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ABSTRACT

This policy brief discusses the Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder being implemented in Washington State. The initiative institutionalizes a career ladder with wage increments based on experience, job responsibility, and relevant education with a unique mix of public and private funding. The brief builds a case for the career ladder by exploring the role of child care in society and flaws in the current system of compensation for early childhood workers. Following an executive summary, contents are: (1) "Background: Our Need for Quality Child Care," including "The Context of Work and Family" and "The Child Care Workforce: Low Wages and High Turnover"; (2) "Quality Early Childhood Education Teachers Create the Foundation for Quality Care and Education," including "Brain Research, Early Learning, and Preparedness for K-12 Schooling"; (3) "Current Public Investments in Child Care," including "The Market Is Not the Solution," and "Child Care Wage Stagnation: A Discussion of Wage Discrimination, Market Failure, Public Goods, and Merit Goods"; (4) "A Supply Side Solution: The Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder," including "The Washington State Career Development Ladder Project," "How the Career Ladder Works," "A Pilot Project Developed from Best Practices," "The Status of the Career Ladder," "The Career Ladder Enhances Teachers' Economic Security," and "Unionization and Professionalization"; and (5) "Public Support for Public Funding for a Public Good," including "The Dignity of Work and American Values." The paper's appendix contains the career ladder matrix. (Contains 80 endnotes.) (EV)

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POLICY BRIEF

The Washington State Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder

John R. Burbank

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About the Economic Opportunity Institute

The Economic Opportunity Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, public policy institute focused on creating economic security for working Americans. The institute builds a bridge to economic security through research, policy, and public dialogue.

The Economic Opportunity Institute is currently developing pragmatic policies in the following areas: Social Security, retirement security, early childhood education, health care, family leave, and workforce development.

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Recognizing and Rewarding the Importance of the Early Childhood Education Teacher

Executive Summary

Our Children's Teachers

The most essential component for quality early childhood education is the commitment, quality, and continuity of the teacher/caregiver. We know that quality child care and early education are essential for the intellectual and social development of children. But, instead of receiving recognition and professional standing, child care workers earn poverty-generating wages in undervalued jobs that rob them of the dignity of work. Wages for child care teachers in Washington state have stagnated below $8 an hour for over a decade.[1] Almost half of the licensed child care centers do not provide medical benefits to their teaching staff.[2] Consequently, turnover among early childhood education teachers exceeds 40%.[3]

The Need for Child Care

Child care is essential in today's economy. During the last several decades, mothers have entered the workforce in large numbers and single parents have become much more numerous. As of 1998, 65% of mothers with children under 6 years old were in the labor force.[4] Similarly, in Washington state, 66% of children under age 6 live with working parents.[5] Moreover, both mothers and fathers are working longer hours.[6] Not surprisingly, the number of children being cared for in a child care or early education program has soared over past decades. In Washington state, 30% of all toddlers and preschoolers were in licensed family homes or centers in 1998. And estimates of unlicensed care suggest that approximately 46% of all toddlers and preschoolers were in licensed or unlicensed care in 1998.[7]

The Costs to Families

Child care costs represent a huge burden to most working families. In Washington state, the average annual cost for full-time center care for pre-school children in 1998 was $5,352.[8] This equals 12% of the 1998 before-tax median household income in Washington state of $44,134 for child care for one child and up to 19% of the 1998 per capita income in Washington state of $28,719.[9]

The Quality of Care

Even though the current costs of child care represent a large burden for most families, the costs would be out of reach if all centers provided high quality care. In fact, the majority of child care settings in the United States do not provide high quality care and early learning.[10] Despite its necessity and importance and the evidence that high quality early childhood education makes a positive difference in the developmental outcomes of children, the United States underinvests in both the quantity and quality of early care and education. Parents pay 60% of the costs of child care, with the government paying approximately 39% and business only contributing 1%.[11] Parents can't afford to pay more. Businesses do not even invest in their own employees' child care needs, and there is a downward trend for employer-provided benefits of all kinds. Clearly, the need for high quality child care is a public issue that cannot be solved by individual families alone or sole reliance on the private market.

While public funding is necessary to meet the need for child care and help families with the cost, this funding, through the currently inadequate subsidy structure, should not institutionalize poor quality, as it now does.

Poor quality child care is not inevitable, necessary, or good. Expanding access to child care should result in the expansion of conditions that fully value and appropriately pay the workers who take care of and teach our children.

The Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder

Public policy that remedies the wage impoverishment embodied in early childhood education will pave the way for universal high quality early care and education through the professionalization of the early childhood education workforce. The Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder does just this. It institutionalizes a career ladder with wage increments based on experience, job responsibility, and relevant education with a unique mix of private-public funding. This Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder returns to the early childhood education teacher the value and esteem of her work. It enables and creates incentives for child care workers to gain the knowledge and professionalism to both care for and educate young children. This targeted investment in compensation creates a foundation to secure the future for our children. Further, this policy recognizes the public benefits provided by consistent, qualified, and enthusiastic early childhood teachers.

Background: Our Need for Quality Child Care

The Context of Work and Family

The increase in women's labor force participation has been one of the most significant social and economic trends of the last half-century.[12] The employment rate for mothers with children under age 6 increased from 18% in 1960 to 60% in 1998.[13] Further, the proportion of single-parent households in the U.S. has more than doubled over the past three decades. In 1970, 12% of households with children were headed by a single parent. In 1998, the proportion had grown to 28%.[14]

The number of children being cared for in a child care or early education program has soared over past decades, driven by increases in the number of women in the workforce, changes in family structure, and parents' desire to provide children with educational experiences to prepare them for school.[15]

By 1995, about 40% of three-year-olds, 65% of four-year-olds, and 75% of five-year-olds not yet enrolled in school were enrolled in center-based programs. In comparison just 28% of all four-year-old children were enrolled in a preprimary program in 1965.[16] As more women have entered the workforce, more and more of their children have entered center-based programs at younger and younger ages.[17] For example, since the early 1980s, the percentage of three and four-year-olds in center-based programs has increased by almost 50%, the percentage of toddlers has doubled, and the percentage of infants has tripled.

Welfare reform has further accelerated the need for child care and early learning opportunities as families move from welfare to work. In Washington state, the number of families using the child care subsidy program has increased by 59% since 1997.[18] Moreover, the growth in low-wage jobs over the last several decades is driving many mothers into the labor force and creating more financial strain upon families. The number of children receiving subsidies from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has tripled in the past decade.[19]

The Child Care Workforce: Low Wages and High Turnover

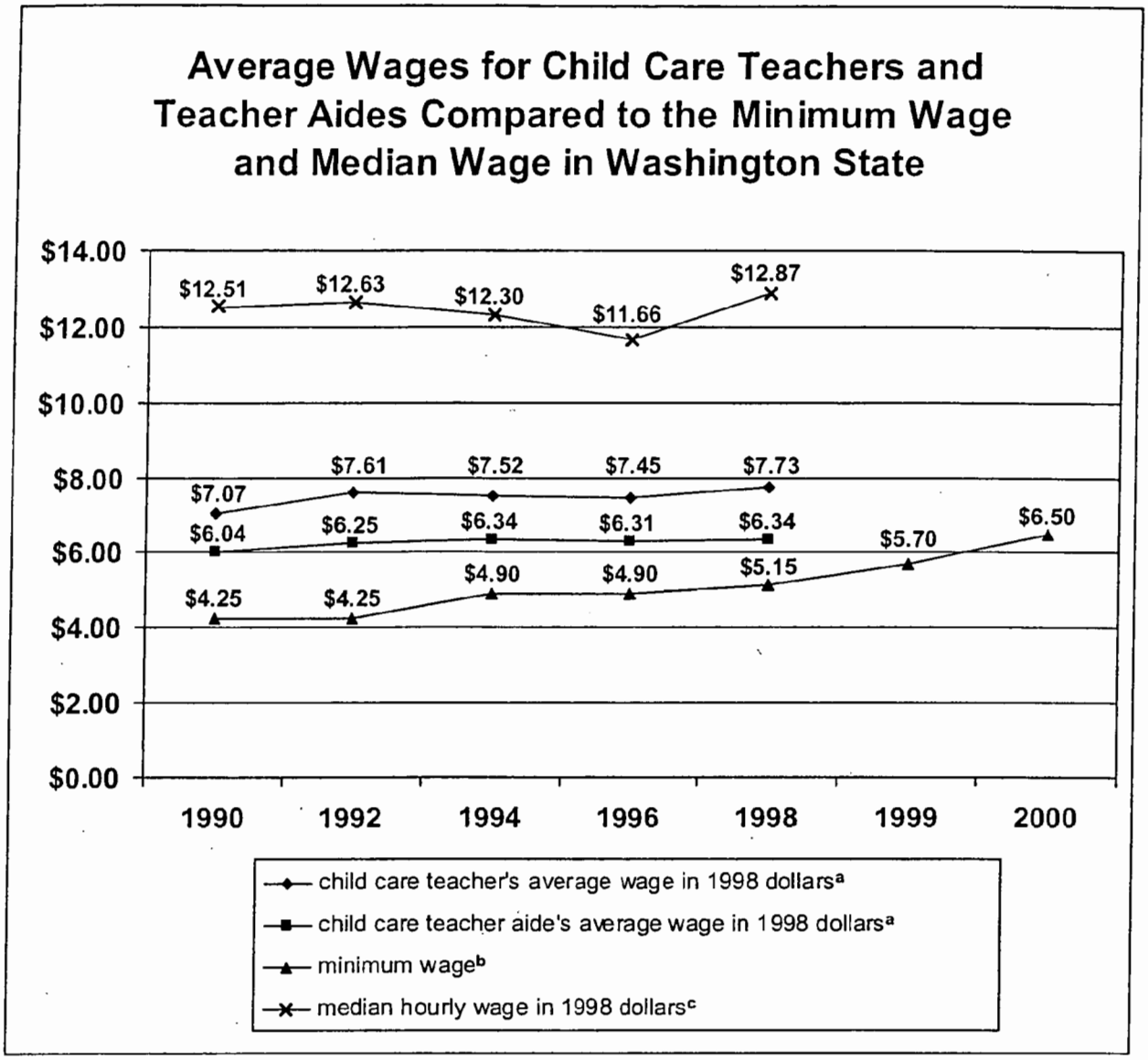
Child care workers are caught between a dedication to the children for whom they care and the need to make a livable wage. In child care centers across Washington state, staff wages bump along the minimum wage floor. Wages for early childhood education teachers have stagnated for the last decade between $7.07 and $7.73, while child care aide wages failed to top $6.50 for the entire decade. In fact, full-time early childhood education workers earn one-third as much as the typical wage earner.[20] Close to half of these workers receive no health care benefits, and a third do not even get sick leave. Wages and working conditions create a revolving door for turnover, which exceeds 40%. In short, the work of early childhood teachers is grossly undervalued, and these teachers are grossly underpaid.

Hourly wages for licensed child care center staff, 1998[21]

Aides	$6.34/hr
Teachers	$7.73/hr
Supervisors	$9.48/hr

Percent of licensed child care centers providing benefits, 1998[22]

Medical Insurance	55%
Paid Sick Leave	68%
Paid Vacation	73%

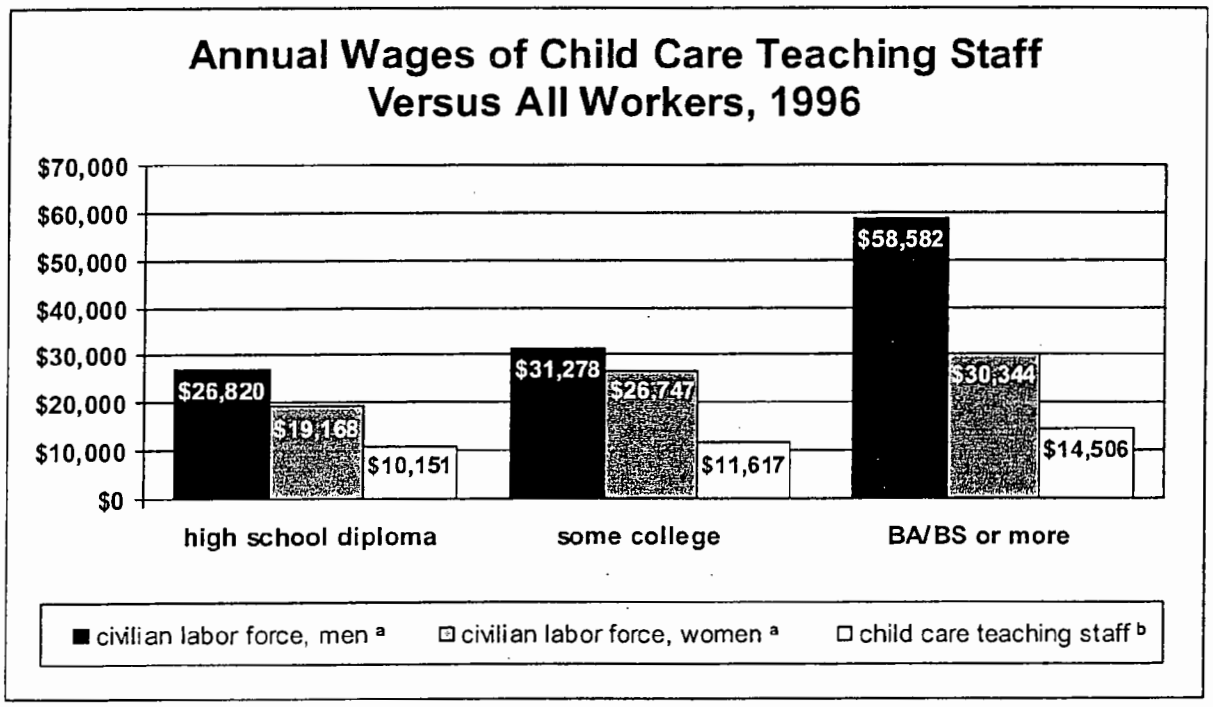


Sources:
[a] "Licensed Child Care in Washington State: 1998" Marna Geyer Miller, Ph.D. and Laura Schrager, M.A. January 2000. Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis. pg. 37.
[b] Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, www.lni.wa.gov/scs/workstandards/wagehist.htm
[c] Economic Policy Institute, www.epinet.org/datazaone/medhrlywages/html

Teacher turnover: High teacher turnover hurts kids and has long-lasting negative effects.[23] The National Child Care Staffing Study found that higher staff turnover rates meant that children spent less time engaged in social activities with peers and more time in aimless wandering and scored lower on language development tests.[24] The relationship that the child care teacher builds with the young children in her care profoundly affects how these children approach all future relationships.[25] Children with closer relationships to their preschool teachers have better thinking and language skills, are more sociable, and show fewer behavior problems.[26]

Wages are the primary determinant of staff turnover. Regardless of their dedication, highly qualified early childhood teachers, 98% of whom are women, can only sacrifice so much financially before they have to place their own financial security and the needs of their families above their desired careers. Not surprisingly, when centers increase wages, turnover declines.[27] For instance, centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) pay higher wages to their teaching staff and their retention rate has been twice as high as non-NAEYC centers over the past ten years.[28] The United States Department of Defense saw a dramatic decrease in turnover after increasing the wages of their child care teachers. In military child care centers, caregivers receive systematic, ongoing training as well as compensation linked to training that is comparable to that of other individuals with similar training, seniority, and experience. Staff turnover has been reduced from over 300% annually before the reforms to less than 30% currently. Staff morale and professionalism have improved.[29] (Note: The Economic Opportunity Institute is preparing a study of how early childhood education works in the military, with a focus on the Fort Lewis, Washington, base. Publication and web posting are expected in July 2001).

Children benefit from teachers who are committed to the profession and seek additional education and training. Instead of being encouraged and supported in their efforts to increase their knowledge of early childhood education, too many teachers cannot afford to make an investment in their career. The directors of typical child care centers are also adversely affected by high turnover. Investments in training are nullified when qualified staff cannot afford to continue to work at the center after training is implemented. The morale of the entire center suffers from the instability of the workforce. Further, as the following chart indicates, child care teachers are not rewarded or recognized for their efforts to increase their education.



Sources:[30]
[a]Current Population Survey, 1996, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor
[b]National Child Care Staffing Study, wages in 1996 dollars.

Quality Early Childhood Education Teachers Create the Foundation for Quality Early Care and Education

"Quality of care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the child care teacher and the child."

The National Research Council,
From "Neurons to Neighborhoods"[31]

A well-trained, dedicated, and stable child care workforce is essential to the quality of care received by children. Academic studies comparing attributes of child care teachers with the quality of care received by children in their care consistently demonstrate strong positive relationships between the quality of child care and staff wages,[32] levels of teacher education,[33] and specialized training in child development.[34] The low wages, high turnover, and lack of incentives for increased education in the child care field create costly and long-term negative consequences.

Brain Research, Early Learning, and Preparedness for K-12 Schooling

The latest research on brain development demonstrates that a child's environment and experiences in the earliest years of life have profound, lifelong consequences.[35] Numerous studies have documented the positive link between high quality early care and the intellectual, verbal, cognitive, behavioral, and social development of children of all ages. These studies include the report of the Carnegie Task Force; the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study; the Carolina Abecedarian Project; and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care.[36]

Parents and experts have long known that how individuals function from the pre-school years all the way through adolescence and even as adults hinges, to a significant extent, on the experiences children have in their first three years. Parents understand implicitly the positive role that tender, loving care plays in a young child's development. For these parents, common sense dictates that babies cared for by loving and attentive adults in safe, predictable environments will be better learners than those raised with less attention in less secure settings. Now that scientists are able to study the developing brain, powerful scientific evidence confirms the particular importance of the first three years of a child's life. The 1994 Carnegie Report documents these findings:

- The brain development that takes place during the pre-natal period and in the first year of life is more rapid and extensive than previously realized.
- Brain development is much more vulnerable to environmental influence than previously suspected.
- The influence of early environment on brain development is long-lasting.
- The environment affects not only the number of brain cells and number of connections among them but also the way these connections are "wired."
- While an adverse environment can have long-lasting negative effects, a good start in life can do much more to promote learning and prevent damage than was previously thought.[37]

The quality of care received by children of all ages has long-term, significant effects on their intellectual and social development. Researchers conducting the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study found that when

they tested and compared children in low quality child care settings to children in higher quality settings, children in the higher quality classrooms:

- ❑ Displayed more advanced language development and pre-math skills.
- ❑ Had more advanced social skills.
- ❑ Had more positive attitudes toward their child care experiences.
- ❑ Had warmer relationships with their teachers.[38]

In general, researchers find that children in poor quality child care are delayed in language and reading skills and display more aggression toward other children and adults.[39] In particular, the Carolina Abecedarian study provides strong evidence that quality early childhood education significantly improves the scholastic success and educational attainments of poor children even into early adulthood. Further, this and other research indicate that while no child is protected from the effects of low quality care, low income and at-risk children are the most susceptible to the effects of low quality child care.[40]

Good child care and early education experiences help young children build their language and literacy skills so they can enter school ready to read and succeed.[41] In high quality early care and education settings, the young child is not only learning but also learning how to learn.[42] The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development followed a group of children through the first seven years of their lives and found that higher quality care was related to higher cognitive and language ability and also higher levels of school readiness.[43] The researchers with the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study followed up with their preschool subjects when they reached the second grade. They found that:

- ❑ High quality child care continued to positively predict children's performance well into their school careers.
- ❑ Child care quality was related to both basic cognitive skills (language and math) and children's behavioral skills in the classroom (thinking/attention skills, sociability, problem behaviors, and peer relations).
- ❑ Children who have traditionally been at risk of not doing well in school are affected more by the quality of child care experiences than other children.[44]

Current Public Investments in Child Care

> "It is not effective to address professional development and compensation as independent factors because...when policies require higher education standards, but do not improve compensation, turnover of staff may be an unintended and negative result."
>
> National Center for Early Development and Learning[45]

Despite major increases in spending on child care, job conditions in the profession remain substandard. For example, total federal dollars available to states for child care increased from approximately $4.5 billion in 1993 to $9.2 billion in 2000.[46] In Washington state, funding for child care and early learning programs for FY 2001 is estimated at $490 million.[47] However, the wages of child care teachers have stagnated, averaging $7.73 an hour. Assistant teachers' wages averaged $6.34 in 1998.[48]

The public investment in child care has allowed more centers to assist low-income families with child care costs.[49] But an increase in public subsidies for low-income families has not improved the job conditions of child care teachers. Public funding for child care in the form of subsidies is based on rates that do not include adequate compensation levels for the teachers.

Further, spending on increasing the quantity of child care that is not focused upon the quality of education and care conceals the enormous investment that will be necessary if welfare reform is to be truly successful. In other words, funding poor quality care may free mothers to enter the paid labor force but it does not foster the cognitive, emotional, and social development that could most benefit children from low-income families.

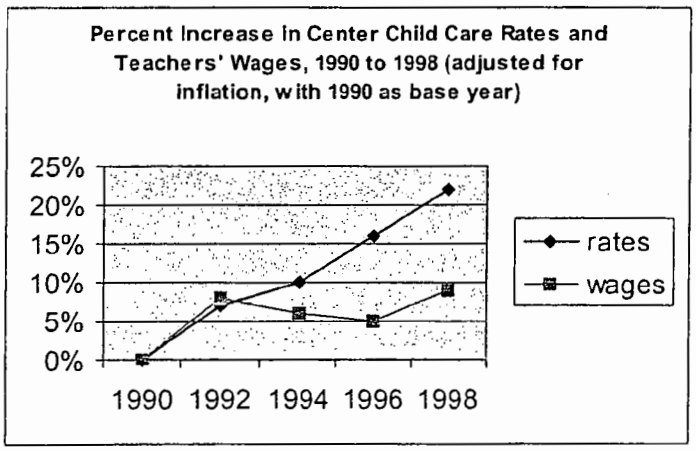
A public investment in training for child care teachers is essential for quality child care. But only public dollars that link training and education to compensation can professionalize the child care workforce. Increased training and education without public funding for wage enhancements will only drive the most qualified early childhood education teachers out of the field.

The Market Is Not the Solution

Relying on the market to improve the job conditions of child care teachers has not and will not solve this problem. Even though demand for child care is high, wages for child care workers have stagnated, while costs have forced many families into financial insecurity. In Washington state, the average annual cost for full-time center care for one pre-school child in 1998 was $5,352.[50] This equals 12% of the 1998 before-tax median household income in Washington state of $44,134 and 19% of the 1998 per capita income in Washington state of $28,719.[51]

Moreover, even though during the last several decades, the benefits accruing to businesses by the availability of child care and early learning opportunities have risen along with the labor force participation of women and the increased working hours of all employees, there has been little change in who pays the bulk of the cost for child care: parents pay 60%, government pays 39%, and businesses only contribute 1%.[52]

The true cost of quality care is far higher than most parents can afford to pay. In fact, presently the cost of child care is subsidized (estimated at 20% of the costs) by the foregone earnings of child care workers. This means that qualified early childhood education teachers subsidize the cost of care because they could earn more in another occupation. These staff provide their services for less than what they are worth in the labor market.[53] Further, wages for child care teachers have stagnated even though the rates charged by child care centers in Washington state during the last decade increased almost 25%.[54]



Source:
DSHS Research and Data Analysis. Licensed Child Care in Washington State: 1998. pg. 54.

Child Care Wage Stagnation: A Discussion of Wage Discrimination, Market Failure, Public Goods, and Merit Goods

The stagnation of child care workers' wages results from a high elasticity of supply, caused by easy labor market entry into this occupation with few education requirements. Further, child care is often a first step into employment or re-employment for many women, in particular women with children, and, with welfare reform, especially those women who are moving off of welfare.[55] From a market perspective, the supply of child care workers has kept up with demand for child care, and the "crisis" in child care is more fictional than real. From a perspective that includes considerations of value outside the market, as child care has moved away from the unpaid and unrecognized work of maternal care in the home, the undervaluing of this work has followed it into the economy. The industry embodies wage discrepancies based upon gender and maternity.

Market failure is another concept that can explain the low wages of child care workers and the poor quality of child care. The private market fails to provide the optimal quantity and quality of care. Some aspects of this can be found in all industries, as a result of imperfect information about available supply. However, especially in child care, families often purchase a level of quality that is too low as it fails to account for the positive external effects of high quality child care on society. Further, from the perspective of economic equity, many families simply cannot afford to purchase quality care for their children. Much as the market ignores child rearing in the home, it fails to account for the public goods, merit goods, and equity aspects of child care.

As a partial public good, child care is an investment in people which will benefit

- the economy through future labor force participation and
- the polity through an informed and active citizenry.

This value is not computed in child care prices or child care workers' wages (as it is, implicitly, in public school teachers' wages).

Child care and early childhood education have important public goods aspects, if not being strictly public goods, much like K-12 education does. Public goods are defined by "non-rival consumption," meaning that the consumption and benefit of the good for one individual are not diminished by the consumption and benefit of the same product by other individuals. (This can also bleed into the benefits being compounded as they are consumed by multiple individuals, beyond the additive benefits per individual.) Another characteristic of public goods is "non-exclusion," meaning that containing the benefits of a good to selected persons is impossible, prohibitively costly, or counter-productive and a costly effort to prevent equity.

Such non-rival consumption and non-exclusion benefits include the development of children who are ready to learn in school and become productive citizens, and the reductions in juvenile delinquency that are consequences of high quality care. In this respect, child care takes on an important public goods aspect if it is high quality care or a "public bads" aspect if it is low quality care.

There is also the important benefit of quality child care that enables the consistent, increasing, and productive contributions of parents in the workforce. (Note: The Economic Opportunity Institute

has gathered a lot of testimony about this from parents whose children are in centers that are part of the pilot career development project and who have seen the quality of care and staff retention go up, and who consequently have not had to lose days of work in filling the holes of inadequate child care and moving children from one bad center to another.] Similarly, by increasing the industry-wide quality of child care, the individual and collective costs of searching for, finding, and receiving care in a high quality child care center decline.

These are public benefits that reinforce economic arguments and theory that child care contains important and significant "non-rival consumption" and "non-exclusion" characteristics. It is an important translation in public policy to extend the concept of public goods from mutual "defense" and free access roads to the development of human capital formation, even if there is no consideration of equity.

As a merit good, child care often embodies a much wider complex of services to children than families recognize and directly purchase. That is, some parents understand child care as closer to babysitting than to an educational experience and culture, and will only pay for babysitting, while their children benefit from a full complex of early childhood education and services.[56] In any case, the bottom line is that child care workers are historically poorly paid and will continue to be so if we allow the provision of child care to remain an uncoordinated and market-driven system.

The quality of child care also has ramifications for the stock of human capital (the future work force) which is composed of today's children. That is, there is a positive correlation between government support of quality child care programs and the earnings potential of children from these programs.[57] This aspect of child care takes on greater importance as the pool of labor market entrants shrinks with the baby boom generation moving toward retirement.[58]

High quality child care creates an indirect public good because, like public education in general, giving children a good start serves the interest of society as a whole. We all benefit from developmentally appropriate child care that results in:

- Fewer public expenditures on special education, public school intervention, health services, and the penal system, and
- Children who grow up to be productive adults and participating citizens.

But to the extent that the societal benefits of quality early childhood education are not recognized, their market value does not reflect their true value. And to the extent that the financing of child care remains principally private, with parents paying 60% of the costs, the social benefits remain unrecognized and unrealized.

A Supply Side Solution: The Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder

"My wage increase makes me feel that the important work I do is finally being valued by others and that I will be able to stay in the job that I love."

Roy Cray, teacher, Interlake Childcare
and Learning Center, Seattle

One solution to the systemic underpayment of child care workers is the implementation of an Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder. Such a ladder incorporates wage increments based on experience, responsibility, and relevant education with publicly funded wage enhancements. Funding for this career ladder is shared between child care centers and other private entities, and state and/or local governments in a partnership to assure quality child care for our children. The intent is to professionalize the early childhood education career and, in so doing, to raise the quality of care for our children. The goal is a child care workforce in which early childhood education teachers are immersed in the field and educated in early childhood education. They will be less likely to leave their jobs because of poor pay and lack of career opportunities and recognition.

For dedicated underpaid child care teachers, a wage differential of several dollars can make an enormous difference. In fact, data collected in focus groups, conducted as part of an Urban Institute study of low-wage workers, indicates that marginal increases in hourly wages were often the primary motivator for child care workers' decision to remain in or change jobs.[59] This finding is demonstrated in the words and stories of the teachers participating in the Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder.

This Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder begins to return to the early childhood education teacher the value and esteem of her work. It enables and creates incentives for child care workers to gain the knowledge and professionalism to both care for and educate young children, so that they are able to develop emotionally and socially and, in turn, feel secure. This approach enhances the ability of families and communities to nurture their children and rewards work and dedication. Further, the wage ladder is an approach that directly engages the child care teacher in the search for and the solution to the need for high quality care and education.

The Washington State Career Development Ladder Project

In Washington state, the Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 925, and Child Care Works for Washington, the statewide coalition of child care advocates, collaborated to seek public funding for the Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder. The work and advocacy of the organizers and workers in the child care union, EOI, and Child Care Works set the stage in June 1999 for Governor Gary Locke to allocate $4 million from welfare reinvestment funds for the Washington State Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder pilot project.

The career ladder designed by the Economic Opportunity Institute was used as a template for the pilot program. EOI currently serves as the major collaborator and advocate for the career ladder and its implementation and as a liaison between the Office of Child Care Policy (OCCP), the state implementing agency, and the participating centers and the directors and teachers in these centers. EOI publishes a newsletter for career ladder participants and sponsors on-the- ground implementation workshops. EOI has also developed an ongoing media campaign that has catalyzed the public discussion about the career ladder. Researchers at the Washington State University Department of Human Development are currently conducting an evaluation of the pilot project.

"We've been long overdue in finding the means to give these teachers a livable wage without bankrupting families who depend on child care. With the Washington State Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder we are recognizing that our most trusted child care workers are living on poverty wages, that our child care centers struggle daily with high turnover rates, and that our youngest, most vulnerable children, our infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, deserve consistent, quality care."

Frank Chopp, Democratic Speaker of the
Washington State House of Representatives[60]

The Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder mandates that the state provide workers with wage increments based on relevant education. Child care centers have to independently increase wages due to wage increments for job responsibility, while wage increments based on experience are shared between the state and the child care centers. The state contributes a higher proportion of the experience wage increments for those centers that have a high percentage of low-income children. Monthly payments to participating centers during the initial four months of the program ranged from $200 to $6,250.[61]

Centers must meet certain requirements to be eligible to participate in the project.[62] The requirements for participation are designed to reward those small, mostly non-profit, local businesses that have tried to address the needs of their teachers. Centers must:

- ❑ Be state licensed or certified
- ❑ Adopt the career development wage scale set in this ladder. (Participating centers are not allowed to roll back current wages. Wages higher than those stipulated in the career ladder are grandfathered in. The ladder is a floor for wages, not a ceiling.)
- ❑ Enroll low-income subsidized children into at least 10% of their child slots (At least 20% of the total pool of children in centers participating in this pilot program must be state-subsidized.)

Additionally, within six months of participation in the pilot career ladder project, centers must:

- ❑ Either offer health insurance to their employees or assist employees (at a minimum of $25/month) to pay for their own coverage, including coverage under the state's Basic Health Plan,
- ❑ Offer a minimum of 10 days paid leave, and
- ❑ Establish quality care committees that include representatives selected from child care assistants and teachers.

How the Career Ladder Works

The career ladder creates an educational incentive program for child care workers to further their education in early childhood education and to retain their positions as child care workers and excel in early childhood education careers. Specifically, from a base wage of $6.72 ($7.00 in King County),[63] early childhood education workers will receive pay increments of:

- ❑ 50 cents an hour for educational credentials, beginning with a high school degree and moving up through the mandated Washington State Training and Registry System (STARS),[64] to Child Development Associate accreditation, Early Childhood Education certification, and AA, BA, and MA degrees in child development,

- 25 cents an hour for each year of service, and
- 50 cents an hour for increased responsibilities, from assistant teacher through program supervisor.

The career ladder moves teachers up or out. For example, a lead teacher must hold a child development associate credential and a program supervisor must have an early childhood education certificate. The mandated wage ladder and benefits package are to be posted so that center staff can track their steps. [The full wage ladder is in the Appendix.]

"With the wage ladder, I can truly say that having STARS training, a CDA, or a degree in early childhood education will make a difference in the rate of pay I receive, and that makes me want to get my education so I can move forward in life."

Felicia Hollinquest, Seattle Child Care Teacher

A Pilot Project Developed from Best Practices

Washington is not alone in this approach. The Department of Defense was faced with a turnover rate of child care teachers of over 300% in its military child care facilities. After initiating the U.S. Military Caregiver Personnel Pay Plan, a wage ladder that linked increased wages to required training and that created wage increments starting at $7.62/hour and topping off at $14.58/hour, turnover dropped to below 30%.[65] Similarly, TEACH in North Carolina has initiated a Child Care WAGE$ Project which gives annual bonuses of up to $2000 to early childhood education teacher/caregivers who have achieved benchmarks in early childhood education, starting with the Early Childhood Certificate. Turnover of these teachers has dropped from 36% to 10%.[66] In some form, TEACH is operating in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Washington state. At the local level, the metropolitan Kansas City area,[67] Nassau County, NY,[68] and the WAGES program in San Francisco fund wage enhancements for child care teachers.[69] The City of Madison, WI, and Dane County, WI, started a two-year pilot project in March 2001 to provide bonuses to child care centers and in-home providers.[70]

The Washington State Early Childhood Education Career Ladder is a modest proposal. In 1992, the Washington State Higher Education Personnel Board's comparable worth study set a salary range from $9.31 to $11.47 an hour for assistant early childhood education teachers and also recommended that assistants have the child development associate (CDA) credential.[71] The career ladder pays assistant teachers with a CDA in a salary range of $8.50 to $10.50 an hour, approximately $1.00 below the standards suggested for 1992! Similarly, the Higher Education Personnel Board recommended that a lead teacher with an early childhood education certificate (ECE) earn $10.69 to $14.09.[72] The career ladder pays lead teachers with ECEs in a salary range of $10.50 to $12.50 an hour.

The Status of the Career Ladder

Currently, 124 centers (approximately 7% of the centers in the state) are participating in the Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder, and approximately 1,250 teachers are realizing wage enhancements. For the 2002-2003 biennium, $15 million dollars will be needed to sustain this program and increase the participation level to 10% of the state's licensed centers, employing about 2,000 teachers.

The reaction among career ladder participants across the state has been overwhelmingly positive. Center directors have seen an immediate increase in the morale of their staff. Many dedicated teachers who have been at centers for a long time are just now beginning to feel that their work is valued. Teachers are making the decision to return to school because the wage ladder is in place.

"Having the wage ladder has been an incredible morale booster for me and my co-workers because we are being better rewarded for the work we do and the training we receive. We are working better as a team and the work environment is less stressful for us and the kids because no one is talking about leaving."

Laura Chandler, Seattle Child Care Teacher

This pilot project accomplishes three key things:

- It increases the quality of care received by the youngest and most vulnerable citizens of Washington state.
- It raises the previously poverty-generating wages of child care teachers.
- It represents a significant step toward professionalizing the career of early childhood education.

The Career Ladder Enhances Teachers' Economic Security

As indicated in the 1998 Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational wages report, the average hourly wage for all child care workers in Washington state was $7.52.[73] The average hourly wage as of December 2000 for all child care workers participating in the career ladder was $8.97.[74] This is an average wage differential of $1.45, which means that the average annualized income of a child care worker participating in the wage ladder ($18,658) is over $3,000 more than the annualized average income for all child care workers in Washington state ($15,642). This represents a **19%** increase in income. Further, the career ladder brings the child care worker closer to the median income and moves her further away from poverty wages.

Child Care Workers Family Incomes With Wage Enhancement

Family Size	Annual Pre-Tax Income	% of Median Income	% of Poverty Level
2 person, 1 worker	$18,658	42%	172%
2 person, 2 workers (1 child care worker and 1 minimum wage worker)	$32,178	73%	297%

[a] The median household income in Washington state in 1998 was $44,134.[75]
[b] The 1998 Federal Poverty Level for a family of 2 was $10,850, and for each additional family member it increased $2,800.[76]

Unionization and Professionalization

A unionization effort is key to this approach. In 1998 and 1999, child care workers in the Seattle area joined together in a union to gain a greater voice over their wages and working conditions. The unionized teachers created a political dynamic that was key to getting the funding for the Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder pilot project. At the same time, the directors of the centers in which child care workers organized into a union also banded together to form an employers' association. These two bodies, the Child Care Guild and the employers' association, have worked collaboratively to negotiate a master contract. This effort continues to improve child care working conditions, provide child care advocates with political clout when pressing for programmatic change, and raise wages. Unionized teachers have worked for expansion of the wage ladder and have developed an advocacy program that involves other teachers, center directors, parents, and community activists. In organizing together, these teachers have gained political and economic power, and, in working together, they now actively participate in the delivery of quality child care. They are much more invested in their work and in themselves as members of a professional workforce. In turn, this helps the public to see the value and importance of this workforce.

Child care workers have been almost completely excluded from positions of leadership and influence in the early childhood education field. In most cases they are not at the table when policy decisions are made that directly affect their professional status and livelihood. The field of early care and education will only place workforce concerns high on its agenda when a significant number of teachers and providers have reached positions of leadership and are able to represent themselves. This is what integrated efforts toward unionization and professionalization can provide. Underlying this initiative is the commonsense notion that the quality of care can be best improved with the input of those who actually provide the care.

Public Support for Public Funding for a Public Good

Early care and education, like K-12 education, are public goods with far-reaching societal benefits. Public education is a highly valued public good. In fact, voters in Washington state overwhelmingly supported two recent ballot initiatives to increase school spending and teacher pay. Dedicated and committed early childhood education child teachers provide highly valuable public benefits. While many workers in the service economy are underpaid and undervalued, child care workers, quite literally, hold the future in their hands. When low wages drive child care teachers out of the profession, this creates short-term and long-term, public and private, costly consequences. The fundamental problem in child care is that the tuition that most parents can afford to pay is too low to provide consistent quality, including adequate compensation for the teachers.

The underfunding of child care is due to the perception of child care as a market good, not a public good. And yet, the benefits of high quality care accrue not just to the parent and the child but also to society in general (as do the negative consequences of poor quality care). In fact, the public can gain up to $7 dollars for every $1 dollar invested in high quality early care and education.[77] Quality child care assures that kids are ready and able to learn when they enter the public school system. Taxpayers save in the costs of future schooling, especially through reductions in special education and grade retention. Teachers and other children benefit from being in schools with children who attended high quality child care centers. All citizens gain through reduced crime, juvenile delinquency and public assistance costs. Working parents who face fewer child-related absences or terminations can remain more securely attached to the labor market.[78] Evidence suggests that among low-income women, higher quality child care may increase the likelihood and stability of employment and hours of work[79] and improve the mother's own later educational achievement.[80]

The Dignity of Work and American Values

A discussion of public benefits must also go beyond a discussion of costs and benefits. The fact that so many child care teachers are paid poverty wages and are not provided with health insurance is completely at odds with American beliefs about honoring hard work, responsibility, and family. While there are certainly enormous private benefits to investing in quality child care, it is dangerous to rely solely upon market-based imperatives. The market does not supply adequate language to capture the value of caring for children.

More generally, recognizing and rewarding the importance of the early childhood education teacher are part of a bigger project to value work and working people and raise the visibility of the many unsung heroes who provide essential goods and services in our new economy. There is great common sense in:

- ❑ Paying those who care for our children a decent wage.
- ❑ Making sure those who work full-time do not live in poverty.
- ❑ Investing in public goods like early childhood education.

These are sound investments that advance the fundamental American values of democracy, fairness, and equality of opportunity.

For More Information

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coordinators, and lead teachers are required to take a 20-hour or two-credit training. The 20-hour training is based on the licensing guidebooks and has specific learning outcomes. Those working at their place of employment in the same position before January 1, 1999 had until the end of 1999 to complete their basic training. For all others, this training must be completed within the first six months of being licensed or starting a job. Each year thereafter, these individuals are required to complete 10 hours of continuing education. http://www.childcare.org/Providers/prof_dev_STARS.htm

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APPENDIX

Early Childhood Education Career Development Ladder
Statewide (except King County)

Position	Years at Center	Educational Requirements							
		No HS	HS/GED	STARS*	ECE*	CDA*	AA*	BA*	MA*
Assistant	0	$6.72	$7.00	$7.50	$8.00	$8.50	$9.00	$10.00	$11.00
	1	6.97	7.25	7.75	8.25	8.75	9.25	10.25	11.25
	2		7.50	8.00	8.50	9.00	9.50	10.50	11.50
	3		7.75	8.25	8.75	9.25	9.75	10.75	11.75
	4		8.00	8.50	9.00	9.50	10.00	11.00	12.00
	5		8.25	8.75	9.25	9.75	10.25	11.25	12.25
Lead Teacher	0			$8.00	$8.50	$9.00	$9.50	$10.50	$11.50
	1			8.25	8.75	9.25	9.75	10.75	11.75
	2			8.50	9.00	9.50	10.00	11.00	12.00
	3			8.75	9.25	9.75	10.25	11.25	12.25
	4			9.00	9.50	10.00	10.50	11.50	12.50
	5			9.25	9.75	10.25	10.75	11.75	12.75
Site Coordinator	0				$9.00	$9.50	$10.00	$11.00	$12.00
	1				9.25	9.75	10.25	11.25	12.25
	2				9.50	10.00	10.50	11.50	12.50
	3				9.75	10.25	10.75	11.75	12.75
	4				10.00	10.50	11.00	12.00	13.00
	5				10.25	10.75	11.25	12.25	13.25
Program Supervisor	0				$9.50	$10.00	$10.50	$11.50	$12.50
	1					10.25	10.75	11.75	12.75
	2					10.50	11.00	12.00	13.00
	3						11.25	12.25	13.25
	4						11.50	12.50	13.50
	5						11.75	12.75	13.75

*Chart titles expanded:

- STARS: 20 hours
- ECE: 30 quarter credit hours or equivalent
- CDA – Child Development Associate Credential or ECE Certificate: 45 quarter credit hours
- AA Degree, Child Development: 90 credits
- BA Degree, Child Development: 180 credits
- MA Degree, Child Development: 270 credits

Base Wage: $6.72; Wage Increments: Education - 50¢, Experience - 25¢, Responsibility - 50¢

State-Paid Education Increments, 50¢ each step:

- High School or GED
- STARS
- 30 credits
- CDA
- Every 45 credits above ECE

Responsibility increments are 50¢ per hour and paid by the center.

Experience Increments		
DSHS-Subsidized Children at Center	Center Pays	State Pays
25%	25¢	-0-
25-50%	15¢	10¢
50-75%	5¢	20¢
75%	-0-	25¢

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