



A New Catch-22: Teacher Turnover in Early Education

Background

During the first six months of 2009, the BCAC Education and Early Care Task Force undertook a study of Bridgeport early education and child care programs to determine which factors contributed to teacher turnover. The Task Force designed a telephone survey with licensed community-based early care and education programs, including Head Start, full-day child care centers, and part-day nursery schools, as well as the Bridgeport Public Schools Early Childhood Program.

A total of 12 community-based, licensed early education and child care programs, 65% of the total number of licensed sites in Bridgeport, responded to the telephone survey. The participating sites serve 2,687 children, 87% of all children in community-based licensed programs. The Bridgeport Public Schools Early Childhood Program, which has preschool classes in 17 schools and serves 886 children, also participated.

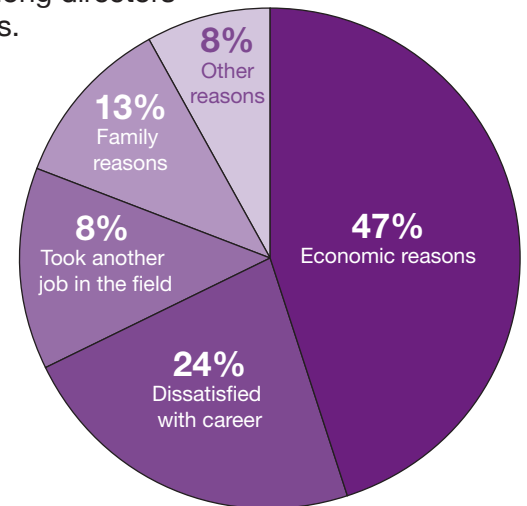
The Catch-22 in Early Education

The quality of early childhood education, which includes a stable and well-qualified workforce, is fundamental to a child's learning and healthy development. Attempts to improve the quality of early childhood education in Connecticut have led to higher education requirements for early childhood teachers in publicly-funded community-based settings. However, salaries in community-based early childhood programs have historically been very low. Once they get their degrees, early childhood teachers often leave their jobs to seek higher paying positions in other careers or in the public education system, which, in turn, contributes to a high teacher turnover rate.

Survey Highlights

BCAC's survey of community-based early care and education programs in Bridgeport found:

- During 2008, teacher turnover among community-based early education and child care programs was much higher (19%) than turnover among teachers in public school preschool programs (0%).
- Average teacher salaries among Bridgeport community-based early education and child care programs (\$18 an hour) are significantly lower than those of preschool teaching jobs in the Bridgeport public schools (\$47.44 an hour).
- There is very little turnover among directors of community-based programs.
- State-funded early care and education programs in Bridgeport have fewer teachers with an associate or a bachelor's degree than similar programs in Hartford, New Haven, or statewide.



Staff report a variety of reasons for leaving

A New Catch-22:

Best Practices for Staff Retention

The following are examples of best practices used in community-based child care programs in Bridgeport to help retain staff:

- Providing a 3-semester class leading to a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential on-site at a child care program.
- Paying for books for Charters-A-Course training, a statewide program that provides ongoing training opportunities for staff in education and early care programs.
- Offering a quiet space within the center for staff to study during their breaks.
- Providing a day trip or event to recognize staff and improve morale.

BCAC would like to thank the following programs that participated in the survey:

ABCD

A Child's World

Bridgeport Board of Education Early Childhood Program

Busy Beaver Day Care Center

Congregation B'nai Israel Nursery School

Hall Neighborhood House Care Around the Clock

Housatonic Community College

Jewish Community Center of Eastern Fairfield County

Mary Immaculate Day Care Center

Precious Memories Child Care Center

St. Mark's Day Care

St. Paul's Child Development Center

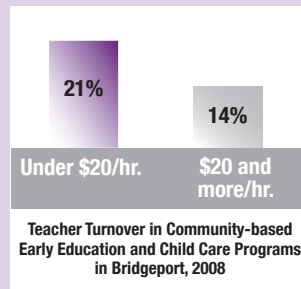
YMCA

Higher Salaries Make Public School Positions Attractive to Community-Based Program Staff

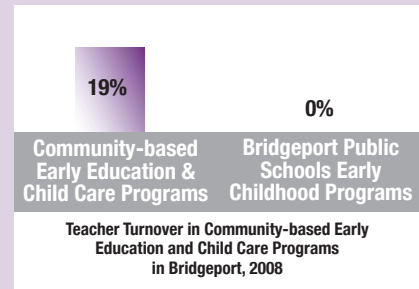
Top reasons given for teacher turnover in Bridgeport community-based early education programs:

- Low salary
- Hired by the Bridgeport Board of Education
- Change in career
- Burnout

Salary Matters: The Higher the Pay, the Lower the Turnover



No Teacher Turnover in Bridgeport Public Schools Early Childhood Programs in 2008-09



The average hourly wage of teachers in Bridgeport community-based early education programs is \$18.00 an hour, less than the average hourly pay for carpet installers, bill collectors, and disc jockeys. The starting salary of preschool teachers in Bridgeport public schools is \$37.65 an hour.

Additional survey findings for community-based sites:

- Early education programs with more than 75 children have a higher rate of teacher turnover (23%) than programs with 75 children or less (15%).
- Although teacher turnover is high, the average tenure of early care and education program directors is 10 years.
- While most sites offer basic health benefits, sick and vacation days, the level of benefits and eligibility criteria vary widely.
- 40% of community-based programs use employee contracts, which can promote workforce stability.
- 14% of community-based programs report being able to fill positions in less than one week, 43% report taking 1-2 months, and 43% report taking 3-6 months.
- Two-thirds of the community-based sites in our survey provide some level of tuition reimbursement.

Teacher Turnover in Early Education

Connecticut Programs That Promote Professional Development

A few examples:

Charts-A-Course is a statewide program providing training and scholarships for first-time educators in early care programs. All early education programs are encouraged to participate in Charts-A-Course.

Charter Oak State College

is Connecticut's distance learning college, offering courses leading to a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential and a bachelor's degree in child studies. Both in-classroom and online courses are offered at a cost of \$186 per credit for residents.

Programs in Bridgeport

Housatonic Community College (HCC)

provides courses leading to a CDA Credential and an associate's degree in early childhood education through traditional classroom and online classes. HCC has initiated a partnership with Wheelock College in Massachusetts, which allows HCC graduates in early childhood education to earn their bachelor's degrees from Wheelock College while taking Wheelock College courses at HCC.

Federal Support

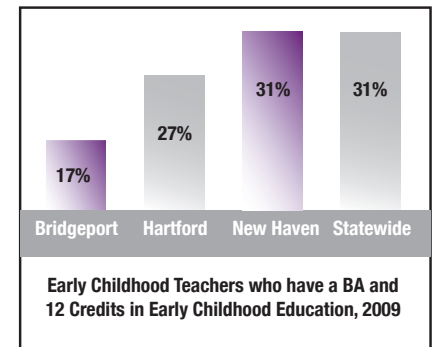
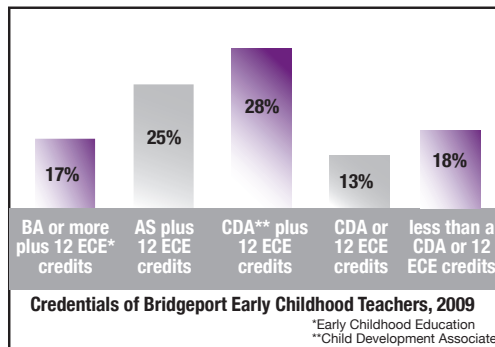
The **Federal Higher Education Act**, passed in summer of 2009, includes a number of provisions and grants for professional development for teachers, including those working towards a bachelor's degree while employed in licensed child care, Head Start, or state-funded early education programs.

Credentialing – a Double-Edged Sword

Public Act 05-245, An Act Concerning Education Implementer Provisions, requires that by 2015, each classroom in state-funded community-based early childhood programs must have at least one teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or related field, or a teaching certificate in early childhood or special education. Federally-funded Head Start programs will require similar credentials by 2013.

Meeting these requirements will be particularly challenging for programs in Bridgeport because so few staff currently have the necessary degrees, and once the degree is obtained, staff are likely to seek higher paying positions, frequently in the public school system.

Fewer than one in five early education and child care teachers in Bridgeport have a bachelor's degree.



A higher degree is out-of-reach for many early education teachers

Early care and education teachers are faced with a number of barriers preventing them from professional advancement:

- Higher education tuition is expensive.
- Staff need child care for their own children while they are in class.
- Because they work all day, staff need to take classes at night – this is difficult after a long day at work; staff want to be able to spend time with their own children.
- There are few incentives in community-based early education programs for staff who receive a bachelor's degree. Early care and education teachers wonder why they should work towards a bachelor's degree if compensation does not improve once they get their degree.



Recommendations to Break the Catch-22

It is important to increase eachers salaries in community-based early education programs, as well as address access to other high quality education credentialing requirements to improve the quality of early education and reduce teacher turnover.

Recommendations to Improve Staff Retention

- Keep Care4Kids open and spend the total amount allocated by the state legislature. Preserve existing staff and early education programs. When the economy improves, raise Care4Kids reimbursement rates, which have not increased since 2001, to more closely reflect current child care costs so that salaries and benefit packages for teachers in community-based programs can be enhanced.
- In conjunction with increased reimbursement, establish a pool of trained, paid substitutes for community-based early childhood programs so that staff can participate in training opportunities.
- Require staff to remain on the job for a period of time following credentialing if the sites financially support them in the credentialing process.
- Develop on-the-job activities that promote professional growth for staff after they are credentialed, such as involving them in curriculum development, organizing parent workshops, and in-service training.
- Develop better documentation of reasons for staff attrition.
- Create a community-based/Bridgeport Board of Education Early Childhood training consortium to provide ongoing, affordable, accessible in-service training for early education programs.

Recommendations to Improve Staff Access to Higher Education and Credentialing

- Extend the deadline by which teachers in publicly-funded early care and education programs must have bachelor's degrees and align credentialing requirements with those of NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children).
- Support the implementation of the statewide early childhood workforce development plan and address the financial resources and other support needed to help early care and education employees meet credentialing requirements, as well as the resources needed by programs to retain staff who have degrees.
- Provide those interested or already in the field of early care and education with assistance navigating the early childhood credentialing system and the variety of public and private training programs, including information on courses, costs, and scholarship opportunities.

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