

Texas early childhood educators do not earn a living wage

CHILD CARE IN CRISIS: TEXAS CASE STUDY RESEARCH BRIEF #1

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High-quality child care facilitates healthy brain and socioemotional development in children,^{1,2} while also allowing parents and guardians to participate in the workforce. Lack of access to consistent, high-quality child care costs the Texas economy \$9.39 billion per year through lost tax revenue and missed work days.³ To provide the child care that supports families and businesses, child care programs need high-quality early childhood educators. However, despite their essential nature, early childhood educators are consistently among the lowest paid occupations in the country: nationally, early childhood educators earn less than 98% of other occupations.⁴

529 child care program directors provided wage information for 3,698 early childhood educators as part of the Texas Director Survey, a representative, statewide survey of the Texas child care industry. Data from this survey provide novel insight into early childhood educator wages in Texas, and the results are clear: early childhood educators are not paid enough to meet their basic needs and the profession provides limited opportunities for advancement over the course of a career.

In Texas, the typical early childhood educator earns \$12 per hour, \$4.41 per hour below a living wage

The median hourly wage for early childhood educators in Texas is only \$12 per hour, which amounts to an annual wage of \$24,960 for an early childhood educator who works full time. Earning this wage would keep an early childhood educator who lives alone out of poverty, but for an educator who is a single mother of two, \$12 per hour is near the federal poverty level (107% FPL), and this parent would qualify for government benefits such as SNAP and child care subsidies. The statewide average living wage in Texas – that is, the wage at which an individual without children can afford the minimum standard of living in their area – is \$16.41 per hour.⁵ In Texas, only one out of 10 early childhood educators earns a living wage.

Only 1 out of 10

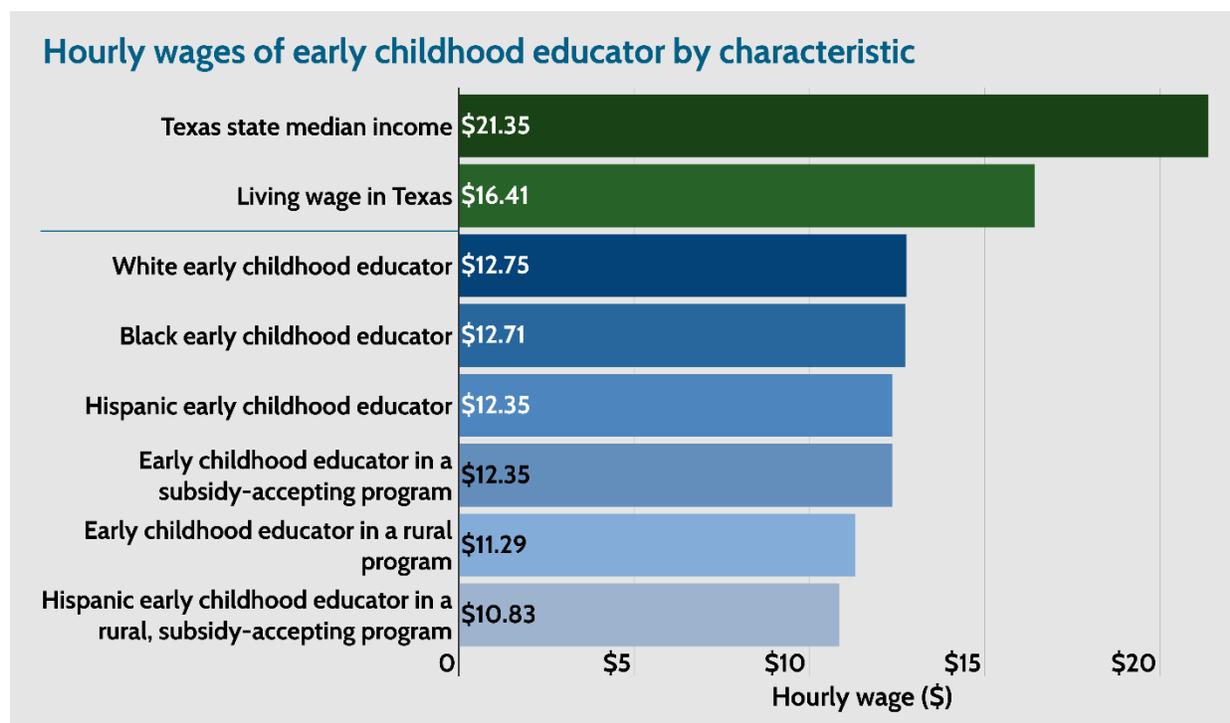
Texas early childhood educators
earns a living wage



Hispanic educators, educators at subsidy-accepting programs, and educators working in rural areas earn the least

Low wages are the standard for the child care industry in Texas, but certain early childhood educators are paid less than others. Accounting for role, experience, education, and other program characteristics, early childhood educators earn significantly less per hour if they are Hispanic, work in child care programs that accept subsidies, or work for child care programs that are in rural counties.

Importantly, these disparities are additive: that is, an early childhood educator who is Hispanic and works in a rural child care program that accepts subsidies can expect to earn only \$10.83 per hour.



Note: Early childhood educator wage estimates reflect predictions from a regression model using data reported in the Texas Director Survey with the values of all unspecified terms held constant at their respective means. Texas state median income reflects 2021-2022 value for 100% state median income (SMI) for an individual living alone.⁶

With 25 years of experience, an early childhood educator can expect to earn only \$2 per hour more than a first-year educator

Delivering high-quality child care requires early childhood educators to have the knowledge and skills to provide safe, nurturing, and responsive care to children. Despite the value that experience can bring to the classroom, early childhood educators do not see meaningful wage increases with more experience: early childhood educator wages increase by only 8 cents an hour for each year of experience. This means that an early childhood educator who has been

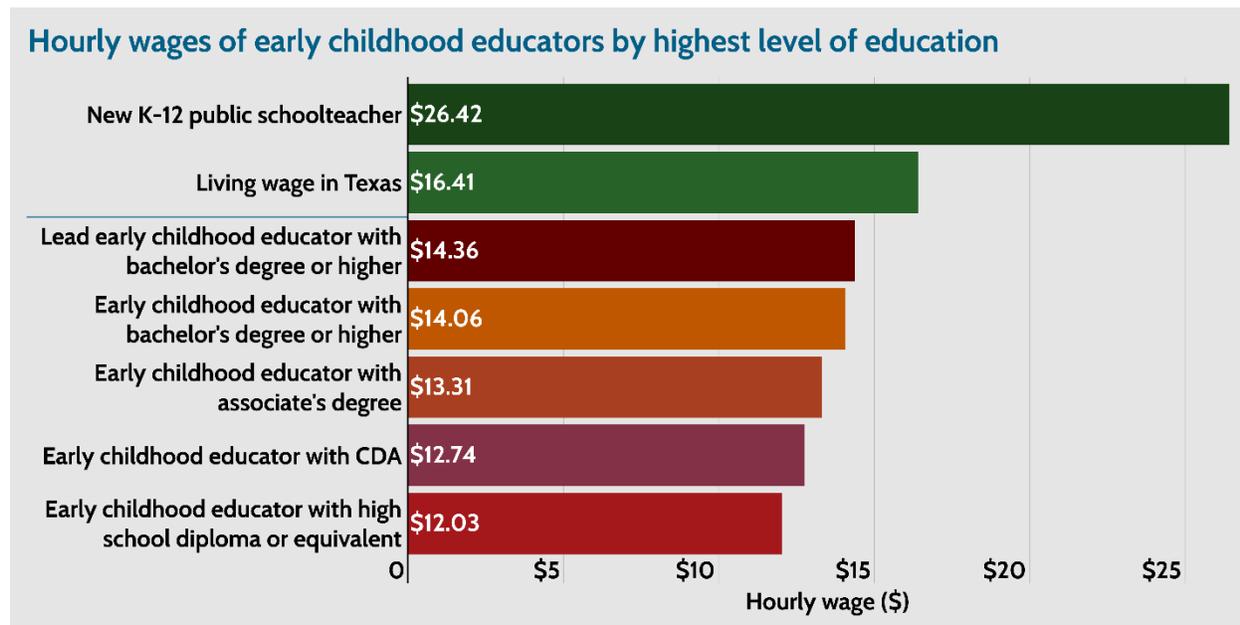
working in child care for 25 years could expect to earn only \$2 more per hour than a new high school graduate joining the field with no experience.

An early childhood educator with a bachelor’s degree earns only \$2 per hour more than an educator with a high school diploma

Early childhood educators in Texas earn higher wages with more education, but these small wage increases do not meaningfully compensate educators for the time and costs associated with pursuing higher education. Accounting for role, experience, race, and other program characteristics, early childhood educators can expect to earn only \$2.03 more per hour with a bachelor’s degree than with a high school diploma.

Despite incremental wage increases with more education, at all education levels the median wage remains below a living wage. Early childhood educators can expect to earn an hourly wage increase of \$0.71 with a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, \$1.28 with an associate’s degree, and \$2.03 with a bachelor’s degree.

Early childhood educators are responsible for educating young children but earn far less than public school teachers. Even early childhood educators who work as lead teachers – and share many of the same responsibilities as elementary school teachers – earn just over *half* of what a first year K-12 public teacher earns, with the same degree.⁷ The large difference in pay between early childhood educators and K-12 public schoolteachers – as well as public pre-K teachers – can lead high-quality early childhood educators to leave the child care field for jobs in the public school system where they would receive higher pay and benefits for similar work.



Note: Early childhood educator wages reflect predictions from a regression model using data reported in the Texas director survey with the values of all unspecified terms held constant at their respective means. K-12 public schoolteacher wages reflect median starting salary for Texas public schoolteachers,⁸ adjusted to hourly wage assuming a 10 month contract.

Conclusion

The vast majority of early childhood educators in Texas do not earn a living wage. Instead, the individuals responsible for caring for and educating the children of Texas are paid wages that do not allow them to meet their basic needs. Early childhood educators who are Hispanic or work in rural or subsidy-accepting child care programs fare worst. Even advanced experience and education have little impact on wages, and highly-qualified educators continue to earn below a living wage.

Early childhood educators support healthy child development and comprise a critical role in the Texas economy, but without competitive wages that fairly compensate their important work, it may be challenging for high-quality early childhood educators to afford to join or remain in the field.

About the Report: *Workgroup Recommendations to Inform the Strategic Plan*

In response to Texas HB 619 (2021), the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center worked in partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission and convened a Workgroup of 27 child care experts and designed and administered an original survey, collecting data from more than 800 child care directors across the state. Using novel data on workforce characteristics, wages, and education collected from the statewide, representative sample of directors, the Policy Impact Center and the Workgroup created a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve the quality of the child care workforce in Texas and create sustainable, long-lasting changes to improve the quality of child care across Texas.

The Workgroup recommends that the Texas legislature increase funding for child care to stabilize the market and ensure access to high-quality care, including through 1) providing retention bonuses to educators, 2) increasing subsidy reimbursement rates to reflect the true cost of care, and 3) expanding the number of subsidized slots provided. The workgroup also provides a series of recommendations for state and local government entities and educational institutions to raise workforce quality and support the child care sector, and outlines how other states are funding their improvements to early childhood education.

Read the full report here: <https://pn3policy.org/resources/workgroup-recommendations-to-inform-the-2022-texas-child-care-workforce-strategic-plan/>

Who We Are

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center translates the science of the developing child into state level policies that have the strongest evidence of improving outcomes for infants and toddlers and their parents. Based in Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development, the Center's team of researchers and nonpartisan policy experts work with policymakers, practitioners, and advocates to navigate the evidence on solutions for effective child development in the earliest years. Learn more at www.pn3policy.org.

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