



## Characteristics of the Early Care and Education Workforce

The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) provides a nationally representative snapshot of the number of providers employed in the field of early care and education (ECE) and the characteristics of the field's workforce. This brief summarizes the experience, educational attainment, weekly work hours, and wages that characterize the ECE workforce<sup>1</sup> and identifies questions for state ECE leaders to consider in relation to professional development supports.

### How Does the NSECE Classify Providers?

A provider refers to any individual providing early care and education to children between birth and 5 years of age, including teachers, aides, and home-based providers.

The NSECE categorizes the ECE workforce into three main groups:

1. **Center-based providers**, sampled from state and national administrative lists, including state licensing lists, Head Start program records, and prekindergarten rolls, these are providers in regulated, licensed, and other private center-based programs.
2. **Listed home-based providers**, sampled from state or national administrative lists of ECE services, primarily consist of licensed or regulated family child care providers. They also include license-exempt providers and providers participating in Early Head Start.
3. **Unlisted home-based providers** were drawn from an address-based sample of housing units screened for the presence of an adult who cared for a child who was not his or her own for at least 5 hours a week in a home-based setting and did not appear on state or national lists (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 6).

This brief is one of a [six-part series](#) providing information excerpted from the 2012 NSECE, a nationally representative study that includes the following surveys:

- Household Survey with approximately 12,000 parents or guardians who have children younger than 13 years
- Home-Based Provider Survey with approximately 6,000 interviews
- Center-Based Provider Survey with approximately 8,200 directors of programs on state or national administrative lists.
- A Workforce Provider Survey with 5,600 classroom-assigned center staff members.

The information in this brief is based on the report *Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education (ECE) Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)* (NSECE Project Team, 2013).

<sup>1</sup> Information on race and ethnicity was not available.



## Who Are the Providers That Constitute the ECE Workforce?

There are almost four times as many home-based ECE providers as center-based ECE providers (table 1). It is estimated that center-based and home-based providers care for approximately 14 million children: approximately 7 million in centers and 7 million in homes<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1. Number of ECE Providers by Setting and Type**

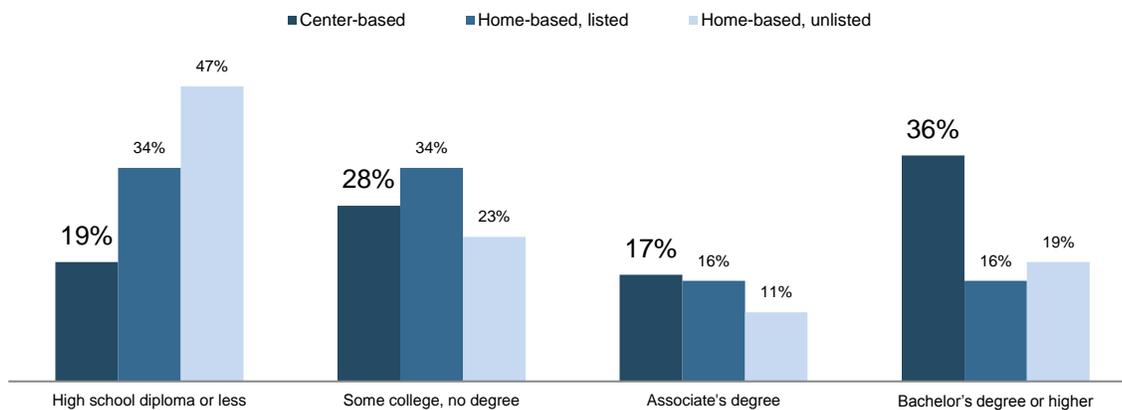
Setting	Type	Number of Providers
Center-based Number of providers: approximately 1,000,000 Number of children served: 6.98 million	Lead teacher	447,000
	Assistant teacher	225,000
	Teacher or instructor	212,000
	Aide	111,000
Home-based Number of providers: approximately 3,800,000 Number of children served: 7.15 million	Listed	118,000
	Unlisted	3,650,000

Source: NSECE Project Team, 2013. Figure 2 and table 2.

## What Is the Educational Attainment of the ECE Workforce?

Center-based providers<sup>3</sup> are more likely to have an associate's degree or higher (53 percent) than listed home-based (32 percent) and unlisted home-based providers (30 percent), as shown in figure 1 (NSECE Project Team, 2013, pp. 11, 16). The higher percentage of center-based providers with a degree may be related to an increased emphasis on degree attainment in center-based programs like Head Start and public prekindergarten (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 16).

**Figure 1. ECE Providers' Educational Attainment by Provider Type**



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2013. Appendix tables 8, 31, and 32.

<sup>2</sup> See NSECE reports on the characteristics of care provided in home-based ECE and the characteristics of center-based ECE programs, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>.

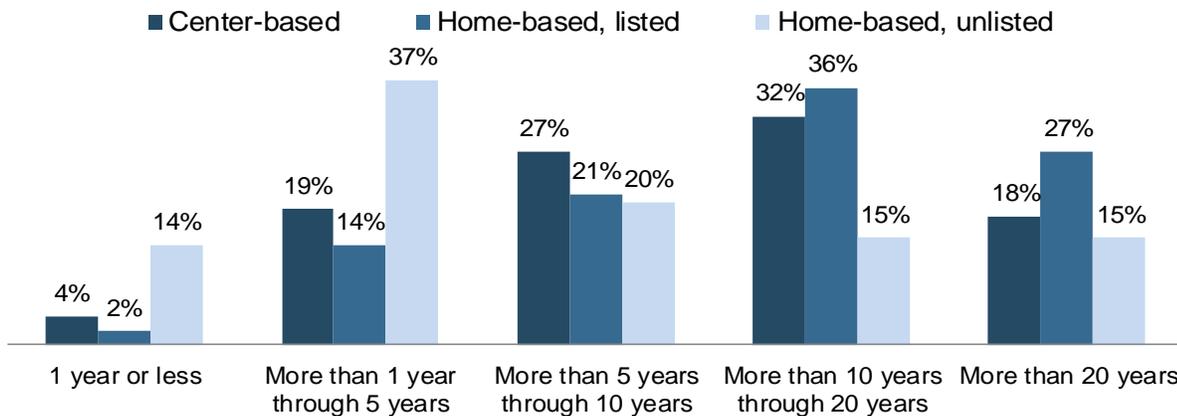
<sup>3</sup> All results include center-based providers (aides, assistant teachers, teachers and instructors, and lead teachers).



## How Many Years of Experience Do ECE Providers Have?

Overall, providers in more formal ECE settings—center-based and listed home-based care—have substantial experience, reporting a median of 10 and 14 years, respectively (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 18).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, unlisted home-based providers reported a median of 5 years of experience. Similarly, as figure 2 shows, center-based and listed home-based providers are more likely to report having more than 5 years of experience than unlisted home-based providers (77 percent of center-based providers and 84 percent of listed home-based providers, versus 50 percent of unlisted home-based providers).

**Figure 2. ECE Providers’ Years of Experience by Provider Type**



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2013. Appendix tables 34, 35, and 36.

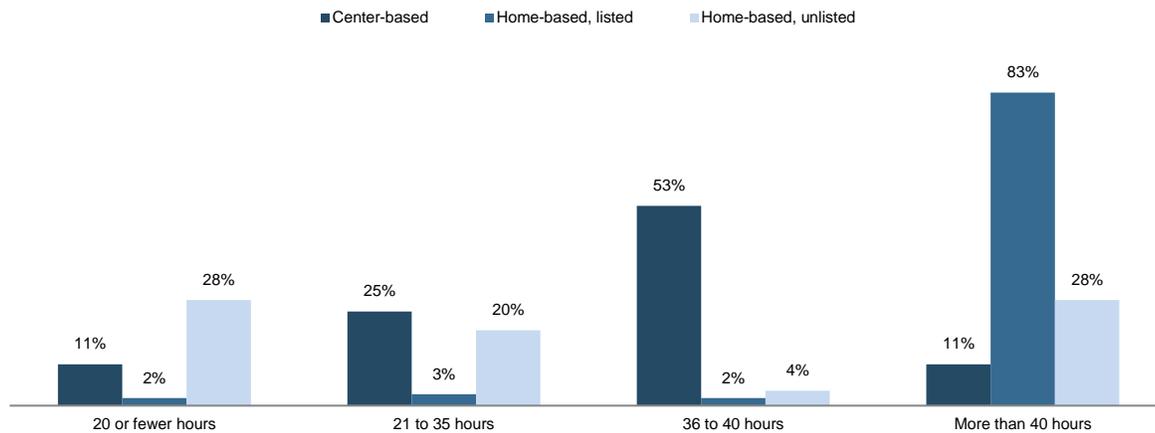
## How Many Hours per Week Do ECE Providers Work?

The median hours worked by each type of ECE teacher or caregiver varies substantially, as listed home-based providers worked almost twice as much as unlisted home-based providers (54 hours versus 28 hours) and about a third more hours than center-based providers (39 hours) (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 20). As figure 3 shows, listed home-based and center-based providers are more likely to work at least 35 hours a week than unlisted home-based providers (85 percent for listed home-based providers and 74 percent for center-based providers, compared with 32 percent for unlisted home-based providers). Home-based listed providers are the most likely to exceed the 40-hour work week; 83 percent of these providers work more than 40 hours, compared with 11 percent of center-based providers and 28 percent of home-based unlisted providers.

<sup>4</sup> ECE providers were asked to report the “total number of years of experience caring for children birth to 13 years who were not their own” (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 18).



Figure 3. Weekly Hours of Work by Provider Type



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2013. Tables 36, 37, and 38.

Note: 10 percent of listed home-based providers and 20 percent of unlisted home-based providers did not report their weekly work hours.

## What Are the Hourly Wages of Center-Based Providers?

Overall, the median hourly wage<sup>5</sup> for center-based providers<sup>6</sup> in 2012 was \$10.60 (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 12). However, as figure 4 shows, wages varied by providers' educational attainment and place of employment: providers with degrees and those working for school-sponsored program earned higher wages than their counterparts (NSECE Project Team, 2013, p. 13).<sup>7</sup> Although wages were highest for providers with bachelor's degrees, their median wages ranged from \$13.90 to \$20.60 depending on program type. To put these figures in context, census data indicate that the average hourly wage for workers with a bachelor's degree is \$27.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mean hourly wages for center-based providers were substantially higher than median hourly wages, indicating that some providers were earning substantially higher wages than most providers. Thus, all data reported is based on median hourly wages.

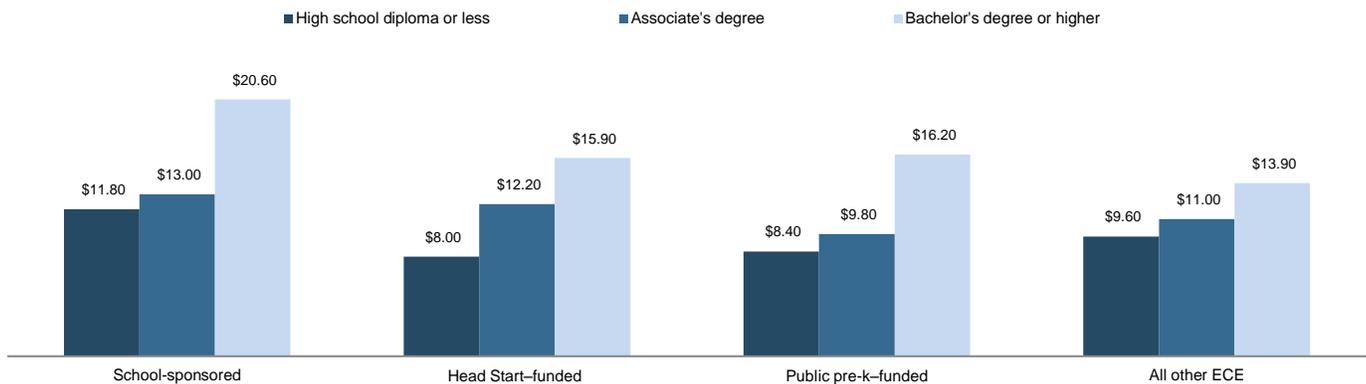
<sup>6</sup> Information on home-based providers' hourly wages was not available in the NSECE report.

<sup>7</sup> Providers with "some college, no degree" were omitted from these analyses because their wages were close to those for providers with a high school diploma or less.

<sup>8</sup> NSECE Project Team (2013, p. 13). NSECE authors' calculations from "US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment... Online data table accessed 07-06-13 at [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)."



**Figure 4. Median Hourly Wages for Center-Based Providers by Educational Attainment and Program Type**



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2013.

Note: Providers with “some college, no degree” were omitted from these analyses for simplification and because their wages were very similar to those earned by providers with a high school diploma or less.

## Questions for States to Consider

- ◆ **State-level data.** What state-level data are available regarding the characteristics of the early childhood education workforce? How is your State using these data? Can your State break down information about experience in the field, educational attainment, and compensation by children’s ages to determine whether these characteristics are the same or different across groups? If different, what are the implications for the State’s strategies?
- ◆ **Educational opportunity and advancement.** Nationally, more than a third of the center-based workforce has a bachelor’s degree or higher. Are there data from your State about the educational qualifications of the ECE workforce? What do you know about the educational attainment of infant and toddler teachers? Does your State offer supports or incentives to encourage the ECE workforce to continue their education? Do you have a career ladder? Are professional development opportunities tied to college course credits?
- ◆ **Retention and time in the field.** Some conventional wisdom has suggested that States may want to minimize professional development investments in ECE teachers during their first few years in the field so that those investments are not lost if a teacher leaves the field soon after she begins working in it. The NSECE findings suggest just the opposite: most individuals in the ECE workforce, particularly those who are listed, have multiple years of experience, and thus, would be able to implement changes in their practice based on professional development. What professional development opportunities does your State offer to the ECE workforce? Are there particular professional development topics that might be more appropriate for someone early in their career, who may change jobs but stay in the early care and education field?
- ◆ **Serving unlisted home-based providers.** Unlisted home-based caregivers and teachers have the least amount of experience caring for children other than their own. However, they are also the least likely to work full-time, which suggests that they may not be very attached to the field of ECE. Other NSECE data have revealed that unlisted unpaid home-based caregivers are more likely to report that they care for children to help the children’s parents (77 percent) rather than because it is a personal calling or career (9 percent) (NSECE Project Team, 2016). Therefore, early care and education professional development opportunities may not be appealing to this type of caregiver. What are some strategies your State is using to engage these providers in existing services that may be particularly relevant to their role as caregivers?
- ◆ **Serving listed home-based providers.** Findings indicate that most listed home-based providers are working more than 40 hours a week, which may limit their opportunities to participate in professional development. What strategies is your State using (or could your State use) to support the professional development of these providers? Are there web-based trainings or online courses to accommodate their work schedules?



- ◆ **Wages.** The nationally representative results indicate that center-based providers' wages are closely tied to educational attainment; however, wages for providers who have earned a bachelor's degree remain much lower than those of other US workers with the same educational background. Are there data from your State about the wages earned by the ECE workforce and how these vary by providers' educational attainment? Does your State have information on race and ethnicity (this information has not yet been reported from the NSECE)? Does your State offer any financial incentives for supporting degree attainment? Are there compensation strategies your State can use to promote degree attainment?
- ◆ **Wages by program type and age group served.** Center-based provider wages vary substantially by type of program. Are there data from your State that indicate the extent to which provider wages differ across program type, educational attainment, and age group served? Has your State considered ways to increase the wages of ECE providers?

## References

- NSECE [National Survey of Early Care and Education] Project Team. (2013). *Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education (ECE) Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*, OPRE Report #2013-38. Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/number-and-characteristics-of-early-care-and-education-ece-teachers-and>
- NSECE Project Team. (2016). *Characteristics of home-based early care and education providers: Initial findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education*. OPRE Report #2016-13, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/characteristics-home-based-early-care-education-findings-national-survey-early-care-and-education>.

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