

FAMILY CHILD CARE EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT

A research-to-policy brief from the Multi-State Study of Family Child Care Decline & Supply¹

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INTRODUCTION

Data from national studies show a steep decrease in the number of regulated family child care (FCC) programs operating in the United States over the past two decades.ⁱ Although FCC educators (also commonly referred to as FCC providers) represent a relatively small proportion of the home-based child care (HBCC) sector, they may be more engaged in early care and education (ECE) systems and more likely to be influenced by ECE policies compared to other HBCC providers, most of whom are unpaid and may care only for relatives. HBCC providers, including FCC educators, disproportionately care for children from low-income families and infants and toddlers compared to center-based programs.ⁱⁱ In addition, families from marginalized communities of color (including Black, Latinx, immigrant, and Indigenous) and families living in rural communities may rely on FCC settings.ⁱⁱⁱ

THE MULTI-STATE STUDY OF FAMILY CHILD CARE DECLINE AND SUPPLY

The Multi-state Study of Family Child Care Decline and Supply is the first of its kind to examine the in-depth factors behind regulated FCC educators' decisions to enter, stay, and leave the FCC workforce from educators' perspectives.^{iv} Findings indicate that for FCC educators at all stages of their careers, inequitable ECE systems presented an array of challenges that contributed to educators leaving the field. Intersecting with system challenges were educators' challenges making a living from FCC work as well as difficult working conditions running a small home-based business. For educators who remained in the work, FCC offers rewards of working with children and families, job control, and the sense of mission some educators feel around helping children and families. The study also suggests that educators who exit as well as those that engage in FCC work are not monolithic. Their individual demographics, lived experiences, and motivations for doing FCC work need to be considered when developing a policy response to decreases in FCC supply.

MULTI-STATE STUDY OF FCC DECLINE AND SUPPLY: METHODS

- Data collection across 4 states: California (Los Angeles County), Florida, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin
- 25 focus groups with 149 currently operating regulated FCC educators
- Interviews with 30 former regulated FCC educators who left the work between 2007-2020

The Multi-state Study of Family Child Care Decline and Supply was conducted in 2020, when the nation was consumed by the COVID-19 pandemic that upended the lives and livelihoods of millions of families. Its disproportionate effects on families of color who live in marginalized communities surfaced long-standing historical structural inequities including systemic racism. The pandemic also highlighted the inequities in child care access and affordability for families. To address equitable access to child care, the recently enacted American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) includes the largest infusion of new child care funds in history. In addition to \$24 billion for time-limited child care stabilization grants and \$15 billion for one-time supplemental funding for the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), it allocates a \$3.5 billion permanent annual increase in mandatory and matching funding for CCDF.^v Other policy changes to expand access to early care and education are underway. New funding provides an opportunity for states to make significant policy changes that can have long-term effects on the ECE workforce, including regulated FCC.

¹ Recommended citation: Porter, T., Ragonese-Barnes, M., Melvin, S., & Bromer, J. (2021). *Family child care educators speak out: A research-to-policy brief from the Multi-State Study of Family Child Care Decline and Supply*. Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute.

FAMILY CHILD CARE EDUCATORS' VOICES

“If you could tell Governor or Mayor one thing that they could do to support family child care providers and recruit more people to work in this field, what would that be?”

“If I had a chance to speak to the governor, I would say to him as a family child care provider that we need to be heard. We need to be at the round table with him and stop treating us as a different entity... We are early childhood and we need the same respect that they give to the centers... We are the foundation. We are the backbone. We make everybody in the town, in this city so they can go to work.”

(Experienced educator from Florida)

The majority of current and former educators in *The Multi-state Study of Family Child Care Decline and Supply* responded enthusiastically to this opportunity to “speak” to policy makers when we asked this question at the conclusion of our focus groups and interviews. Here we present their voices and recommendations that were informed by these conversations. Many of the recommendations, specifically those that relate to income and benefits as well as ECE system reforms, reflect other research and recommendations that have underscored long-standing inequities encountered by HBCC providers, particularly FCC educators.^{vi} The recommendations presented here also parallel, to a great extent, proposals from recent policy briefs that focus on the use of expanded ARPA funds.^{vii}



Recommendations to address economic challenges that FCC educators face

“I’d say, treat us as professionals and pay us what we’re worth.” (Experienced² educator from Florida)

Federal government agencies should:

- Increase current funding levels for CCDF and support states in how they determine and set subsidy reimbursement rates that are equitable for FCC educators.
- Encourage states to use ARPA funds to increase compensation and cash assistance for FCC educators, with a focus on those disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of the pandemic and the economic recession.
- Expand the availability of Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships for FCC educators, particularly those from marginalized groups (including Black, Latinx, immigrant, Indigenous, Asian American, as well as those living in rural communities).

“You can let him know it’s a challenging field. With a lot of competition. Centers and from schools and Head Start... Competition and trying to recruit enrollment. It’s not easy.” (Experienced educator from California)

- Meaningfully integrate FCC educators into plans for affordable child care expansion (e.g., the American Families Plan), including access to higher wages and benefits.

“We need universal child care, but it can’t look like public schools. That’s what we really need. We don’t need this decimated system.” (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)

States and tribes should:

- Rethink how subsidy policies (including rates) are set in order to ensure that FCC educators receive an equitable income that covers the full cost of providing high-quality child care.

“They actually need to support the family child care... Make it financially for each home to be able to stay afloat... You only make so much when doing child care. If you don’t have adequate amount of children, you may break even, or you may just end up going under. [The government] gotta get in there and make sure what is needed, and they can provide.” (Formerly regulated educator from Florida)

- Consider ways to reduce the gap in payment rates between centers and FCC and to redress payment equity issues for FCC educators of color from historically marginalized communities.
- Provide benefits for health care, retirement, and paid time off for FCC educators who participate in public payment systems such as subsidy and public pre-kindergarten.

“You know, we’re not a center, but we’re still doing the same thing. We’re providing the same or better service; then we should get paid for that.” (Experienced educator from Florida)

“I would ask the governor to please create a retirement plan for us, because we’re going to get old just like anyone else, and we don’t have a retirement plan, and we don’t have health insurance benefits. I think that all of this is more necessary job as in a normal job.” (Experienced educator from California)

- Offer cash support such as unemployment, paid leave, and disaster relief funding to help educators during times of fiscal crisis.

States, tribes, counties, and local agencies that work with FCC educators should:

- Expand FCC educators’ access to grants or scholarships for training and higher education.

“More financial support as far as like grants and scholarships, that kind of thing.” (New educator from Wisconsin)

- Prioritize access to funding and resources, particularly for FCC educators from historically marginalized communities.
- Include FCC in child care search platforms and making information about FCC programs more publicly available.

“We have trouble with getting on lists... that would refer children to our facility... Marketing, it was kind of difficult.” (Formerly regulated educator from California)

- Offer training and coaching in business and financial management and marketing tailored to operating an FCC program.
- Help FCC educators access public benefits (e.g., health insurance) and design their program policies to promote their own health and well-being (e.g., articulating time off around sick days, vacations, and holidays).

States, tribes, and local municipalities should:

- Meaningfully incorporate FCC educators into public pre-kindergarten initiatives that provide opportunities for stable income and enrollment as well as training and supports.

² In this brief, experienced is defined as more than 5 years of experience as a regulated FCC educator. New FCC educators are defined as having been regulated for 5 or fewer years.



Recommendations to address challenges related to unresponsive licensing systems, subsidy policies, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that create barriers for new and experienced FCC educators:

“Never, ever, ever, ever let a licenser walk into a house and treat the owner/ operator... as if they've done something wrong and you're going to prove it. What I'm saying is, I want to be seen as if I'm professional, not because you're sitting at my kitchen table.” (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)

States, tribes, and counties should:

- Revise or develop licensing and QRIS requirements and standards that honor the strengths of FCC rather than imposing center-centric standards. This includes recognizing the ways that FCC educators of color, in particular, support families as well as children and the important life-long roles they play in meeting the needs of their communities.
“I think separating a family versus a center because there's a night and day difference... Nothing's the same. Almost like there should be a separate book for family versus center because it is so different.” (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)
- Incorporate equity and cultural and linguistic responsiveness standards and measures into monitoring, accountability, and quality systems.
- Translate system forms, documentation, and trainings, into languages that educators speak.
“Trainings in both languages. Regulations are only in English. Many people haven't been able to read through them because they don't understand them.” (Experienced educator from Massachusetts)
- Coordinate and align ECE systems regulations and standards to reduce inconsistencies across ECE systems regulations and standards.
- Consider using federal funds such as CCDF funding to support navigators who help FCC educators understand cross-system requirements, access resources, and complete applications.
“Maybe like a kit or something and say, ‘This is the way that you go.’ And so everybody can be more effectively in what they're doing, so that way we can grow, be stronger, so we could pull more people in, but until the system comes on one accord, I really don't see the business growing more. I will see more people pulling out more than anything.” (New educator from Wisconsin)
- Ensure that licensing staff and monitors undergo anti-bias training in order to address the ways systemic racism and implicit bias influence the implementation of policies.
“When the state comes in to check out their day care to not intimidate. I think that's the thing that people didn't like, they felt intimidated by the state staff coming in versus supported... Everybody needs direction but not to antagonize, not to make someone feel overpowered by the state or micromanaged.” (Formerly regulated educator from Wisconsin)
- Implement oversight procedures such as inter-rater reliability training for licensing staff and monitors that improve the consistency of monitoring visits. Procedures should also ensure that monitoring and inspection visits are timely and minimize delays in processing applications and approvals.
“One of the things that popped into my mind right away is the consistency. Since I've been in business, it's almost three years, I have not had the same licenser, ever. Every time someone has come to my house, it's been someone new. I've never seen the same person twice.” (New educator from Wisconsin)



Recommendations to address challenges that exacerbate difficult working conditions that FCC educators experience:

"I would like to invite the mayor to come and spend 10 hours of my day, just 10 hours, to see if he's willing to get paid only maybe like \$3 per hour to do my job. I like to see his feedback at the end of the day, how he feels." (Experienced educator from California)

States, tribes, and counties should:

- Simplify administrative workload across licensing, subsidy, and QRIS that results in additional working hours for FCC educators. Specifically, states, tribes, and counties should consider developing shorter applications, documentation available in multiple formats, and elimination of redundancies across licensing, subsidy, and QRIS standards and regulations.

"Stop making [documentation] a priority. I feel like as time goes on and the amount of paperwork is increasing... I would even be willing to go so far as to say I would rather have a licenser in my house every three months or every six months if it meant eliminating some of the paperwork... The paperwork for me is harrowing because... I do almost 12-hour days..." (Experienced educator from Massachusetts)

States, tribes, counties, and local agencies that work with FCC educators should:

- Provide required licensing, subsidy, and QRIS training on days, times and in locations that FCC educators can attend.

"If you want a meeting with family child care providers, you need to make it when we're available, not at 11:00 a.m." (Experienced educator from Florida)

- Develop apprenticeship programs that make higher education more accessible for current FCC educators.
- Pay for substitute educators and other administrative supports through shared services and back office supports for FCC programs.

"It is really difficult to find good quality aides or teachers' assistants... But man, a database for substitute teachers... I think I have interviewed 300 people at least. I mean, it's hard." (Experienced educator from California)

Recommendations to support FCC educators through the intersecting challenges they face:

"People will be more willing to try and stay open if they knew that they... had some type of program to assist them through the years of being open, because I think a lot of people who do leave, they just get overwhelmed. It's easy to feel that you're all alone." (New educator from California)

States, tribes, and counties should:

- Consider increased funding for FCC networks and FCC associations that offer peer support (including one-on-one mentoring with experienced FCC educators) and help navigating ECE systems (including licensing, subsidy, and QRIS).

"If the State really wants to keep these young providers in the business, they will try to get some of the older ones to go in from time to time because we've been there and we're not going to intimidate them. You feel more comfortable with us than the state." (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)

- Efforts to support FCC educators should prioritize educators in historically marginalized communities.

States, tribes, counties, and local agencies that work with FCC educators should:

- Design support programs and systems that are targeted and tailored to engage FCC educators specifically. Programs should consider differentiation of staff roles that work with FCC from those that work with center-based programs.



Recommendations to recruit and support new educators into the regulated FCC workforce:

“If you wanted to recruit more people, knowing that you had a friend that you could call and say, ‘Hey, how do I go from here?’... In a world where we’re already pretty isolated working from home and with our families, knowing that there was a group that wanted this area to be successful.” (New educator from Massachusetts)

States, tribes, and counties should:

- Ensure that all steps of the licensing process are clear and conducted in a timely and responsive manner, including providing all information and training in a variety of languages.
- Provide start-up grants for new educators to cover licensing and insurance fees, home renovations, materials and equipment, and background checks.

“I don’t know if there are any like grant programs. ‘Cuz I remember when I first started... I had to initially buy lots of baby gates and smaller things that definitely add up very quickly.” (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)

- Offer alternative pathways and pipelines to regulation that allow FCC educators to move from a lower regulation tier to licensing while still meeting basic health and safety requirements.
- Consider offering opportunities to attract potential educators to the field including FCC-tailored internships, apprenticeships, and vocational training programs that increase access to higher education and emphasize the potential benefits and rewards of FCC work.

Local agencies that work with FCC educators should:

- Enhance supports for new FCC educators such as mock licensing visits, licensing help warm lines, program policies development assistance, and business practices.

“If you’re gonna have somebody be recruited into this job, a good thing is having a consultant come to your house and help you through the rulebook. Help you figure out what you have to do first, because I haven’t done this job my whole life.” (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)

- Ensure licensing supports are timely and responsive to educators’ needs.

“I would say to speed up the process. Have more people... helping with enrollment, or helping them set up for child care.” (Experienced educator from Wisconsin)

- Provide marketing materials, tools, and trainings for prospective FCC educators and those who are starting out.

TABLE 1. SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF FCC EDUCATORS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE MULTI-STATE STUDY OF FCC DECLINE AND SUPPLY

	All Educators N=179			All Educators N=179	
	%	(N)		%	(N)
State			Race/Ethnicity¹		
California	27%	(48)	Black/African American	27%	(48)
Florida	29%	(52)	White	34%	(60)
Massachusetts	19%	(34)	Latinx or Hispanic origin	32%	(56)
Wisconsin	25%	(45)	Asian or Pacific Islander	6%	(10)
Language of interview or focus group			Indigenous	1%	(1)
English	76%	(135)	Experience²		
Spanish	25%	(44)	Currently regulated for 5 or fewer years	26%	(45)
			Currently regulated for more than 5 years	57%	(101)
			Formerly regulated	17%	(30)

¹N=175, 4 missing responses; ²N=176, 3 missing responses

ENDNOTES

- i National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (NCECQA). (2020). *Addressing the decreasing number of family child care providers in the United States*. Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/addressing_decreasing_fcc_providers_revised_march2020_final.pdf
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- iii Bromer, J., Melvin, S., Porter, T., & Ragonese-Barnes, M. (2021). *The shifting supply of regulated family child care in the U.S.: A literature review and conceptual model*. Chicago, IL: Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute. https://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The_shifting_supply_of_regulated_FCC_in_the_US_2021_LITREVIEW.pdf; Henly, J.R., & Adams, G. (2018). *Increasing access to quality child care for four priority populations: Challenges and opportunities with CCDBG reauthorization*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99150/increasing_access_to_quality_child_care_for_four_priority_populations_report_3.pdf;
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- v Meek, S., Iruka, I.U., Catherine, E., Yazzie, D., Gilliam, W., McIntosh, K., Fernandez, V., Blevins, D., Jimenez Castellanos, O., & Garcia, G. (2021). *Start with equity: Advancing equity in early care and education systems with the American Rescue Plan Act*. The Children's Equity Project. <https://childandfamilysuccess.asu.edu/cep/initiatives/advancing-equity-through-american-rescue-plan-act>; U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2021). *Coronavirus state and local fiscal recovery fund fact sheet*. <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRP-Fact-Sheet-FINAL1-508A.pdf>
- vi Adams, G. & Dwyer, K. (2021). *Child care subsidies and home-based child care providers: Expanding participation*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104165/child-care-subsidies-and-home-based-child-care-providers-expanding-participation_0.pdf; Adams, G. & Hernandez, F. (2021). *The Child Care and Adult Food Program and home-based child care providers: Expanding participation*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104166/the-child-and-adult-care-food-program-and-home-based-child-care-providers-expanding-participation_1.pdf; Bromer et al., 2021; Early Childhood Initiative. (2021). *Family child care policy framework*. Washington, DC: Bipartisan Policy Center. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/family-child-care-policy-framework/>; Maxwell, K. & Starr, R. (2019). *The role of licensing in supporting quality practices in early care and education*. OPRE Research Brief #2019-31, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ccepra_licensing_and_quality_brief_508.pdf; Meek et al., 2021; NCECQA, 2020 ; Porter, T., Bromer, J., Melvin, S., Ragonese-Barnes, M., & Molloy, P. (2020). *Family child care providers: Unsung heroes in the Covid-19 crisis*. Chicago, IL: Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute. https://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Family-Child-Care-Providers_Unsung-Heroes-in-the-COVID-19-Crisis.pdf; Vogtman, J. (2017). *Undervalued: A brief history of women's care work and child care policy in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center. https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/final_nwlc_Undervalued2017.pdf
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This brief was made possible with the generous support of a grant from the Foundation for Child Development.