

Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Study: A Cross Sector Survey

Executive Summary

IdahoSTARS

Center on Disabilities and Human Development

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Idaho's 112,256 children who are birth to five years old make up 6.8% of the Idaho population (US Census, 2015). Many of these children are served by care and education programs. These programs include for-profit and not-for-profit child care programs, private preschool programs, and publically funded programs that serve young children and families who are low income, young children who are at risk for developmental issues and their families, and young children with diverse needs and their families. Professionals working in these settings are in the early childhood workforce.

Early childhood professionals are diverse in many characteristics, yet in many ways, they are similar. Across the workforce, professionals use the same evidence-based practices and strategies, and aim toward the same expected outcomes for children's health and development. To provide a view of workforce characteristics across sectors, a statewide survey of early childhood professionals was conducted in October and November, 2015. The Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Study was funded by the University of Idaho Center on Disabilities and Human Development, and by IdahoSTARS, Child Care and Development Block Grant, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

In addition to addressing workforce sector characteristics in the study, IdahoSTARS professional development activities were examined. IdahoSTARS is charged with providing a professional development system that is specifically aimed toward improving quality of child care for children in Idaho. In the Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey, child care administrators and those who participate in IdahoSTARS and the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) were queried. They responded to questions about the impact of IdahoSTARS activities on practices with children, families, and the workplace.

What is the Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Study?

The Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey offers a snapshot of those who offer care, education, and early intervention programs and services for Idaho children birth to five years old and their families.

Who is in the Study?

This study includes a survey of those who work in specific early childhood positions from six sectors, including: 1) teachers, assistant teachers, and administrators in child care programs; 2) teachers, assistant teachers, and family advocates in Head Start/Early Head Start; 3) teachers in public school developmental preschools for children with diverse needs; 4) developmental specialists and service coordinators who work with children who have diverse needs and their families in the Idaho Infant Toddler Program; 5) teachers in private preschools; and, 6) professional home visitors in the Idaho Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.

How was the Study Implemented?

Survey participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire that was distributed during October and November, 2016. Participation was voluntary and 1,048 useable questionnaires were completed. Topics of study included personal demographics (age, gender, education, current position, sector, experience in early childhood positions, income, region, race/ethnicity, and hours worked), number and age of children served, preferences for education and training methods, career path activities, reasons to continue as an early childhood professional and reasons to leave the field, curriculum practices that included classroom practices, program practices, use of the Idaho Early Learning Guideline, inclusion of children with diverse needs, and business practices of programs. Those who have used IdahoSTARS and the Idaho Child Care Program responded to specific questions about those activities. Results of the study provide a snapshot of those who work in early childhood settings.

Key Findings

Demographics

A majority of respondents are female (96%), ranging in age from 18 to 78 years. The age range was wide in all sectors, with the majority of respondents in the 35 years to 54 years old category (52%). Nearly a third of respondents are younger than 35 years, and about 20% are older than 55 years. Most respondents speak English as their current primary language (95%).

Experience

Respondents in this survey are generally experienced in working with young children and families. Just over 10 percent of respondents have three years or less experience in the early childhood field, another 20% have worked three to six years, 14% have worked seven to ten years, while 53% have ten years or more experience in the field.

Education

- Respondents are educated. The majority of survey respondents (68%) have college degrees that range from one year vocational/technical degrees (Applied Sciences), two year AA (Applied Arts) or AS (Applied Sciences) degrees, BS or BA degrees, or graduate degrees, however level of education varied across sectors. Nearly 90% of respondents in the Developmental Preschool and Infant Toddler Program sectors report having a four year degree or higher. Respondents who report education levels that do not include having a college degree cluster in the Child Care sector (47%), the Head Start/Early Head Start sector (26%), and the Private Preschool sector (24.1%).
- Among those who have a college degree, the most reported major fields of study are early childhood education (22%), elementary education (16.5%), and early childhood special education (9.8%). Though early childhood related majors are the most common across sectors, other majors were reported, including majors such as nursing, child development and family development, general special education, speech and language pathology, psychology, sociology, family and consumer sciences, social work, general studies, English, and criminal justice.
- A portion of respondents in each sector report that they are working toward a college degree (21.1%), including vocational degrees in applied science, Associate of Arts/Associate of Science degrees, BA/BS degrees, or graduate degrees. The predominant fields of study for these degrees are early childhood education (43.3%) and early childhood/early childhood special education (11.3%).
- Almost all respondents (over 90%) indicate desire to continue taking training and education in work-related topics. The most preferred methods of learning for professional development across all sectors are searching the internet, reading on their own, short online courses, and attending local conferences.

Wages

- Annual individual incomes from paid work in early childhood positions range from less than \$10,000 to more than \$55,000, with significant differences among sectors. Those who receive annual salaries of less than \$20,000 represent 48.9% of respondents. Thirty-nine percent of respondents receive an annual salary of \$20,000 to \$35,000, with 13.3% receiving an annual salary of greater than \$35,000 up to \$55,000. Only 27 respondents (3%) report salaries higher than \$55,000, with the majority of those in the Developmental Preschool sector. Respondents likely to have higher individual income from their work are those in the publically-funded Developmental Preschool and Infant Toddler Program sectors. Those with the lowest reported individual incomes are in the Child Care and Private Preschool sectors.
- Annual total household income of those in the early childhood workforce range from less than \$20,000 to more than \$75,000. Reported household income showed that 18.4% of respondents are in households with total income below \$20,000, 22.2% report total household income of \$20,000 to \$35,000, 19.3% report total household income of \$35,000 to \$55,000, and 40.1% report household incomes of over \$55,000. Respondents reporting the lowest percentage of total household income of less than \$25,000 were in the sectors for Child Care (31.7%), Head Start/Early Head Start (28.2%) and Private Preschool (15.4%).
- A majority of respondents in the survey report a total household income above the US Census poverty threshold, though 20% of respondents are living in households below the poverty threshold. The heaviest areas of poverty are in the Child Care and Head Start/Early Head Start sectors. Fifty-six percent of respondents who work part-time in the Child Care sector meet the US Census definition for total household poverty, whereas 25.1% of those working full-time in the Child Care sector meet the total household poverty threshold. Forty percent of respondents who work part-time in the Head Start/Early Head Start sector meet the US Census for total household poverty, whereas 21.6% of those working full-time in the Head Start sector meet the total household poverty threshold status. Few respondents, whether in working part-time or full-time in the Infant Toddler Program, Developmental Preschool, Private Preschool, and Home Visiting sectors meet the total household poverty threshold.

Benefits

- Most respondents across sectors receive one or more benefits as part of their employment. The majority of respondents in Head Start/Early Head Start, Idaho Infant Toddler Program, Developmental Preschools, and the Home Visitor Program receive paid health insurance and personal sick leave. Few respondents receive paid time to attend trainings or professional development activities (20%), paid membership in professional organizations (10.3%), or paid fees for background check family leave (18.1%). Benefits for respondents in the Child Care sector are less generous, with 45.3%

reporting that they receive no benefits. Paid vacation days (36.7%) and paid personal sick leave (26.4%) are the only benefits reported by at least a quarter of child care respondents. Fewer than 15% receive paid health insurance, family leave, retirement benefits, or paid time to attend trainings.

Career Path

- About 60% of respondents report plans to stay in their current workplaces for more than three years, though 45.8% of those in the Developmental Preschool sector plan to stay less than three years. Overall, more than eight in ten respondents plan to stay in the early childhood field for more than three years. Most respondents in the Home Visiting sector (93.8%) and Infant Toddler Program sector (94.4%) report plans to stay in the early childhood field. In the Developmental Preschool sector, 87.7% plan to stay in the early childhood field.
- Nearly all respondents (97.5%) report their desire to work with children is a very influential factor in continuing to work in the field, and over eight in ten respondents report that pride in serving society is influential. More than 85% of all respondents said that working with supportive co-workers is influential in their decisions to keep working in the early childhood field. Those in the Child Care and Private Preschool sectors report that benefits and salaries are not encouraging them to stay at their current job, while seven of ten public sector respondents report that salaries and benefits are influential to stay in their jobs. Over 70 percent of respondents in each sector report that job-fit with education or training are influential. Less than a third report that lack of job opportunities elsewhere is a factor. Opportunity to earn scholarships for college credits is seen as an influential factor by 57% of Child Care sector respondents and 63% of Head Start/Early Head Start respondents. Those in the Child Care (75.7%) and Head Start/Early Head Start (81.2%) sectors report that support from professional development systems is an influential factor.
- A majority of respondents said that exposure to illness, societal views of their work, paperwork, assessments, and evaluations are not influential when it comes to factors that impact decisions to leave the workforce. The most influential reasons for leaving are low salary, inadequate benefits, inflexible work schedule, and emotional fatigue.

IdahoSTARS Participation

- Each sector in the Workforce Survey had at least some respondents who belong to the IdahoSTARS Professional Development System Registry, though membership varied widely across sectors. Nearly three quarters (76.6%) of respondents in the Child Care sector report participating in the IdahoSTARS Professional Development Registry, though 14.8% of those say they are unsure, and 1.4% report that they do not know what this is. Forty two percent of Head Start/Early Head Start sector respondents and 61.9% of Private Preschool respondents report belonging to the Professional Development

System Registry. About 10% of respondents in the other sectors report membership in the PDS, while about 25% of those in the Developmental Preschool, Infant and Toddler Program, and the Home Visiting sectors report they are unsure if they belong, or that they do not know what this is.

- Participants in Idaho's Quality Rating Improvement System, *IdahoSTARS Steps to Quality*, are represented among the respondents. Thirty-eight percent said they are in a program that participates in the QRIS. A fourth (25.7%) of respondents said they are unsure if their program is in the program, and 3% said they do not know what this is. Child Care sector respondents report the highest enrollment (55.4%) in Steps to Quality, and the lowest number who are unsure (17.8%), followed by Private Preschool (32.3%) and Head Start/Early Head Start (30.2%). Many respondents said they are unsure if they are in the program, with as many as over 40% in some sectors choosing unsure.

Use and Outcomes of IdahoSTARS Professional Development Offerings

- Almost half of respondents across sectors used IdahoSTARS professional development activities. Most respondents report that practices and strategies with children and families changed after participating in those activities, though taking IdahoSTARS Trainings and/or receiving IdahoSTARS college scholarship support did not result in employment changes or higher salaries for most participants.
- A small percentage of all respondents (13.5%) report using IdahoSTARS college scholarships for professional development. Twenty percent of respondents in the Child Care sector report using an IdahoSTARS college scholarship.
- Ten percent of those in the Head Start/Early Head Start sector report using an IdahoSTARS scholarship for a college course. Of those who used the scholarship, at least 80% report some changes or a lot of changes in their practices with children and families. Taking a college course resulted in a raise at work for 23% of child care sector respondents and 52.4% of Head Start/Early Head Start respondents who took a course with an IdahoSTARS college scholarship. Fewer respondents who took IdahoSTARS scholarship supported college courses report changes in promotions at their current worksite (Child Care sector 8.4%) (Head Start/Early Head Start 14.3%), a better paying job in their current sector (Child Care 9.2%), a better paying position in a different early childhood sector (Child Care sector 1%) (Head Start/Early Head Start sector 9.5%), or getting a better paying job outside the early childhood field (0%).
- A large number of respondents (42.1%) report completion of at least one IdahoSTARS Essential Training, with many of those respondents receiving an IdahoSTARS scholarship for the Essential Training. Respondents in the Child Care sector (65.3%), Private Preschool sector (39.7%), and Head Start/Early Head Start sector (21.8%) are the highest users for Essential Training, though some respondents in all sectors reported taking Essential Trainings. At least 70% of respondents who took the trainings report change in strategies as an outcome of the Essential Trainings. Other than receiving an IdahoSTARS

Essential Training Award (35.5%), respondents in the Child Care sector report little impact of the Essential Training on their employment as pertains to getting a raise at work (4.3%), getting a promotion at work (1.5%), moving to a better paying job at worksite (1.9%), taking a better paying job in another early childhood sector (0%), or taking a better paying job in a job outside the early childhood field (7.7%).

- Almost half of respondents (46%) participated in an IdahoSTARS approved training that was not an Essential Training. Participation is spread across sectors, including 65.7% of Child Care sector respondents, 28.4% of Head Start/Early Head Start respondents, 17.2% of Infant Toddler Program respondents, 18.5% of Developmental Preschool respondents, 42.9% of Private Preschool respondents, and 13.5% of Home Visitor respondents. At least 60% of respondents report some change or a lot of change in their work practices as a result of the training. Respondents report few changes in employment as a result of taking the training, with most (64.2%) reporting nothing changed in their employment. Though 35.3% of respondents in the Child Care sector report getting an IdahoSTARS Anniversary Award (35.3%), there was little to no reported impact of STARS approved trainings on their employment, including getting a raise at work (Child Care sector 5.2%), getting a promotion at work (1.8%), moving to a better paying job at their current worksite (1.8%), taking a better paying job in another early childhood sector (0.3%), or taking a better paying job in a job outside the early childhood field (0%).

Curriculum Practices

Across sectors, respondents report using practices to support children that are consistent with guidelines from professional organizations (Division of Early Childhood (DEC), 2014; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2016; National Association for Family Child Care, 2016; United States Office of Administration for Children and Families, Head Start/Early Head Start, 2016; and Zero to Three, 2016).

- Over 90% of respondents across sectors report offering play-based activities, social skills activities, and child-directed activities. Following closely behind these were direct instruction, teacher-directed activities, daily living activities, and academic school skills. Across respondents, the least reported services were health care services (17.2%), dental care services (19.1%), and immunizations (14.3%).
- Many respondents in the workforce survey (57.8%) report that their programs use the Idaho Early Learning Guidelines to plan curriculum, to determine children's developmental characteristics, to identify guidance strategies, and to evaluate outcomes. A greater percentage of respondents in the Developmental Preschool sector (90.2%), the Head Start/Early Head Start sector (72%), and the Child Care sector (58.7%) report using the Early Learning Guidelines than respondents in the Infant Toddler Program (39.3%), the Private Preschool sector (35.6%) and the Home Visiting sector

(25.7%). Notably, 23.2% of respondents report being unsure if their program used the Guidelines, and 3.3% report they do not know what the Guidelines are.

Children with Identified Diverse Needs

Respondents in all sectors of the early childhood workforce report serving children with identified diverse needs and their families.

- Most people in every sector report currently working with children with identified diverse abilities, though over a quarter of those in the Child Care sector (26.8%) and the Private Preschool sector (27%) report they did not. As expected, nearly all respondents in sectors where the program charge is to offer services to young children with diverse abilities report serving children with diverse abilities.
- Across sectors, respondents report that they see a wide variety of identified diverse needs for children in their programs. The most selected categories include social and emotional needs, behavioral challenges, speech or language delay, and food allergies. The least selected categories are epilepsy and diabetes. Those in the Child Care and Head Start/Early Head Start sectors also chose asthma as a frequently seen category.
- Across sectors, respondents report that they refer a child who is not developing typically for assessment. Sector respondents in Developmental Preschool (81%), Head Start/Early Head Start (80%), Infant Toddler Program (76%), and Home Visiting Program (96%) are most likely to refer, while fewer respondents in the Child Care sector (40%) and Private Preschool sector (59%) say they refer.
- Sector respondents in the Developmental Preschool (97%), Infant Toddler Program (97%), Head Start/Early Head Start (93%), and Home Visitor (86%) report working with specialists when they serve a child with diverse needs. Fewer respondents in the Child Care (55%) and Private Preschool (67%) report working with specialists when a child has a diverse need. Notably, in the Child Care sector, 44% say they never to rarely work with a specialist.
- When asked about their experiences with children who *exhibit behaviors that do not respond to typical guidance strategies* (challenging behaviors), most respondents report the most encountered challenging behaviors are aggression toward other people, lack of self-control, defiance, and inability to stick with a task. Those who work with infants and toddlers report their most often encountered challenging behaviors are sleeping and eating challenges, a child's lack of self-control, and a child's inability to stick to a task.
- Respondents chose the top strategies they use to support children with challenging behaviors. Those most chosen are: adjusting schedules, routines, and activities to a child's needs; using consistent and dependable routines; and teaching children alternative ways to act and speak. The least chosen strategies are: time out; sending notes home to the family; and playing games that offer scenarios for practicing self-control.

- Respondents in each sector report serving children with challenging behaviors, though fewer than 7% of respondents in all sectors, except the Idaho Infant Toddler Program at 15.5%, chose asking a specialist for help as a top strategy. Fewer than 11% of respondents in each sector, except Idaho Infant Toddler Program at 17.2%, chose referring the child to specialists.

Participation in the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP)

Participation in ICCP was reported by 56% of all respondents. Most administrators in the Child Care sector report participation in ICCP (87.3%), with 53.3% of Head Start/Early Head Start child care administrators reporting participation. Fourteen percent of Private Preschool administrators report participation in ICCP. Forty percent of all administrators report that they do not qualify because they do not charge a fee to families.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Findings in the Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey are consistent with recent national and state studies of the early childhood workforce (Whitebook, et.al, 2014, *Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education (ECE) Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*, 2013; Whitebook, et.al, 2015: *Addressing Infant-Toddler Teacher Compensation; Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina*, 2015; *High-Quality Early Learning Settings Depend on a High-Quality Workforce: Low Compensation Undermines Quality*, 2016).

The Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey participants are positive about their work, almost unanimously citing making a difference in the lives of children and families as the reason they work in the field. Most enjoy working with supportive colleagues and working with administrators and supervisors as mentors.

Early childhood professionals in the Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey plan to continue in the early childhood field, with many planning to stay in their current workplace. The results of the survey however show discouraging inequities across sectors in wages, benefits, and hours worked. Many respondents in the Child Care and Head Start/Early Head Start sectors commented on these inequities and the difficulty of balancing their love for the work they do with their need to support their own families on a meager salary. Further, burnout and emotional fatigue are factors that discourage continuation in the field.

The variety of benefits received by respondents is wide. The true value of those benefits deserves greater scrutiny. For example, it is notable that over 60% of administrators in Child

Care and Private Preschool sectors offer reduced fees for enrollment of employees' children. Examination of the fiscal and non-fiscal value of this benefit can be informative.

The Idaho early childhood workforce is disparate across sectors in some characteristics, including position descriptions, their program's characteristics, and how their programs are funded. Education levels range from less than high school education to graduate degrees. This range is especially noticeable in the Child Care sector which sits apart from the other sectors in the breadth of the range. Publically funded early childhood programs typically demand college degrees and pay higher salaries and offer more benefits, and that is reflected in the Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey respondents. Though many in the lower paid sectors have higher education degrees, many report a vocational degree or a two year degrees. It is typical for those with lower level degrees to receive lower salaries, and those with higher degrees to earn higher salaries, usually in publically funded programs. Even though many in the workforce are educated, salaries and benefits lag behind those of most other professional workers. Nearly half (46.5%) of all respondents earn an individual salary less than \$20,000 which is below Idaho's mean per capita income of \$23,087 (US Census Bureau, 2016).

Though earned salaries and benefits among sectors are disparate, the Idaho early childhood workforce has similarities in professional characteristics and roles.

- Respondents in all sectors value professional development and seek higher levels of training and education. They are adult learners who indicate a need for self-directed learning, a path to advance in their workplace, and opportunity to make a difference with children and families.
- The early childhood workforce includes people across all sectors that range in age from just entering adulthood to well beyond expected retirement age. Many employees are beginning their careers and many have a decade or much more experience in the field. This indicates a need for differentiated professional development activities that reflect generational and experiential characteristics of learners.
- Respondents identified similar practices that are inherent in their work. These include keeping children safe, guiding children, and providing opportunities for children to be educated and competent, and working with families. Respondents in each program sector report offering evidence-based services and activities that address young children's development in brain function, physical competence, social and emotional skill building, and language and cognitive skill growth. Recognition of family as foundational to a young child's success is common across sectors in the reported services used by respondents. Yet, those in the workforce are sometimes unfamiliar with the roles, responsibilities, and activities in sectors other than their own. For example, in the Idaho Early Childhood Workforce Survey, there was limited recognition of the IdahoSTARS Steps to Quality program.
- Respondents in all sectors report serving children with identified diverse needs. Across sectors, a majority of respondents refer to or work with a specialist when a child has a

diverse need. Some respondents report that they do not make referrals or seek assessments when children have challenging behaviors that do not respond to typical guidance. Many first line and direct service early childhood workers appear to be working on their own when it comes to serving children with challenging behaviors.

- Many respondents serve children and families who are low income or in poverty. Respondents who work in programs that participate in the Idaho Child Care Program and those who work in the Head Start/Early Head Start sector always serve this population as required by program requirements, along with some portion of respondents in each sector in the survey.
- Technology, especially digital technology is a preferred method of learning across sectors, as is a preference for independently accessing professional development activities.
- IdahoSTARS Professional Development System (PDS) primarily serves those in the Child Care sector, the Head Start/Early Head Start sector, and the Private Preschool sector. Scholarships for both training and for taking college courses are frequently accessed by eligible child care providers. Respondents in the Workforce Survey report positive outcomes for children and their programs from IdahoSTARS supported training and college coursework, though personal outcomes including salary increases and career advancement are unchanged. Many respondents report plans to move up levels in the PDS. This indicates that IdahoSTARS will be called upon to support additional training and college courses as providers move through the PDS levels.
- Participation in a professional development system that supports professionalism and offers professional benefits is desired across sectors. Organized professional development systems hold promise for the early childhood workforce among and within sectors. Collaborative planning across state and policy leaders can address the possible expansion and coordination of existing systems.
- Many respondents desire to advance in their careers and report a desire for higher paying positions or more responsible positions. Yet, most see themselves in their same position in the next five years. Discussions about defining what advancement means, and strategies for increasing advancement opportunities can yield practical solutions and opportunities for those who want to advance in the field.
- IdahoSTARS incentives and scholarships are having an effect on evidence-based practices in the field, though the impact on wages and advancement in the workplace is negligible.

Recommendations

1. Examine the fiscal and non-fiscal costs and benefits of an umbrella statewide early childhood professional development system that includes participation of those across the workforce sectors.
2. Establish a consistent tracking mechanism to monitor salary and benefit information among Idaho's early childhood sectors.
3. Examine the non-fiscal and fiscal impacts of benefits across sectors. Examine the fiscal value of reduced fees for child care and private preschool employees' children in the programs where they work.
4. Examine existing advancement opportunities, and create strategies for advancement opportunities for those in the early childhood workforce.
5. Examine economic outcomes for those in the early childhood workforce across sectors who receive additional education.
6. Monitor level status of those in the IdahoSTARS Professional Development Registry, and make projections of the number of providers who intend to move through the system taking college credits and the associated need for IdahoSTARS scholarship support.
7. Examine economic outcomes for those in the child care workforce who receive additional education, (i.e., college degrees, essential trainings, and approved STARS trainings), and for those who move through incentive levels in the IdahoSTARS Professional Development Registry.
8. Examine the practical impact of IdahoSTARS activities on evidence-based quality practices in programs.
9. Examine knowledge of those in the workforce about roles, responsibilities, and activities of professionals in early childhood sectors other than their own.
10. Consider cross-sector collaboration to establish criteria for professional development activities that support independent learning (i.e., internet searching, independent reading, short online courses, and webinars).
11. Examine resources and professional development needs of classroom teachers (particularly non-special education teachers) in the Child Care sector, Private Preschool sector, and Head Start/Early Head Start child care sector, for supporting children with special abilities, including challenging behaviors.
12. Examine how universal design to accommodate all children is imbedded in pre-service and in-service professional development across sectors.

13. To maximize access to and use of professional development resources, identify content and topics for training that has application across sectors.
14. Examine the availability and use of preservice and in-service training/education opportunities that focus on children and families in low income households or poverty situations.
15. Investigate strategies for differentiating professional development activities for the workforce that respond to variations of age and experience levels of the workforce.
16. Recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the widely held belief by those in the early childhood workforce that they can make a difference in the lives of children and families, and that they take pride in the work they do for society.
17. Monitor early childhood workforce turnover rates across sectors to inform personnel preparation efforts.