

### *Strengthen the Infant-Toddler Teaching Workforce by Increasing Compensation*

Babies are learning from birth, and the first three years of life lay the foundation for all of the years that follow.<sup>1</sup> Early experiences mold the architecture of the brain, building capacity to learn and grow—cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Optimal brain development depends on secure attachments with caregivers, both in the home and in child care. Infants and toddlers develop and learn through their relationships with the adults in their lives – parents, family members, and early childhood teachers.

Over 60% of parents of infants and toddlers are working, and many rely on quality child care when they return to work, often within days or weeks of giving birth, because they lack family support or other options for caring for their babies.<sup>2</sup> Infant-toddler teachers have the enormous responsibility of safeguarding and facilitating the development of our youngest children while they are spending the majority of their waking hours in child care when their parents work. Infant-toddler teachers must have the knowledge, skills, and resources to provide consistent, nurturing, and positive relationships. Every day, approximately 15,000 infant-toddler teachers are paid to care for and educate over 60,000 infants and toddlers enrolled in licensed child care programs across North Carolina.

Research has shown that early childhood teachers earn wages that are not sufficient for meeting their own basic needs, and they have high rates of food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, teachers who work with infants and toddlers earn even lower wages than their peers who work with preschool aged teachers.<sup>4</sup> The poverty rate for early educators in North Carolina is 17.6 percent, much higher than for North Carolina workers in general (10.6 percent) and 7.4 times as high as for K-8 teachers.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the early childhood workforce lacks access to health insurance, which has dire implications as North Carolina begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, qualified teachers are likely to leave the field due to poor compensation.

Infant-toddler teachers make an average of **\$11 per hour.**  
1 in 5 doesn't have health insurance.

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance believes that all babies and toddlers in our state deserve a well-qualified and well-compensated child care workforce to provide strong early learning experiences during this important window for young child development.

### Why Is This Important to Do Now?

#### **Compensation Should Reflect the Value of the Infant-Toddler Workforce**

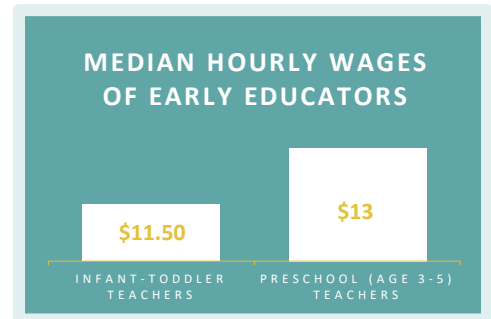
Infants and toddlers develop and learn through their relationships with the adults in their lives – their parents, family members, and their early childhood teachers when they are enrolled in child care programs. The quality of early care and education young children receive is most closely tied to the quality of the teachers in the classrooms. According to national researchers, early childhood educators having specialized knowledge of child development and early childhood education is correlated with better

educational outcomes for young children.<sup>7</sup> This is also true for infant-toddler teachers who are supporting the youngest children during the most critical time in their development.<sup>8</sup> Qualified teachers are more likely to have effective, positive interactions with children and their families, offer richer language experiences, use appropriate curricula and teaching practices, and create more high-quality learning environments.

### The Infant-Toddler Teacher Wage Gap

Infant-toddler teachers earn the lowest wages of all early childhood teachers. Among an early education workforce that is already low paid, teachers working with infants and toddlers earn the least, regardless of educational level. According to researchers at the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, nationally, infant-toddler teachers, even those with a Bachelor's degree, are paid about \$4 less per hour than similarly qualified early educators working with 3-5-year-olds.<sup>9</sup>

Compensation trends in North Carolina are similar. According to the 2019 Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina Report, it is financially beneficial for educators to teach preschool aged children rather than infants or toddlers. In fact, the report found that "teaching staff who taught 3-5-year-olds could expect approximately 13% higher wages over teaching staff who taught infants and/or toddlers."<sup>10</sup> For example, the median salary for teachers of infants and toddlers is \$11.50 per hour, while the median salary for teachers of 3-5-year-olds is \$13.00 per hour. The large wage gap between the earnings of those working with infants and toddlers and those working with preschool-age children undermines the ability to hire and retain staff during a child's earliest years when research shows the brain is growing the fastest.<sup>11</sup>

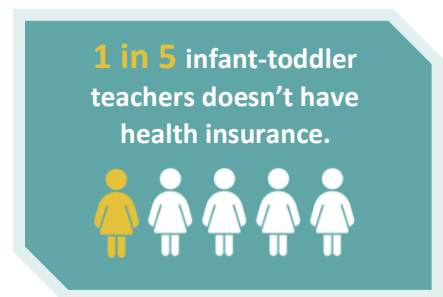


### The Wage Gap and Equity

The wage gap may also serve to disproportionately affect people of color. As indicated in the Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina report, 51% of the teaching staff in NC are people of color. A larger 73% of family child care providers reported they were people of color. Nationally, reports have found that the infant-toddler teacher "wage penalty" disproportionately affects Black teachers.<sup>12</sup> One report found that while 43% of all center-based early educators work with infants and toddlers, 53% of Black teachers work with this young age group. In addition, the report found that "Black early educators who work with infants and toddlers earn \$0.78 less per hour on average than other infant-toddler teachers. While all teachers experience a 'pay bump' for working with older children, the increase for Black educators is smaller than it is for other educators: \$0.96 less per hour on average."<sup>13</sup>

### Infant-Toddler Teachers Lack Access to Health Insurance and Other Benefits

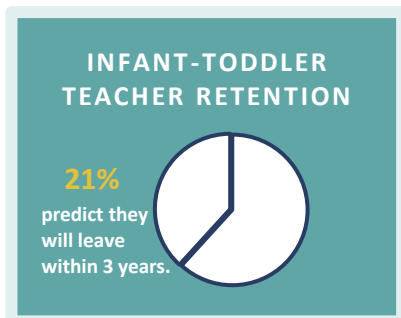
Benefits are also important, particularly health insurance coverage as the country continues to face the COVID-19 pandemic recovery. Although the NC workforce study found that there has been an improvement over the last decade in the percentage of the workforce that reported having health insurance, there has been a decline in the last four years. Statewide, in 2019, approximately one in five teachers reported having no health insurance from any source. In addition, the study found that the most needed service received for the North Carolina early childhood teaching staff was Medicaid for their child(ren).<sup>14</sup>



### Inadequate Compensation and the Impact on Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Increased compensation for infant-toddler teachers is urgently needed to attract and retain qualified staff who can support young children's developing and learning. North Carolina's inadequate compensation of

infant-toddler teachers contributes to the lack of quality infant-toddler child care programs, and leads teachers to leave the field to pursue work that can provide a living wage. The NC workforce study found that once early childhood teachers enter the classroom, one in five infant-toddler teachers (21%) predict that they will leave the field in three years, typically because of low pay and low status.<sup>15</sup> Fourteen percent (14%)



of family child care providers expressed their desire to leave the field in the next three years. Those who have obtained higher degrees often move on to teach in the state's NC Pre-K program, public schools, or into other fields that pay better. This is especially concerning due to the fact that infants and toddlers experience heightened stranger anxiety during this developmental time period, which is exacerbated by increased staff turnover. Teacher stability is even more critical at this stage than at any other period of child development.

During COVID-19, the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education recognized that workforce compensation was a serious issue that needed attention. The NC Division of Child Development and Early Education was a leader in this regard by providing monthly bonus pay for all onsite child care employees during the early stages of the pandemic. As reflected in the NC workforce study, "the decision to provide these bonuses from the state underscores the necessity of supplementing the fees that parents are unable to pay for child care. Without new and strategic investments like this one, North Carolina may experience a resurgence of higher turnover rates and the loss of its better educated teachers in its licensed and higher star settings. Better paying jobs in other industries may be a significant enticement without the compensation and recognition the workforce deserves."<sup>16</sup>

### High-quality infant-toddler programs are on the decline.

Fewer centers are enrolling infants and toddlers today than they did in 2008, typically because they lack the resources, including finding and affording qualified staff, to maintain these programs.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, overall in North Carolina, there are fewer infants and toddlers enrolled in high-quality programs compared to preschool programs. Just 70% of all infants and toddlers are enrolled in high-quality four- and five-star licensed programs versus 78% of all preschoolers. Forty-five percent (45%) of infants and toddlers are enrolled in 5-star programs, compared to 59% of all preschoolers.<sup>18</sup>

### North Carolina has the infrastructure and financial resources to support infant-toddler teachers.

Two compensation programs provide financial relief salary supplements for early childhood teachers who are pursuing higher education. The Child Care WAGE\$<sup>®</sup> Program provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors, and family child care providers working with children between the ages of birth to five. The Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$<sup>®</sup> Program provides education-based salary supplements to low paid infant and toddler teachers who have obtained at least an Associate degree and are working full-time in infant-toddler classrooms. The program is designed to better compensate and retain well-educated teachers working with our youngest children. AWARD\$ is funded by DCDEE. As of June 2020, 1,287 child care professionals in 745 child care programs were active AWARD\$ participants.<sup>19</sup> These promising strategies have been found to support the three primary factors associated with teacher quality: education, stability and compensation.



Think Babies™ NC Alliance

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*The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to ensure that North Carolina's youngest children, prenatal to age 3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences.*

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For more information:

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- <sup>1</sup> Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. (2020). Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap 2020: Building a Strong and Equitable Prenatal-to-3 System of Care. Child and Family Research Partnership. Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin. <http://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap>
- <sup>2</sup> Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), University of California, Berkeley. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: North Carolina.
- <sup>3</sup> McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/report-pdf/>
- <sup>4</sup> Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L. J. E., & Edwards, B. (2018). Early childhood workforce index – 2018. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/>
- <sup>5</sup> Gould, E., Whitebook, M., Mokhiber, Z., & Austin, L. (2020). Financing Early Educator Quality: A ValuesBased Budget for Every State. A series of state-by-state reports produced by the Economic Policy Institute and University of California Berkeley’s Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/financing-early-educator-quality-a-values-based-budget-for-every-state/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2019). 2019 Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina Report [https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA\\_2020\\_Statewide\\_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf](https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA_2020_Statewide_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> National Academies of Science. (2015). Transforming the Workforce for Children from Birth Through Age Eight.
- <sup>8</sup> NAEYC. (2014). High-Quality Early Childhood Educators Are the Key to Quality Programs for Children. [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policyadvocacy/201NAEYC\\_Childhood%20Educators.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policyadvocacy/201NAEYC_Childhood%20Educators.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2019). 2019 Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina Report [https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA\\_2020\\_Statewide\\_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf](https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA_2020_Statewide_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/report-pdf/>
- <sup>13</sup> Center for the Study of the Child Care Workforce. (2019). Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/RacialWageGaps-Early-Education-Brief.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2019). 2019 Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina Report [https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA\\_2020\\_Statewide\\_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf](https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA_2020_Statewide_WorkStudyRprt-FINAL-web.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2017). Who’s Caring for Our Babies? Early Care and Education in North Carolina.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2020) FY 2020 AWARD\$ Full Report. <https://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/CCSA-AWARD-Report-FULL-FY20-8-20.pdf>