Minnesota (1.8%) North Carolina (-2.1%), New Mexico (11.6%), Rhode Island (12.7%), and Washington (9.1%).

Also, though the Workforce Indexes did not offer reasons for the percent changes in wages, I imagine others have seen growth due to targeted state-level initiatives that acknowledge the growing demand for child care and the workforce that sustains it—states, for example, that have implemented wage support programs like Illinois, Minnesota, and New Mexico (Hudson & Mauzy, 2026).

Next, despite the fact that a 10% increase in wages is significant, it is unlikely that those increases kept pace with living wages, or even cost-of-living adjustments. To be quite clear, a 10% increase is not enough.

Lastly, I also wonder how permanent some of these increases are. I imagine some of the increases have come from federal stabilization grants either during or post-pandemic, maybe local pilot programs, or even temporary wage stipends. In Michigan and North Carolina, we saw an increase in compensation during the pandemic, but have been unable to sustain those increases after the grant period ended (MiTECEWC, 2025; MI Interview, 25; NC Interview, 25). This group of states shows that short-term investments work, but only for a while, and they certainly do not translate into large system-wide change without a permanent funding source behind them.

Question 2: States that Developed Salary Scales

Findings

- Nineteen states/districts have created salary scales for the early childhood workforce, per the Workforce Index Table 3.4 (CSCCE, 2024): Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia.
- Six states have developed full salary scales, per the ECE Workforce Compensation Policy Database (CSCCE, 2205): Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, and Washington.
- Fifteen states/districts showed evidence of developing salary scales, per data from the other sources (ACF, 2024; BI, 2021; CCSA, 2021; CELFE, 2022; ECIC, 2023): Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington.
- Twenty-two states/districts showed evidence of published salary scales, per my independent search using both states' early childhood agency webpages and the Google search engine: Arizona, Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.

Interpretations

First, states like Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington stand out as they appeared across multiple datasets, suggesting their work might be more established (ACF, 2024; BI, 2021; CCSA, 2021; CELFE, 2022; ECIC, 2023). Other states might be in earlier stages of development, but still demonstrate the commitment to addressing compensation for the EC workforce through structured wage frameworks and a growing interest in using salary scales as a strategy to build a more sustainable EC workforce.

Another thought on finding published salary scales, whether developed, piloted, studied, or implemented, is that literature on the efforts is not always present, and can be difficult to find. Even when searching for literature I knew existed, the search was not always simple. As described in Chapters 2 and 3, I often found myself playing with combinations of keywords like “early childhood” (preschool, child care, Pre-K) and “salary scale” (salary schedule, wage scale, career lattice) in order to find what I was looking for. In addition to trying different combinations of words, I also tried reordering, moving the name of the state to either the front or back of the search terms, or the keywords “salary scale” before “early childhood” or after.

Despite the fact that each of the states and their efforts to raise wages for the EC workforce differ in scale and scope as well as implementation, together they reflect the idea that equitable compensation is key to stabilizing the early childhood workforce. From a feminist economics perspective (Folbre, 1982), salary scales make care labor visible by creating roles, responsibilities, and assigning value (through compensation). From a bioecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), they

represent the idea that exosystem intervention (state-level actions like developing and implementing salary scales for the EC workforce) will influence workforce stability over time.

Question 3: States that Built Policy

Findings

We can see evidence of these policies to improve compensation from a number of different sources. First, from the CSCCE Table 3.1, we see

- One state/district (District of Columbia) that is “Making Headway” per the Workforce Index Table 3.1 (CSCCE, 2024).
- Fifteen states that are “Edging Forward,” including Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia, per the Workforce Index Table 3.1 (CSCCE, 2024).

Next, from the NCSL Early Childhood Legislative Policy Database (NCSL, 2025), we can see

- Sixteen states/districts with 34 policy wins or policies enacted (in Teachers & Workforce): Arkansas, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Tennessee.
- Twelve states with 25 policy losses or policies failed (in Teachers & Workforce): Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, and West Virginia.

From the CCAA site, specifically the ECE Ballot Measures 2020-2024 and States Funding Workforce Support, we see:

- Twenty-four states are making progress: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.

Lastly, from the AES site and their 50-State Early Childhood Policy Progress and Landscape Report (AES, 2024), we can see:

- Seventeen states/districts that have made policy progress: Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Dakota (though vetoed by the governor), Tennessee, and Washington.
- Twenty-six States/Districts with Dedicated Funding Streams for Early Childhood Education: District of Columbia, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, and Washington.

Interpretations

What stood out to me was how many states across the country, in all regions-the South, the Midwest, the Northeast, and the West- are active in building policy (both policies that are enacted and those which fail). Many of the same states appear across multiple data sources (CSCCE, 2025; CCAA, 2025; NCSL, 2025; AES, 2025), which, to

me, signals sustained attention to improving compensation. At the same time, the overlap between policy wins and policy losses shows how contested this space is. States like AR, ME, and MD appear on both lists-policy wins and policy losses-underscoring that progress is often incremental and uneven, a bit like the old adage, one step forward/two steps back.

All these bills drafted around wages, benefits, and workforce supports suggest growing recognition that the early childhood workforce is essential to the broader child care system, and stabilizing the EC workforce is a priority. These ideas can be seen as directly influencing the Macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In the end, again, it is exciting to see so much policy movement related to improving compensation (wages and health care benefits) as well as education (scholarships) for the early childhood workforce. Even those policy losses can be seen as setting the stage for the next policy win.

Question 4: States That Made Progress Implementing a Salary Scale

Findings

- Twenty-four states showed evidence of developing salary scales, but 22 states had published versions of their salary scales complete with positions and wages:
Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.
- Seven states had salary scales with a point of interest for me (mention of living wages, pay parity with public K teachers, accounting for regional differences):

Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington.

- Three states responded to my request for an interview: Illinois, Michigan, and North Carolina.
- Two states had the ability to participate in an interview within the data collection window: Michigan and North Carolina.
- The seven states I requested to interview all had fully developed salary scales that were similar in some ways.
 - Seven of the seven states (IL, MI, MN, NC, NM, RI, WA) mentioned living wages in their wage determination.
 - Seven of the seven states (IL, MI, MN, NC, NM, RI, WA) link wages to educational attainment/credentials, recognizing that experience and skill development should be financially acknowledged.
 - One state (NM) offers competency-based credit for prior learning.
 - Seven of the seven states (IL, MI, MN, NC, NM, RI, and WA) prioritize a higher starting salary for lead roles.
- In terms of differences, some scales, like MN, are more detailed across multiple competency levels and years of experience than others.
 - Five of the seven (IL, MI, MN, NM, WA) salary scales adjust for regional cost of living, but others do not.
 - Four of the seven states (MN, NM, RI, and WA) have salary scales that give adjustments for years of experience, using step-based structures to reward professional growth.

- Three of the seven states (IL, MI, NC) salary scales also include parity with K-12 teachers somewhere in their wage determination.
- One of the seven (RI) salary scales is tied to the State Median Income.

Interpretations

What stood out to me was how many states are actively thinking about salary scales for the early childhood workforce, even if they are at very different stages of development. Watching the number of states with some evidence of salary scale development decrease to states that have published fully developed scales is a clear signal of how complex this work really is and how much time it takes to move forward.

With regards to the actual salary scales themselves, I was thrilled to see seven states mention living wages or account for regional differences in their wage determination—a clear sign of understanding the current economic reality for the EC workforce, and most of those mentions of living wage came with an understanding that pay parity with public K teachers is the goal (with an acknowledgement of the importance of extending benefits). It was also interesting to see how equity and access were approached by different states. Offering credit for prior knowledge and recognizing both education or demonstration of competencies are steps to ensuring that we have a skilled EC workforce, and that we are using a multitude of ways to measure qualifications for the work.

Question 5: How Those States Were Successful

For the last research question, I offer a brief description of how states were successful in developing a salary scale for the EC workforce, organized by the four attributes of success identified through my early salary scale research (Casale & Noel,

2021; CCSA, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022). Key takeaways for states considering this work are also presented.

Stakeholder Involvement

MI and NC both made progress in developing a salary scale for the EC workforce by intentionally involving stakeholders at multiple levels of the system. Both states intentionally invited child care providers and families to be a part of the process. This finding aligns directly with both feminist economics, which centers lived experience and relational labor (Waring, 1988; Folbre, 2001), and Bronfenbrenner’s emphasis on interconnected systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). MI and NC shared the following points during interviews:

- Families need to be at the table, and their voices need to be heard.
- Families need training to understand how the voices can be used for systems-level change, not just individual problem-solving.
- Providers need to be at the table, and their voice needs to be heard when discussions focus on the business of child care, not just pedagogy or quality.
- Providers need training to understand what data they need to collect and store, and how those data will be used by states to inform funding and policy decisions.
- Speaking with a unified voice is powerful; fragmented advocacy weakens the ask.
- Having data to back up the ask is not only strategic, it is responsible.

Key Takeaways on Stakeholder Involvement. MI and NC both aligned stakeholders around a shared vision, grounded their work in data, and leveraged available resources to make progress. For example, in MI, when it came to stakeholder involvement in developing the “Balancing the Scales” report (Andrews, 2023), there

were three child care directors and four parent leaders who were a part of that group. In NC, there were child care providers and families at the table when the scale was being developed, and after the scale was developed, NC reported gathering additional feedback from child care providers and families to see how the scale would work. Despite the fact that both MI and NC could have included better representation of child care providers (not only directors, but all early educators from a variety of settings), as well as better representation of families across different regions of the states, these findings reinforce the idea that early childhood educators and families are not passive recipients of policy, but essential participants in shaping the system that affects their work and lives.

MI and NC have been able to find success with stakeholder involvement by:

- Including stakeholders from all parts of the early childhood system, who came together, and
- Determined the mission, vision, and values of the group, so they could
- Speak in a unified voice, and
- Gathered data for decision making, which ensures advocacy is informed.

Further Thoughts on Stakeholder Involvement. Despite the progress we have made regarding stakeholder involvement, we could be doing it better. It is time for advocates of systems change to empower child care providers of all types to participate in every advocacy group if not lead them, and not just directors-which tends to be the default. This empowerment would include training and resources as well as funding to pay child care providers (and their substitutes) for their time while away from the child to teacher ratio of their classrooms. Additionally, it is time to embed families of varying

composition and demographics into each of the conversations, so all regions of the states are represented when talking about systems-level change in early childhood.

Wage Determination

MI answered the question about how wages are determined in two parts: how current child care wages are determined, and then how the wages in the “Balancing the Scales” report (Andrews, 2023) were calculated. So, first, current child care wages in Michigan are calculated in one of two ways. For 10% of providers, they respond to a market rate survey, put out by the state-which asks a series of questions regarding what they currently charge families for care-which sets their reimbursement rate. For the other 90% of child care providers, their wages are determined by the rates they choose to charge families. For the Balancing the Scales report (Andrews, 2023), when discussing how the advocacy group developed the proposed salary scale in MI, they were intentional about including providers in the decision regarding wage determination. Not only were there providers at the table, but the Task Force for Equitable Educator Compensation (Andrews, 2023) also surveyed providers to understand the true cost of the care they provide. The living wage for the state was also a factor.

NC answered the question about how wages on the scale were determined by saying that when the scale was first built, the MIT living wage calculator was used. It was the minimum on the scale. The maximum on the scale was parity with entry-level K-12 teachers. Since it was built, the cost of living has increased beyond what entry-level K-12 teachers are earning, and the scale now needs to be revised.

Key Takeaways on Wage Determination. MI and NC have been able to find success with wage determination by:

- Utilizing a combination of living wage calculations and parity with K-12 teachers.
- Including providers in the decision-making process (to ensure true cost), and
- Providing periodic review (to ensure salary scales are aligned with cost-of-living adjustments).

Further Thoughts on Wage Determination. Working toward parity with K-12 public teachers is a step in the right direction, but oftentimes K-12 teachers are also underpaid. States also need to examine the living wage in each specific area, as well as annual cost-of-living adjustments, and take that into account when determining wages for all educators.

Funding

For both MI and NC, funding emerged as both a great force behind progress and also the largest barrier. This finding is consistent with Marxian critiques of labor valuation and also the bioecological understandings of how exosystem-level decisions shape lived experience, meaning the system is struggling to provide better wages, because the system itself has been underfunded, mainly due to the fact that those who appropriate funding are still not seeing its value (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Folbre, 1982). Between both states, the following themes emerged:

- Funding for early work, and certainly sustained work, is critical.
- Only a handful of states have dedicated funding streams; all states need them.
- Private and public dollars can (and must) work together to fund systems sustainably.
- Funding needs to be steady, not temporary dollars that systems have to lobby for year after year, or compete with other agencies across the state. Lobbying is

exhausting, and the uncertainty it creates undermines progress. Additionally, lobbying is costly, and the money (and time) spent on lobbying would better serve the system if it were directly invested.

Key Takeaways on Funding. Funding is generally recognized as necessary for planning and implementing any initiative or innovation, and certainly for any system-wide change. Both MI and NC shared successes with (small) funding: the ability to offer TEACH scholarships, wage initiatives (WAGES in NC, and the Early Childhood Educator Wage Initiative in MI), and Tri-Share (in both MI and NC). Both states also shared challenges with funding, namely the fact that both MI and NC are seeking a dedicated funding stream, or a predictable series of funding streams, that would fund the systems change they aim to make.

MI and NC have been able to find success with funding by:

- Braiding multiple funding streams to test innovations, while
- Working to build a dedicated funding source. And sometimes,
- Combining private and public dollars. Also,
- Identifying consistent funding sources that reduce the burden on stakeholders to repeatedly lobby.

Further Thoughts on Funding. With full funding for wage initiatives not realized, states often pilot wage initiatives that could potentially be scaled. We tend to view these pilots as progress, and they are, but we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that there is also the potential for harm. Short-lived wage increases create a temporary fix, but without infrastructure to make them permanent, child care programs take a risk in participating. Members of the early childhood workforce also face real

consequences to wage increases such as losing their eligibility for the social support subsidies many rely upon.

Policy

Policy is the mechanism through which values become practice. MI and NC both have made progress in embedding compensation goals into policy. Both shared in their interviews that they have made policy advancements to ensure some of the following, namely TEACH scholarships to support educational attainment, WAGES (in NC), and the Early Childhood Educator Wage Initiative (in MI), to support improving compensation. In their interview, MI also reported a new child care benefits program called Nurture Benefits that the state is piloting.

Additionally, in their interviews, both MI and NC shared that they have made policy advancements related to true-cost fiscal modeling, to ensure there is funding for cost-reducing initiatives (such as Tri-Share-which operates in both MI and NC) that allow child care providers to charge the true cost, ensure reimbursement rates are set at true cost, not market rate, and ensure that all working families that need a child care subsidy/scholarship have access.

Key Takeaways on Policy. These policy conclusions reflect a broader shift away from treating child care as a private family responsibility and toward a recognition of child care as essential public infrastructure. Salary scales can be an extremely beneficial tool for policymakers once they make the commitment to improve compensation for the EC workforce (Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; Portillo, 2022). MI and NC have both found success in advancing policy by:

- Drafting bills that increase funding allocations for EC workforce initiatives, like wage increases and scholarships for educational pursuits, as well as access to benefits like health care and retirement, and before that
- Drafting bills that build Early Childhood Departments within state governments with their own funding, and even before that
- Assembling working groups to address compensation for the EC workforce.

Further Thoughts on Policy. Despite the progress that has been made, which has been a colossal undertaking on behalf of advocates of early childhood, there is still more work to be done by the policymakers themselves. It is time for those who are actively pushing against progress to change course and instead, pave the way for the change our early childhood education system needs. In lock step, we advocates need to raise our bar. Yes, we will celebrate small wins, but we will not settle for anything less than big systems-level change.

Connecting Findings Back to Theories

Now that I have discussed the findings and shared my interpretations, I want to connect these back to the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research: Feminist Economics Theory, Marxian Theory of Economics, and Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory.

First, the purpose of selecting Feminist Economics Theory was that it challenges traditional economic ideas by focusing on how care work (like teaching young children) is undervalued because it is mostly done by women (Waring, 1988; Folbre, 2001). The findings were that caregivers are an essential part of shaping the system they work within, and my research showed that states that had made progress implementing a salary

scale for the EC workforce had, in fact, included them in decision-making. This process supports the way that Feminist Economics Theorists would approach the issue, by involving those most affected by it. The connection, then, is that we see an important redistribution of power within the system.

Next, the purpose of selecting the Marxian Theory of Economics was that it informs Feminist Economics Theory by defining such terms as Labor Value and Exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1848). The findings showed a clear recognition that the EC workforce has been exploited since the beginning and so have all other caregivers. This process provides evidence for the ways that Marxian Economics functions, in order for those at the top of the chain to continue earning at a high rate, those at the bottom of the chain (earning a low rate) must go to work, and they must have child care (for which they pay an even lower rate) to do so. The connection here is two-fold: there is the importance of the role that the EC workforce plays in the care and education of young children, but also the role it plays in economic development. People cannot go to work unless they have care for their children.

Last, the purpose of selecting Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) was that it demonstrates the interconnectedness of society, like the early childhood education system operating within multiple interacting environments. The findings showed the enormity of the work that has been done to shape societal beliefs needed for system reform in the macrosystem, and not just by advocating for early childhood education to be valued, but also those providing the essential care and education to be valued as well. Here we see the ideologies of feminism and progressivism at work. The findings also showed the ideologies that

continue to prevent compensation reform, including conservatism, sexism, racism, and capitalism. This influence of one system on another is what Bronfenbrenner was talking about in terms of the interconnectedness. The chronosystem is also at work here as we can see both the Covid-19 pandemic as a catalyst for change, and the historical ideas of patriarchy and traditional construction of the family, including responsibilities of child rearing, at work even today. The connection here is the influence those in the macrosystem have to affect change in the exosystem, which directly affects the EC workforce in the microsystem, over time in the chronosystem.

For each theoretical perspective, we can see the connections between the initial ideas for its selection and the findings of the study. The connections are important reminders, as researchers consider future work. First, the EC workforce must have a drivers seat to the change they want to see in the system. In addition to the value ECE has in raising our next generation, society needs to recognize the value of the early childhood education system as it related to broader economic development. The sphere of influence that society has to apply pressure to policymakers should not be underestimated.

Limitations of the Research

There were three main limitations of this research, the first of which was the fact that I was only able to interview two states. While these interviews yielded rich data, I did miss capturing the experiences of other states that have developed salary scales for the early childhood workforce. This limitation was largely shaped by a tight timeline, which did not leave space for multiple waves of recruitment efforts, thus limiting response rates from requests for interviews. In future efforts, I would also include all the states that had developed salary scales, not just those with points of interest.

Next, I was not able to interview any of the states that had implemented the salary scale they developed, piloted, and studied (as seen in Table 4.17). MI was in the studied phase, and NC was in the piloted phase, but neither had yet implemented the salary scale across their respective states. Interviewing a stakeholder from a state that had implemented its salary scale state-wide would have provided me with a better understanding of how the developed salary scale functioned across diverse environments, and the modifications the state had made, if any, after its pilot phase.

Lastly, in terms of the limitations, the existing data that I used from the CSCCE, NAEYC, CCAA, AES, and the NCSL all presented data from different years. The CSCCE Workforce Index from 2024 uses the survey data from two different sources: the National Survey of Early Care and Education, which is published every two years (last in 2019), and the American Community Survey, which is published annually (last in 2024). NAEYC publishes its workforce surveys annually (last in 2025), the most recent of which is called *An Unsustainable Status Quo-We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System*. CCAA includes data in the ECE Policy Database from 2019 to the present day. The AES published its State Policy Landscape Profiles in 2024, while the NCSL published ECE policies from 2019 to the present day. As stated in my Methods section, I acknowledge that the data I analyzed from different sources are from different years. However, by using the same process of comparison for each state, I was able to address the different dates-meaning the inequality of dates was present for all the states as the same process of comparison was used for all states. Also related to the data, it was difficult to compare data from pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, as there was an influx of ARPA funded initiatives during the pandemic to bolster wages for the EC workforce, as

well as a wide variance in the ways that states spent down those funds, and the timeframe in which they completed their spending.

Directions for Future Research

I have three ideas for future research, outlined here.

1. After my study was written, I wished I had asked my research questions in a different order and started with those states that had developed salary scales. Then I could have looked at funding and policy only related to salary scale development and implementation. For this study, my research questions would be:
 - Which states have developed salary scales for the EC workforce?
 - Have the scales been piloted, studied, and/or implemented?
 - Have policies been introduced to support the implementation of the scales?
 - Has funding been secured to support the implementation of the scales?
2. While I was able to understand the process of developing and piloting a salary scale for the EC workforce from a state-level stakeholder, it would be fascinating to hear about the pilot from the perspective of the EC workforce who were a part of the pilot, namely, a member of the EC workforce from the pilot sites in MI and NC. For this study, my research questions would be:
 - How did pilot participants feel about their wages before the pilot?
 - How did pilot participants feel about their wages during the pilot?
 - What impact did improved wages have on pilot participants?
 - What do pilot participants recommend for implementation?

3. It would be interesting to interview more states from each of the different points of progress, from developing a salary scale for the EC workforce to implementing a salary scale for the EC workforce: Developed, Piloted, Studied, and Implemented. For this study, my research questions would be:
- For those who have piloted, what was the greatest force to move your state from Developed to Piloted? Greatest challenge?
 - For those who have studied, what was the greatest force to move your state from Piloted to Studied? Greatest challenge?
 - For those who have implemented, what was the greatest force to move your state from Studied to Implemented? Greatest challenge?

Conclusions and Recommendations

In Chapter 4, I shared the three patterns that emerged as a result of the transversal comparison. I will use these three patterns to make three recommendations to states that are working to develop or pilot salary scales for the EC workforce. These patterns emerged after coding the interview transcripts from interviews with MI and NC. The patterns were:

First, states that invest in data collection are better positioned to drive decision-making and policy development. Both MI and NC used workforce studies, cost-of-care analyses, and wage modeling to make the case for compensation reform. Data served as an internal planning tool, but also a key set of points to use in advocacy when engaging legislators, funders, and the public. In both cases, having those concrete numbers played a part in solution building. Both MI and NC talked about the importance of data in making decisions and advocating for funding. Recommendation: States should invest in

strong data collection to guide decisions and make a clear case for funding. Having solid numbers helps leaders plan smarter policies and better advocate for compensation improvements.

Second, states that speak with a unified voice are more likely to be heard. In both cases, success was attributed to alignment amongst stakeholders-providers, advocates, state agencies, and business leaders. Both MI and NC emphasized the importance of shared mission, vision, and messaging, and talked about identifying common goals to coordinate advocacy. This unity that was built in both states served to strengthen their credibility and increase their influence, both in funding and policy conversations.

Recommendation: States should prioritize building alignment across all stakeholders. A shared mission and clear, consistent messaging strengthen credibility and increase influence in funding and policy decisions.

Third, even states with limited funding can move the work forward when used strategically; both MI and NC have proved that to be true. Neither state has secured the level of funding needed to fully implement a salary scale anchored in living wages for the EC workforce. But both have demonstrated that smaller, targeted investments like pilot programs, wage supplements, scholarships, and benefit initiatives can stabilize parts of the workforce and build momentum for systemic change. These steps benefit some early educators directly, but more broadly, provide evidence that larger investments are warranted. Recommendation: States should use available funding strategically to move the work forward. Even without full funding for comprehensive wage reform, targeted investments can stabilize the workforce, demonstrate impact, and build the case for larger, long-term investments.

Behind these recommendations for compensation reform is a call for holistic support for the EC workforce. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) has been at the forefront of the compensation movement since its inception. Their Model Work Standards, which highlight “rights, raises, and respect for the early care and education workforce,” begin with three declarations, which serve as fitting reminders to close this paper. We must ensure/understand/support (CSCCE & AFTEF, 2019, p. 1):

- The right of educators of young children to work under conditions that support their economic, physical, and socioemotional well-being;
- The importance of educators of young children to receive appropriate supports from their workplace and from the community in which they work in order to meet the expectations of providing high-quality early learning experiences; and
- The need for educators of young children to be active participants in decision-making that affects their work lives.

If this research contributes anything to the field, I hope that it is further affirmation that these declarations are not aspirational; they are necessary.

Returning to the vignette presented in the Preface of this dissertation, it was not an anomaly; it was representative of the economic realities the EC workforce faces. Early educators continue to show up every day, despite wages that do not reflect their skills, responsibilities, or importance.

In one of the round table testimonies given to the Early Childhood Educator Compensation Task Force (ECECTF, 2022) in the District of Columbia, early childhood educator Kelly Sloan made the case for improving compensation by stating, “We, early childhood educators, deserve to worry less and live more. A compensation increase will

help me position my children and family for life success” (ECECTF, 2022, Roundtable Testimonies). The question is not whether they deserve better; it is whether we are willing to build systems that reflect that truth.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letters

Initial Approval Letter



Date: October 14, 2025

Study #: IRB-FY2026-82

Study Title: A Living Wage Is a Floor, Not a Ceiling: Improving Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce Using Living Wage Salary Scales

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: Exempt

Research Team:

Jennifer Harris

Tomoko Wakabayashi

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to be Exempt, with the following categories:

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation;

Modification Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board

Date: November 21, 2025

Study #: IRB-FY2026-82

Study Title: A Living Wage Is a Floor, Not a Ceiling: Improving Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce Using Living Wage Salary Scales

Submission Type: Modification

IRB Decision: Exempt

Research Team:

Jennifer Harris

Tomoko Wakabayashi

The IRB has reviewed the Modification submission related to the above referenced study and determined that the changes listed below do not affect the exemption status of the study. The Modification submission is Approved and the study remains Exempt per federal regulations.

The approved modifications are the following:

- Revise the current research strategy of keeping identifiable data to de-identify the data with the hope that that change will encourage more people to participate in the study. The interview recordings will be deleted after the transcription is complete.
- Based on the above change, the recruitment email, consent form and application will be revised to indicate that data from the research will be deidentified.
- In the consent form a sentence is included to clarify that participants will be referred to as "a state-level stakeholder from (NAME OF THE STATE)" and that the recordings will be deleted after the transcription is complete.

This submission includes the following approved documents:

- Recruitment Email
- Date-Stamped Consent Form V 11/21/2025

APPENDIX B

IRB Approved Email Message

November 20, 2025

Hello Stakeholder,

My name is Jen Harris, and I am a PhD candidate in the Early Childhood Education Program within the Department of Human Development and Child Studies at Oakland University, where I am just starting my dissertation on improving compensation for the early childhood workforce. My dissertation chair is Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi, Early Childhood Professor and Department Chair.

I am writing today in hopes that you will consider participating in my research project. Your participation is an interview, which should last approximately one hour, where I'll ask questions to better understand your experience as a stakeholder at the state level, and to get your perspective on systemically improving compensation for the early childhood workforce. I will be recording the interview after you offer your consent, and then transcribing it. The information you provide will be published in my dissertation, but your name, role, and organization will not. The interviews will be deidentified.

I have attached a consent form for review. It explains in greater detail the particulars of the study. We'll review the consent form during the first few minutes of the interview, and then I will ask for your verbal consent. I have also attached the list of interview questions, so you can prepare. If you are unable to commit to a Zoom interview, I hope you will consider submitting your responses via email.

I aim to have all interviews completed as soon as possible, and I can make myself available almost any day of the week in order to accommodate your busy schedule. Please respond at your earliest convenience.

I am grateful for your consideration!

Warmly,

Jen

Jen Harris, PhD Candidate in Early Childhood Education
Department of Human Development and Child Studies, Oakland University
(jharris4@oakland.edu)

Tomoko Wakabayashi, EdD, Professor, Department Chair, and Dissertation Chair
Department of Human Development and Child Studies, Oakland University
(twakabayashi@oakland.edu)

APPENDIX C

IRB Approved Research Participants Consent Form

Study Title

A Living Wage is a Floor, Not a Ceiling: Improving Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce Using Living Wage Salary Scales

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study on early childhood (EC) workforce compensation in your state, done by Jen Harris, PhD Candidate, under the direction of Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi, EdD, Professor and Department Chair of Early Childhood Education, Department of Human Development & Child Studies at Oakland University.

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You can choose to stop your participation at any time or skip any part of the study if you are not comfortable. Your decision will not affect your present or future relationship with Oakland University, the researchers, or the Department of Human Development and Child Studies.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this interview is to better understand your experience as a stakeholder at the state level and to get your perspective on systematically improving compensation for the EC workforce. The purpose of my dissertation is to examine the use of salary scales anchored in living wages to improve compensation systematically. My aim through this research is to inspire our field (and others) to consider the cost of living for the workforce as they set wages. Again, a living wage is the bare minimum anyone should be earning.

Who can participate in this study?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a stakeholder in a state that has recently made progress in raising wages for the early childhood workforce.

What will I have to do?

You will be asked to participate in a video/audio-recorded interview. During the interview, which will be conducted over Zoom, you will be guided through a set of questions. You will be asked to share your thoughts and experiences related to your position within the state, and answer questions regarding initiatives to improve compensation for the EC workforce, salary scales, wage determination, stakeholder involvement, funding for wage initiatives, and policy efforts and/or changes. If an interview is not possible, you will also be able to submit your answers via email. The questions will consist of your experiences improving compensation for the EC workforce.

Your responses to the questions will be anonymous, and your name and state organization will be deidentified. You will simply be referred to as “a state-level

stakeholder from NAME OF STATE.” The interview will be recorded using Zoom (audio/video), and recordings will be transcribed for analysis, or your interview will be conducted over email. You have the right to participate, say no, or withdraw from participation in the research. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop, and you will not be criticized. Your decision will not affect your present or future relationship with Oakland University, the researcher, her advisor, or the department.

Where will this study take place?

This study will take place online via Zoom, at a time and place that you choose.

How long will I be in the study?

The interview, regarding EC workforce compensation in your state, should last approximately one hour.

Are there any risks to me?

For this study, the potential risks are minimal. The most likely risks of participating in this study are emotional risks associated with sharing personal experiences. The video/audio recording of this interview will be stored in a secure location, with access restricted to researchers who have been approved. Once the recordings have been transcribed for data analysis, the recordings will be deleted, and the data will be deidentified.

Are there any benefits to me?

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are a space to reflect on your role within the field of early childhood education (either present or past) and how you have impacted the EC workforce in your state with your compensation initiatives. Your participation in this study may inform decision-making and investment in the early childhood education system in Michigan and elsewhere.

Will I receive anything for participating?

You will not receive anything for participating in this study.

Who can see my information?

Your research records may be shared and reviewed by the following groups:

- Representative of the Oakland University Institutional Review Board, whose job is to protect people who are in research studies, and/or other regulatory compliance staff, whose job is to facilitate research projects and ensure compliance with the university, state, and federal regulations
- Regulatory authorities who oversee research (Office for Human Research Protections, or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies).

Who do I contact if I have questions about this study?

Jen Harris, PhD Candidate, at jharris4@oakland.edu, or Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi, the faculty advisor for this study, at twakabayashi@oakland.edu.

For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human subject research, you may contact the Oakland University Institutional Review Board at 248-370-4898.

Signature

I agree to participate in this research study.

Print Name of Participant

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

IRB Approved Interview Protocol

Study Title:

A Living Wage is a Floor, Not a Ceiling: Improving Compensation for the Early Childhood Workforce Using Living Wage Salary Scales

Program, Department, and Institution:

Early Childhood Education PhD Program, Department of Human Development and Child Studies, Oakland University

Contact Information:

Jen Harris, PhD Candidate at Oakland University
(jharris4@oakland.edu)

Tomoko Wakabayashi, EdD, Faculty and Dissertation Chair at Oakland University
(twakabayashi@oakland.edu)

Introduction:

Thank you for meeting with me today. To start, I'd like to introduce myself and give you some background information about this research project.

My name is Jen Harris, and I am a PhD candidate in the Early Childhood Education Program within the Department of Human Development and Child Studies at Oakland University. My research interests include EC Funding Mechanisms, True-Cost Fiscal Modeling, EC Business Models, and Compensation. My dissertation chair is Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi, Early Childhood Program Chair and Professor.

Purpose:

The purpose of this interview is to better understand your experience as a stakeholder at the state level and to get your perspective on systematically improving compensation for the Early Childhood workforce.

I am going to conduct a semi-structured interview with a few closed-ended questions and some open-ended ones. All in all, the interview should take just under 60 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Speak as much or as little to each question as you like, knowing I may ask clarifying questions or offer further prompts. I will be recording the interview, but only after all of your preliminary questions have been addressed and you have given your consent. Do you have any questions about the interview or the consent form I mailed? Do you offer your consent?

(ONCE THE INTERVIEWEE GIVES CONSENT, START ZOOM RECORDING)

Repeat.

I will be recording the interview, but only after all of your preliminary questions have been addressed and you have given your consent. Do you have any questions about the interview or the consent form I mailed? Do you offer your consent?

(PROCEED WITH QUESTIONS)

Questions (either to ask participants during the interview or via email):

1. With what gender do you identify?
2. What is your current title?
3. Please describe your current role.
4. How long have you worked in this role?
5. Please describe your experience in early childhood education.
6. How did the idea of improving compensation for the EC workforce come about in your state?
7. How were the decisions made about how much to pay the EC workforce?
8. Who was involved in making those decisions? Were the EC workforce themselves involved?
9. Was there short-term funding for the early work around improving compensation?
10. Do you have a long-term funding strategy for implementing the compensation improvement? If so, please describe it.
11. What has been the greatest force behind the headway your state has been able to make? And the bookend question: what has been the greatest challenge?
12. What role has stakeholder involvement played in your success? And now, on a scale of 1-10, 1=not important at all, 10=the most important, what role has stakeholder involvement played in your success?
13. What role has identified funding to sustain improved compensation played? And now, on a scale of 1-10, 1=not important at all, 10=the most important, what role has identified funding to sustain improved compensation played in your success?
14. What role have policy changes played? And now, on a scale of 1-10, 1=not important at all, 10=the most important, what role have policy changes played in your success?
15. Lastly, for other states that are just starting this work, what advice would you give?

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate it. I'll turn off the recording now.

(STOP RECORDING)

If you have any additional thoughts, please send them along via email. You have my contact information. Thank you again for your time!

APPENDIX E

Data Analysis: Deductive Sheet

	NC	MI
1. Stakeholder Involvement (Composition)	Higher ed Smart Start Division of Child Development DPI Voice of child care providers Families Rural areas, urban areas Feedback Educate families Educate providers	Early childhood advocates Providers started to feel like they had a voice Cohesive advocacy group Think Babies and Pritzker Initiative funding to assemble Providers included if they participate in survey Providers on the committee Talked to providers outside committee State increased opportunities...to hear feedback
2. Wage Determination (Construction)	MIT's living wage Parity with public school teachers Model Salary Scale was almost inverted Not updated Have not been able to address benefits Alternative rate methodology	Market rate survey, Legislature appropriates funds Providers setting their own rates, Charging what they think families can afford -Not necessarily the cost of care Balancing the Scales report Cost of care analysis, Alternate methodology Hard to get that data
3. Funding (Short-term planning, Long-term action)	A little bit of seed money Relief dollars Stabilization grants No direct revenue stream Multi-pronged Increase subsidy reimbursement rate \$1.3 billion price tag Blend and braid dollars Endowment Tri-Share	\$1.4 billion childcare emergency assistance -bonuses, stabilization grants PDG funding- pilot in two locations, actual check bonuses \$30 million appropriation, \$16 million equals \$300 bonus/month for 20 months, public-private funding model Match dollar for dollar Direct to the person

	NC	MI
	Corporate Income Tax	Federal grant award is only so much No dedicated funding stream or Income tax - like casino money
4. Policy Change (either on the floor, or passed)	Leadership at the governor's level Smart Start Initiative Had to adopt a salary scale Very conservative legislature Not a public good Deregulation Increase pipeline by 8,000 Credit for experience Link to TEACH	Prospective payments New rule set from 2024 Federal regulatory change (CCDBG 2024) Coordinated effort Creation of MiLEAP, Bringing together early childhood and higher education Pre-K for all Common message for advocating
5. Other Factors (Key partnerships, state party, etc.)	1989 workforce study: 1) undereducated, 2) very low-paid, 3) high turnover Essential workers Having the data Unified mission Shared vision Have a champion Takes a lot of time - 25 years	Ongoing issue for years Shift during the pandemic-hard time staying in the field Exposure during the pandemic lit a fire Limited resources competing...for general fund dollars Can't get the funding to continue...have to stop Learn from other states

APPENDIX F

Data Analysis: Inductive Sheet

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
1. How did the idea of improving compensation for the EC workforce come about in your state?	Codes	1989 workforce study Undereducated Very low-paid High turnover Essential workers TEACH scholarship: a debt-free way to send people to school Stipends built within-bonus-WAGES Salary Supplement 6-month stipends + retention rate...13% Model salary scale-minimum set a living wage-maximum set at parity with public school teachers Stabilization grants-had to adopt a salary scale Tri-share model Alternative rate methodology Parent pay...can't pay enough-ratios are so low	Ongoing issue for years Early childhood advocates Providers started to feel like they had a voice Shift during the pandemic Heard providers saying hard time staying in the field Connected to supply building Cohesive group-with funding from Think Babies and Pritzker Initiative working towards recognitions of: Actual cost of care Prospective payments Grants and contracts for infants and toddlers Making progress but with technology changes-\$3.5 million...not enough money
	Categories	Data identified workforce problems, Compensation is linked to education, Focused on retention incentives, Salary scale development, Leveraged (ARPA) dollars to test scale,	Longstanding advocacy group, Pandemic as catalyst, Provider voice emerged during pandemic, Organized coalition-building has been successful, Cost-of-care framing

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
		Piloting public-private cost sharing (Tri-Share) Ultimately limited by funding	Federal regulatory change (CCDBG 2024), Implementation barriers identified are technology and funding
	Themes	Data-driven Reform, Multi-Strategy Approach, Pilot/Proof of Concept to Set Stage for Change	Pandemic-Driven Momentum, Organized Advocacy is Critical, Data (True-Cost Fiscal Modeling) Drives Progress
2. How were the decisions made about how much to pay the EC workforce?	Codes	Bottom of scale-MIT's living wage and top level-parity with public school not updated-scale was almost inverted-cost of living is higher than parity have not been able to address benefits-working on solution	10%-market rate survey, cost of care analysis, every 3 years, scholarship is 10% of our system, legislature appropriates funding 90%-providers setting their own rates-charging what they think families can afford-not necessarily the cost of care Balancing the Scales report used alternate methodology Providers are not good...record keepers-hard to get that data
	Categories	Living wage benchmark, Public school parity benchmark, Scale misalignment over time, Benefits gap	Market rate vs. cost-of-care methods, Scholarship vs. private-pay divide, Legislative appropriation dependency Underpricing due to family affordability Data capacity limitations Methodological innovation challenges

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
	Themes	Equity-based wage benchmarking, Sustainability challenges	Fragmented funding system, True cost-based compensation reform
3. Who was involved in making those decisions? Were the EC workforce themselves involved?	Codes	Higher Ed Smart Start Child Care Resource and Referral Division of Child Development DPI Voice of child care providers Families Surveyed providers in rural areas & urban areas-to get feedback Feedback-they didn't have the funds to implement	10%-included if they participate in survey 90%-24 providers participated in-depth case study Providers on the committee Talked to providers outside committee Committee: ECIC, MLPP, MC, MiAEYC
	Categories	Cross-sector collaboration Workforce & family voice Iterative feedback process Financial feasibility barriers	Provider participation through research Advisory committee involvement Consultative data collection
	Themes	Inclusive collaborative governance, Feedback was that providers were constrained by resources	Stakeholder inclusion is critical, It occurs primarily through structured consultation
4. Was there short-term funding for the early work around improving compensation?	Codes	Little bit of seed money-covered meeting costs Nothing...directly to providers	\$1.4 billion childcare emergency assistance-bonuses, stabilization grants

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
		Relief dollars-stabilization grants-idea was that providers had to have some type of salary scale, but also they could qualify without	actual check bonuses-PDG funding-pilot in two locations \$30 million appropriation-WAGES initiative-10 regional childcare coalitions-\$300 bonus/month for 20 months public-private funding model-match dollar for dollar direct to the person-stay at their place of employment, helps them build the case for future investment
	Categories	Limited planning funds, ARPA Funding Helped Test Salary Scale, Incentivized adoption model (sorta)	Federal relief funding surge, Direct workforce bonuses, Pilot Testing Reforms, School Aid Wage Appropriation Allowed Pilot of WAGES, Regional Coalition Implementation-Not Businesses Public-Private Matching Strategy, Retention-Linked Incentive, Pilot/Proof of Concept
	Themes	Short-term funding leveraged for structural change	Short-term relief funds leveraged to pilot scalable compensation models
5. Do you have a long-term funding strategy for implementing the compensation	Codes	No direct revenue stream Multi-pronged approach	WAGES initiative-becoming our long-term strategy public-private funding model

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
improvement? If so, please describe it.		Increase subsidy reimbursement rate to increase compensation Alternative market rate study-compensation reform comes with a \$1.3 billion price tag True cost of care Blend and braid dollars Starting an endowment Launching Tri-share Corporate income tax-0% by 2030-\$5.6 billion economic dollars-if we can direct to ECE-economic vitality recognizing the importance of business investment	advocates working on dedicated funding stream-income tax-casino money piloting innovative opportunities not the voice that makes that argument, but the data that makes the case
	Categories	Absence of dedicated funding, Cost-of-care reform, Braided funding strategy, Business engagement, Economic argument framing	Hybrid public-private sustainability model, Dedicated revenue advocacy (external groups), Innovation to demonstrate viability
	Themes	Pursuing diversified funding, and a sustainability model	Long-term sustainability pursued through hybrid financing and external advocacy
6. What has been the greatest force behind the headway your state has been able to make? And the bookend question: what has been the	Codes	Greatest force: Having the data Unified vision Leadership at the governor's level Smart Start Initiative Blended state dollars	Greatest force: Exposure during the pandemic-not deemed essential workers-lit a fire Coordinated effort of advocacy group Creation of MiLEAP-bringing together early

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
greatest challenge?		Greatest challenge: Very conservative legislature Child care seen as responsibility of families-not a public good Doesn't apply to everyone-struggle when businesses engage	childhood and higher education Pre-K for All Package of initiatives: TEACH, WAGES, Nurture Benefits Greatest challenge: Funding-federal grant award is only so much-competing for general fund dollars Money-limited resources
	Categories	Evidence-based advocacy, Executive leadership, Political barriers, Ideological resistance, Limited public-good framing	Public awareness shift, Federal funding constraints, Cross-sector agency alignment, Centralized governance (MiLEAP), Fiscal competition, Pre-K for All momentum, Comprehensive workforce supports
	Themes	Leadership and political context shape reform success	Visibility, coordination, and funding limits shape reform progress
7. What role has stakeholder involvement played in your success?	Codes	Should be 10-but we could have done a much better job Hard to get feedback Hard to educate families and providers to see the bigger picture	10-After pandemic-increased opportunities to hear feedback Everything was super fast moving-keep that (feedback)going State is well connected to feedback
	Categories	Importance of engagement,	Stakeholder engagement is a part of the state, Sustained communication channels

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
		Sees room for improvement when it comes to engagement, Capacity-building need, Systems-level understanding gaps	
	Themes	Stakeholder engagement requires intentional education and alignment	Embedded stakeholder engagement strengthens reform both power and responsiveness
8. What role has identified funding to sustain improved compensation played?	Codes	Absolutely-most important 10-we rank about a 5-not sustained always fight new battles for funding Smart Start dollars decreased investment (in ECE) has decreased since 2001 funding is vitally important to have sustainability plan	Funding is obviously critical-10 For innovation, critical, 10 pandemic funding-try something-can't get the funding to continue-have to stop=negative impact
	Categories	Critical role of sustained funding, Declining investment trends, Instability of revenue	Innovation dependent on funding, Sustainability challenges, Short-term funding=Discontinuity impacts field
	Themes	Sustained funding is essential yet persistently unstable	Sustained funding is essential yet chronically unstable
9. What role have policy changes played?	Codes	Probably 9 Strong advocates Hard to move policy We are seeing it go in the opposite direction-deregulation	9-Common message Everybody's saying the same thing (broad)

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
		Increase pipeline by 8,000-credit for experience-link to TEACH-addressing barriers in higher ed Started to use economic development as a conversation starter	
	Categories	Policy as change lever, Advocacy strength, Regulatory shifts, Workforce pipeline reforms, Policy tied to economic framing	Advocacy alignment & Unified messaging
	Themes	Policy innovation advances workforce reform, Advocacy alignment, Political fluctuation is challenging	Policy change is strengthened by united advocacy and funding strategies
10. Lastly, for other states that are just starting this work, what advice would you give?	Codes	Have a champion-your Governor is so important Shared vision Shared agenda Unique partners-industry and business Families at the table Providers...educated Plan for sustainability Takes a lot of time-keep moving forward	Stakeholder engagement Not making assumptions Cost estimates Data-we talked to X number of people-will impact access and supply Learn from other states-our model...implemented in Iowa-we took elements of it
	Categories	Political champion, Cross-agency alignment, Unconventional partnerships,	Authentic stakeholder, Data-driven budgeting, Clear funding asks, Cross-state learning

Question	CO/CA/TH	NC	MI
		Include authentic stakeholders, Sustainability planning, Long-term persistence/patience	
	Themes	Change requires leadership, alignment, partnerships, sustainability, and patience	Change requires, data-informed decisions,, collaboration,, as well as cross-state learning

APPENDIX G

Technology Usage Recognition Sheet

Dear Readers,

In my dissertation research, I used a number of different technologies, including the following:

Google: Spelling and Grammar Check,

Microsoft: Spelling and Grammar Check,

Grammarly: Spelling and Grammar Check, Dictionary/Thesaurus,

ChatGPT: Spelling and Grammar Check, Searching/Researching,

Dictionary/Thesaurus,

Microsoft CoPilot: Searching/Researching, Dictionary/Thesaurus,

Google Gemini: Searching/Researching, Dictionary/Thesaurus, and

Zoom: Transcription.

I acknowledge that the technologies above were useful tools for my study.

Sincerely,

Jen Harris

APPENDIX H

Evidence of States that Raised Wages

States	Evidence of Raising Wages for the EC Workforce in Percentage (CSCCE-Map, Data from 2022, Published 2024) LINK	Median Wage of the State's EC Workforce (CSCCE-Map, Data from 2022, Published 2024) LINK	Gap Between Average and Living Wage of the State's EC Workforce in Percentage (CSCCE-Appendix Table 2.6, Data from 2022, Published 2024) LINK	Early Educator Pay - Living Below the Federal Poverty Line, 2022 (LINK)
AL	0.1%	\$10.93	26%	16.6%
AK	-5.2%	\$13.08	19%	9.5%
AZ	9.2%	\$12.98	22%	12.0%
AR	-2.9%	\$11.04	23%	17.1%
CA	9.6%	\$15.66	22%	11.8%
CO	11.1%	\$15.06	17%	13.0%
CT	8.4%	\$15.01	10%	12.5%
DE	12.5%	\$13.89	15%	6.9%
(DC)	27.1%	\$18.23	12%	29.0%
FL	1.8%	\$12.02	28%	12.3%
GA	0.8%	\$11.44	31%	12.8%
HI	0.0%	\$14.16	32%	11.8%
ID	13.1%	\$11.00	27%	18.3%
IL	3.3%	\$13.33	22%	13.1%
IN	4.3%	\$11.95	19%	12.3%
IA	4.9%	\$11.30	24%	11.9%
KS	4.2%	\$11.25	24%	13.0%
KY	6.3%	\$10.70	26%	19.4%
LA	-7.4%	\$10.60	29%	13.9%
ME	3.7%	\$13.51	13%	11.7%
MD	-0.7%	\$14.17	23%	12.3%
MA	5.4%	\$16.95	16%	11.7%
MI	5.2%	\$11.81	23%	12.3%
MN	1.8%	\$13.66	14%	10.8%
MS	-0.1%	\$10.62	27%	23.5%
MO	4.3%	\$11.71	21%	11.9%
MT	1.4%	\$10.90	26%	16.1%

States	Evidence of Raising Wages for the EC Workforce in Percentage (CSCCE-Map, Data from 2022, Published 2024) LINK	Median Wage of the State's EC Workforce (CSCCE-Map, Data from 2022, Published 2024) LINK	Gap Between Average and Living Wage of the State's EC Workforce in Percentage (CSCCE-Appendix Table 2.6, Data from 2022, Published 2024) LINK	Early Educator Pay - Living Below the Federal Poverty Line, 2022 (LINK)
NE	2.6%	\$11.29	24%	14.6%
NV	-9.6%	\$13.25	17%	12.2%
NH	7.6%	\$14.95	8%	9.4%
NJ	4.2%	\$14.33	19%	11.1%
NM	11.6%	\$12.03	20%	16.0%
NY	12.3%	\$14.90	26%	14.5%
NC	-2.1%	\$12.31	22%	12.6%
ND	-20.9%	\$11.46	21%	13.5%
OH	-2.6%	\$12.02	17%	12.9%
OK	-5.9%	\$11.04	24%	18.8%
OR	5.7%	\$14.33	21%	15.8%
PA	6.1%	\$13.07	15%	12.2%
RI	12.7%	\$14.79	10%	12.0%
SC	2.8%	\$10.96	30%	12.0%
SD	12.0%	\$11.81	17%	15.0%
TN	4.2%	\$11.57	23%	14.3%
TX	4.8%	\$11.67	26%	13.3%
UT	16.8%	\$12.47	24%	12.9%
VT	-1.7%	\$13.25	16%	7.3%
VA	4.5%	\$13.41	25%	12.5%
WA	9.1%	\$15.46	16%	13.8%
WV	4.6%	\$11.43	22%	12.6%
WI	3.0%	\$12.99	14%	13.9%
WY	10.5%	\$10.60	28%	10.6%

APPENDIX I

Evidence of States (and Districts) that Developed Salary Scales

States	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from CSCCE Table 3.4 LINK	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from CSCCE 2025 Policy Database	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from Other Sources
AL		Salary Scale	
AK			
AZ	Salary Scale		Salary Scale
AR	Salary Scale		
CA			
CO	Salary Scale		Salary Scale
CT	Salary Scale	Salary Scale	Salary Scale
DE	Salary Scale	Salary Scale	Salary Scale
(DC)	Salary Scale		Salary Scale
FL			
GA		Salary Scale	Salary Scale
HI			
ID			
IL	Salary Scale	Salary Scale	Salary Scale
IN			
IA	Salary Scale		
KS			
KY			Salary Scale
LA			
ME			
MD	Salary Scale	Salary Scale	
MA	Salary Scale		
MI			Salary Scale
MN	Salary Scale		Salary Scale
MS			
MO			
MT			
NE			Salary Scale
NV			
NH			

States	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from CSCCE Table 3.4 LINK	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from CSCCE 2025 Policy Database	Evidence of Salary Scale Development from Other Sources
NJ			
NM	Salary Scale	Salary Scale	
NY	Salary Scale		
NC	Salary Scale	Salary Scale	Salary Scale
ND			
OH			
OK			
OR	Salary Scale		Salary Scale
PA			
RI	Salary Scale		Salary Scale
SC	Salary Scale		
SD			
TN			
TX			
UT			
VT	Salary Scale		
VA	Salary Scale		
WA		Salary Scale	Salary Scale
WV			
WI			
WY			
TOTALS	19	9	15

Note: Other Sources include ACF, 2024; Andrews, 2023; Casale & Noel, 2021; CCSA, 2021; Dichter & LiBetti, 2021; Hong & Teng, 2022; and Portillo, 2022

APPENDIX J

Evidence of States (and Districts) that Built Policy

States	CSCCE	NCSL#1 # of Bills	NCSL#2 # of Bills	CCAA 1=present	AES #1 1=present	AES #2 1=present
AL	Stalled					
AK	Stalled					
AZ	Stalled		1	1		1
AR	Edging Forward	1	2	1	1	1
CA	Stalled			1		1
CO	Stalled					1
CT	Stalled		5	1	1	1
DE	Stalled					
(DC)	Making Headway	3			1	1
FL	Not Available					1
GA	Edging Forward					1
HI	Stalled	3				
ID	Stalled					
IL	Edging Forward			1		
IN	Stalled			1		
IA	Edging Forward			1	1	
KS	Stalled		1			1
KY	Stalled			1		1
LA	Stalled	1				1
ME	Edging Forward	1	1	1		1
MD	Edging Forward	1	1		1	1
MA	Stalled	1		1	1	1
MI	Stalled				1	
MN	Edging Forward			1		
MS	Stalled		3	1		
MO	Stalled		1			1
MT	Not Available		1			1
NE	Stalled				1	1
NV	Not Available					1
NH	Not Available			1	1	

States	CSCCE	NCSL#1 # of Bills	NCSL#2 # of Bills	CCAA 1=present	AES #1 1=present	AES #2 1=present
NJ	Stalled	2		1		
NM	Edging Forward	2				1
NY	Stalled	3		1		
NC	Edging Forward	2		1	1	1
ND	Stalled			1		
OH	Stalled	1		1		1
OK	Not Available	2		1		
OR	Stalled		4			1
PA	Stalled	5				
RI	Edging Forward	2		1	1	1
SC	Stalled					1
SD	Stalled				1	
TN	Not Available	2		1	1	
TX	Not Available				1	
UT	Edging Forward			1		
VT	Edging Forward			1		1
VA	Edging Forward					
WA	Edging Forward			1	1	1
WV	Edging Forward		4			
WI	Stalled				1	
WY	Stalled				1	
Total	16	16	11	24	17	26

Note: CSCCE-from Table 3.1 of 2024 Workforce Index Policy Progress to Raise Wages (CSCCE, 2024), NCSL#1-from ECE State Legislation Database (2025, Teachers & Workforce, Enacted or Pending), NCSL#2-from ECE State Legislation Database (2025, Teachers & Workforce, Failed), CCAA-from State Policy Dashboard (ECE Ballot Measures 2020-24, States Funding Workforce Supports), AES #1-from the 50 State EC Policy Progress and Landscape Report (Policy Progress), AES #2-from the 50 State EC Policy Progress and Landscape Report (Permanent Funding Streams)

APPENDIX K

Interview Inclusion: Mapping the Evidence

States	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Salary Scale Development	Evidence of Policy	Evidence of Published Salary Scale
AL		•		
AK				
AZ	•	•	•	•
AR				
CA	•			
CO	•	•		•
CT	•	•	•	•
DE	•	•		•
<u>(DC)</u>	•	•	•	•
FL	•			
GA				•
HI				•
ID	•			
<u>IL</u>	•	•	•	•
IN				
IA	•	•	•	•

States	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Salary Scale Development	Evidence of Policy	Evidence of Published Salary Scale
KS				
KY	•	•		
LA				•
ME				
MD	•	•	•	•
MA	•	•	•	•
<u>MI</u>	•	•	•	•
<u>MN</u>	•	•	•	•
MS				
MO	•	•		
MT	•			
NE	•	•		•
NV				
NH	•			
NJ	•			
<u>NM</u>	•	•	•	•
NY	•	•	•	•
<u>NC</u>		•	•	•
ND				
OH				

States	Evidence of Raising Wages	Evidence of Salary Scale Development	Evidence of Policy	Evidence of Published Salary Scale
OK				
OR	•	•		•
PA	•			
<u>RI</u>	•	•	•	•
SC	•	•		
SD	•			
TN				
TX				
UT	•			
VT	•	•	•	•
VA	•	•	•	
<u>WA</u>	•	•	•	•
WV	•			
WI	•			
WY	•			
TOTALS	35	24	16	22

APPENDIX L

Reflections from Participants in the 2025 NAEYC Workforce Survey: An Unsustainable Status Quo-We All Bear the Burdens of an Underfunded System (NAEYC, 2025)

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
AL	“Too much stress. Inadequate workforce pool.” - Director/Administrator “We no longer offer 3-year old care due to staffing issues” - Director/Administrator “I am going to retire 5 years early because of the stress level in the classroom.” - Early Childhood Educator
AK	“We hire staff but are not able to keep them. This is a hard job and I think people think they are just watching children but there is so much more to what we do. Our starting pay is 2 to 3 dollars less than some places where the work is not as difficult.” - Director/Administrator “The grants have helped us to increase salaries and benefits, but to sustain this we must continue to increase tuition for families.” - Director/Administrator “We are financially in red every month by thousands of dollars. We have used and exhausted all of our grant money and are now simply hanging on month by month. If changes are not made on a state or federal level, this industry will surely collapse. I have never seen this industry in worse shape than it is right now.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
AZ	“I’ve had to enroll more children in order to pay for staff and properly supply the classroom, not ideal ratios but this is what is needed for financial reasons.” - Director/Administrator “Staff are having to get second jobs to supplement their incomes. This is resulting in a less flexible schedule. In addition, all of our income is going towards payroll and regular expenses. This leaves nothing for repairs and improvements.” - Director/Administrator “We have a hard time hiring enough staff. New staff are less educated and turnover more which makes training challenging.” - Director/Administrator “Childcare centers are incredibly underfunded and unfortunately the business aspect of it often puts finances over quality practice. Class sizes are larger, teachers are more overwhelmed, and best practice isn’t prioritized.” - Early Childhood Educator
AR	“Costs are rising for us, but also for our employees so our program is taking a negative hit. We haven’t increased rates, but we will in March. We could use funding in a major way right now.” - Director/Administrator “We are always short staffed and out of ratio. We constantly have to beg to get a lunch.” - Specialist “Even our most skilled workers experience burnout due to staffing shortages as well as having to “hold up” rooms with inexperienced staff. When our “teachers” make less or similar to fast food workers and vet techs, what are we to do? Children matter.” - Director/Administrator “I cannot afford to pay a substitute when I need assistance. As things break or need repair, I have not had the extra resources to do the repairs.” - Early Childhood Educator
CA	“It has been challenging to hire new staff as we cannot pay a higher hourly rate. It is a vicious cycle! We can’t enroll more students without more teachers! There is a demand in my area for care. Our program is running at a fiscal deficit for 2023.” - Director/Administrator “We are short staffed because no one wants to hire in at such a low pay rate for teachers. Pay for teachers is a ridiculously low amount and should be raised across the board.” - Director/Administrator “Everyone is expected to do more work with less leading to teacher burnout and resignations.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
CO	"I am no longer able to provide families with tuition discounts or breaks and have had to increase tuition." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "We are working long hours with a skeleton crew." - Early Childhood Educator "It is difficult finding qualified individuals to work in our program. Applicants walking through the door have little to no experience. A lack of qualified applicants is a real problem in early childhood education." - Early Childhood Educator
CT	"I'm unable to enroll to full capacity due to lack of qualified staff. While we have maintained pay and health insurance for staff in an effort to retain them, we have needed to reduce other benefits such as PTO, Christmas party, etc..." - Director/Administrator "This is the worst I have seen my program in 19 years. I keep myself going each day by reminding myself that all the children and families that we serve are depending on us." - Director/Administrator "We are making improvements to our centers and programs, but that isn't helping us retain staff. We've lowered class sizes for groups with more challenges, yet teachers are still leaving the field and not being paid appropriately." - Director/Administrator "My program is now struggling to stay open because of low payments and fewer parents are able to keep up with child care costs." - Early Childhood Educator
DE	"We continue to have a difficult time hiring qualified staff. I have stopped looking because the lower qualified staff were more of a liability than help, resulting in huge turnover. It is difficult to attract qualified staff willing to work in an underserved community without proper compensation." - Director/Administrator "While salaries have increased, the amount staff is paying for benefits has increased; therefore, showing a net gain of zero for many." - Director/Administrator "Since funds are no longer available and the cost of food and supplies have increased substantially, I was forced to raise my rates. Families are feeling the burden of higher tuition." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
DC	"We have benefitted from DC Pay Equity and Healthcare4Childcare, which have increased salaries and provided free health insurance. However, my program suffers from under-qualified staff and difficulties in hiring. An influx of workers with little experience and little education in child development has hurt our quality." - Early Childhood Educator "Our core crew is dedicated and tenured but beyond exhausted." - Director/Administrator "The last 6 months have been the worst financially in the last 17 years." - Director/Administrator "Hiring is quite a challenge because we are looking for qualified teachers. While waiting for the right staff to do the job, teachers are stressed out handling combined classes." - Director/Administrator
FL	"We have had to raise our rates 2x since August 2023. What we are paying out in payroll is too much. But to have a quality program, you need to be fully staffed with teachers and assistants. That mixed with the cost of living, we are now at a point where we are nervous. Are we going to be able to keep serving our community? We have for over 50 years and now I feel like we are on the brink of losing and that breaks my heart." - Director/Administrator "We are a non-profit so we have struggled financially finding staff to open more rooms. I do not have much staff turnover, but I do want to open another room that has been closed since the pandemic. We had 32 before the pandemic and now have 16." - Director/Administrator "We are trying our best to keep our staff happy by doing different things for them, like bonus and pay increases. The school had to raise their tuition starting this year because we wanted to pay the teachers a bit more. We are still not full because I don't have a full staff yet." - Early Childhood Educator
GA	"We struggle paying payroll because we refuse to raise tuition but eventually, we will have to do that, so we won't have to close our center." - Director/Administrator "My own salary has been cut along with health insurance. To avoid raising the cost of childcare for parents that are already struggling I no longer pay myself and am using credit cards to help purchase food, gas and other necessities." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	"We hold our breath that we can get through each month - everything is a struggle." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "The teachers are tired, overworked and burned out due to rooms being maxed out. The state says we can have 6 babies ALONE. SIX is exhausting." - Early Childhood Educator "We've had to close multiple centers due to staff shortages. We've had to move from brick-and-mortar buildings to 40-year-old run down trailers." - Specialist
HI	"I have not been able to find qualified staff of any level, teacher, assistant, or aide that is willing to drive to our community, work full- time or part-time, for the pay we are able to give." - Director/Administrator "We have increased our tuition, as well as increased our staff salaries." - Director/Administrator "Having less qualified staff meant we had to close a classroom and increase the number of students per classroom to meet demand." - Early Childhood Educator
ID	"Not enough staff. I'm having a hard time finding staff and can't afford to pay what they need. McDonalds pay is better than childcare." - Director/Administrator "Having to increase our rates 28% for our families was a hard hit and still limits what families can afford our center." - Director/Administrator "It is hard to make ends meet. I don't want to raise tuition too high for parents but feel like it may end up happening." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "Our program is a glasshouse just waiting to crumble, one big unexpected financial mishap and we will close. This is extremely dependent on our fundraising lift. We are a non-profit and funds to support 80 percent of our families are fragile." - Early Childhood Educator
IL	"Our center is struggling to survive." - Director/Administrator "Our program continues to lose staff due to retirement, different job opportunities and relocation. We have had to close 5 classrooms due to limited staffing. We have a wait list for all age groups." - Early Childhood Educator "The shortage of staff has really stretched our current staff and contributes to increased turnover. I am not currently acting in my role as coach but am acting as a lead teacher in a toddler room due to staff shortages." - Coach/Professional Development Professional "My staff are really getting burnt out! They are working longer hours for very low wages. If they leave, I will be forced to close my center!" - Director/Administrator
IN	"I am unable to recruit teachers at a sufficient and proper wage rate. I am unable to sustain the increases to salary that I provided to my current/long-term teachers with the grant. I have had to take funds from my husband's and my retirement funds to cover monthly bills at my Center. I am unable to continue assisting parents who need help but don't qualify for state subsidies." - Director/Administrator "We have been impacted by staffing issues. Lead teachers have left for higher paying jobs. We are hiring younger and less qualified assistants due to low wages. I worry that we will not be able to maintain our quality improvement rating due to less educated staff." - Director/Administrator "The turnover rate is adding extra stress- whether that is because we are desperate and hiring people who aren't qualified or interested in early childcare and so they quit or leave because it's actually more stressful than they thought, or because those that are dedicated to the job are being slowly over-worked and under-appreciated." - Early Childhood Educator
IA	"Insurance and Property taxes are extremely high and really takes a chunk of change away from employee salaries." - Director/Administrator "We have increased tuition so that we pay our staff more to recruit and retain more qualified staff. Unfortunately, we are paying more for less qualified staff just to remain fullystaffed." - Director/Administrator "There is no budget for purchasing classroom materials and the teachers are buying their own supplies. The push to enroll more children has added to the stress of being in a classroom. The priority for hiring is to get bodies in the classrooms and training is done by existing classroom staff during the time children are in the room." - Early Childhood Educator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
KS	"It has been increasingly difficult to staff our center with qualified teachers. As an administrator I spend at least 30 hours a week in classrooms training staff and substitute teaching." - Director/Administrator "We have defaulted on our loan and may have to close soon. We are unable to hire qualified staff because our wages are low so we raised tuition and lost families." - Coach/Professional Development Professional "Recruiting and retaining staff remains challenging due to low pay and lack of benefits. Costs for operations continue to rise and families cannot afford tuition increases. Fortunately, our county has received funds from the state to stabilize our workforce and try to keep classrooms open. Without these funds, we would be forced to close classrooms." - Early Childhood Educator
KY	"We have only 2 classrooms (out of 7) open due to lack of staff. We can't get or keep staff. We have raised pay (due to grant money in the past) but can't afford to keep raising pay to keep up with what other places are offering. We also are small and can't offer such benefits (insurance, etc...) due to lack of funding." - Director/Administrator "We are now accepting staff with less than previously preferred qualities due to a low number of people looking for work." - Director/Administrator "It has been more difficult to attract and retain staff. They can start at the same rate of pay or higher in fast food or retail work. I would like to see more invested in childcare so that we can continue to pay staff adequately and give future raises." - Director/Administrator "Everything is going well with our program EXCEPT pay and benefits." - Early Childhood Educator
ME	"We have had to close two classrooms due to the lack of workforce. We are a full-time staff of 18 and in the last three years we have had 23 resignations, creating a chaotic and constant hiring loop." - Director/Administrator "With cost of living rising we have had to increase our tuition dramatically which has caused a few families to leave our center. That coupled with public PreK, we have lost more families than we are accustomed to." - Director/Administrator "Staff is extremely overwhelmed and asked to do much more than we have time for without a lot of administrative support." - Early Childhood Educator "Over the last six months our enrollment is still under the total number of children that my state license says that I can have. I still struggle with retaining staff because they can go elsewhere and get paid more and have more benefits than what I can offer." - Specialist
MD	"We are having a hard time finding qualified staff and keeping qualified staff." - Director/Administrator "We need a long-term plan to offer highly qualified early childhood educators competitive salaries and benefits. The funding for this cannot rest solely on the tuition from parents." - Director/Administrator "We have problems hiring long-term skilled staff. We are trying to hire teachers, but they won't stay long-term because of the wage, and we can't afford paying more due to the number of children we have enrolled now and the regular costs the building has." - Early Childhood Educator
MA	"We are experiencing teacher burnout from challenging behaviors of children. It is difficult to fill all available slots in a classroom when the teachers are already overwhelmed." - Director/Administrator "I have spoken to and coached programs who are experiencing issues hiring staff for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is compensation. There aren't enough seasoned teachers still in the profession to mentor younger teachers. There are parts of our area where we are experiencing child care deserts." - Coach/Professional Development Professional "We have had to hire less than ideally qualified staff and that impacted our program quality. We have experienced turnover due to this. We have opted to not hire for a vacant staff position and instead forfeit the six enrollment slots available to fill for the remainder of the year. There are simply not enough candidates to interview that will work for what we can afford to pay." - Director/Administrator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	“Without more staff we cannot enroll more children.” - Early Childhood Educator
MI	“I am unable to sustain wage and salary increases with inflation and prices increasing in all areas. Rent and loan payments have increased. I might be forced to close in 6 months. All funds have run out and there is no help available.” - Director/Administrator “Retainment of qualified staff is difficult. Mental wellness of staff due to financial worries is challenging.” - Director/Administrator “We have not been able to keep staff and the qualifications of staff have suffered greatly. I am the only educator with a teaching degree and a master’s in early childhood education. I have been an EC educator for over 30 years and it has never been this bad.” - Early Childhood Educator “The inability to recruit and maintain staff (especially quality) staff has resulted in decreased enrollment and a decrease in quality. Further, I believe that the decrease in quality has led to an increase in challenging behaviors.” - Coach/Professional Development Professional
MN	“We are finally almost fully staffed for the first time in over three years. COVID really impacted our ability to hire quality teachers at the current, average pay rate. We are making use of the MN Greater Compensation grant funds and that is helping.” - Director/Administrator “We are constantly facing staffing shortages and having difficulty hiring and retaining good teachers.” - Early Childhood Educator “Staff decreased, so classroom sizes increased. The pay is poor. You have to work two jobs just to make ends meet and burn out is coming faster these days. So it’s difficult.” - Early Childhood Educator “It has been very stressful. We are technically in ratio, but staff is spread very thin. Being in an infant/ toddler room, it’s been hard to do more than take care of their basic needs. I would love to do more art and sensory activities, but we are just too busy.” - Early Childhood Educator
MS	“It has now become my desire to leave the profession which I’ve cherished. The financial, mental and emotional strains are overwhelming.” - Director/Administrator “We need to pay the staff for the degrees they have to make them stay and not seek employment somewhere else.” - Early Childhood Educator “My program has been impacted in every negative way possible. I can’t pay bills on time, supplies are limited, and I can’t support the children as I did. I am at the point of closing my center after 25 years.... I can’t afford to pay my staff what they are worth, or I don’t pay myself.” - Director/Administrator “We did have to raise our rates to keep paying our staff what they deserve.” - Director/Administrator
MO	“Our child population is growing and the space we have is too small for the number of children in each classroom. We are unable to find qualified staff to increase the number of classrooms available. We are unable to find quality substitutes when a teacher needs to take leave. We are unable to find enough support staff to adequately address the needs of the students.” - Early Childhood Educator “Tuition for families has increased \$15 per week, but no noticeable improvements have been made to the facility and no raises have been offered to staff.” - Early Childhood Educator “We are continuing to lose staff due to higher paying jobs and staff leaving the field. We are hiring less and less qualified staff to cover ratio and it impacts program quality.” - Coach/Professional Development Professional
MT	“We can’t keep staff because they want more than we can pay. We can’t pay them what they are worth without raising tuition beyond what families can afford. The cost of living in Missoula has more than doubled.” - Director/Administrator “The ARPA money ended, and we raised tuition again. Normally we increase 2-3% each year to keep pace with the cost of living, but in the past two years, it has gone up 10-15% and we are pricing out the lower -middle income bracket.” - Director/Administrator “The cost of food has grown so much, and parents aren’t paying their bills on time anymore.” - Director/Administrator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	"We have no guaranteed income. When families are faced with not being able to pay for care our income decreases rapidly even though we are still working 5 consecutive 12-hour shifts. It's a lose-lose for everyone." - Early Childhood Educator
NE	"We are losing money and unable to pay rent. We are at risk of closing and being stuck figuring out how to get out of the lease." - Director/Administrator "We are unable to hire more staff and have to decrease the number of children served. We have also had to cancel care for children on a weekly basis because of staff shortages" - Early Childhood Educator "Due to being short staffed we have raised the ratios & we don't plan to lower them. Our teaching quality has drastically decreased & challenging behaviors in children have drastically increased. Most days we are extremely exhausted & just getting by." - Early Childhood Educator "Inflation continues to rise, the CACFP stopped funding good rates for food, so grocery costs have been insane as well as insurance premiums." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
NV	"When grants are done, payroll eats us alive forcing us to further enroll, lowering quality while increasing staff burn out. It is a vicious cycle." - Director/Administrator "The last 6 months have been very challenging in attracting and retaining staff. Our staffing model was extremely understaffed due to lack of qualified applicants and pay." - Director/Administrator "We all pull together and work as a team. We move children around to stay in ratio when we are short staffed. Plus we work through our lunch breaks to make things work." - Early Childhood Educator "As this is arguably the most formative part of a person's life, it is astounding how little the staff are paid to be responsible for all that they do. Staff are teachers and nurses, nutritionists and psychologists. They are artists and musicians, athletes and performance artists...all in one person, all in one day. And we as directors cannot offer them a future in their career that supports their family any better than the fast-food industry? It is shameful that we think so lowly of those in whose hands we place our children's lives." - Early Childhood Educator
NH	"We increased our rates, downsized our program, and fight to stay open." - Director/Administrator "We are hiring more entry level teachers who take a lot of mentoring. We are financially unstable. Payroll is very tight." - Director/Administrator "Low quality staff creates a stressful environment. We can't have people with just high school degrees in charge of a group of children. Also there needs to be more funding for professional development hours. That shouldn't be coming out of teacher's pockets" - Early Childhood Educator
NJ	"We have lost staff to other centers who are able to pay higher wages. We had to temporarily close classrooms due to lack of staff. Due to those closures, we lost enrollments because families needed access to childcare. The impact to my program has been devastating." - Director/Administrator "We can't hire teachers. Our current teachers and staff are competitively compensated but I don't have the budget to hire teachers and staff we lost during the pandemic. People are not applying for the open positions." - Director/Administrator "We haven't been able to raise tuition fast enough to cover wage increases necessary to attract and keep good staff over the last two years. Now, we can't afford to raise wages again and we're unable to hire qualified applicants. We have a budget deficit that makes us worry about our long term viability." - Director/Administrator "The prices on everything have gone up and we are living paycheck to paycheck trying to make ends meet and still provide quality care for the families we serve." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
NM	"The stabilization funds were vital to stay open. Honestly, without continued grants, I am not sure if our program can continue....My mental health has taken a dive. Our program has been able to remain open for the last 3+ years but I am stressed and worn down from trying to hire and maintain operations." - Director/Administrator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	“New Mexico increased funding and this has had a profound impact on the way we can serve children. We were able to hire more workers, pay more, and enjoy less frustration, anxiety and resentment among staff.” - Director/Administrator “We are currently under-staffed and have been for the last four and half years. This is due to a lack of funds to pay for an assistant and not finding people who are qualified for the position given the pay.” - Early Childhood Educator
NY	“I want to pay my staff more. They deserve it for their hard work. I just can’t with current costs.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator “We have lost a lot of staff because of a lack of morale in this department. Teachers aren’t treated well, and the lack of professionalism is weighing on us. The rate of pay hasn’t increased since 2021 which isn’t keeping up with the cost of inflation in this city.” - Early Childhood Educator “The cost of living on Long Island is so high that our wages are simply not enough to sustain the life expenses. In ECE, we work long hours, year-round and in a job that is extremely challenging. Teachers and staff are expected to not only understand each developmental stage but provide an environment that supports that development while also caregiving. People do not understand how high pressure this job is. Staff are under high stress due to the expectations and liability. Earnings matter!” - Director/Administrator
NC	“We are struggling because of staff shortages. We have a very long waitlist but cannot get to it because we don’t have enough staff to fill the classrooms.” - Director/Administrator “Staff burnout is real. Early childhood providers should be respected more we are essential to the country. In order for parents to work they need a child care provider.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator “We’ve had lots of rate increases, I think we’ve gone up about \$250 kid. We had to cut employee benefits, we are hiring people the state considers underqualified, we’ve shifted our menu to 100% processed/canned to save labor and food costs, we’ve cut special programs, we no longer have janitorial staff... anything we can do to make the budget work due to loss of grant money.” - Director/Administrator “Our pay has decreased since the grant has ended. We knew this would happen at the end of the grant but it has affected our own families and we are having trouble paying our household bills.” - Early Childhood Educator
ND	“We are not able to provide raises or insurance for our staff, as income doesn’t allow for either. Hopes for facility improvements have also been delayed or cancelled.” - Director/Administrator “My program is struggling to continue to operate at the current level due to the staff pay scale increase and the stabilization decrease.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator “I cannot afford to hire staff, so I had to invest in a bigger vehicle to transport children with me, instead of leaving them at child care while I drive the school age children to and from school.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
OH	“My staff are depleted, and families have maintained their high standards as they should. Both my sites have director vacancies and very few qualified applicants.” - Director/Administrator “Staff wages and benefits are outpacing income. Equipment and building repair and replacement costs are much higher. The number of parents requesting need-based scholarships has increased.” - Director/Administrator “The operational cost is above the income that comes in. Parents and families cannot afford the rates.” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator “The cost of running a center without the help of government funds is a thing of the past. I can’t afford the quality staff that children deserve because between the low reimbursement rates and the increased expenses, my starting wage isn’t livable.” - Director/Administrator “The program’s expenses have consistently increased and caused increases in tuition, as well as alternate ways of meeting expenses (such as credit cards).” - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
OK	“With fewer staff it puts more pressure on the staff that has stayed. It is hard to use sick leave and we have had to close classrooms because of staff not being able to be at work. This causes stress on

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	our parents and could eventually cost them their jobs for missing work to take care of their children.” - Director/Administrator “The staff we have are extremely burnt out, but they always do their best.” - Early Childhood Educator
OR	“We don’t bring in enough tuition to meet salary. Increasing tuition would be a huge hardship on parents. We need to increase wages but can’t afford to. I can’t find qualified staff and have had to close a classroom. Morale is low, behaviors are challenging. We are NOT OK.” - Early Childhood Educator “I have seen much turnover of staff. Pay is up but they are overwhelmed by challenging behaviors in the classroom. Too many staff do not have field practice or foundational education in ECE.” - Coach/Professional Development Professional “We are unable to hire more staff to accommodate more families who need care. We have been unable to properly compensate current staff. We are barely making ends meet.” - Early Childhood Educator “We recently moved staff around from the positions they were in so that we could open more infant/toddler classrooms as that is where we have the most kids on the waitlist. We are opening 3 new classes this week. Our biggest barrier is a lack of qualified staff. When qualified staff apply they often turn down the position because of the wage.” - Coach/Professional Development Professional
PA	“Our waitlist continues to grow due to not having enough staff. We are not conducting many interviews and the people that do show up are underqualified. Bringing in people who lack knowledge causes more stress to my current staff.” - Director/Administrator “Hiring qualified staff has become a nightmare. Hiring staff with fewer qualifications has become the norm and thus there is far more need for in-house staff training.” - Director/Administrator “As a full-time lead teacher my hours have decreased because of low enrollment. The extra grants helped to aid my decrease in hours. Now that they are gone, I have to use my vacation & personal time to make up the difference. I have a BA in Art & now a CDA & struggle to financially survive. More families are leaving because of the cost of childcare. We as teachers do so much yet get paid so little.” - Early Childhood Educator
RI	“The cost of everything gone up, yet tuition really cannot because then families will not be able to attend” - Director/Administrator “My program is a non-for-profit organization, so we are on a strict budget. Salary is low and retention is low. We are losing great staff members because the pay is so low.” - Early Childhood Educator “It is incredibly stressful. We have multiple staff call out just about every day, and we cannot find good staff because the work is challenging and the pay in the ECE field in general is terrible. I worry every single night about paying my bills and furthering my education. I want to start a family and can’t, largely due to the insultingly low pay ECE teachers get. It’s heartbreaking.” - Early Childhood Educator
SC	“We are having to raise tuition and offer less because of lack of funding to offset higher wages and employee benefits.” - Director/Administrator “Costs have continued to increase, and we have been forced to make a 27% tuition increase to attempt to gain footing and continue to stay open” - Director/Administrator “I am being forced to increase enrollment to ratio caps. Quality will suffer and I am anxious about potentially losing staff who are burned out already.” - Early Childhood Educator
SD	“Our program is barely staying in business. The owners have not taken a wage for at least a year. ” - Director/Administrator “All costs have steadily increased in the last six months. We have increased our tuition to help cover these operating costs but that increases the cost of living for families.” - Director/Administrator “I can’t find quality staff to hire and I continue to lose the staff that I have. Needs and behaviors of the children are beyond what our staff are qualified to teach.” - Director/Administrator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	"The current economy is making things harder to buy and pay for. Insurance and food prices are crazy! I can't keep passing on the bill with higher rates, but I might have to." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
TN	"We cannot pay our staff enough to live on. It is very hard to keep quality workers when we are charging as much as we can and trying to make it cover everything." - Director/Administrator "Lack of stabilization grant funding has ripped the band aid off of our failing industry. Prices of food and other expenses continue to increase, but without additional subsidies our quality will suffer." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "In order to provide a "livable" wage for our employees, we have had to greatly increase our tuition. Unfortunately, this has decreased our ability to provide child care to some families. Many of our families and/or potential families do not qualify for the state subsidy programs." - Director/Administrator
TX	"We had to shut down the school due to a lack of funding." - Director/Administrator "We have not brought in enough income to balance the books and we are dipping into our savings. We are in a very stressful condition." - Director/Administrator "We are about to have to close our doors due to under enrollment and lack of qualified staff." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "Without grants, we have had to bring on staff without experience and with lower pay. With higher student-teacher ratios, our quality is not the same and our staff is wearing down." - Director/Administrator "The two areas of most concern are trying to keep tuition rates reasonable while still being able to give necessary raises to staff; and our insurance costs have increased due to the economy, not due to claims." - Director/Administrator
UT	"Our quality has decreased because I have had to cut out support staff that are not necessary for ratios/group sizes. This impacts the classroom negatively, burns out teachers more, and frustrates parents when they see the chaos in the classroom." - Director/Administrator "Numbers are down and we have had to close classrooms. The staff is leaving to find jobs with more sustainable hours since the hours of employees have been cut to save money." - Early Childhood Educator "Our revenue has decreased and because we had to raise wages while lowering our hiring requirements just to get any staff the last two years, our costs have skyrocketed while quality has suffered. We're barely keeping our doors open. Help needs to come soon." - Director/Administrator "The reality is that without grants childcare centers can't survive." - Director/Administrator
VT	"Vermont made some important investments, allowing us to provide increased pay, large bonuses, and access to early education coursework & degrees for free. More families are qualifying for subsidy assistance and providers are receiving subsidy payments closer to the cost of care." - Director/Administrator "Act 76 passed in May 2023, creating significant tuition relief for families and increased funding for programs through family eligibility." - Director/Administrator "Finding qualified educators is extremely difficult and pay must be increased. Wondering if I will be able to continue for years to come." - Early Childhood Educator
VA	"Over the last 6 months, we have had difficulty in filling open spots and in finding qualified teachers. Additionally, we are stressed financially by decreased enrollment, higher wages, increased operating costs, and lack of parent demand. Staffing continues to be a challenge and therefore our operating hours are still shorter than the need in the community." - Director/Administrator "So far it's been hard, student turnover is high, expenses are going up and income is going down." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "We are striving to pay our teachers what they are worth, but that means planning for a deficit. Parents CANNOT pay the true cost of quality care and education. We need substantial federal funding or quality childcare in the US will disappear." - Director/Administrator

State	Reflections from Survey Participants
	"We are finding it difficult to obtain and recruit qualified staff. We are not able to pay them what they need to stay. We can't raise our rates because families won't be able to afford it." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
WA	"We continue to struggle with staff shortages. We have two classrooms that we have not been able to open due to lack of staffing. It is a struggle. This impacts staff morale when we are short staffed and office staff are trying to support classrooms." - Director/Administrator "Staffing costs continue to rise and we have no choice but to raise prices for already struggling parents." - Director/Administrator "Staffing shortages & challenging child behaviors are leading to high teacher burnout and staff turnover." - Early Childhood Educator "The funds are depleted, and we are just trying to maintain things and keep our doors open. The few staff we have left are working hard to provide quality care to our families, but without being able to hire more staff, everyone is feeling the burn. It is not easy to keep everyone going." - Director/Administrator "I might have to offer less benefits to staff. The cost of medical insurance increases every year and it will soon be out of my price range and my staff will lose their health insurance." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator
WV	"We have had a huge staff turnover. We are seeing educators leave the field and we cannot find qualified replacements. When McDonalds can pay more than we can, we lose people." - Director/Administrator "The last 6 months have been extremely hard financially. The cost of everything is going up, but childcare funds have decreased. It affects the facility in every way, from paying staff, buying groceries, just being able to pay all our bills to keep the facility running." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "My wait list is over 400 kids long and yet I have classrooms I can't open due to not being able to hire staff. Parents can't afford to pay more, and the state has decreased subsidy payments. We need state and federal investments to make childcare more affordable for families and incentives to raise quality." - Director/Administrator "Because we are unable to provide higher wages due to higher costs of operating, we have had to hire less qualified and experienced educators. In my opinion, the quality of education has gone down significantly." - Early Childhood Educator
WI	"I'm one more rate increase away from closing my doors. I can barely afford the 40% increases to goods, insurance, taxes, water, heat, electric to stay open. I have no way to recover that money" - Director/Administrator "My staff are really getting burnt out! They are working longer hours for very low wages. They could easily work elsewhere for higher wages. If they leave, I will be forced to close my center!" - Director/Administrator "We had to institute an 18% tuition rate increase. It will not be enough, but families cannot pay any more." - Director/Administrator "Staff turnover has been extremely difficult for those who have been consistent employees. The weight of what each of us must carry continues to get heavier without any extra support." - Early Childhood Educator "Staffing has been a real problem. I am passionate about my classroom, and it would be nice to find someone who showed some passion. If I hear another person say that we just need bodies in a classroom I will scream!! I want to work with others who love to work with kids." - Early Childhood Educator
WY	"We regularly have teachers leave for entities with federal/state funding because they can offer better pay, benefits, and hours than we can." - Director/Administrator "Food costs, utilities and overall costs have steadily gone up and it is impacting the quality of care we can provide." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator "Finding and retaining quality help has been our biggest challenge and has caused us to minimize our numbers in some classes." - Family Child Care Owner/Operator