REPORT December 2025

"A Weight Off Our Shoulders"

Pandemic Payments to Early Educators in Riverside County

By Wanzi Muruvi, Anna Powell, Yoonjeon Kim, and Abby Copeman Petig

This evaluation was generously funded by First 5 Riverside County.

"A Weight Off Our Shoulders"

Pandemic Payments to Early Educators in Riverside County

This evaluation was generously funded by First 5 Riverside County.

We are grateful to the local early care and education leaders in Riverside County who provided context and data in support of this evaluation:

- Carol Abella
- Selene Arellano
- Yolanda Bernal
- Cindy Brandon
- Judith Carroll
- Jennifer Delany
- Tammi Graham
- Laura Madigan
- Patricia Perez
- Jesse Rodriguez
- Charna Widby

Thank you to Dr. Raúl Chávez for his expert facilitation of focus groups in English and Spanish. Thank you also to our research assistants, Leah Gutierrez, Kelly Loc, and Claudia Martinez, who provided numerous educators with support in accessing and completing their surveys. The views presented herein are those of the authors and may not reflect the views of the study's funders or those acknowledged for lending their expertise or providing input.

Editor: Deborah Meacham

Suggested Citation

Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., & Copeman Petig, A. (2025). *"A Weight Off Our Shoulders"—Pandemic Payments to Early Educators in Riverside County.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/riverside-county-pandemic-payments

About CSCCE

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.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

I. Introduction

Early educators often choose to work with children out of passion, but their hard work earns them low wages in return. Turnover, particularly among center-based teaching staff, remains high. Wage enhancements can make a tangible difference in educators’ daily lives: for example, an additional $2,400 can cover 1.6 months of rent or 4.2 months of food expenses for an early educator in Riverside County.

Riverside County implemented a wage enhancement program providing direct cash payments to eligible early educators from 2021 through 2024. Eligibility was limited to educators who earned no more than $41.86 per hour working directly with children in licensed center- or home-based settings serving children supported by a voucher subsidy. The initiative was funded with COVID-19 relief dollars made available under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 and administered by First 5 Riverside County. The goal was to support the recognition, recruitment, and retention of early educators and to help address persistent workforce and associated child care shortages that were further exacerbated by the pandemic.

Background

Early care and education professionals (early educators) perform essential and highly skilled work, teaching young children, supporting parents’ ability to work, and enabling the economy to function (Melhorn, 2024; Whitebook et al., 2016). Early educators care deeply about their jobs because they know their work significantly impacts the lives of children and families. For example, more than nine out of ten early educators in California strongly agree that they are helping children grow and develop (Muruvi et al., 2024).

At the same time, early educators often feel they are not respected or valued for the important work they do (Muruvi et al., 2024). They remain among the lowest-paid workers in the United States, earning less than 97 percent of all other occupations (McLean et al., 2024). Early educators earn below the living wage in every state. In California, the median hourly wage for early educators in 2022 was about $15, which was $25 less than the state’s living wage of $40 needed to support one adult and one child (McLean et al., 2024). Many early educators also lack benefits that most workers, especially their peers in the TK-12 school system, typically access through their employer, such as health insurance and retirement plans.

Low Wages Contribute to Economic Insecurity

As a result of low wages and limited access to benefits, early educators experience profound economic insecurity and financial stress. In California, poverty rates are nearly two times higher among early educators compared to all other workers in the state and five times higher than poverty rates among elementary school teachers (McLean et al., 2024). Many families of early educators must rely on public safety net programs, like food stamps and Medicaid, to meet their basic needs. Nearly one half of California early educators’ families participate in at least one safety net program (McLean et al., 2024). Furthermore, the undervaluing of the early care and education (ECE) workforce is an issue of economic, gender, and racial equity. California’s ECE workforce is almost all women, the majority of whom are women of color and/or immigrants (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment [CSCCE], 2022).

Low Wages Drive Staff Turnover and Workforce Shortages

The ECE sector has long struggled with workforce and child care shortages, both of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Low wages and financial insecurity are well-documented drivers of staff turnover (Caven et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2022; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). High levels of staff turnover not only undermine the stable, nurturing relationships that are foundational for education quality, but also force classroom or program closures, limiting access for children and families (Khattar & Coffey, 2023; Melhorn, 2024). To address these persistent challenges, some state and local governments are increasingly turning to wage supplements[1] to boost compensation and reduce turnover (Maier et al., 2025).

Role of Sufficient Public Funding

A key contributing factor to the undervaluing of early educators is insufficient public investments in early care and education. Unlike the K-12 school system, which is funded as a public good, ECE operates in a broken market where programs rely heavily on private tuition from families (McLean et al., 2024; U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021). Because public funding is inadequate, parents bear the costs of providing high-quality early care and education, which are inherently higher due to low child: adult ratios (Zero to Three, 2024). Yet, what families can afford to pay is not sufficient to cover fair wages for early educators.

Although states, including California, invest in ECE for low-income families through a patchwork of public subsidies, such as vouchers (like the Alternative Payment Program, APP) and state contracts (like the State Preschool programs), these investments are insufficient in size to reach all eligible families. Only one in ten children who are eligible for subsidized child care in California are enrolled (Pryor, 2024). Additionally, the amounts paid to ECE programs are too low to cover their actual operating costs (Workman, 2021). As a result, whether publicly or privately funded, ECE programs are unable to improve the wages they pay early educators.

ARPA Payments Showed What Is Possible

Inadequate public funding leaves the ECE sector vulnerable to collapse during economic downturns (Brown & Herbst, 2021). Even though programs were urged to stay open and provide care for essential workers, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many programs to the brink of closure, which prompted advocates to call for emergency government action on child care to protect ECE programs and the workforce (CSCCE, 2020). In response, the federal government enacted several relief packages that provided substantial one-time funding to address the COVID-19 health emergency, support economic recovery, and make communities resilient to future crises. The largest of these efforts was the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, a $1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill.

To shore up and expand child care services, ARPA included $39 billion in supplemental funding to the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), comprising $24 billion in stabilization grants and $15 billion in supplemental CCDF discretionary fund allocations to states, territories, and Tribes. California’s total share of these ARPA funds was $3.7 billion: $2.3 billion in stabilization grants and $1.4 billion in supplemental discretionary funds.

1 In this report, the terms “wage enhancement” and “wage supplement” are used interchangeably.

ARPA also provided $350 billion to eligible state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to support pandemic recovery and promote equitable economic growth (U.S. Department of the Treasury, n.d.). This funding included a focus on enhanced compensation for eligible workers performing essential services during the pandemic (U.S. Department of the Treasury, n.d.). SLFRF provided $65 billion in direct aid to counties. This funding provided great flexibility within the guidelines of the ARPA Final Rule, which allowed counties to invest in projects that addressed local priorities related to the economy.

Although the flow of federal pandemic relief funding has ended, these one-time public investments allowed many states and local governments to pilot ECE workforce compensation initiatives—including wage increases, bonuses, and wage supplements—as part of their economic recovery efforts. Some states have since continued these efforts using state or other funding sources (Maier et al., 2025).

Riverside County and ARPA Funding

Riverside County is home to an estimated 2.5 million residents, representing approximately 6 percent of California's total population. The county is diverse: close to one half of all residents speak a language other than English at home. According to the *2023 Child Care Portfolio*, children birth to age 12 make up about 17 percent of the county's population (407,665), with nearly one half (168,689) age five or younger (California Resource & Referral Network, 2025). Among children birth to five, almost one half (48 percent) are two-years-old or younger.

Child care is essential for working parents, and limited availability can constrain their ability to work. In California, the labor force participation rate for women with children under five is much lower compared to all women in the state (67 percent and 77 percent, respectively), likely reflecting challenges with child care access (Lafortune et al., 2024). More than four out of five Riverside County parents reported employment as their main reason for seeking child care in 2023, while one in ten cited school or training (California Resource & Referral Network, 2025).

At the same time, the county faces substantial shortages in licensed child care spaces. Riverside County only has enough licensed child care spaces for 15 percent of children birth to age 12 with working parents, which is below the state average of 25 percent (Kidsdata.org, 2023). Access to subsidized child care is even more limited: only 12 percent of the licensed child care centers in the county have at least one federal, state, or local contract to provide subsidized child care, compared to 30 percent statewide (California Resource & Referral Network, 2025). Persistent workforce shortages, made worse by the pandemic, continue to constrain the expansion of child care to meet demand (County of Riverside, 2021).

Riverside County received $479.9 million in SLFRF distributions: two equal installments of $239.9 million in 2021 and 2022. Of this amount, $23 million was dedicated to child care: $15 million of the first installment and $8 million of the second. First 5 Riverside County administered these funds through the Early Childhood Education Recovery Fund. This fund was established to leverage other ECE investments, support child care business recovery, strengthen workforce recruitment and retention, and address chronic child care space shortage (County of Riverside, 2021).

Key Terms

Early care and education (ECE): By “early care and education,” we mean licensed programs that serve children under six years of age (less than 72 months). While some four-year-olds attend transitional kindergarten (a grade level in elementary school; see below), this report focuses on the two primary settings serving the full ECE age range: child care centers and family child care homes.

Center teaching staff: This term covers a combination of lead and assistant teachers who work directly with children. Assistants (sometimes called “teacher aides” or “associate teachers”) work under the supervision of a lead teacher (sometimes referred to as a “head teacher”).

Family child care (FCC) provider: FCC educators obtain a license to provide child care for a mixed-age group of children in their home. FCC homes may be owned or rented, but all sites must meet the strict requirements of state licensing.

FCC license type: An FCC provider can hold either a “small” or “large” license, a distinction that corresponds to the maximum group size (up to eight children for a small license and up to 14 for a large license). Most often, small FCC educators operate their child care program on their own, while large FCC educators work with at least one assistant.

Transitional kindergarten (TK): This grade level for four-year-olds began as a pilot program for school districts. In fall 2025, California completed a multiyear expansion to make all four-year-olds in the state eligible to enroll. TK is available in public schools and public charter schools.

Alternative Payment Program (APP): The Alternative Payment Program uses federal and state funding to assist eligible low-income families in paying for child care services. The program is administered through local APP agencies contracted by the state. Eligible families are issued a voucher (certificate) that enables them to select a child care provider of their choice. Providers who serve children through this program are reimbursed directly by the administering APP agency.

II. Evaluation Framework

Riverside County dedicated a portion of the Early Childhood Education Recovery Fund for the recognition, recruitment, and retention of the ECE workforce, acknowledging their important contribution to the revitalization of the economy. Administered by First 5 Riverside County, this initiative provided direct stipend payments to eligible educators. Those leading the program’s implementation emphasized maintaining an educator-centered approach by ensuring that funds were distributed directly to the workforce rather than through ECE programs.

Eligibility was limited to child care staff who earned $41.86 or less per hour working directly with children in licensed center- or home-based settings serving children supported by an Alternative Payment Program (APP) voucher. The stipends were distributed in four installments between November 2021 and September 2024 (see **Table 1**). Educators must have received the initial payment to be eligible for later ones.

To evaluate Riverside County’s wage enhancement initiative, First 5 Riverside County partnered with the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at the University of California, Berkeley. The goal of the evaluation was to examine aspects of program design and roll-out to understand its implementation as well as how this implementation could explain outcomes and help inform future initiatives. Additionally, the evaluation explored the impact of the wage enhancement stipends on educator outcomes. A specific focus was placed on core indicators pertaining to staffing, turnover, and well-being.

Table 1. Educator Payment Timelines and Amounts, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement

Payment Round	Timeline	Payment Amount	Payments
Round 1 (Retention & Recruitment)	Nov 2021 – Apr 2022	$1,200	3,128
Round 2 (Retention)	Mar 2022 – Dec 2022	$1,200	2,560
Round 3 (Retention)	Feb 2023 – Apr 2023	$2,400	2,206
Round 4 (Retention)	Jun 2024 – Sep 2024	$2,400	1,671

Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Analytical Perspectives

The following report examines the impact of the First 5 Riverside County wage enhancement initiative through three analytical perspectives: 1) the relationship between economic well-being and workforce turnover; 2) the vulnerability of ECE programs during economic upheavals; and 3) the impact of windfall payments.

Economic Well-Being and Turnover

Research shows that educators who earn higher wages are more likely to remain in the profession (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). Living wages aligned with educators' experience and education—along with benefits like health insurance and retirement plans—enable early educators to meet basic household needs, reduce their financial stress, and help them feel valued for their work. Evidence on the impact of wage supplements is still emerging, but early studies have found that such supports can reduce turnover and improve educators’ well-being, including greater ability to meet basic needs, lower financial stress, and an increased sense of recognition and respect (Bassok et al., 2021; Mefferd et al., 2024).

Vulnerability of ECE Programs During Economic Upheaval

Early care and education programs are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns, as demonstrated during the Great Recession of 2007/2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the Great Recession, the State of California cut annual child care funding by 30 percent, eliminating 30,000 slots and lowering reimbursement rates for some providers (Pryor &

Schumacher, 2025). Although funding levels gradually recovered over the next decade, the sector remained highly susceptible to future shocks. Funding cuts can easily trigger workforce lay-offs and program closures, leading to a vicious cycle in which programs find it difficult to reopen because of workforce shortages.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the ECE sector was still vulnerable, making substantial one-time federal relief funding critical to stabilizing the sector and preventing its near collapse. Federal, state, and local governments mobilized resources to support ECE programs and the workforce, recognizing their essential role in supporting the broader economy. However, without sustained public funding and reforms to address persistently low educator pay, the sector remains vulnerable to short-term shocks and at risk of significant disruption from future crises (Brown & Herbst, 2021).

Impact of Windfall Payments

The impact of cash payments depends on a number of factors, including the size, predictability, and frequency of the payments. When provided in a regular and predictable fashion, such payments can enhance financial stability by allowing households to plan ahead (Hsieh, 2003). Research shows that consistent small monthly payments help families meet basic needs, while sustained annual lump-sum payments can support savings and create opportunities for economic mobility (Abt Global, 2024). In contrast, smaller payments that are irregular, unsustained, or one-time—often referred to as windfalls—can temporarily alleviate acute financial stress but have short-lived effects that fade once the payments stop (Arkes et al., 1994; Rodgers et al., 2023). Based on this schema, we characterize wage supplement payments in Riverside County as windfall payments. This understanding leads us to focus our evaluation on evidence of financial relief in a time of crisis.

Evaluation Approach

This evaluation employed a retrospective mixed-methods design, collecting and analyzing data after the wage supplement initiative had concluded. The mixed-methods approach combined administrative data from application and payment systems, qualitative data from key informant interview and focus groups, and quantitative survey data to assess the initiative’s implementation as well as individual- and site-level outcomes.

Administrative Data

Administrative data provided insight into the wage enhancement program’s design and rollout. Administrative data were obtained through document reviews and report downloads from the application and payment systems, gathered by First 5 Riverside County via the Hubbe platform. These reports provided applicant records that included information such as personal and program characteristics and application details like dates, decisions, and payment amounts for each round. During some application rounds, applicants were asked questions about their experience with the program.

Key Informant Interviews

CSCCE also held key informant interviews with First 5 Riverside County staff involved in implementing the initiative. Between May and July 2025, we conducted group interviews with 11 staff members involved in different roles—managerial, executive, and direct service staff who worked closely with educators—to learn about their experiences implementing the wage enhancement program. Each session lasted 45–60 minutes and focused on documenting the application-to-payment process, identifying implementation challenges, and gathering staff reflections on educator feedback and program impact. First 5 Riverside County staff were also asked for suggestions to improve program administration should a similar initiative be implemented in the future.

Educator Focus Groups

To explore program impact, focus groups were conducted with early educators (N=38) between July and August 2025, about a year after the wage enhancement program ended. A total of 10 focus groups were conducted: five with FCC providers (N=18), four with center-based teachers (N=18), and one with center administrators (N=2). One of the FCC focus groups was conducted in Spanish. Qualitative data from focus groups offered deeper, contextualized perspectives on educators’ experiences and perceptions of the initiative.

Surveys

Survey data were collected as part of a broader 2025 California Early Care and Education Workforce Study of 10,000 individuals (Powell et al., 2025a). In spring 2025, CSCCE surveyed early educators and site administrators, reaching 902 former wage enhancement program participants and 240 nonparticipants in Riverside County. Survey data from educators in nearby counties in Southern California were also included to provide additional comparison. Educator surveys examined economic well-being, educational attainment, and turnover intentions, while administrator surveys gathered additional information on staffing levels, turnover rates, and enrollment trends.

III. Implementation Findings

To evaluate the pandemic payments, we begin by examining implementation with a descriptive lens. This approach looks at two topics: 1) program design and management; and 2) participants and payment distribution.

Key Findings

Implementing the program required substantial staffing capacity but resulted in very high rates of applicant success. Approval rates were high overall and across job roles. However, FCC providers and their assistants were approved at slightly lower rates than center-based educators during the first round of payments.

Having Spanish-speaking staff may have reduced participation barriers among Latina educators. For all job roles, Latina educators were the most likely to receive stipend payments.

The wage enhancement payments benefited educators across all educational levels, underscoring that low wages affect the workforce broadly, regardless of educational attainment. Nearly one half of center teachers and more than one third of FCC educators who received the first round of stipends held an associate degree or higher.

Program Design and Management

Implementation of the pandemic payment program required the rapid development of new systems and processes to administer funds directly to early educators. First 5 Riverside County staff across levels emphasized the complexity of setting up an online application and payment system, including the need to establish educators as vendors through the Auditor-Controller’s Office and to integrate data management with IT contractors. Staff shared that early rounds involved heavy troubleshooting and manual corrections, with large numbers of incomplete applications, duplicate cases, and address changes. Over time, First 5 Riverside County staff refined the systems, streamlined review processes, and improved communication tools, which made later rounds run more smoothly.

Staffing capacity at First 5 Riverside County was a consistent theme. All groups described the project as highly labor intensive, with high call and email volumes, overtime hours, and the need for “all hands on deck.” Managerial staff pointed to the importance of regular interdepartmental communication, daily check-ins, and clear assignment of “go-to” staff for troubleshooting. Bilingual capacity was another critical element: while Spanish-speaking applicants faced challenges similar to other applicants, the availability of Spanish-speaking First 5 Riverside County staff increased trust and responsiveness. Suggestions for improvement included building in longer lead times, ensuring adequate staffing for helplines, and expanding direct deposit options to reduce payment delays.

Executive leadership emphasized that the wage enhancement program demonstrated First 5 Riverside County’s ability to quickly and effectively distribute federal relief dollars, strengthening its credibility with county supervisors and opening doors for future investments. Overall, First 5 Riverside County staff saw the program as a demanding but worthwhile undertaking in support of early educators.

Participants and Payment Distribution

More than 3,500 educators applied to participate in the first round of payments in 2021 and about 3,100 (86 percent) were approved (see **Table 2**). Among the 2021 recipients, 338 educators (11 percent of total recipients) participated as new hires: 250 worked in child care centers and 88 worked in family child care programs.

In each round, the pool of applicants shrank in size as some applicants became ineligible. Individuals who tried to apply for the first time in later rounds were not eligible to join. The approval rate among returning applicants remained very high—at least 90 percent of returning applicants were approved each round, suggesting a constant but small attrition rate of 10 percent at most. These findings demonstrate that attrition primarily determined the size of the recipient pool, not rejection by First 5 Riverside County staff.

Table 2. Approval Rates, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants

Payment Round	Applicants*	Recipients	Approval Rate
2021 Recognition & Recruitment	3,638	3,132	86%
2022 Retention	2,803	2,563	91%
2023 Retention	2,315	2,208	95%
2024 Retention	1,864	1,674	90%

*Excludes individuals who tried to apply for the first time in 2022 or later.
Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Payments by Educator Characteristics

We examined payment approval rates by job role, focusing on the first round of payments—the 2021 Recognition & Recruitment payments (**Table 3**). While the differences were small, center-based applicants were slightly more likely to be accepted. For example, 94 percent of center administrators and 91 percent of center teaching staff were accepted, compared to 87 percent of FCC providers and 85 percent of their assistants.

Table 3. Applicants and Recipients, 2021 Recognition & Recruitment Payments

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants

Payment Round	Applicants	Recipients	Approval Rate
Center Administrators	199	187	94%
Center Teaching Staff	1905	1741	91%
FCC Providers	1083	939	87%
FCC Assistants	311	265	85%
Unknown Role	143	0	0%
All Applicants	**3,641**	**3,132**	**86%**

Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Table 4 describes the characteristics of recipients from the 2021 Recognition & Recruitment payments. Among center teaching staff and home-based educators, the majority of stipend recipients were Latina,[2] while among center directors, the majority were White. This pattern is consistent with the overall distribution of educators by job role in Riverside County—Latina educators represent the largest share of center teaching staff and family child care providers (Powell et al., 2025b). Stipends benefited educators of all educational levels. Nearly one half of center teachers and more than one third of FCC providers who received the first round of stipends held an associate degree or higher.

Table 4. Recipient Characteristics

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants, 2021

	Center Administrators (N=187)	Center Teaching Staff (N=1,739)	FCC Providers (N=934)	FCC Assistants (N=265)
Race and ethnicity				
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0%	<1%	1%	0%
Asian	10%	6%	3%	4%
Black	6%	6%	20%	17%
Latina	37%	56%	54%	56%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%	<1%	<1%	<1%
White	38%	24%	16%	18%
Multiracial	8%	6%	6%	5%
Primary language				
English	96%	89%	73%	87%
Spanish	3%	10%	26%	12%
All other languages	1%	2%	1%	2%
Educational attainment				
High school or less	16%	29%	45%	52%
Some college	21%	24%	19%	20%
Associate degree	20%	25%	19%	14%
Bachelor’s degree	29%	20%	14%	12%
Master’s or higher	14%	2%	4%	2%

Table continues on the next page.

2 Because the early care and education workforce is overwhelmingly composed of individuals who identify as women, we use the gender-specific term “Latina” to describe members of the ECE workforce who identify as part of the Latin American diaspora. However, we know that data collection has not always accounted for gender diversity beyond a male/female binary. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of early educators who identify as men, nonbinary, or another gender identity and recognize that the gendered oppression of women in the ECE workforce is related to the gender-based oppression of nonbinary, trans, and genderqueer educators.

Table 4. Recipient Characteristics, *continued*

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants, 2021

	Center Administrators (N=187)	Center Teaching Staff (N=1,739)	FCC Providers (N=934)	FCC Assistants (N=265)
Age group				
Age 18 to 24	1%	18%	3%	35%
Age 25 to 34	14%	34%	15%	27%
Age 35 to 44	30%	20%	28%	13%
Age 45 to 54	28%	15%	24%	14%
55 and older	27%	14%	30%	11%
Other characteristics				
Female	95%	97%	97%	85%
Married	60%	38%	59%	28%
Parent	55%	44%	59%	34%

Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

IV. Well-Being Findings

Our evaluation framework holds that workforce retention is highly connected to personal and professional well-being. This topic encompasses economic stability, mental and physical health, and more. Early educators’ sense of recognition is also related to their well-being. In this section, we explore how educators used the stipend payments and the association between payments and well-being.

Key Findings

Pandemic payments gave early educators financial relief when they desperately needed it. Educators commented that these payments helped programs retain staff and, more importantly, enabled them to meet household expenses during a time of crisis. However, in 2021, most early educators still earned below the self-sufficiency wage for their household.

Family child care providers showed a unique pattern of stipend payment use, demonstrating the interwoven nature of their personal and professional finances. The majority of FCC providers put the funds back into their businesses: nearly 70 percent reported using relief funds on classroom materials or business expenses.

First 5 Riverside County achieved its goal of boosting educators’ sense of recognition. Stipends generated excitement among educators who felt seen, recognized, and rewarded for their essential work.

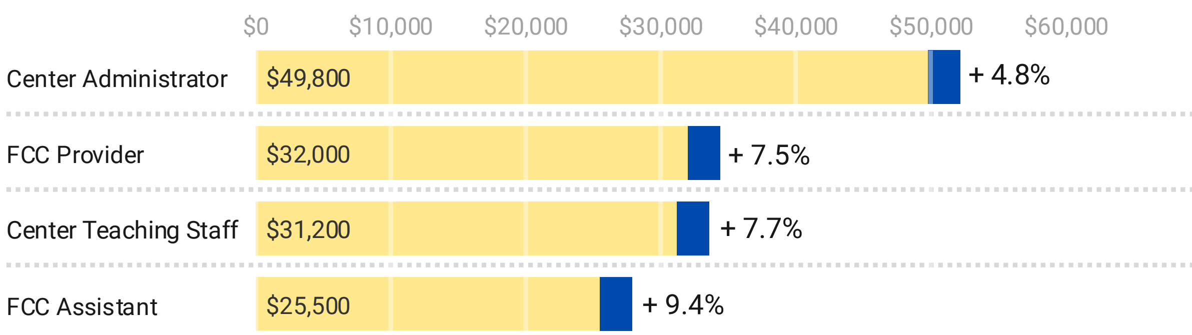
As expected, educators’ economic well-being returned to baseline after the payments stopped, but the sense of recognition endured. While stipends appeared to contribute to short-term financial stability, those effects faded when the program ended. However, the sense of recognition and appreciation persisted, particularly among FCC educators.

Uses of Payments

The stipends were a notable top-up to wages. Educators who received the payment of $2,400 in the 2021-2022 year (in two installments) received an equivalent of a 5 to 10 percent bonus. FCC assistants, whose annual earnings were lowest, experienced the largest relative increase (9.4 percent on average).

Figure 1. Increased Earnings Per Year, By Job Role

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants, 2021



Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County. Chart lists the median self-reported annual earnings of recipients before their annual payment of $2,400.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

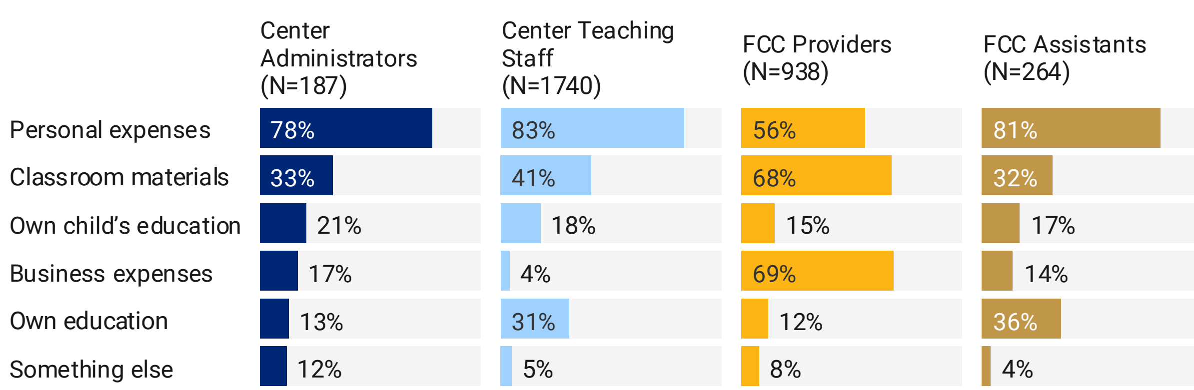
To put the payment in context, typical monthly rent for an early educator in Riverside County was just under $1,500 in 2021, based on the American Community Survey (Ruggles et al., 2025). The payments could thus cover 1.6 months of rent. Alternatively, using the Self-Sufficiency Standard,[3] we determine that the average monthly food cost for applicants was approximately $565 based on their household composition, so the payments could cover 4.2 months of food for an educator's family (Center for Women's Welfare, 2021).

However, while these payments were large enough to help educators afford their basic needs, most early educators still earned below the self-sufficiency wage for their household in 2021. Specifically, before the payments, approximately 18 percent of early educators in the program earned a self-sufficient wage (assuming partnered educators contribute half their household's income). The payments increased this estimate by 2 percentage points for the 2021-2022 year, for an estimated 20 percent of educators earning a self-sufficient wage.

Educators who received the 2023 Retention payments were asked how they used their first payments as part of the re-application process. As shown in **Figure 2**, "personal expenses" was the most common option among center administrators, center teaching staff, and FCC assistants across all roles, with more than 75 percent of wage supplement participants selecting it. Family child care providers deviated slightly from this trend, however: while 56 percent selected "personal expenses," 68 percent selected "classroom materials." The latter option appeared less frequently among other recipients. By comparison, 41 percent of center teaching staff used their payments for classroom materials.

Figure 2. Reported Uses of Payments in 2021 and 2022, By Job Role

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants



Note: Based on authors' analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County. Respondents could select multiple options.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

3 The Self-Sufficiency Standard determines the amount of income (or the self-sufficiency wage), required for working families to meet basic needs at a minimally adequate level, taking into account family composition, ages of children, and geographic differences in costs.

To understand these data in context, we discussed uses of the payments in our focus groups with educators. While participants recognized that the assistance was temporary, many emphasized how significant it felt in the moment. The first two rounds of payments were especially crucial as they were issued during the height of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The funds provided timely support for covering basic needs such as rent, groceries, and household bills, offering much-needed breathing room.

> “The payment was a blessing to us going months being out of work and having payments to catch up on. I had to use it for myself to keep a roof over my head to help pay rent because it was me and my husband with nothing.… And even though we would get the unemployment [benefits], it still wasn’t enough for us to survive on.... So these little checks that we were getting helped keep our heads above water.”
>
> — *Center Teacher*

> “I felt really, I will use the word, ‘blessed,’ because at that time, the enrollment was so bad for me to make money to pay my bills. So when I got this wage enhancement, it really enhanced my payment of my bills and buying food and supplies for the family and the child care because, by then, I had just one child whose mom was a nurse coming to daycare. So she would only come on days that the mom had to work.”
>
> — *FCC Provider*

> “I don’t remember specifically which payment, but I know [...] some of my checks have gone towards medical expenses because one of the things that I deal with is very poor medical insurance options from my company. And so I'm having to pay higher co-payments and whatnot. And so those just started going up, so I was able to pay off a lot of those at one point, which was helpful. But yeah, bills were what they all went towards.”
>
> — *Center Teacher*

Payment Impacts During the Program

In the application process for follow-on rounds, First 5 Riverside County gathered information from recipients regarding the impact of the payments. An optional open-ended question allowed recipients to comment on the wage enhancement. Response themes varied by job role, though the primary themes for all applicants related to their well-being and sense of recognition.

Center administrators praised the hard work and dedication of their staff during the pandemic. They also noted the importance of compensation to retain teachers and called for systemic changes to pay.

> “I believe this is a great opportunity for ECE workers to see that their hard work is noticed. We have been open through the pandemic…. Our staff has done a tremendous job. My passion is working with children, and I have moved my way up from teacher.”
>
> *— Center Administrator*

> “I am very appreciative and proud that this opportunity is available to our field of professionals. I have watched many work in fear over the past year. Some got COVID and returned to work. Some left the field. It has been a challenge. But so many have been dedicated to the families and community they serve. This is such a nice opportunity to show that this field is valued.”
>
> *— Center Administrator*

Center teaching staff frequently described how their personal finances were impacted, particularly their family’s bills and living expenses. They also drew a link between their passion for the work and their commitment to remaining in the field, despite the low pay.

> “This is such a wonderful blessing! The reason I am in this field and continue to stay is because I have a heart for children. Most of the families we serve are frontline workers, so for them to have access to high-quality, consistent child care is a blessing to them, as well. They know their children will be cared for and educated in a loving manner in my care. I feel like this enhancement shows that what I do every day is appreciated and valued! Thank you for helping to also make it financially rewarding, as well.”
>
> *— Center Teacher*

Family child care educators, meanwhile, made connections between their own well-being and that of their program. Their comments demonstrated how deeply linked the two are.

> “This payment is a great help. My child care operation is still in bad shape. We lost many children since the pandemic erupted. Even [though] we received calls and had contacted parents, parents did not commit to it even though they sounded desperate for child care, for the first time in 28 years in this business. We usually have a waiting list and get a [minimum] of five calls a day. What’s sad is, before the pandemic I went back to school and obtained my master’s degree, but now everything is on hold.”
>
> *— FCC Provider*

> “This opportunity is critical for the survival of our in-home [programs]. The amount of hours we provide service in comparison to the funds and wages we receive is substantial and harmful. Many licensed professionals are leaving this field that they love, because they can [no] longer afford to maintain or further run their business. Any assistance or support that can be provided is [essential] to the continued services that we hope to render to our children, families, and communities.”
>
> *— FCC Provider*

Finally, FCC assistants expressed sentiments similar to those of center-based teaching staff. Many respondents shared examples of how the funds would alleviate financial stress in their personal lives.

> “I really need this money because I support my family with this job, especially since I have a daughter with Down syndrome. For her, I want to continue in this business.”
>
> *— FCC Assistant*

> “Working while attending college is pretty challenging with tiring days, but it is very rewarding to build bonds with these kids and learn lessons from them, as well.”
>
> *— FCC Assistant*

To further understand the mindset of educators, we also raised the topic of recognition and well-being in our focus groups. Initial excitement and shock upon learning about the stipends made way for feeling valued and recognized as educators. Participants emphasized that the ECE workforce is often overlooked, and the payments made them feel appreciated and deserving of this recognition. The stipends were valued not just for the financial support, but also for the acknowledgment of their contributions and the importance of their work.

> “Family child care providers have always just been on the back burner, and we haven’t really been noticed or appreciated. It was nice to finally get something, and for the county to realize that we are essential and we are needed…. We’ve never expected anything like that. We’ve never received anything.”
>
> *— FCC Provider*

> “There’s just not enough appreciation for the amount of work that we have to do. It's such a physically and mentally exhausting job, and it felt like, ‘Oh my gosh, the county cares about us. Somebody cares.’”
>
> *— Center Teacher*

> “I thought it was lovely. I think it was great. Preschool teachers don’t typically get any kind of random bonuses and things, at least not anywhere I’ve ever worked, so it was the first time I've ever received any kind of bonus or extra money from working with children. And it was just exciting. It was really exciting.”
>
> — *Center Assistant*

First 5 Riverside County staff members involved in implementing the program also reflected on the program’s impact on educators. During their group interviews, frontline staff noted how rewarding it was to witness educators’ excitement and relief upon receiving funds. Overall, the program was seen as a meaningful affirmation of the value of investing in the ECE workforce.

Payment Impacts After the Program

In spring 2025, CSCCE surveyed former stipend recipients about their job status and well-being a year after the final payment. Some educators had already left the field, though the vast majority who responded to the survey were still employed in early care and education. We looked into whether stipend recipients still show signs of a boost to their economic well-being a year later and their intentions to continue in the field. Since the payments were “windfalls,” we would not expect educators to experience a lasting improvement to their well-being.

As expected, economic well-being remains challenging across the ECE sector due to structurally low wages. To understand the current context of the stipend group, we compare their answers to responses from educators in Riverside County who did not participate in the program as well as educators in nearby Southern California counties (specifically Imperial, Orange, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties). In the case of center-based staff, we also look at Head Start/Title 5 staff in both geographic areas who were not targeted for Riverside payments.[4]

Economic Well-Being

First we look at the current economic status of family child care educators. Our survey reached 215 FCC educators who received all four stipends from First 5 Riverside County, as well as 44 FCC providers who did not participate in the program. We also surveyed FCC educators in similar programs in nearby counties of Southern California (often styled as SoCal).

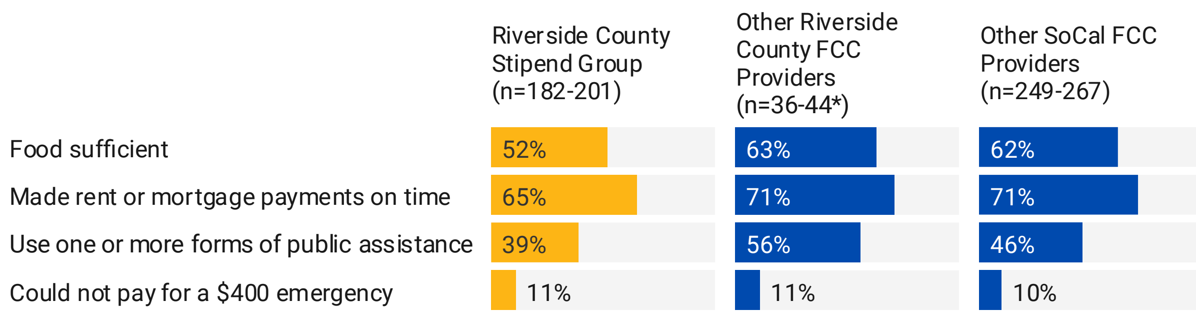
Figure 3 presents findings on the economic well-being of FCC educators across four indicators. While stipends may have contributed to FCC educators’ short-term financial stability, many

4 We make these comparisons to explore whether payments are associated with lasting improvements to well-being. Our analysis does not include causal inference.

continued to experience economic challenges. Notably, stipend recipients were less likely to use any form of public assistance than their peers in Riverside County or neighboring counties who did not receive stipends (39 percent, 56 percent, and 46 percent, respectively). However, stipend recipients were also less likely to be food sufficient or to consistently make their rent or mortgage payment on time (52 percent and 65 percent, respectively) than FCC educators who did not receive stipends in Riverside County (63 percent and 71 percent, respectively) or neighboring counties (62 percent and 71 percent, respectively). There was little difference in educators’ ability to cover a $400 emergency expense.

Figure 3. Economic Well-Being of Family Child Care Providers

California Family Child Care Providers, 2025



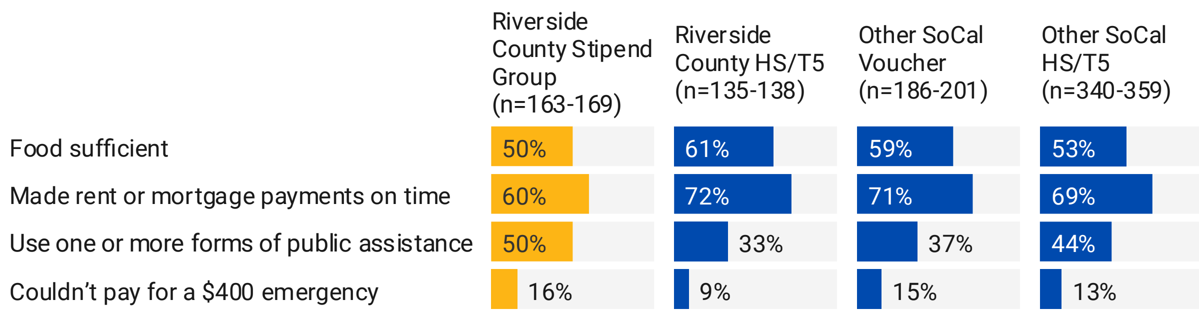
Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Next we examine the current well-being of early educators in center-based classroom roles (but not of educators in site leadership positions, including teacher-directors). Our survey reached 176 educators who received all four stipends from First 5 Riverside County, as well as 155 educators in Head Start/Title 5 programs throughout the county. We also surveyed educators in nearby SoCal counties, reaching 203 educators from voucher-funded programs and 372 educators from Head Start/Title 5 programs.

Figure 4 presents findings on the same four indicators of economic well-being for center-based educators. Stipends were not associated with a lasting impact on center-based educators’ financial stability. The rate of public assistance use was highest among stipend recipients, who were also the least likely to be food sufficient or to make their rent or mortgage payments on time. While one half (50 percent) of stipend recipients used some form of public assistance, the rate was much lower among educators in Head Start/Title 5 programs in Riverside County and neighboring counties (33 percent and 37 percent, respectively). Stipend recipients were somewhat more likely to be unable to pay a $400 emergency expense compared to educators in Head Start/Title 5 programs, but they could cover this unexpected burden at about the same rate as educators in voucher-funded programs in neighboring SoCal counties.

Figure 4. Economic Well-Being of Center-Based Educators

California Center-Based Educators, 2025



Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Overall, these findings suggest that while the stipends may have provided some short-term financial relief, many stipend recipients—particularly center-based educators—continued to face economic challenges. This pattern aligns with research on windfall payments, which shows that although such payments can temporarily alleviate acute financial stress, their effects are short-lived and tend to fade once the payments stop (Arkes et al., 1994; Rodgers et al., 2023).

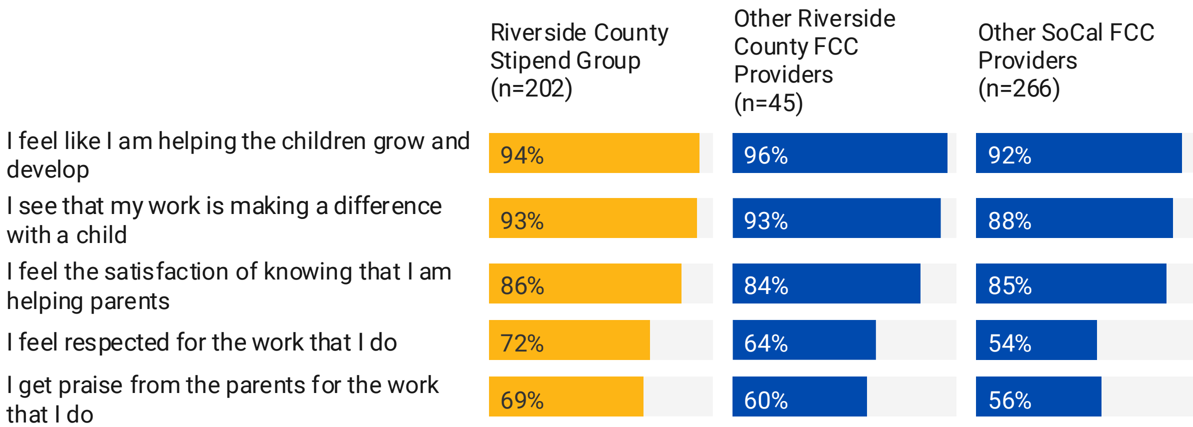
Recognition and Job Rewards

To assess early educators’ perceptions of being recognized and rewarded for their work and regarding their overall feelings about their job, we asked them to rate a series of statements related to the impact of their work. We interpret educators’ sense of being respected by parents and valued for their work as indicative of positive feelings about their job and reflective of a positive work environment, a factor that has been linked to staff retention (Bryant et al., 2023). The responses were measured on a four-point scale—“never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “very often”—and we report the percentage of educators who selected “very often.”

Figure 5 shows the percentage of FCC educators who selected “very often” in response to the statements. About a year after the program ended, receiving a stipend was associated with a positive boost to FCC educators’ sense of being recognized and rewarded for their contributions. A larger proportion of educators who received stipends reported feeling praised by parents or respected for their work (69 percent and 72 percent, respectively), compared to other FCC educators who did not receive stipends in Riverside County (60 percent and 64 percent, respectively) and neighboring counties (56 percent and 54 percent, respectively). Overall, FCC educators’ responses reflect a strong sense of the positive impact of their work, with only small differences between stipend recipients and non-recipients. Across stipend recipients, non-recipients in Riverside County, and peers in neighboring counties, the vast majority reported that “very often” they felt they were helping children grow and develop (94 percent, 96 percent, 92 percent, respectively), making a difference with children (93 percent, 93 percent, 88 percent, respectively), and supporting parents (86 percent, 84 percent, 85 percent, respectively).

Figure 5. FCC Educators Who “Very Often” Feel Recognized and Rewarded

California FCC Educators, 2025



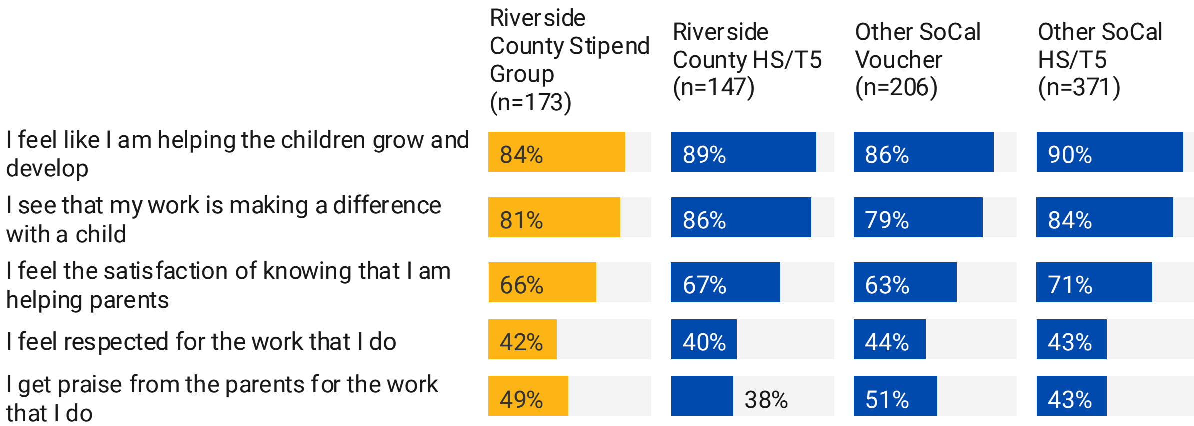
Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Figure 6 provides detail about how center-based educators responded to the same five statements about the impact of their work. One year after the program ended, findings on center-based educators’ sense of being recognized and rewarded does not differ notably from other groups. For instance, while FCC providers who received payments reported higher levels of feeling respected, center-based educators reported similar levels to their peers in Riverside County and neighboring counties who did not receive payments (42 percent, 40 percent, 44 percent, 43 percent, respectively).

Overall, receiving all four payments may have enhanced educators’ sense of being recognized and rewarded for their important work serving children and families, and this impact appears to persist, particularly among FCC educators, even after the program ended. Other studies of wage supplement initiatives have similarly found that such supports can strengthen educators’ sense of being valued, which has been linked to lower turnover (Bassok et al., 2021; Mefferd et al., 2024).

Figure 6. Center-Based Educators Who “Very Often” Feel Recognized and Rewarded

California Center-Based Educators, 2025



Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

V. Retention Findings

Retaining early educators has always been a challenge, in large part due to their unlivable wages (Caven et al., 2021; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). In the first year of the pandemic, turnover among early educators was at an all-time high. In California, job turnover among center teaching staff was about 36 percent and was much higher in centers without contract-based funding, which includes programs that accept vouchers (Kim et al., 2022).

In this section, we review the retention rates among educators who received at least one wage supplement. These findings focus on retention among payment-eligible programs: specifically, those enrolling children with subsidies in Riverside County. It is important to note that educators who received an initial wage supplement payment, but did not reapply or were denied in later payment cycles are considered “not retained” in this analysis. However, they may still have been working with young children in non-eligible programs or other capacities in the ECE sector. Retaining educators within subsidy-serving programs is particularly important for ensuring continuity of care for children from low-income families.

Key Findings

First 5 Riverside County’s goal of improving retention was achieved, but stipends alone are not enough to retain educators. More than half of educators remained in the local ECE subsidy system from 2021 to 2024, and within this group, 80 percent kept the same employer. However, those with advanced degrees were the most likely to leave, possibly drawn to programs with better compensation packages such as Head Start.

Payments may have helped create conditions in Riverside County for community-based centers to retain staff. Riverside showed relatively strong job recovery from the height of the pandemic. Analysis suggests that the county maximized jobs not so much by opening new centers, but by retaining staff at centers that were already open.

Low wages remain a concern for many educators. Former wage enhancement program participants who no longer work with children identified inadequate wages and benefits as the most common reasons for leaving direct care in ECE. Those still working in direct care with children were concerned about the return to living paycheck to paycheck.

For FCC providers, the temporary relief was not enough to offset ongoing financial pressure or the uncertainty lying ahead. With the end of the wage enhancement program, FCC providers are concerned about rising costs and pressure to adjust their business model in response to TK expansion.

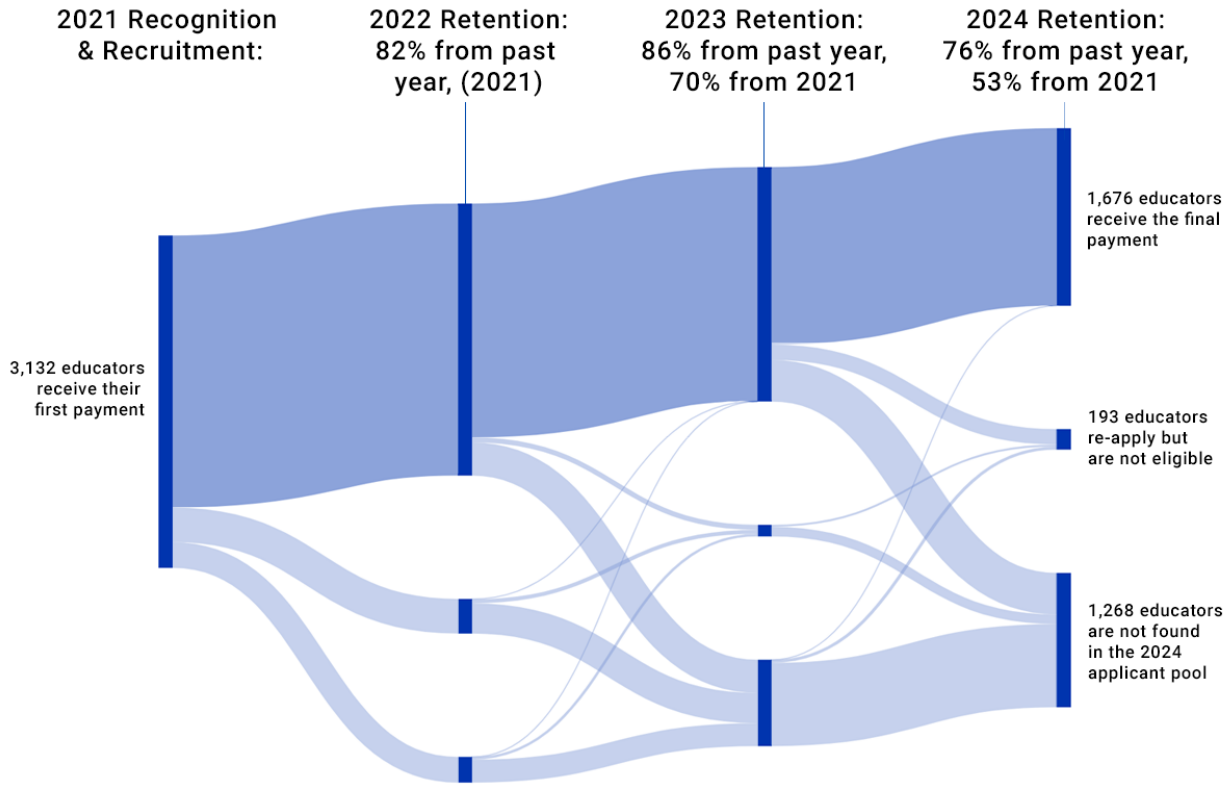
Retention During the Program

The pool of educators receiving pandemic payments began with 3,132 individuals in 2021 and shrank to 1,676 by 2024. This finding corresponds to a 53 percent retention rate over a three-year period. On a year-over-year basis, retention was very high (more than 80 percent in 2022 and 2023; 76 percent in 2024). Given the link between retention and better pay, we would expect a high retention rate in 2022, since educators looked forward to these payments (Caven et al., 2021; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). However, the last two payments were unexpected. Therefore, we would expect retention to be lower in 2023 and 2024, since educators could not count on receiving a payment at the start of the year. This context makes the strong retention rate in 2023 particularly striking.

Figure 7 depicts the flow of educators from 2021 to 2024. The vast majority of educators who did not remain in the wage enhancement program in 2024 were also not in the applicant pool, which suggests they had not reapplied for a stipend. As a reminder, this finding does not necessarily mean they left the ECE field, but that they did not reapply for the wage enhancement program. It is possible that these early educators were still working with children, perhaps in programs or positions that did not qualify for the payment. We know from our longitudinal analysis of early educators in California that many individuals change employers to advance in seniority or pay (Powell et al., 2024). For family child care providers, it could indicate a closure, or it could mean they remained open but pivoted to solely serving tuition-paying families.

Figure 7. Retention Rates, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants



Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Table 5 looks at the retention rates by year, this time comparing trends based on the starting job role (as discussed later in this section, some educators changed jobs but remained eligible). Educators in leadership positions (center administrators and FCC providers) had higher retention than teaching staff. The lowest levels of retention in 2022 were among FCC assistants (75 percent), but in 2023 and 2024, center teachers had the lowest levels of retention (82 percent and 73 percent, respectively).

Comparable data to contextualize these findings are limited; most studies examining ECE workforce attachment report turnover rather than retention rates (Bryant et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2022; Vicente et al., 2025). Nevertheless, one study examined retention of educators working in centers funded through the Washington, D.C., Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund between March 2023 and March 2024 (Doromal et al., 2025). Among educators employed in Pay Equity Fund-supported centers that accepted subsidies, 72 percent remained in the program: 63 percent stayed at the same center, and 9 percent transitioned to another participating center. These findings suggest the year-over-year retention rates for the Riverside County program participants are noteworthy.

Table 5. Retention Rates, By Starting Job Role, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants

Payment Round	2022	2023	2024
Year-Over-Year Retention			
Center Administrators	88%	92%	81%
Center Teaching Staff	83%	82%	73%
FCC Providers	81%	93%	80%
FCC Assistants	75%	87%	76%
Unknown Role	82%	86%	76%
All Applicants	**88%**	**92%**	**81%**
Retention Since 2021			
Center Administrators	88%	81%	66%
Center Teaching Staff	83%	68%	49%
FCC Providers	81%	75%	60%
FCC Assistants	75%	65%	50%
Unknown Role	82%	70%	53%
All Applicants	**88%**	**81%**	**66%**

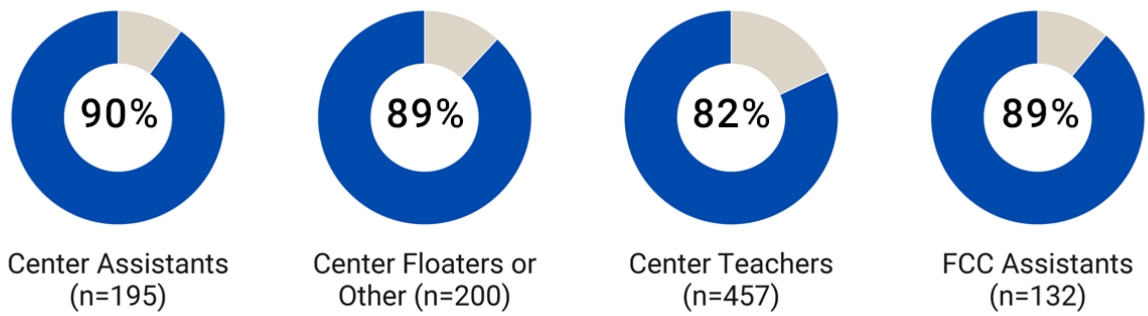
Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Trends Among Retained Educators

For the rest of the section, we will examine the group that was retained through 2024 (1,676 educators). This group was highly likely to still be employed with the same agency or program: approximately nine out of ten early educators. **Figure 8** shows the proportions varied somewhat by initial job role. Center teachers were somewhat less likely to have the same employer while remaining eligible (82 percent). By comparison, these rates are much higher overall than those reported for educators working in the Pay Equity Fund-supported centers that accepted subsidies, where 63 percent remained at the same center (Doromal et al., 2025).

Figure 8. Retained Educators With No Change in Employer, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants



Note: Based on authors' analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

To better understand the wage enhancement program's impact, we once again divided retained educators into groups, this time by demographics (**Table 6**). Readers should interpret with caution the results for small subgroups (e.g., those with fewer than 40 individuals in 2021) in which the decisions of a few individuals can dramatically sway the average.

On the whole, educators of color were more likely to be retained than White educators. Among center teaching staff, for instance, retention was highest for Asian and Black educators (56 and 52 percent, respectively); among FCC providers, retention was highest among Asian and Latina educators (67 and 62 percent, respectively). We duly find that educators who indicated that they speak Spanish fluently (among other languages) were more likely to be retained. For instance, in the case of FCC providers, 64 percent of fluent Spanish-speakers were retained, compared with 58 percent of those whose primary language is English.

Variation by educational attainment depended on job role, but educators with some college education were most likely to be retained in 2024 across all job roles. Educators with bachelor's degrees or advanced degrees showed different retention rates based on their role: for site leaders, retention was fairly similar with other education levels. Nonetheless, for teaching staff, there was a marked decrease in retention among educators with the highest levels of educational attainment. Specifically, early educators with bachelor's degrees showed retention rates of 41 percent among center teaching staff and 42 percent among FCC assistants.

Advanced degree holders among center teachers had the lowest retention of any subgroup large enough to report (26 percent). This finding is not necessarily unexpected: educators with higher levels of education are eligible for better-paying jobs in Head Start and State Preschool. While the data do not indicate whether educators who exited the program took those jobs, movement of workers between subsidized programs and other ECE programs is common (Doromal et al., 2025). Additionally, previous research shows that educators with higher levels of training are more likely to leave their jobs if wages are low (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

Table 6. Retention Rates, By Starting Job Role and Demographics, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants

	Center Administrators	Center Teaching Staff	FCC Providers	FCC Assistants
Race and ethnicity				
Asian	78% (n=18*)	56% (n=105)	67% (n=27*)	50% (n=10*)
Black	100% (n=11*)	52% (n=110)	58% (n=193)	73% (n=45)
Latina	67% (n=69)	49% (n=979)	62% (n=507)	48% (n=148)
Multiracial	53% (n=15*)	47% (n=112)	57% (n=58)	29% (n=14*)
White	58% (n=71)	47% (n=423)	54% (n=145)	40% (n=47)
Primary language				
English	66% (n=180)	48% (n=1,546)	58% (n=685)	49% (n=230)
Spanish	**	56% (n=166)	64% (n=242)	58% (n=31)
Educational attainment				
High school or less	62% (n=29*)	50% (n=500)	57% (n=419)	50% (n=137)
Some college	70% (n=40)	58% (n=412)	71% (n=172)	55% (n=53)
Associate degree	66% (n=38*)	49% (n=429)	56% (n=175)	53% (n=38*)
Bachelor’s degree	65% (n=54)	41% (n=350)	60% (n=125)	42% (n=33*)
Master’s or higher	65% (n=26*)	26% (n=42)	62% (n=37*)	**
Age group in 2021				
Age 18 to 24	**	30% (n=307)	33% (n=33*)	37% (n=92)
Age 25 to 34	69% (n=26*)	42% (n=595)	58% (n=139)	54% (n=72)
Age 35 to 44	61% (n=56)	60% (n=343)	63% (n=261)	70% (n=33*)
Age 45 to 54	77% (n=52)	65% (n=254)	64% (n=226)	59% (n=37*)
Age 55 and older	61% (n=51)	61% (n=238)	57% (n=277)	43% (n=30*)

* Interpret with caution (n<40)
** Not enough individuals (n<10)
Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

While educators in Head Start programs were not eligible for the First 5 Riverside County wage enhancement program (unless they also enrolled children receiving vouchers), they did experience retention pay bumps during the same time period due to state and federal actions. These increases would have helped Head Start programs maintain their position as comparatively higher-paying ECE settings. For example, a 2022 survey of Head Start programs found that more than two thirds had increased wages for teaching staff, while two thirds provided monetary or financial incentives, such as bonuses or short-term pay increases, as part of pandemic relief initiatives (Gonzalez et al., 2024). As such, the wage supplements sponsored by First 5 Riverside County may not have been enough to retain educators who were eligible for employment in Head Start.

Interestingly, while **Table 6** demonstrates higher retention among educators with lower educational attainment, it does not reflect educators’ investment in their own learning from 2021 to 2024. Educators were allowed to use their payments for anything they wished, and most focused on covering their basic needs (see **Figure 2)**. However, around one third of center teaching staff (31 percent) and FCC assistants (36 percent) reported spending at least some of the money on advancing their education.

Finally, retention levels also varied by age group, although not in predictable patterns across roles (see **Table 6**). In general, retention rates were highest among educators between 35 and 54 years old and were lower for individuals younger than 35 and for those 55 and older. This trend was most pronounced among center teaching staff: educators age 35 and older were twice as likely to be retained as educators age 18 to 24. Research shows that more-experienced educators are likely to remain in the field, whereas the likelihood of leaving is greatest during the first two to three years of employment (Bryant et al., 2023).

In some cases, retained early educators experienced job advancement from 2021 to 2024. **Table 7** examines teaching staff who remained in the program for the full period, comparing their roles in 2021 and 2024. Center teachers and FCC assistants who remained in the wage enhancement program were most often in the same job level across the two time points (72 percent for both). By contrast, center assistants were infrequently in the same job level (27 percent); 24 percent of center assistants advanced to a lead teacher position; and another 14 percent of center assistants attained a leadership role, as did 15 percent of center teachers and 12 percent of FCC assistants.

Table 7. Retained Educators With Job Changes, 2021 to 2024

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants

	2021 FCC Assistants (n=132)	2021 Center Assistants (n=195)	2021 Center Floaters or Other (n=200)	2021 Center Teachers
2024 FCC Assistant	72%	10%	6%	1%
2024 Center Assistant	5%	27%	6%	2%
2024 Center Floater or Other	5%	25%	56%	11%
2024 Center Teacher	6%	24%	26%	72%
2024 Center Administrator	1%	7%	2%	2%
2024 FCC Provider	11%	7%	5%	13%

Note: Based on authors’ analysis of administrative data provided by First 5 Riverside County. We highlight examples of advancement in green. Because floaters and other center staff may fill roles ranging from assistant to lead teacher, we treat these positions as neutral in terms of advancement.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Focus Group Findings

Our focus group data show that while the stipends alone were not sufficient to retain educators in the ECE field, they did serve as a meaningful and complementary support alongside other factors contributing to job satisfaction and retention.

> “I just feel like if I didn’t have [the payments], I probably would be sinking financially. At that time, my husband’s company shut down during COVID. So it’s basically me supporting our household right now.”
>
> *— FCC Provider*

> “I strongly believe that those who work with children or within the early childhood field deserve more than minimum wage. I have First Aid/CPR/AED for adults and children, advanced technological skills, bilingual skills, patience, kindness, and a willingness to learn more.”
>
> *— Center Teacher*

Participants reported that they stay in ECE because they value the work and enjoy doing it. Their passion and commitment to children drives their decision to stay, while windfall payments make it financially and emotionally easier to do so.

> “I was debating on quitting and trying to pursue something else, so knowing that I was going to get another payment helped me make up my mind in staying in the field, because I do like what I do. It's not enough money sometimes. So, it helped me stay.”
>
> *— Center Teacher*

> “It helped to feel appreciated, but I don't think it locked me in for staying in ECE. My desire and my heart is what locks me in to stay in ECE, but it's not the pay at all. It's not the payments, it's not the bonuses. The bonuses are great, and we need more pay, but it's overall desire to stay in ECE.”
>
> *— Center Teacher*

Countywide Job Trends During the Program

We analyzed 37 California counties using the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), a resource from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This sample represents all counties where data are available without warnings. In counties with fewer ECE jobs, the estimates are sometimes not as reliable, so the BLS analysts add warnings to the data.

To compare counties, we looked at the number of ECE jobs in community-based organizations over time, screening out employers that are federal, state, or local government agencies (for instance, a county office of education). This process allows us to exclude district-run programs, which disproportionately use contracted funding sources like Head Start or State Preschool rather than vouchers.[5] These estimates are limited to employer-based jobs, so self-employed workers like family child care providers are not included in this analysis.

Table 8 shows the change in number of jobs by the end of 2024, comparing 2024 first to the final quarter of 2019 (pre-pandemic) and then to the final quarter of 2020 (pandemic peak). Compared to pre-pandemic, Riverside County is ranked 13 out of 37 in job growth. In other words, Riverside County outperformed roughly two thirds of other California counties relative to pre-pandemic. However, when looking at change since 2020, the county's rank is even higher: 9 out of 37. So Riverside County's job recovery from the lowest point of the pandemic was stronger than three quarters of other California counties.

Table 8. Community-Based ECE Jobs

Neighboring California Counties, 2019 to 2024

	Change Since Q4 2019	County Rank (1 through 37)	Change Since Q4 2020	County Rank (1 through 37)
Statewide	9%	n/a	38%	n/a
Riverside	14%	13	46%	9
Neighboring Counties				
Los Angeles	3%	20	30%	19
Orange	3%	19	36%	14
San Bernardino	22%	5	25%	25
San Diego	14%	12	36%	15

Note: Authors' analysis of Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2019-2024. Data not available for all 58 counties. ECE jobs are defined by the Child Day Care Services Industry (6244) in the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. Community-based jobs are those that are not employed via a federal, state, or local agency. Q4 corresponds to October through December. For a table with all counties with data, refer to the **Appendix**.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

5 In our statewide survey in 2025, we reached 1,147 program directors and administrators. We estimate only 20 percent of contracted programs also enroll children with vouchers.

This analysis does not necessarily mean First 5's stipends caused an improvement in Riverside County. However, it illustrates that the combined conditions (inclusive of the stipends) for community-based centers in Riverside County were relatively strong when compared to other parts of California.

We can also explore countywide trends using another source: licensure data from Community Care Licensure on the status of child care centers. Because a site may hold multiple licenses, we focused our analysis on preschool licenses only. From 2021 to 2024, Riverside County lost 448 sites and gained 65 sites.[6] **Table 9** reports trends in site closures by county, excluding counties with fewer than 20 sites licensed as of January 1, 2020.

Statewide, there was a 5 percent reduction in centers in 2021, and an approximately 18 percent reduction during 2021-2024. Riverside County was very similar to the statewide average: the number of centers contracted by 4 percent of centers in 2021 and 19 percent from 2021 to 2024. Unlike the jobs analysis in **Table 8**, this estimate includes center-based care operated in school districts. Taken together, these findings suggest that community-based organizations in Riverside County were likely maximizing jobs not by opening new sites, but by retaining staff at sites that remained open.

Table 9. Child Care Center Closures

Neighboring California Counties, 2021 to 2024

	Closed in 2021	County Rank (1 through 40)	Closed 2021-2024	County Rank (1 through 40)
Statewide	5%	n/a	18%	n/a
Riverside	4%	17	19%	19
Neighboring Counties				
Imperial	3%	16	16%	11
Los Angeles	4%	20	17%	15
Orange	6%	32	17%	16
San Bernardino	3%	14	15%	10
San Diego	5%	27	19%	19

Note: Authors' analysis of child care center licensure data, courtesy of Community Care Licensing. The closures are estimated only among programs that were already licensed as of January 1, 2020. Counties with fewer than 20 centers licensed on that date are excluded, so data are not available for all 58 counties. For a table with all counties with data available, refer to the **Appendix**.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

6 Around one third of newly licensed sites received a single license in 2021-2024, which was introduced during the pandemic, rather than a preschool-specific license (California Department of Social Services, 2023). Consequently, it is possible some of these centers were not new sites, but rather sites changing their type of license. However, we consider this data the best proxy for closures currently available.

To examine trends in family child care, we performed a similar analysis using an extract of data from Community Care Licensure on FCC providers with large licenses. As with centers, the 181 FCC provider closures greatly outpaced the 55 openings from 2021 to 2024.

To look at trends in program retention, we examined FCC providers that were licensed before 2020 and compared closure dates within that specific group. **Table 10** excludes any county with fewer than 20 providers licensed as of January 1, 2020.

Table 10 shows that Riverside County performed roughly in the middle of the pack when it comes to large FCC provider closures, both in the year the wage enhancement program launched (2021) and overall during the stipend window (2021-2024). The closure rate for large FCC providers during 2021 was 7 percent, earning a rank of 20 out of 44. For the 2021-2024 period, the cumulative closure rate was 25 percent, a rank of 24 out of 44.

Table 10. Large Family Child Care Provider Closures

Neighboring California Counties, 2021 to 2024

	Closed in 2021	County Rank (1 through 44)	Closed 2021-2024	County Rank (1 through 44)
Statewide	7%	n/a	24%	n/a
Riverside	7%	20	25%	24
Neighboring Counties				
Imperial	3%	2	18%	3
Los Angeles	6%	14	20%	5
Orange	6%	14	29%	32
San Bernardino	5%	10	25%	24
San Diego	8%	28	26%	26

Note: Authors’ analysis of large FCC provider licensure data, courtesy of Community Care Licensing. The closures are estimated only among providers who were already licensed as of January 1, 2020. Counties with fewer than 20 providers licensed on that date are excluded. For a table with all counties, refer to the **Appendix**.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

It is important to note that FCC providers received multiple sources of financial relief during the pandemic: they were eligible for Paycheck Protection Program loans and Small Business Administration loans, and subsidized programs also received union-negotiated payments (Kim et al., 2022). Moreover, FCC providers are self-employed, so each job gained or lost represents a different type of impact than each incremental job in a child care center. All of this context complicates the potential impact of First 5’s stipend on retention among family child care owners/operators.

Retention After the Program

In spring 2025, CSCCE surveyed approximately 1,100 applicants from Riverside County, including 902 who received at least one payment. Most of the early educators we surveyed received all four pandemic payments from First 5 Riverside County. These survey data were collected as part of a statewide study of 10,000 ECE professionals (Powell et al., 2025a).

One limitation of our retention analysis using application data (see **Retention During the Program**) is that educators who take jobs in early care and education in non-eligible programs are hard to distinguish from educators who left the ECE field entirely. By conducting a survey in 2025, we could determine whether educators were still in an ECE job, even if they had moved into a Head Start program or even moved out of Riverside County.

Figure 9 reports the status of educators who were center teaching staff or FCC providers in 2021. As of 2025, 65 percent of center teaching staff who received at least one payment were still working in a child care center classroom, and 11 percent had advanced to a program leadership position. A few individuals had taken jobs in transitional kindergarten (TK). Meanwhile, 23 percent no longer worked in a direct care or supervision role. This group, which we examine more closely in the next section, covers educators who still work in a center, but in a support role, as well as educators who left the field entirely. Because we relied on email addresses to contact most center-based educators, we may be undercounting those who left the field.[7]

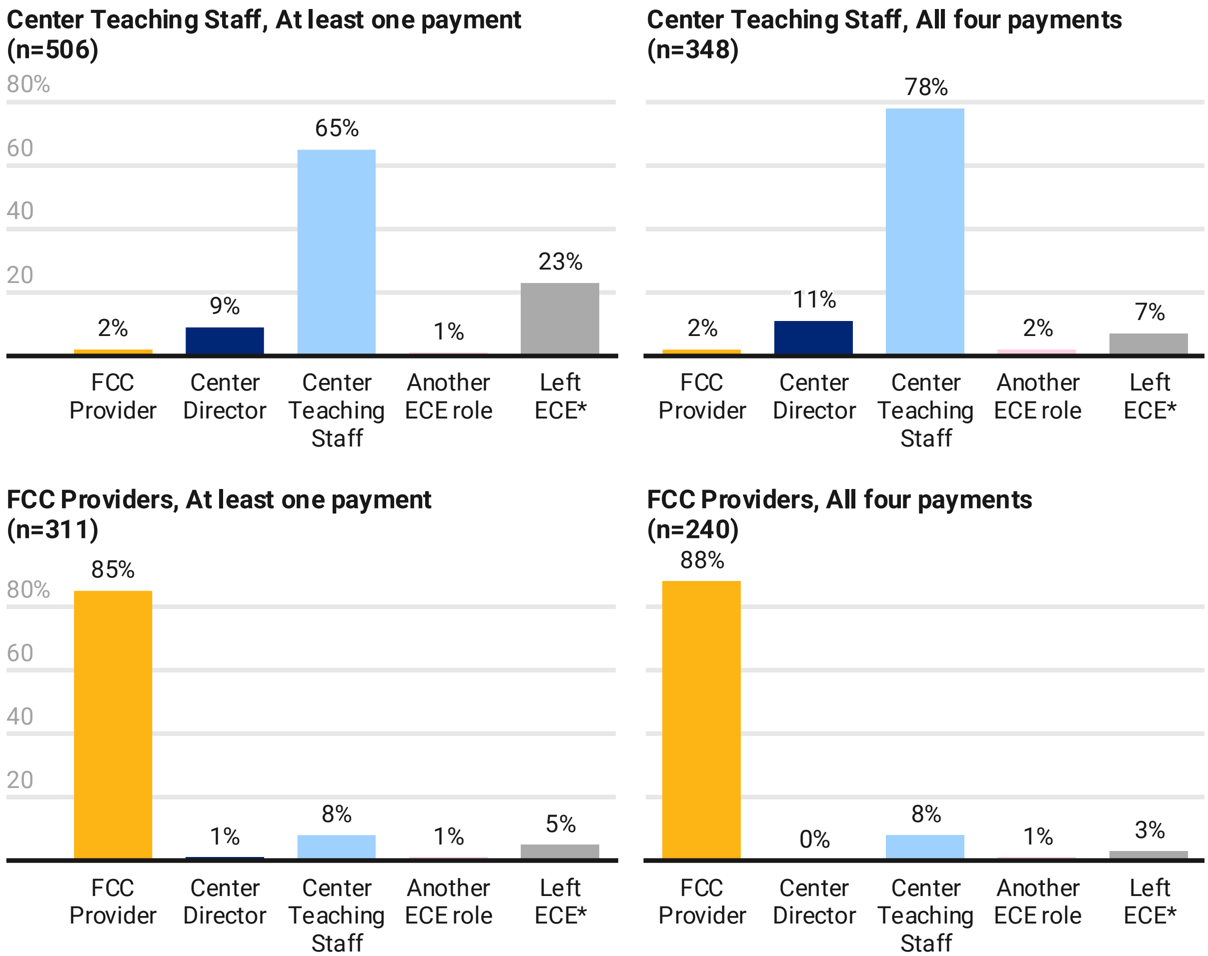
When we limit our analysis to center teaching staff who received all four payments, retention in their job role jumps to 78 percent, compared to the overall rate of 65 percent. The biggest gains came from a much lower rate for educators who had left direct care and supervision roles by 2025: only 7 percent of those who received all four payments, compared with 23 percent of educators who received at least one payment. This finding affirms that when educators left payment-eligible employers, they sometimes took jobs elsewhere in the ECE mixed-delivery system, but more frequently, they embarked on a path that led away from direct care by 2025.

Over the same period, we found approximately 85 percent of FCC providers who received at least one payment were still operating in 2025 (**Figure 9**). Looking at FCC educators who received all four payments, they were slightly more likely to still be operating (88 percent) than the FCC provider average.

7 If educators used a work email address when applying for a stipend, the survey invitation might not have reached them if they changed employers, resulting in lower response rates from educators who changed jobs.

Figure 9. Job Changes From 2021 to 2025

Riverside County Wage Supplement Participants



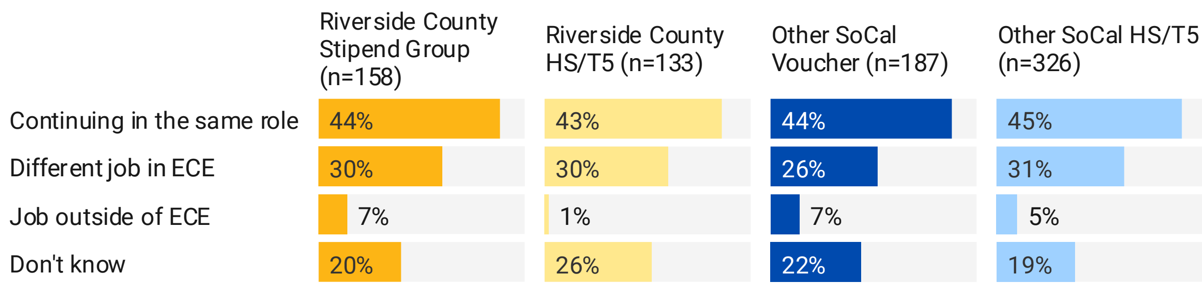
*Left direct care or supervision in ECE. Some individuals pursued support positions in an ECE setting, such as site secretary or family liaison.
Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study. Chart depicts educators' jobs as of 2025, grouped by their job in 2021.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Future Plans

To understand their intentions to remain in the ECE field, our survey asked early educators where they expected to be working in three years. **Figure 10** reports the responses of payment recipients compared to educators in other programs as of 2025. The responses show only small differences among groups. As expected, one year following the end of the wage enhancement program, educators who had received payments looked very similar to their peers in other programs, with just under one half planning to remain in their current role.

Figure 10. Job Plans in Three Years

California Child Care Center Teaching Staff, 2025



Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

To augment our survey questions around future plans and longevity in the ECE field, we included questions in our focus groups about the end of the stipend payments, educators' assessment of their current financial well-being, and their future in ECE. Focus group participants shared a range of perspectives about their financial status and their career decisions. Some felt they could manage without additional support, but many noted the end of the stipends meant returning to a paycheck-to-paycheck situation. Educators described the payments as having provided temporary stability and flexibility, helping them cover expenses more comfortably and plan ahead in ways that are no longer possible.

> “Having the checks took a big weight off our shoulders, and not having them now, it's back to living paycheck to paycheck.”
>
> — *Center Teacher*

> “For me… [the wage enhancement program] was that help to jump ahead of things. Or [the payment] coming just in time to bless us [so] I can pay this bill. So that way when I get my next check, I don't have to worry about this or that. Now [that the payments are over], it's like, ‘Oh, snap. How am I going to pay for this and still get my [teaching] supplies?'”
>
> — *Center Teacher*

For FCC providers, the conclusion of the wage enhancement program brought to light additional concerns tied to the sustainability of their businesses. A number of FCC educators described plans to leave the field, pointing to systemic challenges such as rising costs and the expansion of TK, which have reduced enrollment and forced them to accept younger children into their programs. While the payments offered short-term relief, they were not enough to offset ongoing financial pressures and uncertainty about the future.

> “I'm okay if we get [a 2025 payment] or if we don’t get one. It would be nice, of course, if we did get one, whatever it is. Every little bit helps. I, too, only have infants. It’s not really what I want to do—strictly doing only infants. If it’s something I’m going to continue to do, I don’t think so. I think in the next couple months, I’m probably going to just close.”
>
> — *FCC Provider*

> “I think I’m going to be in forced retirement. I really do…. I just get one call a month [from parents seeking child care]. That’s it…. The schools and churches have all opened daycares, and there’s nothing left out there except kids that have issues or evenings and weekends.”
>
> — *FCC Provider*
>
> “I've been looking at possible remote positions of really anything I can do. And recently, I have been looking into my local school district. I have had a few interviews already. Because it's something I need to consider, having only five kids enrolled. I don't know how much longer I can stay afloat.”
>
> — *FCC Provider*

Educators Who Left the Field

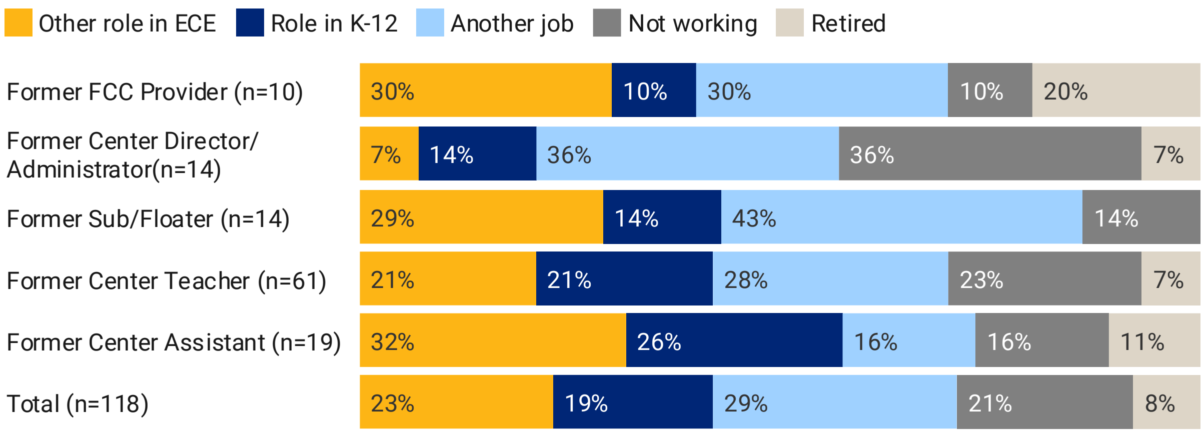
We surveyed 125 early educators who left direct care and supervision. Nearly all of them received at least one stipend, and around one quarter received all four payments. **Figure 11** shows the last role they held in ECE and their role now, for the 118 educators who replied to all our questions.

Around 23 percent of former educators were still working in an ECE context, either as nannies or in ECE program support roles like cooking, out-of-school-time care, or student or family services. Meanwhile, 19 percent had taken jobs in a K-12 setting, often in special education or as substitutes. Another 29 percent, however, were working in other sectors entirely, and 21 percent were not currently working (including several stay-at-home parents). Eight percent of former ECE professionals had retired.

We asked these individuals why they no longer worked directly with children in ECE (or as a supervisor of early educators). The most common reasons were: wages (59 percent); benefits (38 percent); burnout (36 percent); and not feeling supported at work (33 percent). Educators could select multiple responses.

Figure 11. Job Status of Former Early Educators, By Last ECE Role

Former Riverside County Early Educators, 2025

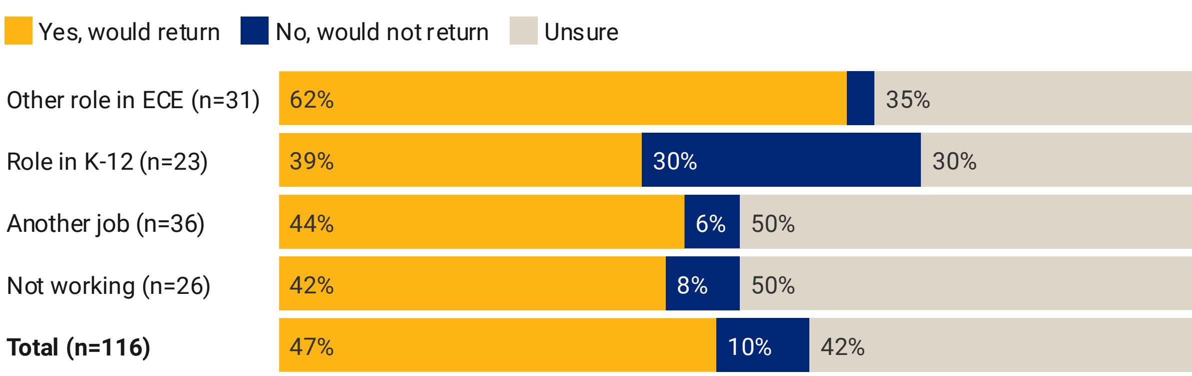


Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study. Interpret results with caution; most groups <50.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Only 10 percent of former early educators said they would not consider a role in direct care or supervision in the future. Nonetheless, the rest of respondents were split roughly between those who would consider it and those who weren't sure (see **Figure 12**). The majority (62 percent) of educators who had taken ECE-related jobs outside of the classroom would consider returning to direct care or supervision, while a smaller proportion of those who had taken jobs in K-12 would consider returning (39 percent). Notably, nearly one half (42 percent) of former classroom educators were unsure whether they might reconsider returning to direct care in ECE.

Figure 12. Willingness to Return to Direct Care, By Current Role

Former Riverside County Early Educators, 2025



Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study. Retired individuals did not receive questions about returning to ECE. Interpret results with caution (groups fewer than 40).
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

We also asked the 110 respondents who were either open to returning or were uncertain, what types of roles they would consider. Former center directors were most likely to prefer returning to a similar position, with few respondents indicating they would work in the classroom. There was one exception: some directors would consider teaching TK. Former center teachers and aides, meanwhile, would consider a variety of jobs in ECE. We reached only eight FCC providers who had taken jobs outside of ECE but were willing to return, so we are unable to report findings for this group.

Using an open-ended follow-up question, we asked this same group of 110 educators what conditions they would need to accept or return to one of these jobs. A majority of educators said that pay and/or benefits would need to be higher. A few individuals mentioned specific life circumstances or working environments.

> “[The] pay is too low for the amount of work…. [I would need] recognition for the dedication and love I've poured into my years of teaching. It’s truly sad that fast food workers make the same or more than preschool teachers earn.”
>
> *— Former Lead Teacher, currently not working*

> “I would need a higher salary and benefits, specifically health and dental. A salary close to what I am making now [$6,804 monthly].”
>
> *— Former Lead Teacher, now in an administrative role in higher education*

> “I would need to feel more supported in my role as a teacher. To not have a supervisor who yells or belittles the staff in front of others. Also somewhere I can enroll my own children possibly. Also a better salary.”
>
> *— Former Lead Teacher, now a stay-at-home parent*

VI. Conclusion

First 5 Riverside County’s efforts in a time of crisis are noteworthy. The initiative aimed to support the recognition, recruitment, and retention of early educators when the workforce faced severe strain. First 5 Riverside County mobilized staff, retooled internal systems, and disbursed pandemic relief funds directly to early educators when they were critically needed.

Our study shows that overall applicant approval rates were very high, though FCC educators were approved at slightly lower rates than center-based educators. This finding suggests that home-based educators may have faced application challenges beyond what could be addressed by having bilingual staff available, though most educators received adequate support. Understanding the unique barriers faced by FCC providers can help inform future implementation of similar initiatives.

Distribution of stipends was relatively equitable. Across all job roles, the racial and ethnic distribution of stipend recipients closely mirrored the demographics of Riverside County’s early education workforce (Powell et al., 2025b). Additionally, the payments benefited early educators across all educational levels, underscoring that low wages are common—even among those with advanced degrees.

This evaluation suggests that the wage enhancement program effectively supported the goals of recognition and retention. Educators described feeling recognized and rewarded for their important work, despite the low wages. These positive feelings endured even after the program ended, particularly among FCC providers.

The stipend payments offered short-term financial relief, allowing educators to meet their basic needs (such as paying rent, groceries, and other household bills) and, in some cases, helped them invest in their education. With the program's end, many educators reported a return to financial precarity and living paycheck to paycheck. The short-term impacts of the stipends is consistent with windfall payments, which are known to be effective at alleviating acute financial stress without having sustained impacts (Arkes et al., 1994; Rodgers et al., 2023). Additionally, despite this wage top-up, most educators continued to earn below the self-sufficiency wage for their household.

For FCC providers, stipend funds meant personal financial relief as well as critical support for their programs. Many FCC educators used the funds to buy classroom materials and cover business expenses. This finding underscores the interconnected nature of FCC providers' business operations and their personal finances—a factor that decisionmakers should consider in designing future compensation initiatives.

Year-over-year retention was high compared to rates reported in other studies (Doromal et al., 2023). Among educators retained throughout the stipend period, nine in ten remained at the same program or agency. When surveyed a year after the wage enhancement program ended, most stipend participants were still working directly with children in ECE. This finding was especially true for FCC providers, the vast majority of whom continued operating their programs, with only 3 to 5 percent no longer working directly with children in early care and education. These findings highlight the strong commitment and work ethic among early educators despite their low wages (Kwon et al., 2020).

Among former stipend participants who had left ECE, the most common reasons cited for leaving the field were low wages and scant benefits, burnout, and lack of workplace support. These findings underscore the need to pair long-term compensation strategies with efforts to improve the work environment and strengthen workplace supports. Notably, nearly one half of those who had left ECE said they would consider returning to direct care if these challenges were addressed, suggesting that sustained systemic strategies could help reduce chronic workforce shortages.

Our findings show that Riverside County also experienced a relatively strong job recovery from the height of the pandemic compared to other California counties. While we do not attempt to establish causality due to the flurry of payments during the pandemic, it is likely that First 5 Riverside County's wage enhancement program helped stabilize the local workforce and supported recovery by maintaining positions in open child care programs. However, as pandemic relief has ended, new challenges continue to emerge, underscoring the continued vulnerability of this chronically underfunded sector.

FCC providers in particular identified the expansion of transitional kindergarten as a significant challenge to the feasibility of their business. As more four-year olds enroll in TK, child care programs are expected to pivot and serve more infants, toddlers, and three-year-olds. However, the loss of older children to TK cannot simply be replaced by infants and toddlers without destabilizing the child care business model. This shift threatens FCC providers' financial stability in particular: younger age groups require lower child:adult ratios (Workman, 2021), and there is a limit on the total number of infants an individual provider can care for. Without adequate support, the loss of older children to TK will likely destabilize the already-fragile business model of FCC providers operating with small group sizes and on razor-thin margins.

Although temporary, First 5 Riverside County's wage enhancement program provided vital support to educators serving children from vulnerable backgrounds during a critical period. The following recommendations outline actions Riverside County and the State of California can take to strengthen ECE programs and build a more stable, resilient system with a well-compensated and well-supported workforce:

Riverside County should...

- Strengthen local ECE workforce compensation strategies:
    - Continue and expand the wage supplement initiative to reach educators across all settings;
    - Explore sustained local revenue sources, such as ballot measures, to fund workforce compensation;
    - Develop and adopt a wage scale and career ladder as the foundation for a long-term, system-wide compensation strategy;
- Strengthen local workforce data systems:
    - Provide adequate funding for the workforce registry and promote participation from educators in all settings;
    - Leverage existing data systems to enable timely and efficient distribution of future one-time funds directly to educators;
    - Integrate data across licensing, subsidy, and workforce registries to monitor impact of policy changes and identify gaps;
- Support child care programs during transition to universal TK:
    - Offer targeted transition and stabilization supports for programs adapting to serve younger children; and
    - Fund research to better understand and address the unique challenges of family child care providers during this transition.

The State of California should...

- Implement policies that improve the wages and well-being of the early care and education workforce:
  - Establish a sustainable and equitable compensation infrastructure, including state-funded wage scales, to ensure fair and consistent pay across all settings;
  - Fund early care and education as a public good to promote system stability and equity; and
- Strengthen workforce data and accountability systems:
  - Invest in ongoing workforce data collection and research to track and evaluate the impact of policy changes, including the expansion of TK, on educator well-being.

Appendix

Table A1. Center-Based Survey Participant Characteristics

California Early Educators, 2025

	Riverside County Stipend Group	Riverside County HS/T5	Other SoCal Voucher	Other SoCal HS/T5
Race and ethnicity	(n=174)	(n=146)	(n=208)	(n=374)
Asian	3%	7%	2%	9%
Black	7%	3%	9%	3%
Latina	56%	55%	64%	43%
White	22%	17%	11%	28%
Multiracial/All other	11%	17%	14%	17%
Tenure in ECE	(n=177)	(n=148)	(n=209)	(n=374)
Less than 5 years	7%	14%	29%	22%
5 to 15 years	52%	45%	43%	35%
16 to 25 years	28%	27%	17%	26%
More than 25 years	13%	14%	11%	16%

Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Table A2. FCC Provider Survey Participant Characteristics

California Early Educators, 2025

	Riverside County Stipend Group	Other Riverside County FCC Providers	Other SoCal FCC Providers
Race and ethnicity	(n=200)	(n=44)	(n=288)
Asian	4%	0%	4%
Black	24%	25%	8%
Latina	48%	61%	57%
White	16%	7%	15%
Multiracial/All other	9%	7%	15%
Tenure in ECE	(n=196)	(n=43)	(n=261)
Less than 5 years	5%	23%	14%
5 to 15 years	33%	33%	34%
16 to 25 years	37%	23%	29%
More than 25 years	26%	21%	22%

Note: Data were collected in 2025 through the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Table A3. Community-Based ECE Jobs

California Counties, 2019 to 2024

	Change Since Q4 2019	County Rank (1 through 37)	Change Since Q4 2020	County Rank (1 through 37)
Statewide	9%	n/a	38%	n/a
Riverside	14%	13	46%	9
All Other Counties With Data Available				
Alameda	15%	10	69%	2
Butte	-13%	32	-3%	35
Contra Costa	17%	8	52%	5
El Dorado	-27%	37	-11%	36
Fresno	11%	16	29%	21
Humboldt	-22%	36	24%	27
Kern	20%	6	33%	17
Kings	30%	3	47%	8
Los Angeles	3%	20	30%	19
Marin	-10%	30	16%	29
Mendocino	-3%	27	15%	30
Merced	48%	2	83%	1
Monterey	15%	9	29%	22
Napa	1%	24	21%	28
Nevada	-12%	31	8%	32
Orange	3%	19	36%	14
Placer	-3%	26	13%	31
Sacramento	14%	11	38%	12
San Benito	5%	18	30%	20
San Bernardino	22%	5	25%	25
San Diego	14%	12	36%	15
San Francisco	1%	23	33%	18
San Joaquin	-22%	34	4%	33
San Luis Obispo	2%	22	25%	26
San Mateo	2%	21	27%	24
Santa Barbara	49%	1	58%	3
Santa Clara	-1%	25	50%	6
Santa Cruz	-9%	29	55%	4
Shasta	-19%	33	-14%	37
Solano	9%	17	50%	7
Sonoma	19%	7	40%	11
Stanislaus	12%	14	44%	10
Sutter	-22%	35	4%	34
Tulare	23%	4	29%	23
Ventura	11%	15	35%	16
Yolo	-4%	28	36%	13

Note: Authors’ analysis of Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2019-2024. Data not available for Imperial County. ECE jobs are defined by the Child Day Care Services Industry (6244) in the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. Community-based jobs are those that are not employed via a federal, state, or local agency. Q4 corresponds to October through December.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Table A4. Child Care Center Closures

California Counties, 2021 to 2024

	Closed in 2021	County Rank (1 through 40)	Closed 2021-2024	County Rank (1 through 40)
Statewide	5%	n/a	18%	n/a
Riverside	4%	23	19%	20
All Other Counties With Data Available				
Alameda	5%	25	20%	24
Butte	14%	40	43%	40
Contra Costa	4%	17	18%	17
El Dorado	3%	10	21%	30
Fresno	2%	7	9%	3
Humboldt	2%	7	25%	36
Imperial	3%	10	16%	11
Kern	4%	17	19%	19
Kings	8%	36	16%	11
Los Angeles	4%	17	17%	15
Madera	3%	10	11%	4
Marin	8%	36	20%	24
Mendocino	0%	1	11%	4
Merced	0%	1	6%	2
Monterey	2%	7	12%	7
Napa	6%	32	20%	24
Nevada	0%	1	16%	11
Orange	6%	32	17%	15
Placer	3%	10	26%	37
Sacramento	5%	25	19%	19
San Bernardino	3%	10	15%	10
San Diego	5%	25	19%	19
San Francisco	5%	25	20%	24
San Joaquin	4%	17	20%	24
San Luis Obispo	4%	17	22%	31
San Mateo	3%	10	13%	8
Santa Barbara	10%	39	24%	33
Santa Clara	5%	25	24%	33
Santa Cruz	4%	17	19%	19
Shasta	9%	38	27%	38
Solano	5%	25	16%	11
Sonoma	6%	32	29%	39
Stanislaus	3%	10	22%	31
Sutter	0%	1	18%	17
Tehama	0%	1	11%	4
Tulare	5%	25	13%	8
Ventura	4%	17	20%	24
Yolo	7%	35	24%	33
Yuba	0%	1	0%	1

Note: Authors’ analysis of child care center licensure data, courtesy of Community Care Licensing. The closures are estimated only among programs that were already licensed as of January 1, 2020. Counties with fewer than 20 centers licensed on that date are excluded.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Table A5. Large Family Child Care Provider Closures

California Counties, 2021 to 2024

	Closed in 2021	County Rank (1 through 44)	Closed 2021-2024	County Rank (1 through 44)
Statewide	7%	n/a	24%	n/a
Riverside	7%	20	25%	24
All Other Counties With Data Available				
Alameda	7%	20	24%	20
Butte	11%	36	38%	43
Colusa	7%	20	21%	7
Contra Costa	6%	14	24%	20
El Dorado	8%	28	24%	20
Fresno	6%	14	22%	11
Glenn	0%	1	20%	5
Humboldt	17%	44	30%	34
Imperial	3%	2	18%	3
Kern	6%	14	22%	11
Kings	3%	2	18%	3
Lake	15%	40	37%	42
Los Angeles	6%	14	20%	5
Madera	4%	8	23%	17
Marin	7%	20	21%	7
Mendocino	7%	20	22%	11
Merced	3%	2	22%	11
Monterey	7%	20	22%	11
Napa	6%	14	21%	7
Nevada	3%	2	26%	26
Orange	6%	14	29%	32
Placer	8%	31	29%	32
Sacramento	7%	20	28%	30
San Benito	3%	2	11%	1
San Bernardino	5%	10	25%	24
San Diego	8%	28	26%	26
San Francisco	5%	10	23%	17
San Joaquin	9%	32	27%	28
San Luis Obispo	8%	28	27%	28
San Mateo	9%	32	31%	38
Santa Barbara	3%	2	23%	17
Santa Clara	9%	32	31%	38
Santa Cruz	5%	10	21%	7
Shasta	16%	43	46%	44
Solano	10%	35	35%	41
Sonoma	12%	38	30%	34
Stanislaus	11%	36	30%	34

Table continues on the next page.

Table A5. Large Family Child Care Provider Closures, *continued*

California Counties, 2021 to 2024

	Closed in 2021	County Rank (1 through 44)	Closed 2021-2024	County Rank (1 through 44)
Sutter	15%	40	34%	40
Tehama	13%	39	30%	34
Tulare	5%	10	22%	11
Ventura	4%	8	13%	2
Yolo	7%	20	24%	20
Yuba	15%	40	28%	30

Note: Authors' analysis of large FCC provider licensure data, courtesy of Community Care Licensing. The closures are estimated only among providers who were already licensed as of January 1, 2020. Counties with fewer than 20 providers licensed on that date are excluded.
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

References

Abt Global. (2024). *Lump Sum or Recurring: Can Cash Transfers Break the Cycles of Poverty*? https://www.abtglobal.com/insights/perspectives/lump-sum-or-recurring-can-cash-transfers-break-the-cycles-of-poverty

Arkes, H.R., Joyner, C.A., Pezzo, M.V., Gradwohl, N.J., Siegel-Jacobs, K., & Stone. E. (1994). The psychology of windfall gains. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 59*(3), 331–347. https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.1994.1063

Bassok, D., Shapiro, A., Michie, M, & Fares, I. (2021). *The Importance of Financial Supports for Child Care Teachers during the Pandemic: New Findings from Virginia.* https://education.virginia.edu/documents/epwthe-importance-financial-supports-child-care-teachers-during-pandemic-new-findings-virginia2021

Bryant, D., Yazejian, N., Jang, W., Kuhn, L., Hirschstein, M., Hong, S.L.S., Stein, A., & the Educare Learning Network Investigative Team. (2023). Retention and turnover of teaching staff in a high-quality early childhood network. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 65*, 159–169 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2023.06.002

Brown, J., & Herbst, C.M. (2021). *Child Care Over the Business Cycle.* IZA Discussion Paper No. 14048. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3771731

California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (2025). *2023 California Child Care Portfolio*. https://rrnetwork.org/research/child_care_portfolio

California Department of Social Services. (2023). *Single License Child Care Center, ORD No. 1121-05*. https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/regulations-home-page/regulations-in-process/ord-no-1121-05

Caven, M., Khanani, N., Zhang, X., & Parker, C.E. (2021). *Center- and Program-Level Factors Associated with Turnover in the Early Childhood Education Workforce* (REL 2021–069). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED611677.pdf

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE). (2020). *California Child Care at the Brink: The Devastating Impact of COVID-19 on California Child Care.* University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/california-child-care-at-the-brink-covid-19/

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE). (2022). *Profiles of the California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2020*. University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/profiles-of-the-california-early-care-and-education-workforce-2020/

Center for Women’s Welfare. (2021). *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California 2021*. Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/California

County of Riverside. (2021). Item 3.42 (ID#17234). Submittal to the Board of Supervisors County of Riverside, State of California. https://rivco.org/sites/g/files/aldnop116/files/About%20the%20County/Budget%20and%20Financial%20Information/ARPA/Form11_F5_Early%20Care%20and%20Education%20(ECE)_09.14.2021.pdf

Doromal, J.B., Lamb, R., Greenberg, E., Sandstrom, H., & Parra, L.J. (2025). *Wage Enhancements Reduce Educator Turnover in DC’s Child Care Centers - Findings from Staff Records and Interviews with Center Director*s. Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/wage-enhancements-reduce-educator-turnover-dcs-child-care-centers

Gonzalez, K., Litkowski, E., Tarullo, L., Choe, J., & Bernstein, S. (2024). *Spotlight on the Head Start Workforce: Program Strategies to Improve Well-Being and Increase Retention*. OPRE Report #2024-094, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://acf.gov/opre/report/spotlight-head-start-workforce-program-strategies-improve-well-being-and-increase

Hsieh, C-T. (2003). Do consumers react to anticipated income changes? Evidence from the Alaska Permanent Fund. *The American Economic Review*, *93*(1), 397–405 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3132183

Khattar, R., & Coffey, M. (2023). *The Child Care Sector Is Still Struggling to Hire Workers*. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-child-care-sector-is-still-struggling-to-hire-workers

Kidsdata.org. (2023). *Availability of Child Care for Working Families*. https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/99/child-care-availability/table#fmt=262&loc=367,2&tf=164&ch=1247,1248&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc

Kim, Y., Montoya, E., Austin, L.J.E., Powell, A., & Muruvi, W. (2022). *Early Care and Education Programs During COVID-19: Persistent Inequities and Emerging Challenges.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/early-care-and-education-programs-during-covid-19/

Kwon, K-A., Malek, A., Horm, D., & Castle, S. (2020). Turnover and retention of infant-toddler teachers: Reasons, consequences, and implications for practice and policy. *Children and Youth Services Review, 115C*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105061

Lafortune, J,, Bohn, S., Cuellar, M., Duan, J., Johnson, H., & McConville, S. (2024). *Labor Force Participation in California.* Public Policy Institute of California. https://www.ppic.org/publication/labor-force-participation-in-california/

Maier, M., Rau, L., Bumgarner, E., & Hsueh, J. (2025). *Using Wage Supplements in Child Care and Early Education. BASE Theory of Change Series.* OPRE Report 2025-005. https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/opre-wage-supplements-april2025.pdf

McCormick, K.I., McMullen, M.B., & Lee, M.S.C (2022). Early childhood professional well-being as a predictor of the risk of turnover in Early Head Start & Head Start settings. *Early Education and Development*, *33*(4), 567–588. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2021.1909915

McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Powell, A., Jaggi, S., Kim, Y., Knight, J., Muñoz, S., & Schlieber, M. (2024). *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2024.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2024/

Mefferd, E., Doromal, J.B., Sandstrom, H., Greenberg, E., Parra, L.J., Nelson, V., & Nikolopoulos, E. (2024). Wage Supplements Improve Early Educators’ Financial Well-Being: Reflections on the DC Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund. Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/Wage%20Supplements%20Improve%20Early%20Educators’%20Financial%20Well-Being.pdf

Melhorn, F.S. (2024). *Understanding America’s Labor Shortage: The Impact of Scarce and Costly Childcare.* U.S. Chamber of Commerce. https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage-the-scarce-and-costly-childcare-issue

Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L.J.E. (2024). *The Professional Well-Being of Early Educators in California. Early Educator Well-Being Series.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/ca-professional-wellbeing-2024/

Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L.J.E. (2025a). *State of the Early Care and Education Workforce: California Regions.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/state-of-ece-california-2025

Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L.J.E. (2025b). *State of the Early Care and Education Workforce: Riverside County.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/state-of-ece-riverside-2025

Powell, A., Muruvi, W., Austin, L.J.E., & Copeman Petig, A. (2024). *“I could not afford to continue”: Job changes and exits in early care and education.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/data-snapshot/california-job-changes

Pryor, L. (2024). *California’s Child Care System Serves Only a Fraction of Eligible Children*. California Budget & Policy Center. https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-child-care-system-serves-only-a-fraction-of-eligible-children/

Pryor, L., & Schumacher, K. (2025). *California Funding Trends for Early Care & Education Programs.* California Budget & Policy Center. https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/california-funding-trends-for-early-care-education-programs/

Rodgers, K., Grissom, S.A., Hubbard, L., & Darity, W.A. (2023). *Understanding the Effects of Windfalls: What People Do with Financial Payouts, and What It Means for Policy*. The Roosevelt Institute and About the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University. https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/RI_Understanding-the-Effects-of-Windfalls_Report_202305.pdf

Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Cooper, G., Rivera Drew, J.A., Richards, S., Rodgers, R., Schroeder, J., & Williams, K. (2025). IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. IPUMS. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0

U.S. Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). *Assistance for State, Local, and Tribal Governments*. https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments

U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2021). *The Economics of Child Care Supply in the United States*. https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/The-Economics-of-Childcare-Supply-09-14-final.pdf

Vicente, D., Venegas, M., & Guerrero, A.D. (2025). Turn-over and retention among Head Start educators. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 53*(5): 1467–1478. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-024-01685-x

Whitebook, M., King, E., Philipp, G., & Sakai, L. (2016). *Teachers' Voices: Work Environment Conditions That Impact Teacher Practice and Program Quality*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/publications/2016-Alameda-SEQUAL-Report-FINAL-for-Dissemination-v2.pdf

Whitebook, M., & Sakai, L. (2003). Turnover begets turnover: An examination of job and occupational instability among child care center staff. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *18*(2003), 273–293. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/S0885-2006(03)00040-1

Workman, S. (2021). *The True Cost of High-Quality Child Care Across the United States*. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/True-Cost-of-High-Quality-Child-Care.pdf

Zero to Three. (2024). *Why Is Child Care so Expensive?* https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/good-question/why-is-child-care-so-expensive/