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Brief | February 2023

Teachers of Preschool-Age Children in California

A Comparison of Lead Teachers in Transitional Kindergarten, Child Care Centers, and Family Child Care Homes



By Anna Powell, Elena Montoya, Lea J.E. Austin, Yoonjeon Kim, Wanzi Muruvi, and Abby Copeman Petig

Introduction

Early care and education (ECE) programs for children prior to kindergarten in California are provided through a mixed delivery system that includes licensed home- and center-based programs as well as school settings. Parents make decisions about what type of program(s) their children attend based on a combination of factors such as culturally affirmative practices, cost, schedule, and location. Most ECE services must be purchased by parents; public funding is limited, and if subsidized access to early care and education is available, it is typically linked to income eligibility. As a result, many children who qualify for ECE don't have access. Furthermore, the financial resources available to a program often depend on what families can afford to pay, not necessarily the true costs to provide services.

The requirements, experience, and supports for educators vary widely across settings, depending more on funding sources and regulatory status and less on what educators and children may need. This situation is typical across the ECE system for children from infancy through preschool, though California has made substantial changes in providing preschool for four-year-olds. Transitional Kindergarten (TK) was introduced into this mix in the 2012-13 school year. As of the 2022-23 school year, TK became the only free, universal ECE program in California available for four-year-olds. In this brief, we compare the experiences of educators who lead their respective classrooms.

Background

Before their children reach kindergarten age, California parents have the option to enroll them in preschool. Prior to the 2022-23 school year, child care centers and home-based family child care (FCC) programs provided the majority of ECE opportunities. Most child care centers and family child care programs in California serve four-year-olds (95 percent and 59 percent, respectively). Our survey took place during the 2020-2021 school year, and at that time, children could only enroll in TK if their fifth birthday took place between September 2 and December 2 of the current school year, though some districts opted to expand to serve younger children. Consequently, most ECE teachers are located in child care centers and FCC programs, cultivating a history of expertise in the care and education of four-year-olds.

By committing to universal expansion by 2026, California has established TK as its primary vehicle for realizing a universal pre-K (UPK) system, flanked by California's other publicly funded programs such as State Preschool, Head Start, and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP). Universal TK represents a step towards policy that enshrines early care and education as a public good alongside K-12 education (now sometimes called TK-12 education).

To realize the vision, California needs a teaching workforce that is well prepared, supported, and experienced with teaching four-year-olds. The state will need to retain and grow its robust system of publicly supported ECE services in which educators—the linchpin of quality—are well supported regardless of setting. Teacher pipelines should also reflect the diversity of children and families: highly skilled teachers of color should be able to advance in teaching positions, move freely among lead teacher jobs in different settings, and earn a living wage.

As of this publication, teachers in centers and FCC programs currently have the most ECE-focused preparation and deepest expertise teaching four-year-olds. Elementary school teachers do not have the same grounding in early care and education, nor do elementary schools hire from the same pool of individuals. TK teachers must hold a Multiple Subject Credential, which entitles them to employment in classrooms through eighth grade. By 2026, all TK teachers must hold 24 units of study (or the equivalent) in early childhood education or child development; however, it is possible that they may not have taught young children before their first day in a TK classroom. As of 2020, only 30 percent of TK teachers had previously taught in another early education setting, such as State Preschool, compared to the 90 percent who had previously taught kindergarten through third grade (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022).

In this brief, we explore the experiences of ECE lead teachers across settings: TK classrooms, child care centers, and family child care programs. We examine their demographics, classroom context, working conditions, compensation, and economic well-being. We identify threads of continuity among lead teachers regardless of setting: for instance, virtually all these early educators are women, and many are age 40 or older. They teach similar numbers of dual-language learner students, and they face similar classroom challenges. By contrast, educators in centers and FCC providers are much more likely to be women of color and/or immigrant women. Teacher pay and benefits also diverge sharply, with TK educators earning at least twice the salary of other lead teachers with a bachelor's degree along with corresponding metrics of economic well-being.

By exploring the experiences of teachers by setting, we aim to understand the state of equity in ECE employment. For the purposes of this analysis, we focus on educators who lead their respective classrooms in order to compare similar job roles and level of teaching responsibilities. We then explore the implications for sustaining an effective and equitable ECE system in California.

Key Findings

Demographics and Classroom Life

- Virtually all lead teachers across settings are women, and most early educators are 40 or older. Educators in centers and FCC providers are much more likely to be women of color and/or immigrant women.
- While center- and TK-based educators work similar hours per week, only FCC and center teachers work year-round.
- The majority of children across ECE settings are either Latine or White.[1] TK classrooms serve the greatest concentration of Latine children (45 percent), and overall enrollment most closely aligns with the composition of children in the state. In all three settings, around one in three children speaks both English and another language.
- Center- and home-based teachers are more likely than TK teachers to speak languages besides English, particularly Spanish. Similarly, center- and home-based teachers report fewer language barriers in communicating with children and families.
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers across settings largely felt confident in their teaching skills, with the exception of managing children's behavior. Only one in five FCC providers identified this concern prior to the pandemic, while approximately one half of lead teachers in centers and three quarters of TK teachers found managing children's behavior a challenge.
- While center- and home-based educators continued to work in person in late 2020, the majority of TK teachers were working remotely. Among those who were teaching in person, teaching challenges increased across the board. More than four times as many FCC providers felt that supporting children as individuals was a challenge, and more than six times as many center lead teachers struggled with group interactions. The majority of TK teachers reported struggling with all teaching challenges listed in our survey.

1 CSCCE is committed to eliminating oppressive language and using bias-free terms. Under this philosophy, for example, all terms used to describe race are capitalized, and gender neutral terms are used when appropriate.

Working Conditions in Centers and Schools

- TK teachers were more likely to report having no planning time at all (17 percent, compared to 5 percent of center lead teachers); at the other end of the spectrum, however, they were also more likely to have five or more hours of planning time per week (35 percent, compared to 14 percent in centers).
- Educators in all settings encounter children experiencing trauma. In both centers and elementary schools, more than four out of five lead teachers feel they can turn to their director or principal for support.
- A majority of teachers in centers and schools purchase school supplies at their own expense. TK teachers, however, spend far more: more than 23 percent spent $500 or more in the first few months of school, compared to 3 percent of center teachers. While many teachers also purchased personal protective equipment (PPE) for themselves, the majority spent no more than $100 in the same period.
- Roughly 48 percent of TK teachers of color feel they have to work twice as hard as their peers, compared to only 38 percent of White TK teachers. Similarly, more than one third of teachers of color felt they had been watched more closely than others, compared to only 21 percent of White TK teachers. In these two cases, the gap between teachers of color and White teachers was greater in TK, where White teachers comprise the majority.

Compensation and Economic Well-Being

- TK teachers earn more than double the salary of their peers with a bachelor's degree working in other settings. The median salary for a TK teacher is $84,700. Similarly, TK teachers are more likely to have access to benefits like retirement and health insurance. In retirement savings in particular, center- and home-based educators lag far behind both TK teachers and average Californians with a bachelor's degree.
- Most center-based educators with any healthcare coverage enroll via their employer, though 23 percent of center lead teachers rely on the plan of a spouse or other family member. By comparison, virtually all TK teachers have access to an employer-sponsored plan, and a strong majority (87 percent) of them ultimately enroll that way. FCC providers do not have the option of employer-sponsored coverage, so they also frequently rely on the plan of a spouse or other family member (38 percent).

- Compared to other ECE teachers, TK educators are more likely to own their homes, maintain food security, and hold less student loan debt than center- and home-based educators.
- A minority of teachers with a bachelor's degree could pay for a $400 emergency expense outright (18 percent of FCC providers, 15 percent of center teachers, and 23 percent of TK teachers), compared to 48 percent of working Californians with the same level of education.

About the Data

From October through December 2020, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) surveyed representative samples of approximately 2,000 center administrators and 3,000 home-based family child care (FCC) providers, as well as non-probability samples of about 2,500 center-based teaching staff members and 280 TK teachers through the 2020 California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.

In this report, we focus on our sample of lead teachers in TK, center-, and home-based settings. While home-based educators (FCC providers) may not always refer to themselves as "lead teachers," they do serve as the person who leads the instruction and care of children in their particular setting.

For personal characteristics, earnings, and well-being of other members of the early education profession (including center-based directors and assistants), refer to our *Profiles of the California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2020* (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2022). Additionally, because we focus on comparable experiences among lead teachers, there are aspects of the TK teacher profession that are not covered in this text. For a discussion of topics such as public school facilities, credentials, and training, please refer to our recent report on the TK teacher experience (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022).

Throughout this report, we also provide comparable estimates for working adults living in California, often specifically those with a bachelor's degree. To that end, we incorporate analysis of the Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED), the American Community Survey, and the Current Population Survey (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2021; Ruggles et al., 2021; Flood et al., 2021).

Demographics of the ECE Workforce

There are many traits in common across the ECE workforce. Nearly all TK teachers, center-based teachers, and FCC providers are women. Additionally, most of these early educators are at least 40 years old, and a majority are married or living with a partner. The workforce differs, however, across a number of other dimensions. Home- and center-based educators are more likely to be teachers of color and/or Spanish speakers than TK teachers. In this way, teachers in FCC programs and centers more closely resemble the population of children in California. Finally, nearly all TK teachers are represented by a union. Unions for other early educators are less widespread, with only one in four center- and home-based educators belonging to a union. **Figure 1** summarizes lead teacher demographics.

FIGURE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS OF LEAD TEACHERS

California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2020

	Family Child Care Provider	Center Lead Teacher	Transitional Kindergarten Teacher
Personal characteristics			
Female	98%	98%	99%
Born outside the United States	42%	26%	9%
Person of color	71%	64%	29%
Age			
Under 40	19%	45%	25%
40-59	60%	44%	62%
60 or older	22%	11%	14%
Language fluency			
Speaks English	87%	98%	100%
Speaks Spanish	37%	34%	16%
Speaks two or more languages	39%	44%	22%
Household composition			
Married or living with partner	74%	65%	79%
Any children under age 6	18%	19%	11%
Any children age 6-17	47%	35%	41%
Group membership			
Union	25%	25%	94%
Professional association	16%	18%	24%
Professional affinity group	2%	2%	5%
None	63%	61%	5%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Family Child Care Provider N=2,173-2,415
Center Lead Teacher N=1,344-1,491
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=276-282

Classroom Life

Operational Context

Classrooms for four-year-olds vary in size across ECE settings. While FCC- and center-based programs often serve this age group, they frequently serve other children as well. For instance, 21 percent of centers and 37 percent of FCC providers serve infants (birth to 12 months). Meanwhile, California designed TK to serve four-year-olds in particular.

Traditionally, ECE classrooms require a small group size and low student-teacher ratios. Center-based child care program ratios have been fixed at 12:1 for preschool-age children since the 1970s, per California Title 22 health and safety regulations, and State Preschool ratios are even lower (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2022). In order to stay within ratios, FCC providers and centers employ teaching assistants or aides. At the time of our 2020 survey, student-teacher ratios in TK were modeled on kindergarten: a classroom could enroll up to 33 children, and TK teachers were not required to have an assistant or aide with them. As part of UTK expansion, classrooms will shift to align with best practices in ECE settings: lead teachers will require an aide during instructional hours, and each classroom must not exceed a 12:1 student-teacher ratio. Ultimately, if sufficient state budget is available, this ratio will drop further to 10:1 (Cal. Ed. Code § 48000).

The median class size of the TK classrooms we surveyed was 18 in 2020 during distance learning. Approximately 37 percent of TK teachers had an aide during the 2019-2020 school year, compared with 44 percent in 2020-2021. Two thirds (62 percent) of aides were in the classroom for part, rather than all, instructional time. Further research is needed on the preparation and skill of TK teaching assistants, as well as clarity around the meaning of "100 percent of instructional time" in the classroom (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022).

Operational differences extend beyond enrollment and ratios: the median number of working days per year also varies by program type. Centers and FCC programs operate nearly year-round (for instance, some 250 days for centers), while TK-12 schools operate approximately 180 days, aligned with district calendars. The work hours of TK and center-based teachers are similar: a median of 40 hours per week. FCC providers, however, tend to provide care and education for 50 hours per week. Moreover, as business owners, FCC providers work additional hours on other administrative, cleaning, preparation, and operational tasks when children are not present.

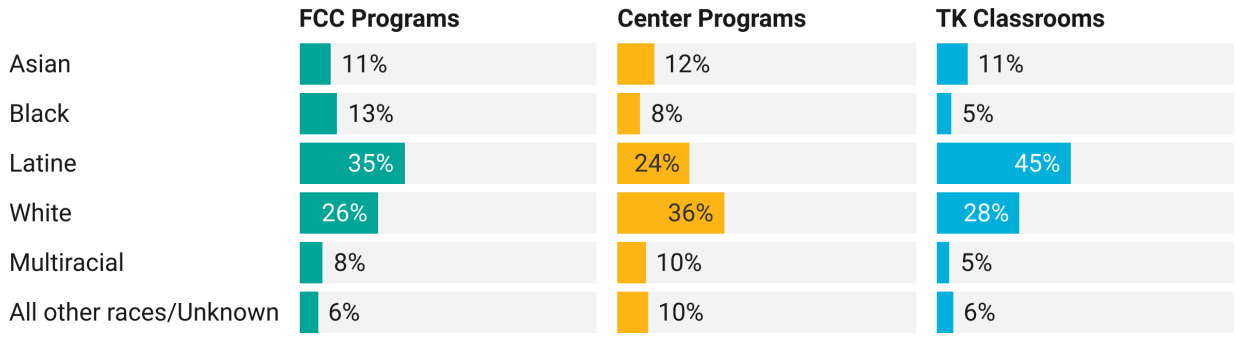
During the COVID-19 pandemic, typical operations diverged further. During the first year of the pandemic, remote work was the norm for the majority of TK classrooms (72 percent), but only 2 percent of FCC programs and 13 percent of centers were exclusively providing distance learning. For the latter two settings, working in person remained the norm. While the vast majority of ECE services stayed open, FCC providers were more likely to close entirely (14 percent) than to provide distance learning, suggesting a shift to remote learning was not feasible for FCC providers. Additionally, during the pandemic, TK teachers were somewhat more likely to be working full time: 86 percent of TK teachers, compared to 82 percent of center lead teachers.

Characteristics of Students

In alignment with the California population of children under the age of five, the majority of children across ECE settings are either Latine or White. **Figure 2** summarizes the composition of enrollment. TK classrooms most closely resemble the population of children in the state: Latine children comprise 45 percent of TK enrollment, virtually identical to the population of children under age six in California (Ruggles et al., 2021). FCC programs, meanwhile, serve the greatest proportion of Black children (13 percent).

FIGURE 2. RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY OF CHILDREN ENROLLED

California Early Care and Education Classrooms, 2020

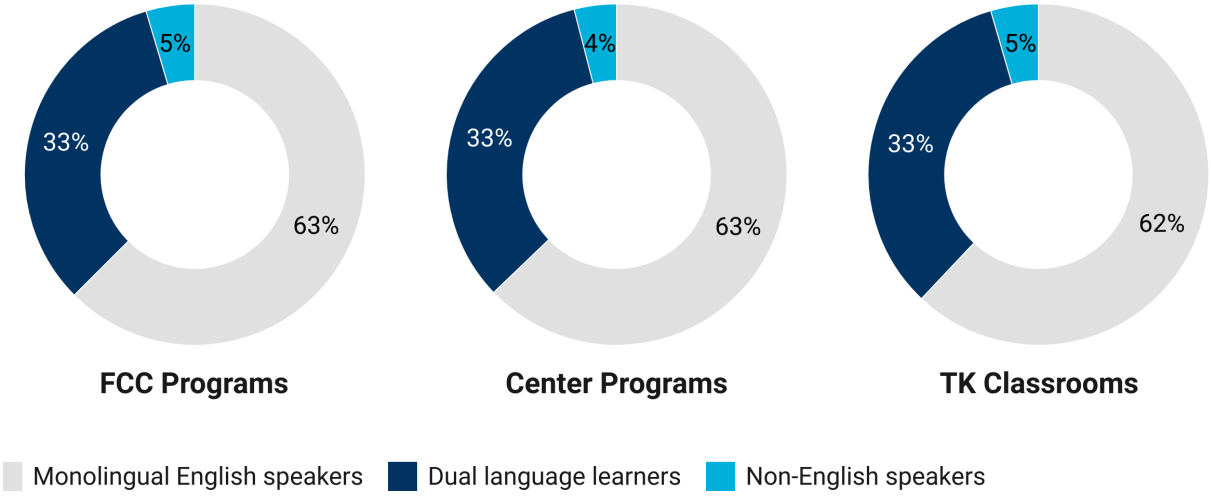


Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Family Child Care Provider N=2,173
Center Lead Teacher N=1,491
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=279

Despite some variation in racial and ethnic background of children served, the share of students who are dual language learners is nearly identical across settings: an estimated one in three children speaks both English and another language. An additional 5 percent speak only languages other than English. **Figure 3** describes the proportion of enrolled children who are dual language learners by setting.

FIGURE 3. DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER STATUS OF CHILDREN ENROLLED

California Early Care and Education Classrooms, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Family Child Care Provider N=2,121
Center Lead Teacher N=1,390
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=281

While children who speak languages besides English are evenly distributed across ECE settings, the proportion of classrooms where teachers use languages besides English varies: 41 percent of FCC providers, 29 percent of center lead teachers, and 13 percent of TK teachers speak languages besides English in the classroom. The difference reflects the language capacity in the workforce: FCC providers and center teachers are more frequently multilingual.

Challenges in the Classroom

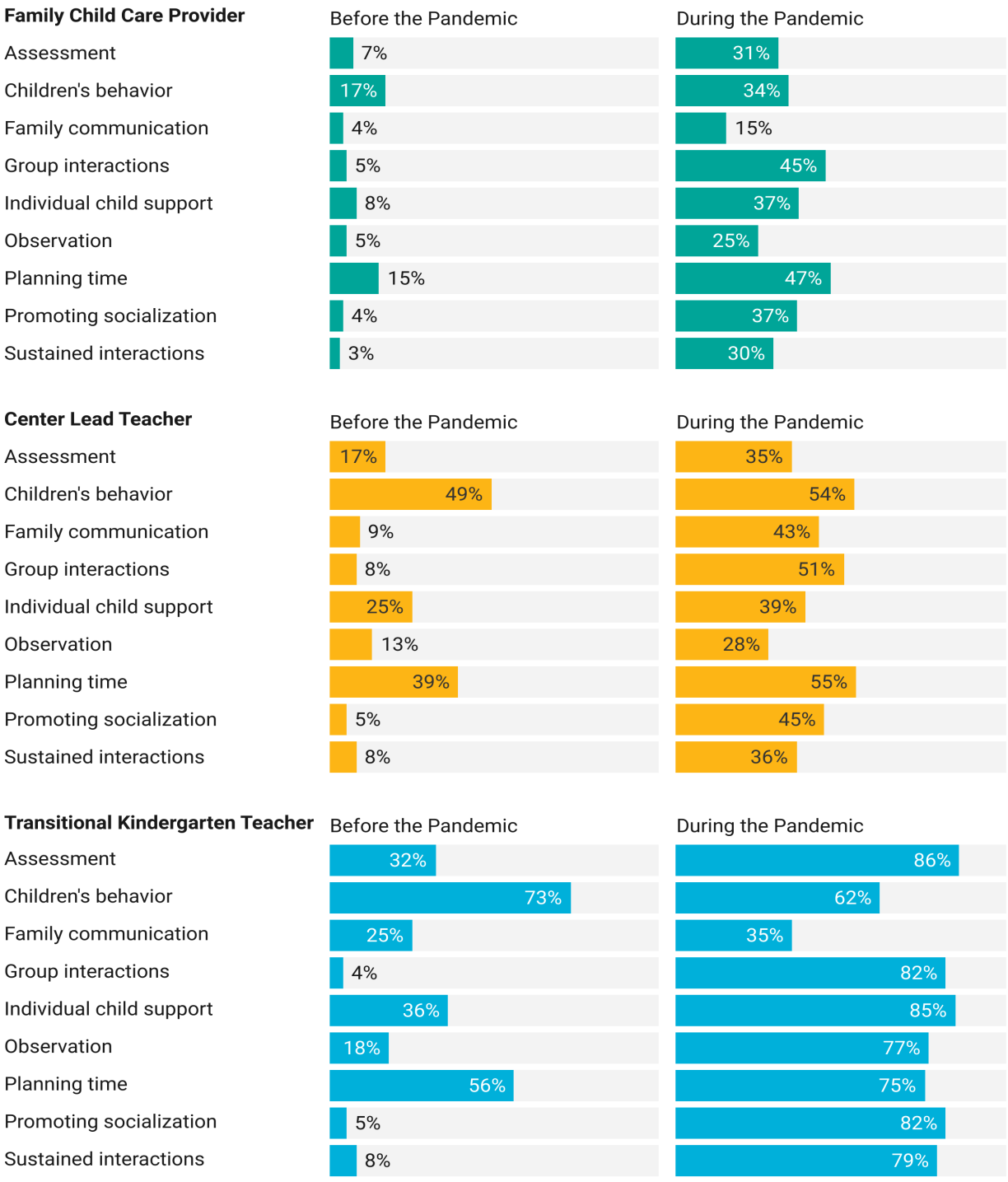
The everyday job of teaching requires an array of skills: for instance, responding to students' needs or differentiating instruction for a math activity. **Figure 4** describes the proportion of educators who reported that specific core teaching skills were a challenge, both before and during the pandemic. In this figure, we exclude teachers who did not teach in person during the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, when in-person learning was standard, only some lead teachers agreed that teaching skills were challenging. For instance, fewer than one third of lead teachers in any setting reported assessing children or promoting socialization to be a challenge. Many lead teachers in centers and TK classrooms, however, agreed that accessing planning time was a challenge. (For greater detail on planning time, refer to **Figure 5**.) Educators diverged in their feelings on behavior management. Only one in five FCC providers found managing children's behavior to be a challenge prior to the pandemic, while approximately one half of lead teachers in centers and three quarters of TK teachers identified this concern.

During the 2020-2021 school year, by contrast, teachers across settings reported many challenges in the classroom. For instance, more than four times as many FCC providers agreed that supporting children as individuals was a challenge during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic, and more than six times as many center lead teachers struggled with group interactions.

There may be multiple factors driving these differences among educators by settings, particularly the higher number of TK teachers who reported challenges stemming from children's behavior. Differing student-teacher ratios may be at play: FCC providers have the smallest group size, while TK teachers have the largest. In addition, those working in FCC programs and centers typically have more years of experience and more educational training focused on younger children. Additionally, since TK teachers primarily have experience working in kindergarten to third grade, their preparation and expectations for students may differ from teachers who have worked with younger children for many years. Further research is needed to understand these stark differences.

FIGURE 4. CLASSROOM CHALLENGES, BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Estimates "during the pandemic" exclude teachers who were working fully remote.
Family Child Care Provider N=1,883-2,463
Center Lead Teacher N=844-1,314
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=77-281

Working Conditions in Centers and Schools

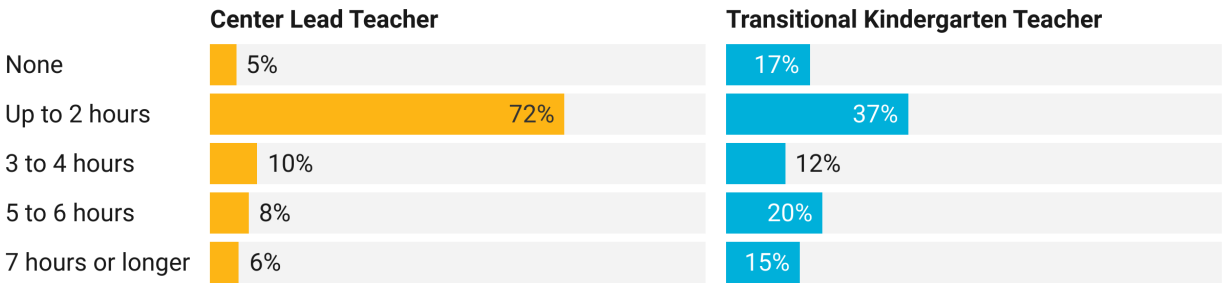
Center-based programs are organized in classrooms, often grouped by age, analogous to TK classrooms within public schools. FCC providers educate and care for the same population of students, yet they have unique work environments: not only are their classrooms co-located with their living quarters, they also frequently serve mixed age groups. In view of this difference, this section will explore specific comparisons for center teachers and TK teachers.

Planning Time

Protected planning time is a crucial support for teachers: it allows them to prepare lessons, review student progress, and access the support of colleagues. While many lead teachers in center and TK classrooms felt that planning time was a challenge in late 2020, the amount of planning time per week differs between settings (**Figure 5**). TK teachers were somewhat more likely to report no planning time at all (17 percent, compared with 5 percent of center teachers). At the other end of the spectrum, however, they were also more likely to have five or more hours of planning time per week (35 percent, compared to 14 percent in centers).

FIGURE 5. WEEKLY PLANNING TIME

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, 2020



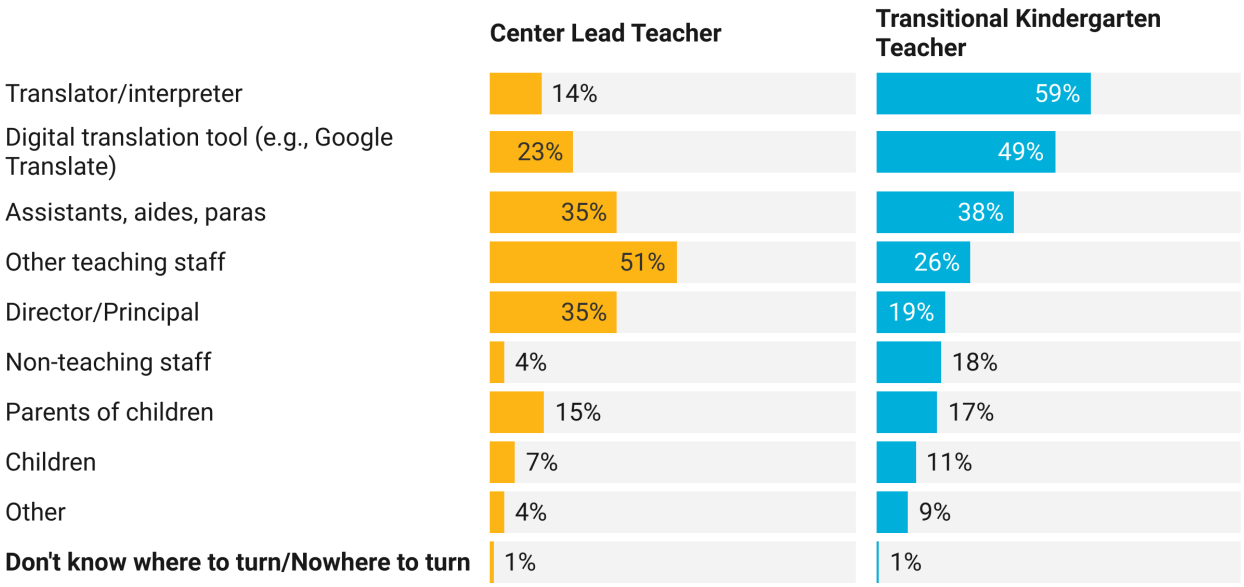
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Center Lead Teacher N=817
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=259

Communication Barriers

Many educators face barriers in communicating with children and families. Within both centers and elementary schools, however, numerous supports are available when a communications challenge arises. For center-based educators, the most common sources of assistance are their fellow lead teachers (51 percent) and their directors (35 percent); for TK-based educators, an interpreter (59 percent) or digital tool like Google Translate (49 percent) are more prevalent. Notably, lead teachers in both settings rely on assistants or aides (around one in three), suggesting that assistants may be more likely to speak the languages of children enrolled. **Figure 6** summarizes where teachers would turn for support by setting.

FIGURE 6. RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNICATION BARRIERS WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, 2020



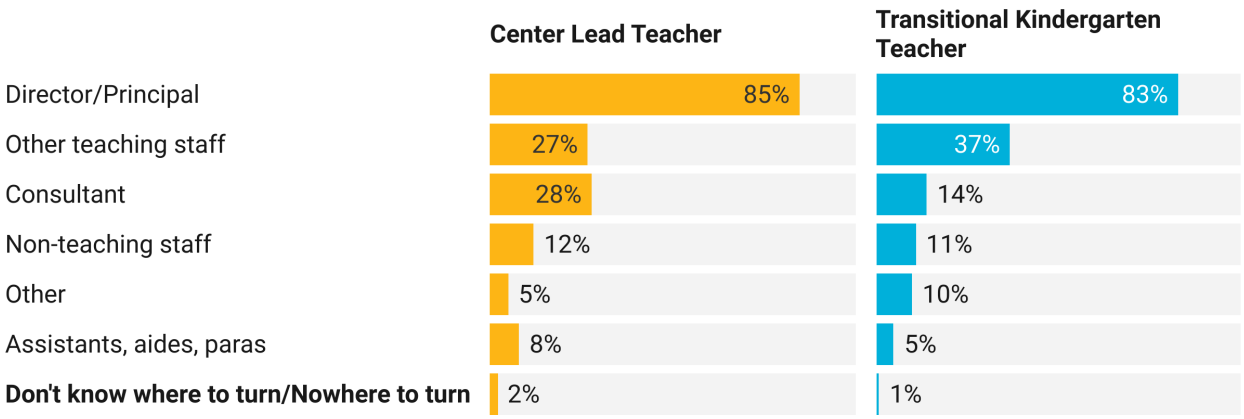
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Center Lead Teacher N=1,410
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=281

Students Experiencing Trauma

In addition to language barriers, teachers often encounter children or families experiencing trauma. While two thirds of center-based educators agreed they were adequately trained in responding to trauma, only one half of TK teachers (49 percent) concurred. Nonetheless, across both settings, more than four out of five lead teachers reported that they can turn to their director or principal if they need assistance with children and/or families experiencing trauma. Other sources of support, such as other teaching staff or non-teaching staff, are less commonly available; but on the whole, nearly all lead teachers feel they do have somewhere to turn. **Figure 7** describes where lead teachers would seek support when responding to children and families experiencing trauma.

FIGURE 7. RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING TRAUMA

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, 2020



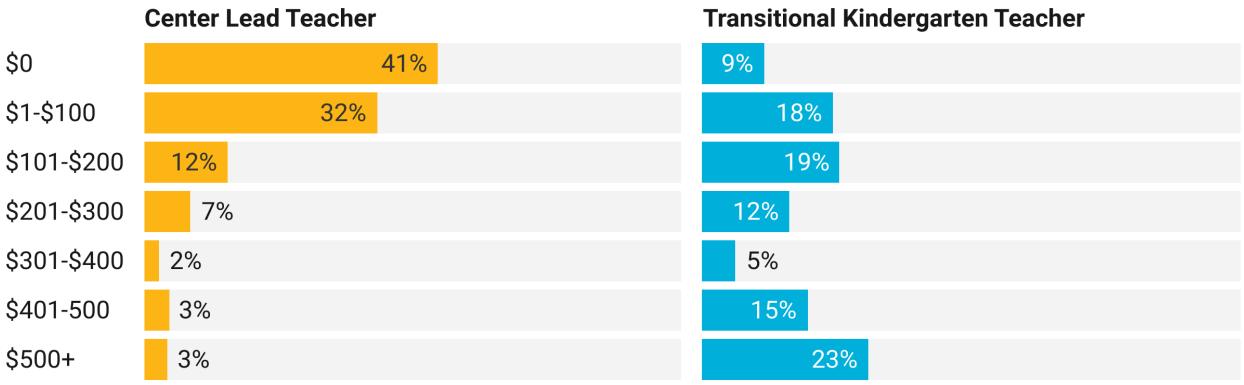
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: In addition, 77 percent of TK teachers have a counselor available to support them with child/family trauma. Some centers may also have counselors on staff, but our center teacher questionnaire did not ask about this type of support.
Center Lead Teacher N=1,410
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=281

Unreimbursed Work Expenses

In the fall of 2020, many teachers purchased school supplies out of their own pockets, despite the new normal of distance learning and haphazard closures (**Figure 8**). This practice, however, was less common among center-based educators: 41 percent of center lead teachers spent $0 of their own money in this way, compared with only 9 percent of TK teachers. Meanwhile, 23 percent of TK teachers spent at least $500 out of pocket on supplies for students that fall.

FIGURE 8. UNREIMBURSED SCHOOL SUPPLY PURCHASES

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, Fall 2020

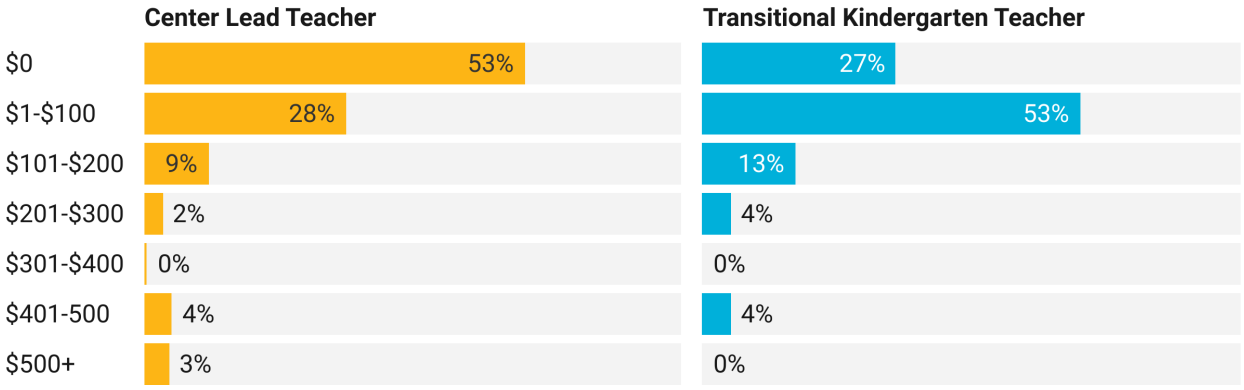


Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Center Lead Teacher N=1,334
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=282

Personal protective equipment (PPE) was not always provided by employers of early educators working in person in Fall 2020. Once again, center teachers were less likely to spend their own paychecks on PPE: 53 percent spent $0 on PPE in the fall of 2020, compared with 27 percent of TK teachers. Meanwhile, more than one half of TK teachers spent up to $100 on purchasing PPE for themselves. **Figure 9** summarizes unreimbursed purchases of PPE among lead teachers.

FIGURE 9. UNREIMBURSED PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT PURCHASES

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Table excludes teachers working fully remote at the time of the survey.
Center Lead Teacher N=899
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=78

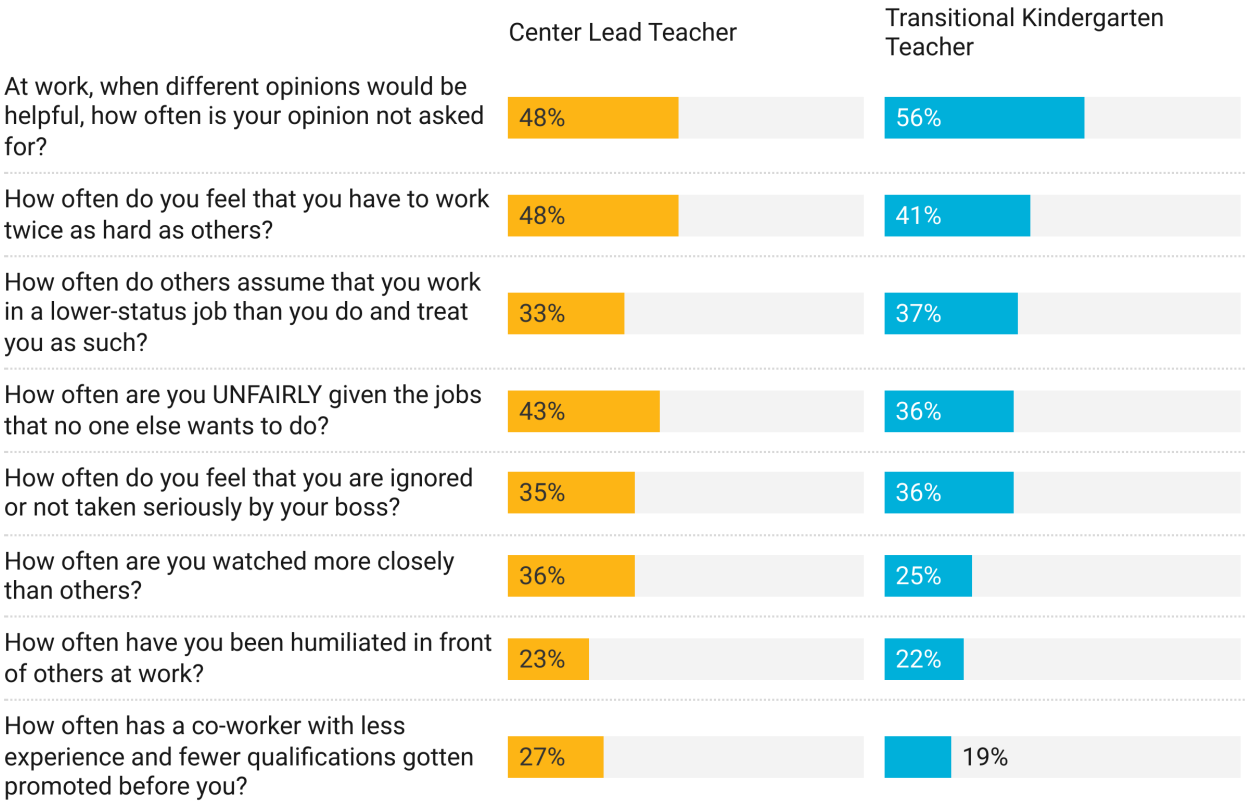
Workplace Climate

In addition to teaching challenges, some lead teachers in centers and TK face interpersonal challenges such as devaluation or discrimination by their supervisors and co-workers (**Figure 10**). While the majority of negative experiences below affect fewer than one half of educators, the estimates demonstrate the troubling frequency of these incidents. In fact, around one half of lead teachers in both settings have felt their opinion was not solicited on one or more occasions in the past year, and similar numbers reported feeling they had to work twice as hard as others.

In some cases, lead teachers in both settings reported similar experiences: for instance, slightly more than one third of teachers in both settings reported feeling ignored or not taken seriously by their supervisor in the previous year, along with more than one in five who had been humiliated in front of others. In other aspects, however, the prevalence of negative experiences differs: for example, 56 percent of TK teachers reported that their opinion was not asked for in the past year, compared with 48 percent of center lead teachers. By contrast, 27 percent of center teachers reported that a co-worker with less experience and fewer qualifications received a promotion, compared to only 19 percent of TK teachers.

FIGURE 10. WORKPLACE CLIMATE

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, 2020

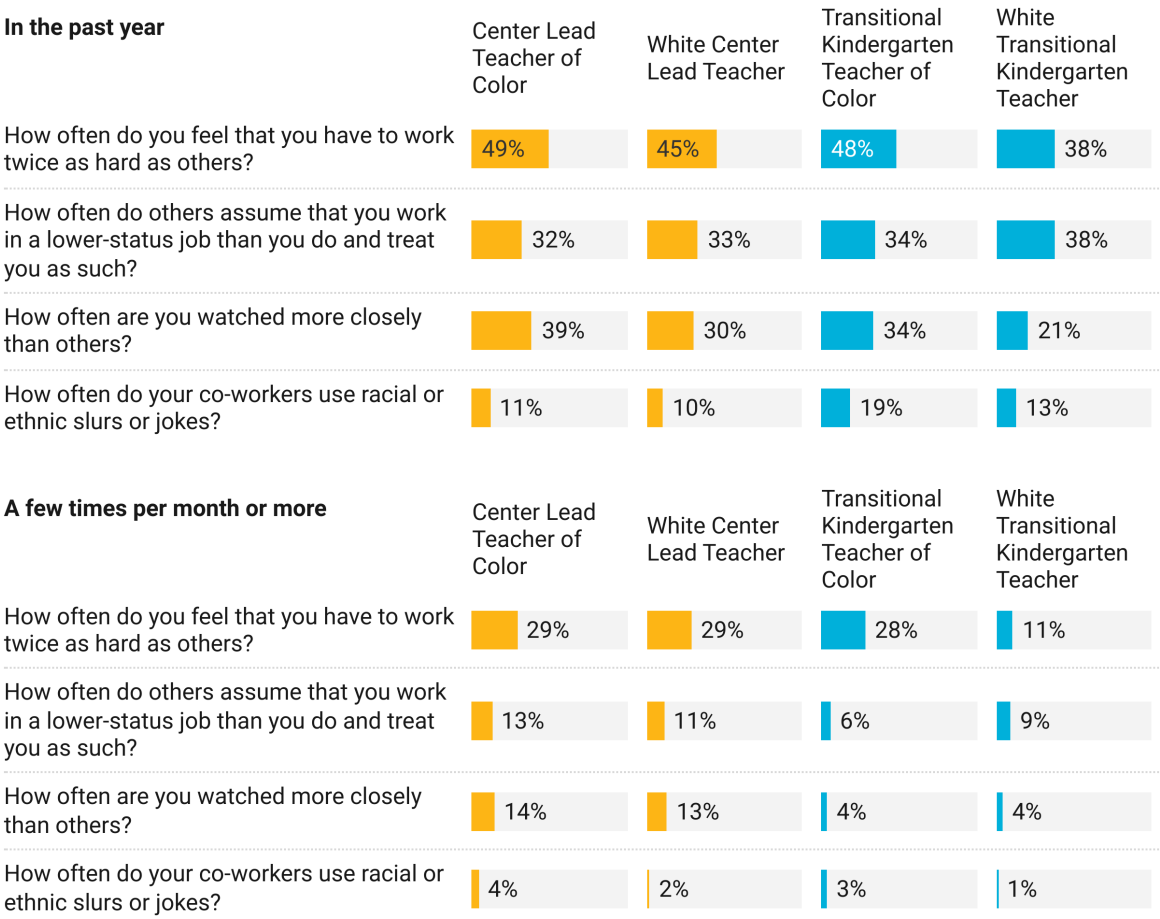


Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Center Lead Teacher N=1,162-1,271
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=270-280

Some differences expand when focusing on the experiences of teachers of color (**Figure 11**). In both settings, around one half of teachers of color reported feeling like they have to work twice as hard as others in the past year, compared to 45 percent of White center teachers and only 38 percent of White TK teachers. Notably, while 28 percent of TK teachers of color reported feeling this way a few times per month or more, just 11 percent of White TK teachers did so. Similarly, while more than one third of teachers of color reported being watched more closely than others, 30 percent of White center teachers and only 21 percent of White TK teachers reported similarly. It should also be noted that across settings, more than 10 percent of teachers reported that their co-workers use racial or ethnic slurs or jokes; and this number jumps to 19 percent among TK teachers of color, who are employed in predominantly White workplaces.

FIGURE 11. WORKPLACE CLIMATE, BY RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY

California Child Care Centers and Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Center Lead Teacher N=1,162-1,271
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=270-280

Compensation and Economic Well-Being

Poor compensation has long been a fixture of the early care and education profession. The introduction of jobs in TK classrooms represents a departure from this norm. Among lead teachers with a bachelor's degree, we estimate a lead teacher in a child care center could double her salary by moving to a TK teaching position and a family child care provider could increase her salary nearly two and a half times (Powell, Montoya, et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, the salary of a TK teacher only covers a living wage for a single parent with one child (Montoya, Austin, et al., 2022). A single parent of two or more children would typically not earn a living wage working in Transitional kindergarten. As a result, some TK teachers encounter challenges to their economic well-being, just as home- and center-based educators often do.

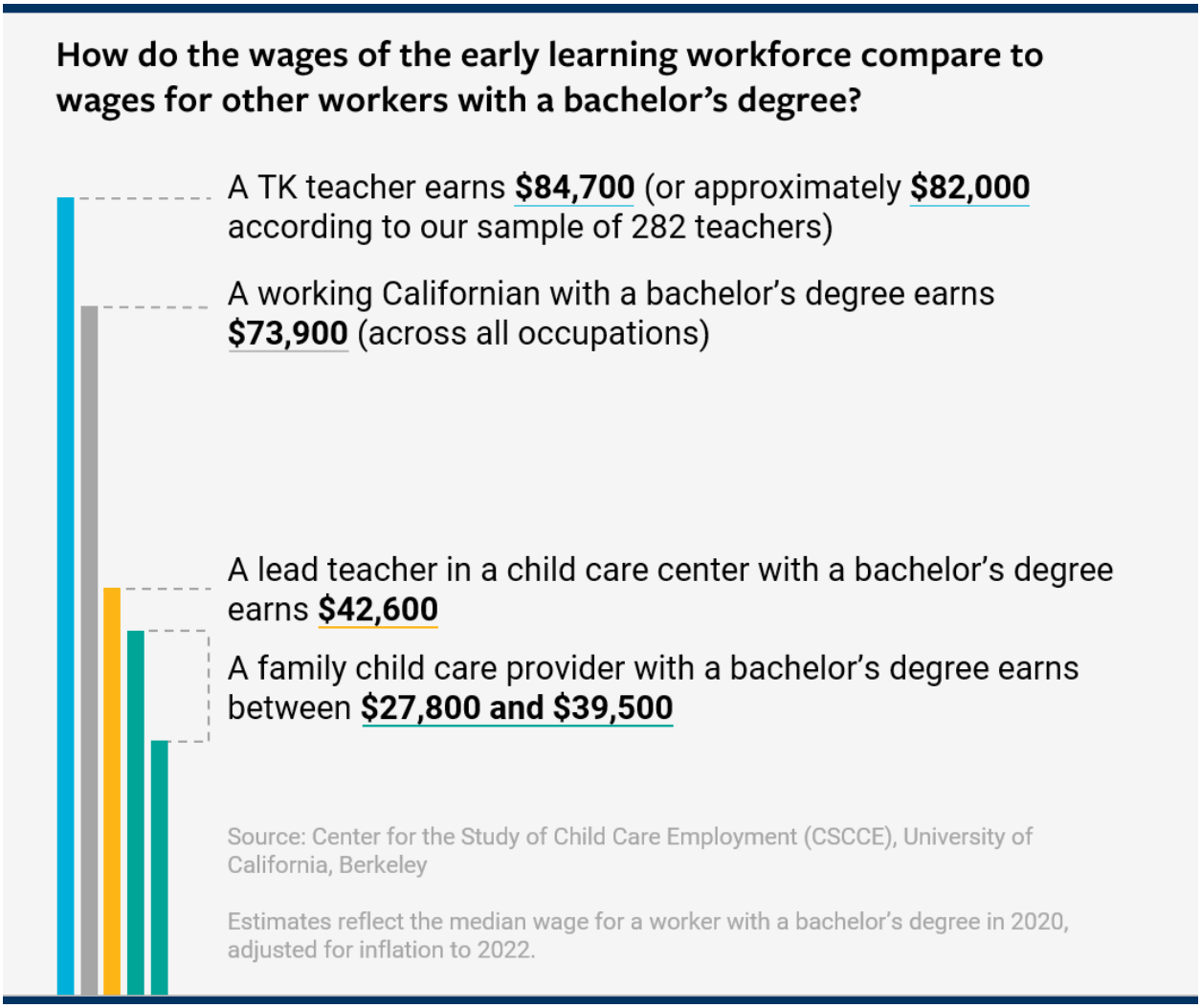
Throughout this section, we compare the wages, benefits, and financial stability of early educators. In particular, we focus on workers with a bachelor's degree or higher, who are the most comparable to TK educators. For our findings on compensation across all FCC providers and center educators, refer to our report *California Early Educator Compensation* (Montoya, Austin, et al., 2022); for information on their economic well-being, see *"The Forgotten Ones"—The Economic Well-Being of Early Educators During COVID-19* (Powell, Chávez, et al., 2022).

Wages

Among lead teachers with a bachelor's degree, an FCC provider earns between $27,700 and $39,300, and a center-based educator earns around $42,600. Despite having similar educational attainment, we estimate that teachers in Transitional Kindergarten earn double this salary: our sample of 282 TK teachers reported a median salary of $82,000. When combining this estimate with other publicly available data sources, we find a similar estimate of $84,700 (Powell, Montoya, et al., 2022). **Figure 12** compares median annual wages for workers with a bachelor's degree. For regional estimates, refer to the **Appendix**.

FIGURE 12. MEDIAN ANNUAL WAGES FOR WORKERS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

California Early Education Workforce, 2020; Adjusted to 2022 Dollars



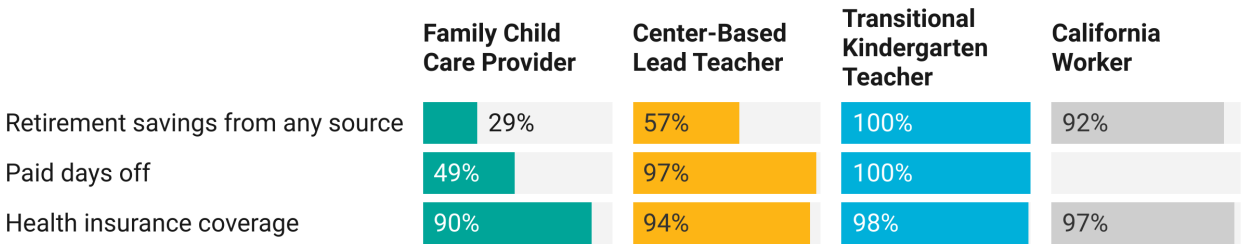
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
FCC Pay Range: Family child care providers are self-employed and may not quantify their wages on an hourly or monthly basis. To estimate their median take-home pay, we instead compute a pay range: we multiply their annual household income by the reported proportion earned through working in early care and education. For more details, refer to our report on educator compensation (Montoya, Austin, et al., 2022).
Median for Californians: Author's analysis of the 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Sample, accessed via IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2021).
TK Teacher Estimates: The estimate of $84,700 is a composite of the authors' analysis of CDE J-90 actual salary data from 2019, 2021 California Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates for kindergarten, 2021 California BLS estimates for elementary teachers, and the 2020 CSCCE California ECE Workforce Study TK sample. The median estimate of $82,000 represents the last of these alone. For more details, refer to our snapshot on TK wages (Powell, Montoya, et al., 2022).

Benefits

In addition to higher wages, TK teachers tend to have more robust benefits than their peers in center- and home-based child care settings. Virtually all TK teachers have access to retirement savings, paid days off, and health insurance (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022). In this regard, they fare better than the broader California workforce, even among those with a bachelor's degree: for instance, 92 percent of working Californians with a bachelor's degree have retirement savings from any source. By comparison, among early educators with a bachelor's degree, only 57 percent of center-based educators have retirement savings of any kind, along with just 29 percent of family child care providers. **Figure 13** summarizes the differences in benefits by ECE setting.

FIGURE 13. RETIREMENT SAVINGS, PAID DAYS OFF, AND HEALTH INSURANCE

Californians With a Bachelor's Degree, 2020



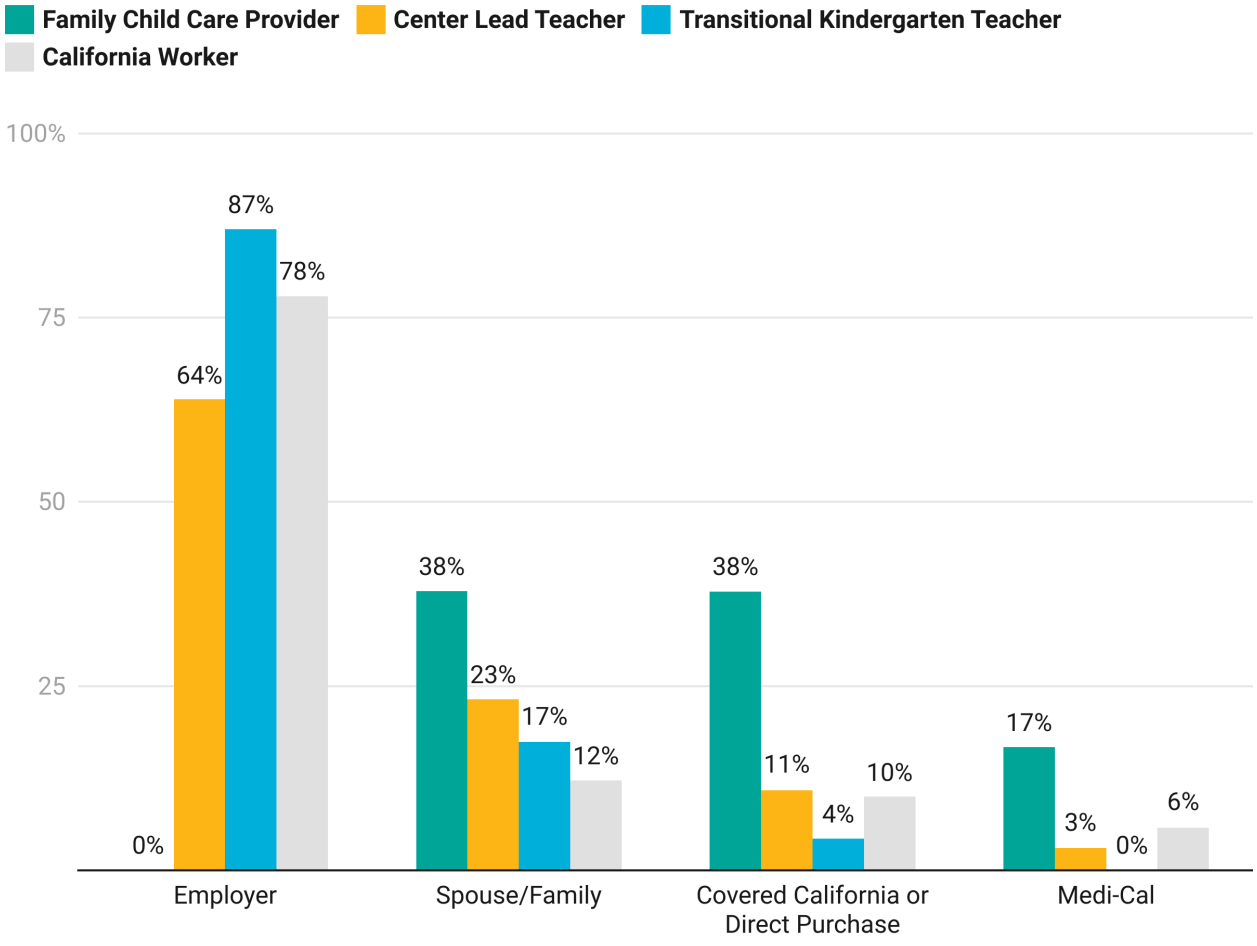
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Among those who have paid time off, the median number of days off is 10 in all settings. Data are not available for all California workers.
California Averages: Retirement savings derive from the authors' analysis of the 2020 Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2022). Paid days off by state and educational attainment are not available. The health insurance estimate derives from the authors' analysis of the 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Sample, accessed via IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2021).
Family Child Care Provider N=454-624
Center Lead Teacher N=682-740
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=260-282

Health insurance remains a challenge for FCC providers: one in ten providers with a bachelor's degree do not have coverage. They have no option for an employer-sponsored plan to reduce the cost burden; instead, the majority of FCC providers either enroll through the plan of a spouse or other family member or purchase a plan directly (**Figure 14**). Access to Medi-Cal provides coverage for 17 percent of FCC providers with insurance.

Most center-based educators with any coverage enroll via their employer, though 23 percent of center lead teachers rely on the plan of a spouse or other family member. By comparison, virtually all TK teachers have access to an employer-sponsored plan, and a strong majority (87 percent) of them ultimately enroll that way.

FIGURE 14. SOURCES OF HEALTH INSURANCE

Californians With a Bachelor's Degree, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Family child care providers do not have employer-sponsored health insurance. Figure excludes Medicare and other sources of coverage such as TRICARE.
California Averages: Statewide sources of insurance derive from authors' analysis of the 2017-2021 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS-ASEC) (Flood et al., 2021).
Family Child Care Provider N=1,629
Center Lead Teacher N=990
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=234

While access to healthcare coverage is vital for the economic and physical well-being of educators, the quality of this coverage has its own impact. High-deductible plans have proliferated in the past 15 years, but they are not evenly distributed across workers (Cohen & Zammitti, 2018). FCC providers are more likely to enroll in a high-deductible plan than center- and TK-based educators (43 percent, compared to 38 and 25 percent, respectively). Additional research on the affordability and quality of healthcare plans for teachers is necessary to illuminate nuance in this regard.

Economic Well-Being

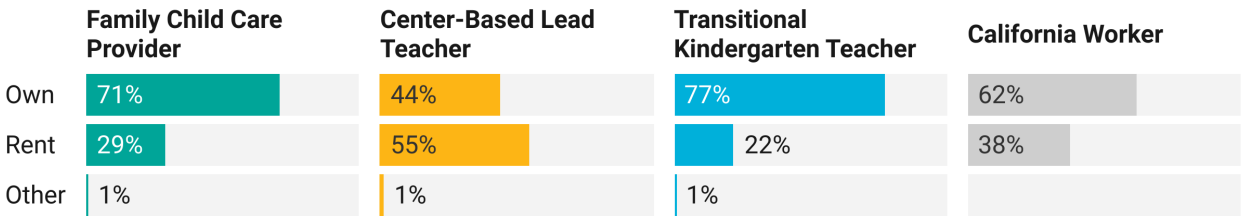
Low wages and inconsistent benefits have a profound impact on the ECE workforce. To make ends meet, some early educators take on a second job: around 11 percent of FCC providers and center lead teachers with a bachelor's degree and 8 percent of TK teachers. These second jobs typically take up around one additional work day for center and TK lead teachers (a median of 8 hours and 7 hours per week, respectively) and one and a half additional work days for an FCC (12 hours). In other words, some teachers supplement their income with a "side hustle," but most rely on their wages and those of their spouse to make ends meet. Teachers' economic well-being, in other words, is a product of their chronically low wages. Even TK teachers, who earn the living wage for a single parent of one child, face some challenges.

Homeownership

Among early educators with a bachelor's degree, TK teachers are the most likely to own their home (77 percent), followed closely by FCC providers (71 percent). Center-based teachers, meanwhile, trail at 44 percent. For comparison, approximately 62 percent of Californians with a bachelor's degree own their home. **Figure 15** describes the living arrangements of early educators and Californians with a bachelor's degree.

FIGURE 15. HOMEOWNERSHIP

Californians With a Bachelor's Degree, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
California Average: This estimate derives from the authors' analysis of the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Sample, accessed via IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2021). ACS data does not include an option for "other."
Family Child Care Provider N=611
Center Lead Teacher N=731
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=281

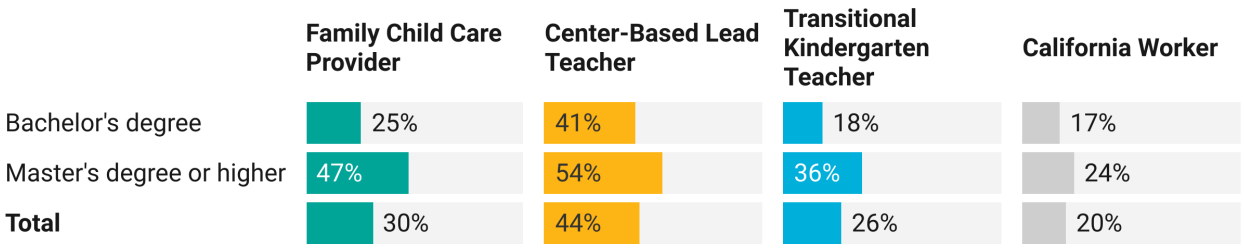
For many Californians, homeownership remains out of reach until the mid-career stage or later. Across the broader California workforce with a bachelor's degree or higher, 88 percent achieve homeownership by their fifties. For the ECE workforce with the same education, FCC and TK teachers are not far behind: 83 percent and 87 percent, respectively. Lead teachers in centers, however, are far less likely to own their home in their fifties (63 percent). Notably, our sample of center teachers also includes a few educators with a bachelor's degree who are experiencing homelessness.

Student Loan Debt

Many educators with at least a bachelor's degree are working on paying back student loans, including 30 percent of FCC providers, 44 percent of center teachers, and 26 percent of TK teachers (**Figure 16**). By comparison, 20 percent of Californians with four-year degrees across professions have current student loan debt. Among educators with a master's degree or higher, the prevalence of loan debt is greater: for instance, 54 percent of center lead teachers with a master's degree or higher have student loan debt, compared with only 24 percent of Californians with a master's degree or higher.

FIGURE 16. STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Californians With a Bachelor's Degree, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
California Average: This estimate derives from the authors' analysis of the 2020 Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2022).
Family Child Care Provider N=639
Center Lead Teacher N=774
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=280

Among educators with student loans, the current balance exceeds $50,000 for a crucial minority of educators with a bachelor's degree or higher: 40 percent of FCC providers, 33 percent of TK teachers, and 20 percent of center lead teachers.

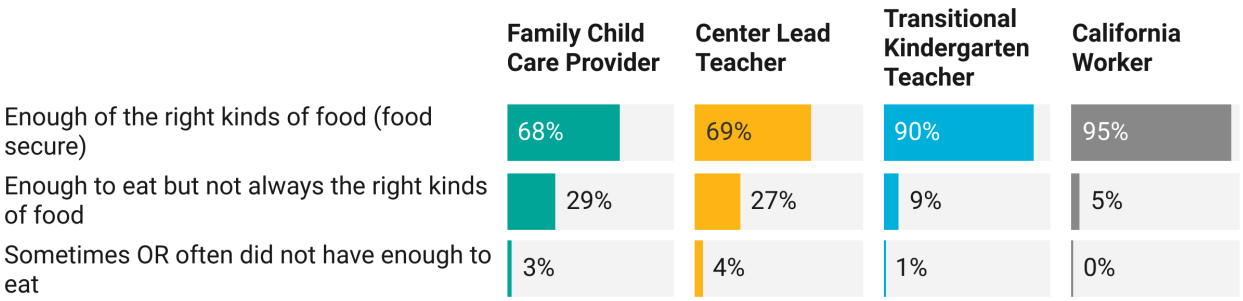
Food Security

Apart from some TK positions, salaries in early care and education fall short of a living wage in California (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022). As such, educators with bachelor's degrees may contend with food insecurity, including around one in three center- and home-based educators in 2020 (**Figure 17**). Most of this group could obtain sufficient food, but not always the right kinds of food they needed. Meanwhile, an estimated 3 percent of all FCC providers and 4 percent of center teachers with a bachelor's degree sometimes or often did not have enough to eat.

Among TK teachers, 10 percent experienced food insecurity with only 1 percent sometimes or often not having enough to eat. By contrast, fewer than 5 percent of Californians with bachelor's degrees across professions experienced food insecurity, with less than 1 percent sometimes or often not having enough to eat.

FIGURE 17. FOOD SECURITY

Californians With a Bachelor's Degree, 2020



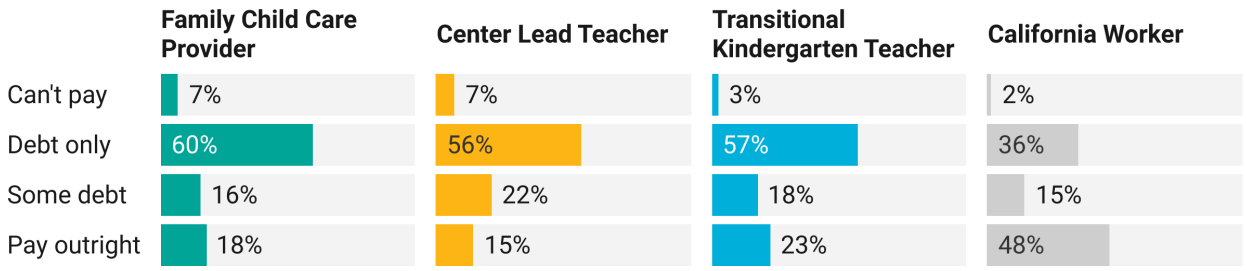
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
California Average: This estimate derives from the authors' analysis of the 2016-2020 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) (Flood et al., 2021).
Family Child Care Provider N=639
Center Lead Teacher N=774
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=280

Financial Emergencies

Salaries in early care and education leave little room for savings. As a result, few educators with a bachelor's degree reported being able to pay for a $400 emergency expense outright, either by using cash on hand or using a credit card and paying off in full at the next statement: 18 percent of FCC providers, 15 percent of center teachers, and 23 percent of TK teachers, compared to 48 percent of working Californians with the same level of education. Around 7 percent of home- and center-based teachers could not afford the unplanned expense at all, compared with 3 percent of TK teachers and 2 percent of all Californian workers. Instead, early educators often rely wholly or partially on debt to cover an emergency expense—strategies such as paying off credit card debt over time, borrowing from friends and family, selling something, obtaining a loan from a bank, or relying on a measure of last resort like overdraft, a deposit advance, or a payday loan. **Figure 18** describes the choices of workers with a bachelor's degree when faced with an unplanned expense of $400.

FIGURE 18. HOW WOULD YOU PAY FOR A $400 EMERGENCY EXPENSE?

Californians With a Bachelor's Degree, 2020



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
California Average: This estimate derives from the authors' analysis of the 2020 Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2022).
Family Child Care Provider N=586
Center Lead Teacher N=738
Transitional Kindergarten Teacher N=282

Future Professional Plans

The majority of early educators we surveyed in 2020 planned to continue in the ECE profession—at least through 2023. As of late 2020, 74 percent of TK teachers intended to stay in their roles. Similarly, about two thirds of other early educators with a bachelor's degree or higher see themselves remaining in the classroom, with 4 percent of home-based and 6 percent of center-based teachers envisioning a shift to TK-12.

While a strong contingent of educators planned to carry on in the profession in 2020, some were uncertain of the future: 21 percent of FCC providers with a bachelor's degree did not know where they would be in three years, along with 17 percent of center teachers and 5 percent of TK teachers. While TK teachers were less likely to express uncertainty, 12 percent of them did plan to retire, compared to 6 percent of home-based and 5 percent of center-based teachers.

At the time of publication of this report, 2023 has just begun, and teacher shortages abound. Nationally, the size of the child care workforce has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels; there are 92.5 percent as many individuals employed in the sector today as there were in February 2020 (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2023). Inflation has eroded the weak purchasing power of teachers' salaries, and pandemic relief dollars are winding down. Against this backdrop, the relatively financially secure TK workforce is slated to expand with an influx of state dollars, but stabilizing funds for other early educators are uncertain.

Conclusion

For TK teachers, kinship and connectivity with other ECE lead teachers may be a new concept: nearly one in three did not feel like part of the ECE field in 2020 (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022). However, TK will soon become one of the cornerstones of California's early care and education system, and as a result, policymakers must develop programs that consider the teacher workforce across the mixed-delivery ECE system.

The 2022-2023 budget year in California ushered in an era of increased focus and spending on early learning. Policy initiatives aimed at improving and growing the state's system include universal Transitional Kindergarten, increased attention to creating a broader universal preschool program, and increased reimbursement rates for the state's subsidized child care system, as well as reform of the rate structure. However, the increased attention and resources for early care and education do not adequately support the unstable ECE system, a system that is struggling to recover from the combination of persistent underfunding and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While some new ECE policies are promising, they also bring upheaval to the early learning system and its workforce. The expansion of Transitional Kindergarten has created an increased demand for TK teachers. Jobs in TK pay the highest wages in the early learning system, followed by those in the subsidized California State Preschool Program, and then those in all other settings. There is an expectation that many early educators currently teaching in child care centers and family child care will move to TK jobs where they can double their income and attain employer-provided benefits that are lacking in the rest of the field.

While educators should absolutely have the opportunity to access better paying jobs—and adding their expertise and diversity of backgrounds and experiences to TK classrooms would be a boon to children and schools—an exodus of center- and home-based teachers into TK will create a need for more teachers in the birth-to-age-three system. In addition, early educators still face barriers to accessing the higher-paying jobs in TK because they are not likely to become lead teachers without first acting as an assistant, intern, or similar interim position (Montoya, Powell, et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the most recent increase in reimbursement rates, while positive, does not counter the effects of inflation and applies only to subsidized programs. California's piecemeal improvements further entrench disparities between programs with stable public funding and those without.

More broadly, ECE policy in California continues to treat settings as either "care" (FCC programs and most centers) or "education" (California State Preschool and TK), reinforcing an artificial divide between the ECE options for families. Meanwhile, the compensation and working conditions of educators still depend on program resources and setting, the price families can afford, and the age of children served. These differences yield an inequitable result for children and their teachers. Going forward, the design of policies that address the ECE system as a whole will be both a profound challenge and an urgent need.

Policy Recommendations

1. Continue the redesign of California's public ECE funding to cover the true cost of care; simultaneously, continue advancing towards a truly universal ECE system for children birth to age five.
2. Design policies that unify and uplift, rather than distinguish and separate, teachers in TK, centers, and FCC programs. In particular, design policies that achieve parity in compensation and benefits across settings.
3. Ensure that early educators with a bachelor's degree—particularly with a major in early childhood education or child development—can move freely between ECE settings by minimizing barriers to hiring eligibility. In hiring for TK, honor the expertise of California's longest-serving preschool teachers: the workforce in FCC programs and centers.
4. Fund career pathways into the ECE field that support teachers who reflect the diversity of California's children, including educators who start out as teaching assistants. Allocate funding to analyze and support the burgeoning assistant teacher workforce in TK.
5. Gather data on the quality of healthcare plans and other benefits available to the ECE workforce.
6. Allocate public funding to evaluate the impact of TK expansion on the broader ECE system in California. Assess and address inequities in the system—both for children enrolled and teachers employed.
7. Expand investments in programs that support the economic well-being of the workforce: for instance, facilities grants for FCC providers and Credential Fee Support for TK teachers.

Appendix

APPENDIX FIGURE 1. MEDIAN ANNUAL WAGES FOR WORKERS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE, BY REGION

California 2020, Adjusted to 2022 Dollars

Region	Family Child Care Provider	Center-Based Lead Teacher	Transitional Kindergarten Teacher	California Worker
Northern	$19,700 to $33,400	$40,500	$74,900	$69,900
Bay Area	$30,900 to $45,600	$51,500	$84,700	$91,600
Central	$13,100 to $30,100	$39,500	$78,700	$66,200
Southern	$30,600 to $42,200	$41,600	$85,800	$70,100
Los Angeles	$30,600 to $39,500	$41,600	$89,300	$65,000
Statewide	**$27,800 to $39,500**	**$42,600**	**$84,700**	**$73,900**

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
FCC Pay Range: Family child care providers are self-employed and may not quantify their wages on an hourly or monthly basis. To estimate their median take-home pay, we instead compute a pay range: we multiply their annual household income by the reported proportion earned through working in early care and education. For more details, refer to our report on educator compensation (Montoya et al, 2022a).
Median for Californians: Author's analysis of the 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Sample, accessed via IPUMS (Ruggles et al., 2021).
TK Teacher Estimates: The estimate is a composite of the authors' analysis of CDE J-90 actual salary data from 2019, 2021 California Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates for kindergarten, 2021 California BLS estimates for elementary teachers, and the 2020 CSCCE California ECE Workforce Study TK sample. The statewide median for the last component alone is $82,000. For more details, refer to our snapshot on TK wages (Powell et al, 2022b).

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Teachers of Preschool-Age Children in California

A Comparison of Lead Teachers in Transitional Kindergarten, Child Care Centers, and Family Child Care Homes

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The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), founded in 1999, is the national leader in early care and education workforce research and policy. 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 an effective public early care and education system that secures racial, gender, and economic justice for the women whose labor is the linchpin of stable, quality services.

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