Turnover in the Center-Based Child Care and Early Education Workforce: Findings from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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Introduction

Retention of the CCEE center-based workforce is important for centers, teachers, and children. Turnover, or the annual loss of teachers at a center, represents a cost for centers and lack of continuity for children and families. While some turnover is natural and may indicate a lack of fit with a particular center or the sector as a whole, high turnover can be problematic for teachers (e.g., reduced continuity of routines and relationships, stress levels), programs (e.g., increased costs to hire and train new staff, increased staff stress),[1] and families (e.g., reduced continuity of care for children).[2]

In prior studies of the center-based workforce, turnover rates have varied across teachers, localities, sectors, and time.[3] Identifying center characteristics associated with high levels of turnover could help move the field toward identifying centers at risk for high turnover and understanding work conditions that could be potential protective factors.

Glossary

CCEE: Child care and early education (provided to children birth to age five).

Turnover: A metric indicating the proportion of staff working directly with children ages 0 through 5, not yet in kindergarten, who left the center in the last 12 months.

High turnover: A center is characterized as high turnover if more than 20% of their staff who work with children left the center in the last 12 months.

Center-based CCEE provider: An organization providing child care and early education services to at least one child age five and under, not yet in kindergarten, at a single location.

CCEE teachers: Individual members of the child care and early education workforce. Teachers include teachers, assistant teachers, or specialists directly working with children.

Auspice and sponsorship: A measure of centers' organizational context, derived from respondents' report of the organization's auspice (for-profit, non-profit, or run by a government agency) and sponsorship (non-profit and programs run by a government agency can either be independently operated or sponsored by another agency such as a public school district or a human services department). Auspice and sponsorship do not take into account types of revenues the center receives.

[1] Cassidy, D. J., Lower, J. K., Kintner-Duffy, V. L., Hegde, A. V., & Shim, J. (2011). The Day-to-Day Reality of Teacher Turnover in Preschool Classrooms: An analysis of classroom context and teacher, director, and parent perspectives. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 25*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2011.533118

[2] Markowitz, A. J. (2019). Within-year teacher turnover in Head Start and children's school readiness [EdPolicyWorks Working Paper].

[3] Totenhagen, C. J., Hawkins, S. A., Casper, D. M., Bosch, L. A., Hawkey, K. R., & Borden, L. M. (2016). Retaining Early Childhood Education Workers: A Review of the Empirical Literature. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 30(4), 585–599. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1214652

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This snapshot provides a look at characteristics associated with high center-based workforce turnover from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE). The data presented were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and can serve as a baseline for understanding the extent of turnover during and after the pandemic, when some centers were forced to close and some educators changed sectors.

Key Findings

Some center characteristics were associated with higher rates of high turnover in bivariate comparisons. Centers with the following characteristics were more likely to have higher rates of high teacher turnover:

- **For profit business model:** Centers with a for-profit business model, including both independent and franchises/chains, compared to centers with nonprofit and government-run models.
- **Subsidy receipt:** Centers that served at least one child receiving a subsidy, compared to centers that did not serve children with subsidies.
- **Serving younger children:** Centers that served children ages birth through three only or birth through five years old, compared to centers that served children ages three through five years old only.
- **Lack of benefits:** Centers that did not provide benefits, including health insurance and retirement, compared to centers that provided these benefits.
- **Lack of director experience:** The center director had fewer years of experience working directly with children, compared to centers with directors who had more years of experience working directly with children.

Importantly, factors associated with high center-based workforce turnover were interrelated. For example, for-profit centers also frequently served at least one child that received a subsidy, so any correlation between subsidy and turnover could be related to the center's for-profit status, or some other characteristic. Nonetheless, knowing center characteristics associated with turnover could help inform approaches to lowering turnover rates.

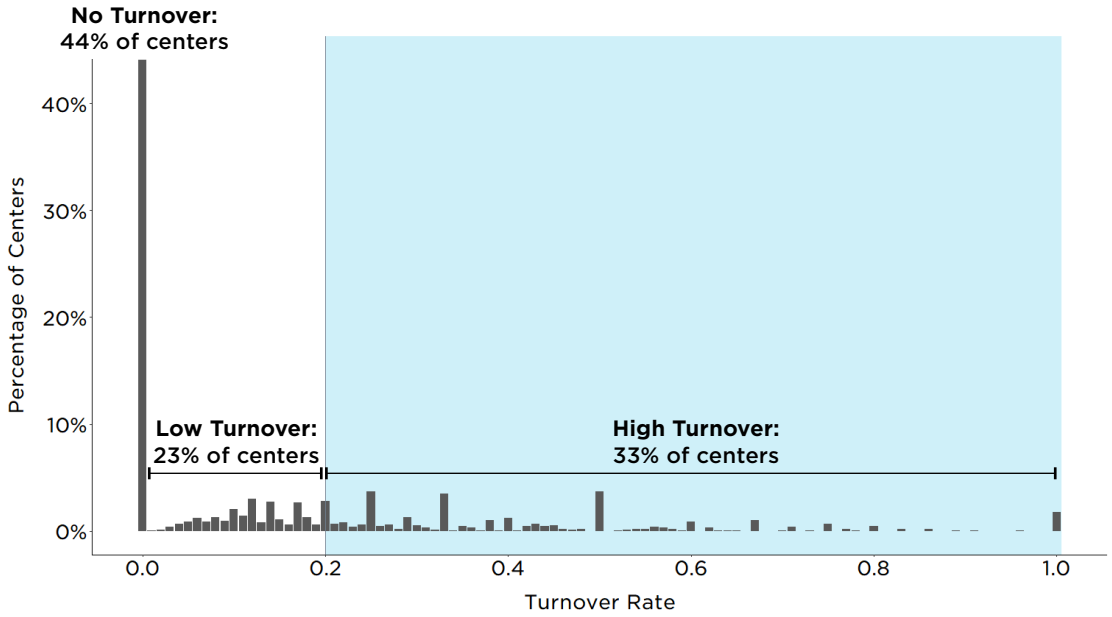
Data and Methods

This snapshot draws upon data from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) Center-Based Provider Survey. The sample included 6,904 center-based CCEE programs that represented 121,049 centers nationally serving children birth through 5 years old, not yet in kindergarten. Respondents of the survey were the director or an instructional leader of the center-based program. This snapshot describes centers with high workforce turnover (i.e., more than 20% of their teachers who worked with children birth through 5 not yet in kindergarten left the center in the past 12 months) and center characteristics that were associated with rates of high turnover. Significance tests (Chi-square) were conducted to examine whether there were significant differences in rates of high turnover by each characteristic.

What Proportion of Centers Had High Workforce Turnover?

In 2019, 33% of centers had high workforce turnover in the 12 months before survey response. By contrast, 44% of centers had no turnover (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of 2019 centers by turnover rates



Note: Low turnover: centers with turnover rates of 20% or lower. High turnover: centers with turnover rates of more than 20%.

Did High Turnover Rates Vary by Center Characteristics?

The proportion of centers with high workforce turnover (i.e., more than 20%) varied by some center characteristics, including auspice and sponsorship, whether the center served children who received a subsidy, and ages of children the center served. Those characteristics include:

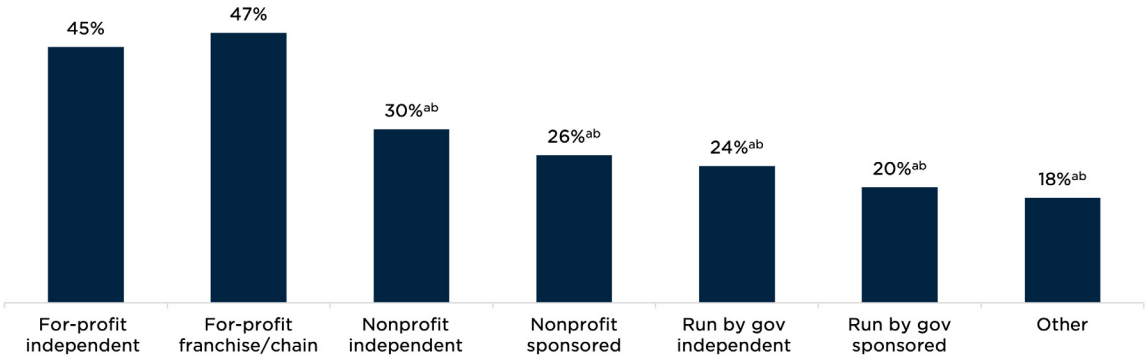
- **Auspice and sponsorship:** For-profit centers, either independent or part of a franchise/chain had the highest rates of high turnover (45% and 47%, respectively), compared to non-profit centers (26% non-profit sponsored and 30% non-profit independent), centers run by the government (20% sponsored and 24% independent), and centers with an auspice/sponsorship other than those mentioned above (18%; see Figure 2).
- **Served children who received a subsidy (0-3 and 3-5 age groups):** Centers that served at least one child ages 0-3 or 3-5 with a subsidy had higher rates of high turnover (50% and 48%), compared to centers that served zero children with a subsidy (27% and 26%; see Figure 3).
    - Note that centers that served children with subsidies also tended to be for-profit centers, which were more likely to provide lower wages and fewer benefits.[4,5]
- **Center enrollment:** There were no differences in the proportion of high turnover centers by enrollment size (see Figure 4). About one-third of centers (31%-35%) had high turnover regardless of the number of children enrolled in the center.

[4] Phillips, D.A., Anderson, S., Rupa Datta, A., & Kisker, E.E. (2018). The changing landscape of publicly-funded center-based child care: 1990 and 2012. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 91, 94-104. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.05.029 The 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

[5] 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 Science, National Center of Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Education Laboratory Northeast & Islands. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2021069.pdf

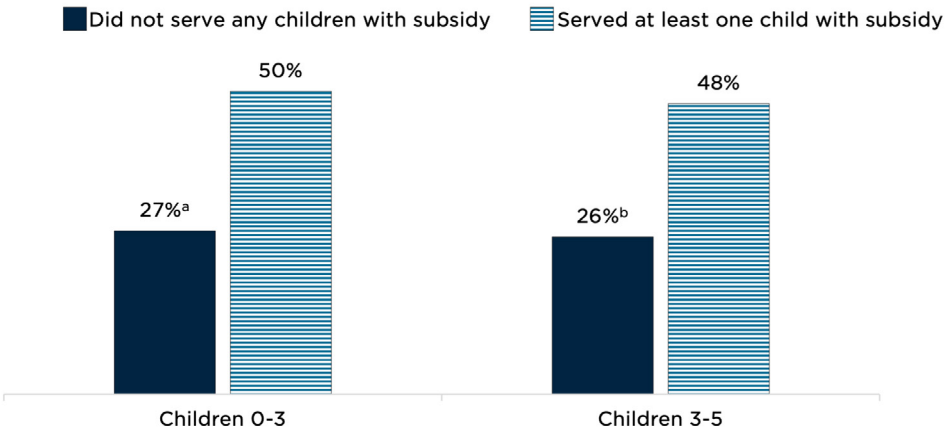
- **Ages of children served:** Centers that served children ages 0-3 only, as well as centers that served children ages 0-5, had higher rates of high turnover (35% and 43%, respectively), compared to centers that served ages 3-5 only (18%; see Figure 4).

Figure 2. Proportion of 2019 centers characterized as high turnover, by auspice and sponsorship



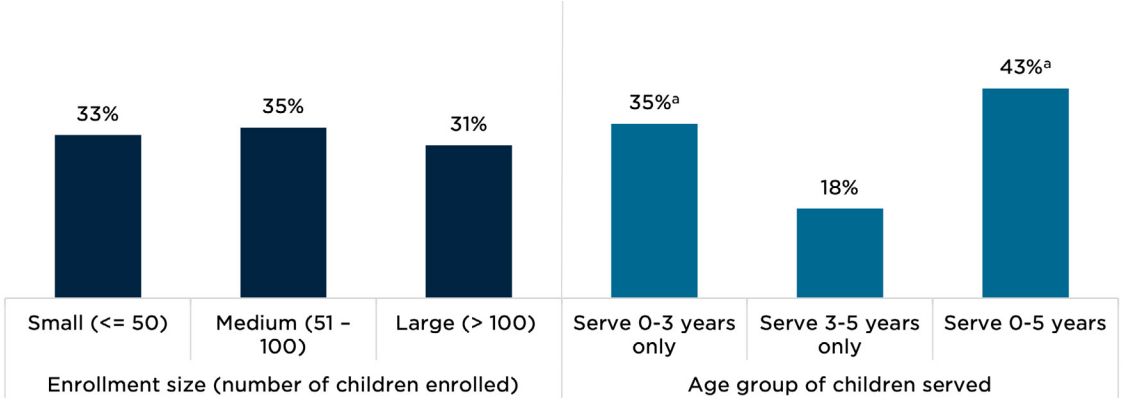
Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Center-based Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates significant differences from centers that were for-profit independent ($p<0.05$).
[b] Indicates significant differences from centers that were for-profit franchise/chain ($p<0.05$).

Figure 3. Proportion of 2019 centers characterized as high turnover, by whether center served at least one child with subsidies



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Center-based Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates significant differences from centers that served any children ages 0-3 who received a subsidy ($p<0.05$).
[b] Indicates significant differences from centers that served any children ages 3-5 who received a subsidy ($p<0.05$).

Figure 4. Proportion of 2019 centers characterized as high turnover, by center enrollment (left panel) and ages of children served (right panel)



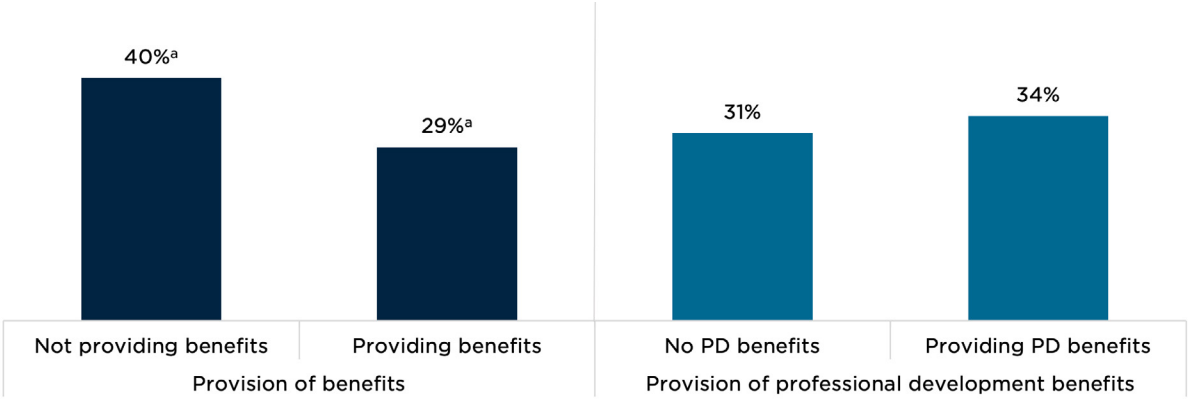
Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Center-based Survey.
Note: No significant differences were detected for the proportion of high turnover by enrollment size.
[a] Indicates significant differences from centers that served children ages 3-5 only ($p<0.05$).

Did High Turnover Rates Vary by the Staff Benefits Provided by Centers?

The type of staff benefits provided by centers was related to the proportion of high turnover centers, including whether the center provided health insurance and retirement benefits and whether the center provided professional development benefits (see Figure 5).

- **Health insurance and retirement benefits**: Centers that did not provide health insurance and retirement benefits had higher rates of high turnover (40%), compared to centers that provided these benefits to their teachers (29%).
- **Professional development benefits** (including paid time off for professional development, funding for courses/training, and/or mentors/coaches/consultants): Centers that provided no or some professional development benefits had similar rates of high turnover (31% and 34%, respectively).

Figure 5. Proportion of 2019 centers characterized as high turnover, by health insurance and retirement benefits (left panel) and professional development benefits (right panel)



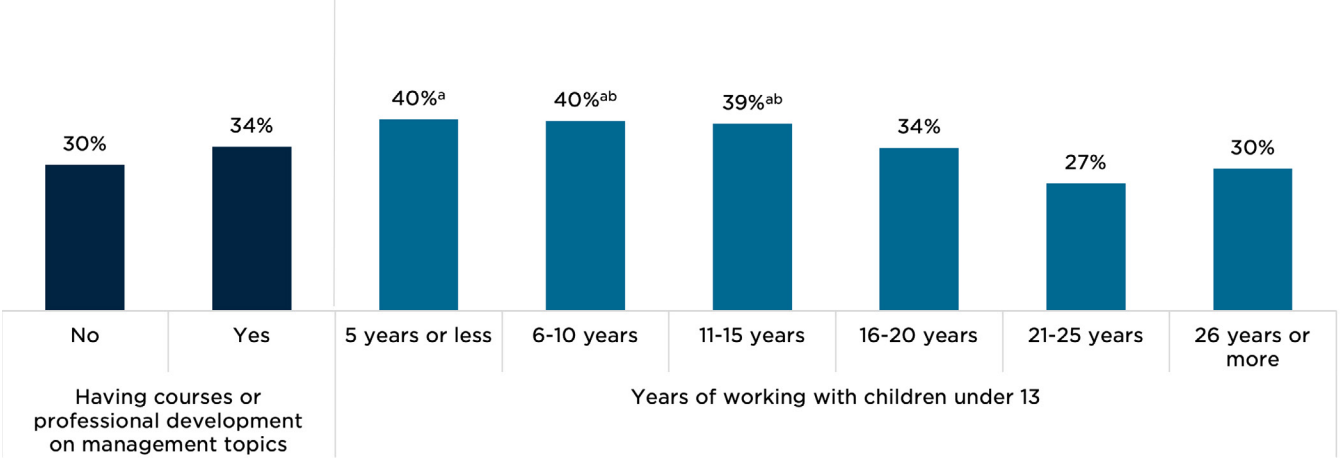
Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Center-based Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates significant differences from centers that provided health insurance and retirement benefits to their staff ($p<0.05$).
No significant differences were detected for the proportions of high turnover by the provision of professional development benefits.

Did High Turnover Rates Vary by Center Director Characteristics?

There were differences in the proportion of high turnover centers by only one of the center director characteristics examined (see Figure 6).

- **Management training:** There were no differences in the rates of high turnover between centers with directors with and without professional development or coursework on management topics (34%and 30%, respectively).
- **Years working with children under 13 years of age:** In general, rates of high turnover were higher among centers with directors that had fewer years of experience working with children. Centers led by directors with fewer than 16 years of experience working with children had the highest rates of high turnover (39%-40%), compared to centers led by directors with 21-25 years of experience working with children (27%). Centers led by directors with 6-10 and 11-15 years of experience also had higher rates of high turnover (40% and 39%) than centers led by directors with 26 years or more experience (30%).

Figure 6. Proportion of 2019 centers characterized as high turnover, by director management training (left panel) and director years of working with children under 13 years old (right panel)



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Center-based Survey.
Note: No significant differences were detected for the proportions of high turnover by whether center directors had professional development on management topics.
[a] Indicates significant differences from centers with directors with 21-25 years of experience ($p<0.05$).
[b] Indicates significant differences from centers with directors with 26 or more years of experience ($p<0.05$). The difference between centers with directors with 26 or more years of experience and centers with directors with 5 years or less of experience was not statistically significant at conventional levels ($p<.10$).

Conclusion

Although a large proportion (44%) of centers had no workforce turnover in 2019, one-third of centers experienced high turnover. The proportions of high turnover centers varied by auspice and sponsorship, provision of staff benefits, and center director years of experience, among other operational characteristics. The associations between high workforce turnover and center characteristics are descriptive, and the analyses cannot explain the reasons for these associations. In addition, center characteristics were interrelated and may be related to other factors (e.g., teachers' wage) not examined in this snapshot. Findings from this snapshot provide a pre-pandemic baseline for understanding turnover rates as the CCEE field continues to explore ways to encourage a stable workforce post pandemic. Future research should examine the mechanisms that drive the associations between high turnover and certain center characteristics.

Suggested Citation

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