Wages of Center-Based Child Care and Early Education Teachers: Findings from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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Introduction

Compensation of the child care and early education (CCEE) workforce is a critical topic of discussion among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Ensuring a well-compensated workforce can improve worker retention, staff consistency in the classroom, and overall worker well-being, which in turn benefits the children and families in need of care.[1]

In 2019, the median wage for full-time female hourly workers was $14.85 per hour,[2] with variation across sectors and by individual characteristics, such as race and ethnicity.[3] Given this variation in hourly wages across professions, variation in hourly wages among sectors of the CCEE workforce in 2019 is also likely. Identifying teacher and program characteristics associated with lower wages may inform efforts to target and remedy inequitable compensation across the CCEE workforce.

This snapshot uses data from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) to examine variation in hourly wages by CCEE teachers' demographic characteristics, teachers' roles and responsibilities in the center, and center and community characteristics. Findings are focused on center-based CCEE teachers who serve children ages 0-5 who are not yet in kindergarten.

Glossary

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

Center-based CCEE provider: An organization providing child care and early education services children aged five and under, not yet in kindergarten, at a single location in a center setting (as opposed to a home-based setting).

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

Key Findings

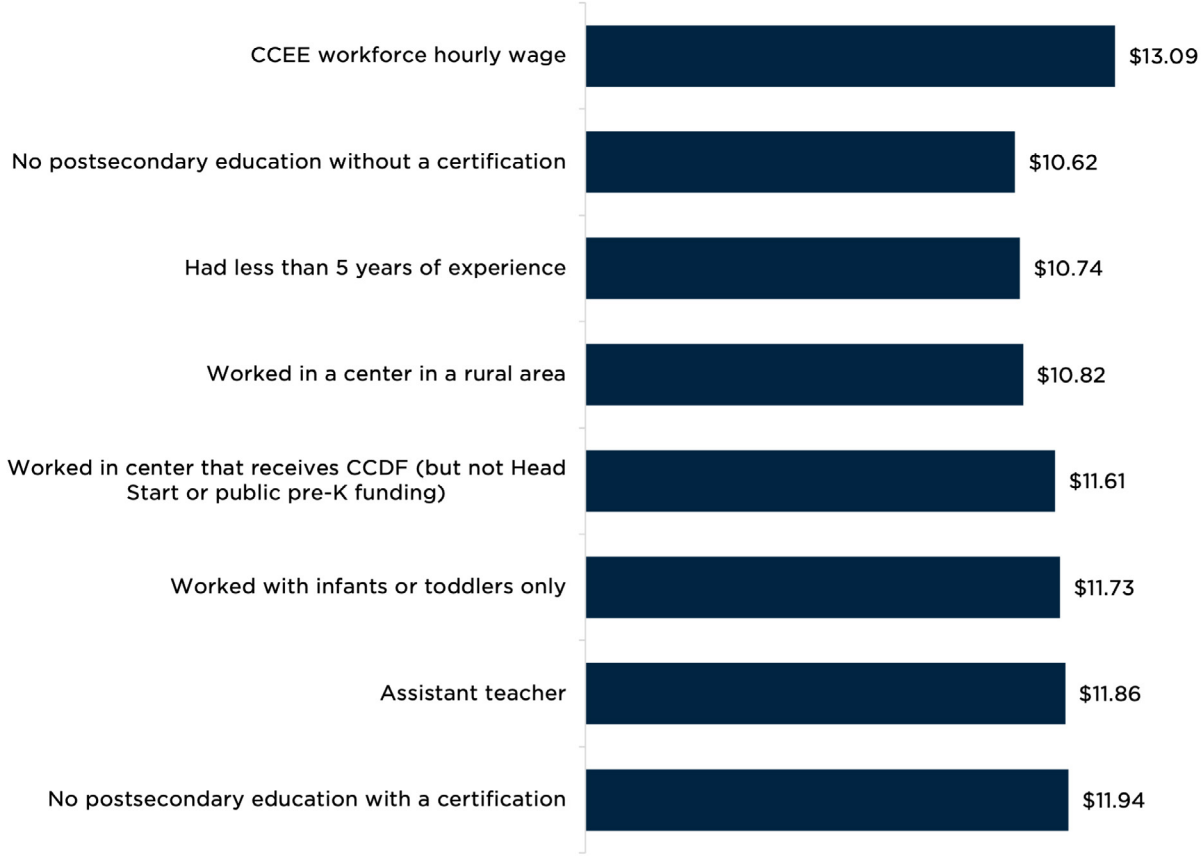
The average hourly wage of center-based CCEE teachers in 2019 was $13.09 per hour. Wages varied by teacher demographic characteristics, teacher roles and responsibilities, and center and community characteristics. Figure 1 includes the wages of seven groups of teachers with the lowest hourly wages.

[1] McLean, C., Whitebook, M., & Roh, E. (2019). From unlivable wages to just pay for early educators. *Center for the Study of Child Care Employment*.
[2] This statistic was selected because the hourly female workforce is the closest overall comparison group to the CCEE workforce, which is predominantly female.
[3] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). Highlights of women's earnings in 2019. *BLS Reports.* https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-earnings/2019/pdf/home.pdf

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Figure 1. CCEE teacher average hourly wage, compared to the average hourly wages of groups of CCEE teachers with the lowest hourly wages



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.

Data and Methods

The analyses in this snapshot were conducted using the Public Use (PU) versions of the 2019 NSECE Center-based Workforce (WF) Survey.[4] Respondents were CCEE teachers who earned less than $100 per hour and were not located in centers associated with a public school address.[5,6] This sample reflected a weighted total of 1,093,750 CCEE center-based teachers. We conducted descriptive analyses of average hourly wages by demographic characteristics, workplace responsibilities, and community and center characteristics. We then conducted significance tests within these subgroups to determine whether differences in average wages were statistically significant.

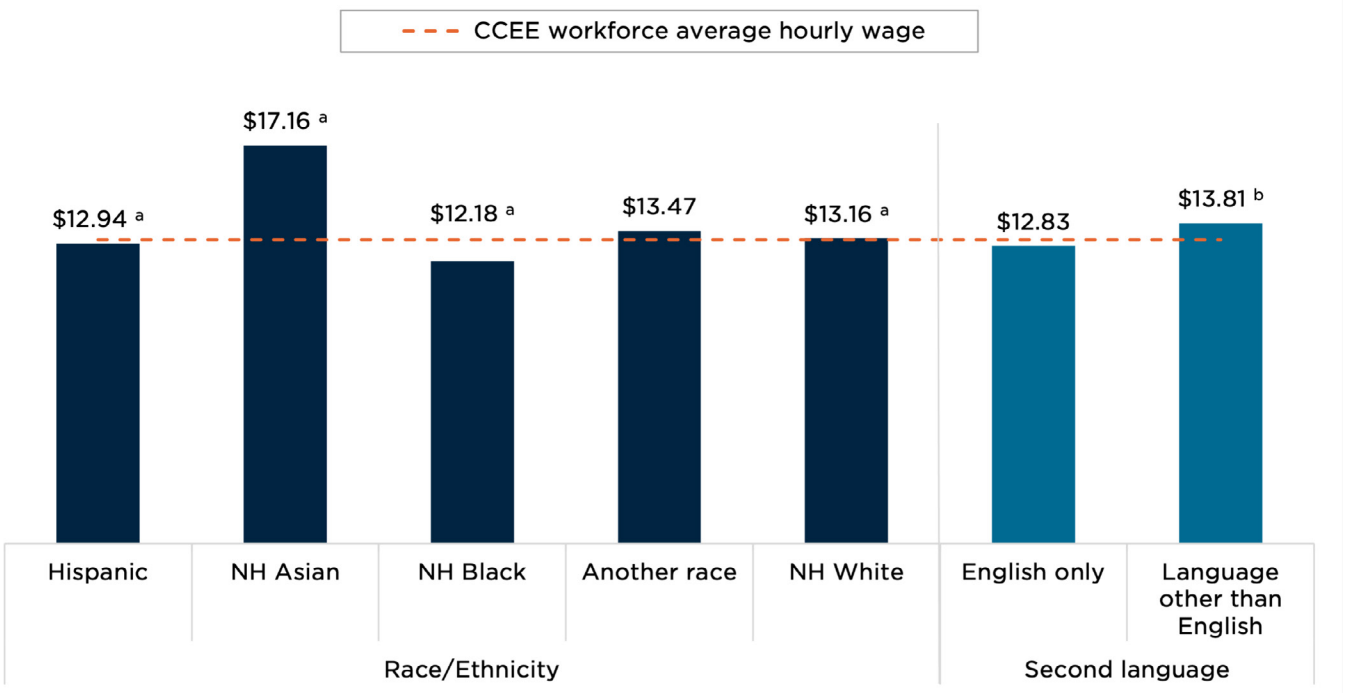
[4] The school sponsorship covariate is from the PU version of the 2019 NSECE Center-Based (CB) Provider Survey.
[5] Outliers with top coded wages of more than $100 an hour were removed from these analyses. We examined the wage distributions and found that, after excluding the top coded wages, the highest workforce wage was in the $50-$60 an hour range. Ten observations were excluded from analysis.
[6] The results in this snapshot are limited to the workforce in centers that did not have a public school address. Challenges related to data collection in public school settings resulted in survey data being collected for 429 of the 912 public school-based workforce members in the NSECE workforce sample. Due to high levels of missing data, these members of the workforce were excluded from analysis. Average hourly wage for those in the CCEE workforce working in centers with public school addresses was $20.79.

Did Teachers' Wages Vary by Their Demographic Characteristics?

The hourly wages of center-based CCEE teachers varied by key demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity and languages spoken. Hourly wages also varied by education and years of experience working with children.

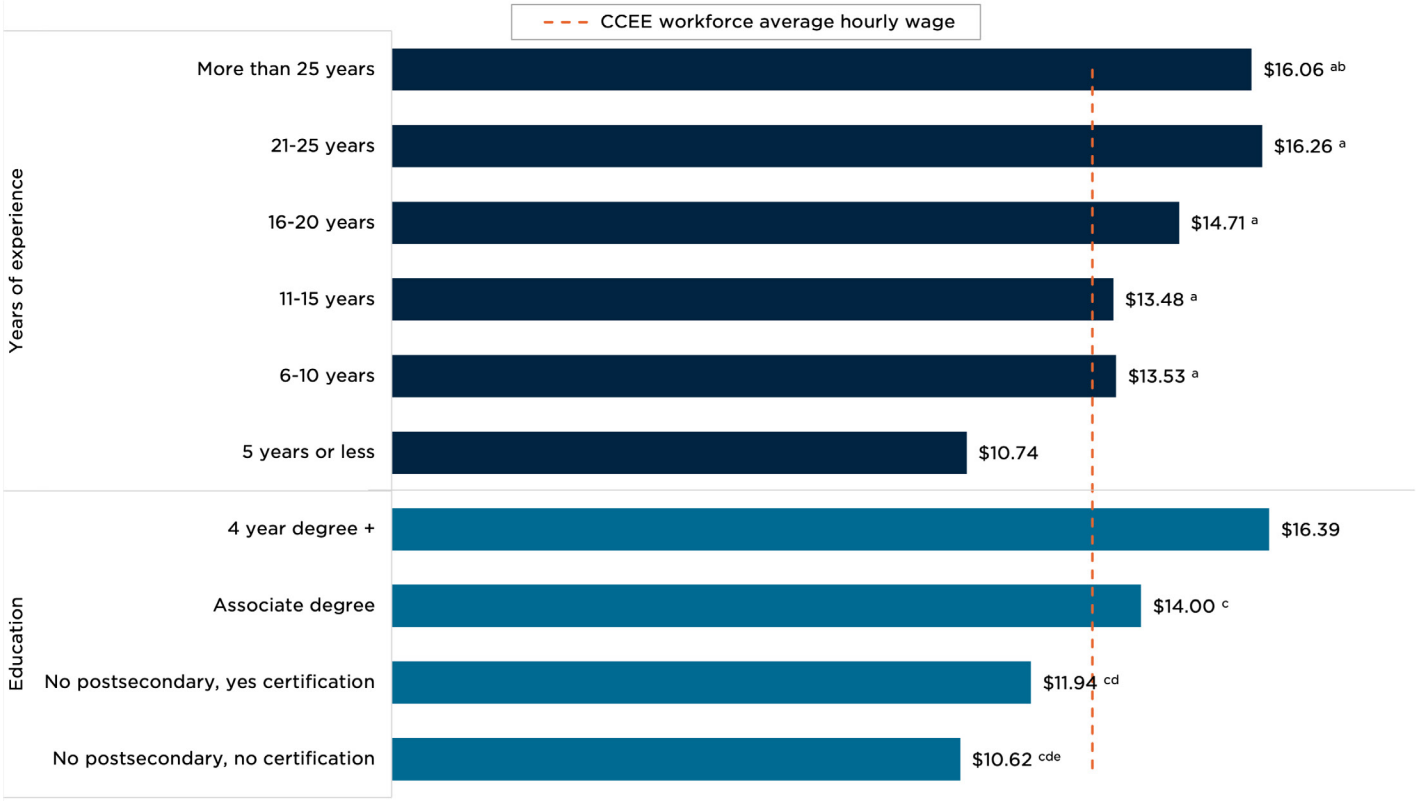
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Hispanic ($12.94), non-Hispanic Black ($12.18) and non-Hispanic White teachers ($13.16) earned significantly lower wages than non-Hispanic Asian teachers ($17.16; see Figure 2).
- **Second Language:** Teachers who only spoke English ($12.83) earned significantly lower wages than teachers who spoke English and at least one other language ($13.81; see Figure 2).
- **Education status:** Teachers with no postsecondary degree and no certification ($10.62) earned significantly lower wages than teachers with a postsecondary degree and a certification ($11.94). Teachers with no postsecondary degree with and without a certification earned significantly lower wages than those with an associate or bachelor's degree ($14.00 and $16.39, respectively), and teachers with an associate degree earned significantly lower wages than teachers with a bachelor's degree (see Figure 3).
- **Experience in CCEE:** Teachers with five or fewer years of experience ($10.74) earned significantly lower wages than teachers with all other levels of experience ($13.48 - $16.26). Those with more than 25 years of experience ($16.06) earned significantly higher wages than teachers with 11-15 years of experience ($13.48; see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Average hourly wages, by teacher race and ethnicity (left panel) and language spoken with children (right panel)



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.
Note: NH indicates non-Hispanic
[a] Indicates a significant difference from non-Hispanic Asian teachers ($p<0.05$).
[b] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who only speak English ($p<0.05$).

Figure 3. Average hourly wages, by teacher education (bottom panel) and years of experience (top panel)



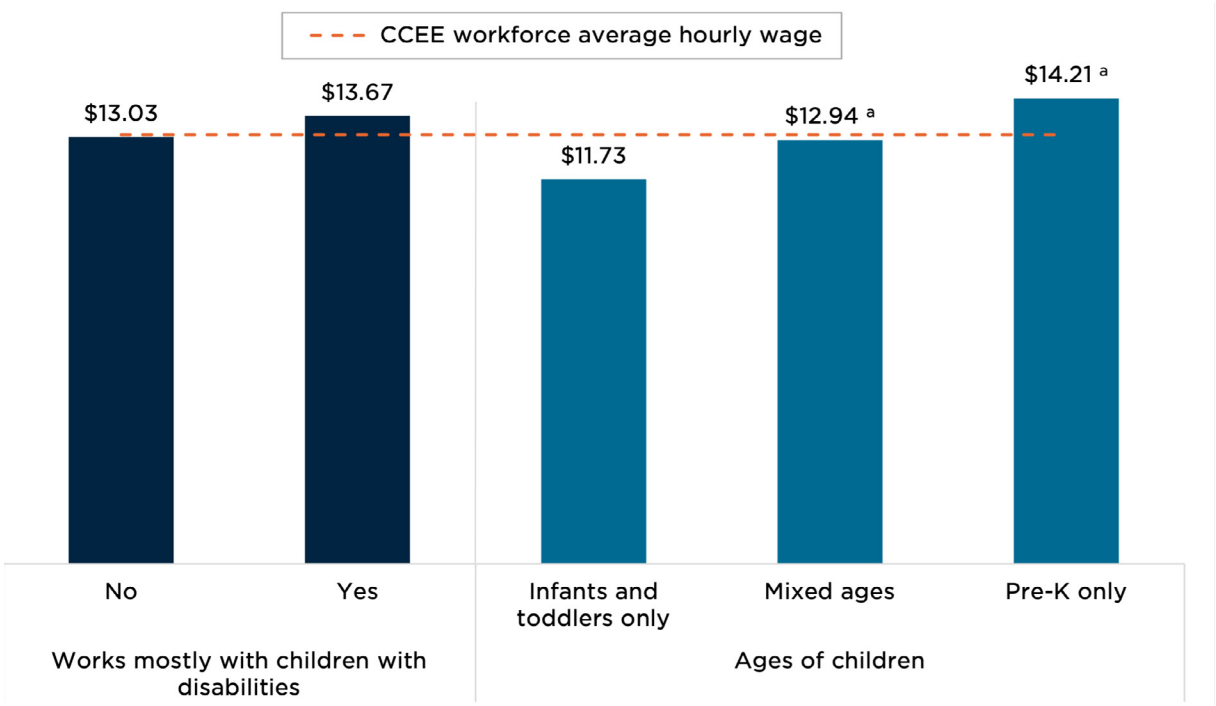
Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates significant difference from teachers with five or fewer years of experience ($p<0.05$).
[b] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who have 11-15 years of experience ($p<0.05$).
[c] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who have a four-year degree or higher ($p<0.05$).
[d] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who have an associate degree ($p<0.05$).
[e] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who have no post-secondary education with a certification ($p<0.05$).

Did Teachers' Wages Vary by their Roles and Responsibilities in the CCEE Center?

The hourly wages of CCEE teachers differed based on their roles and responsibilities within the center.

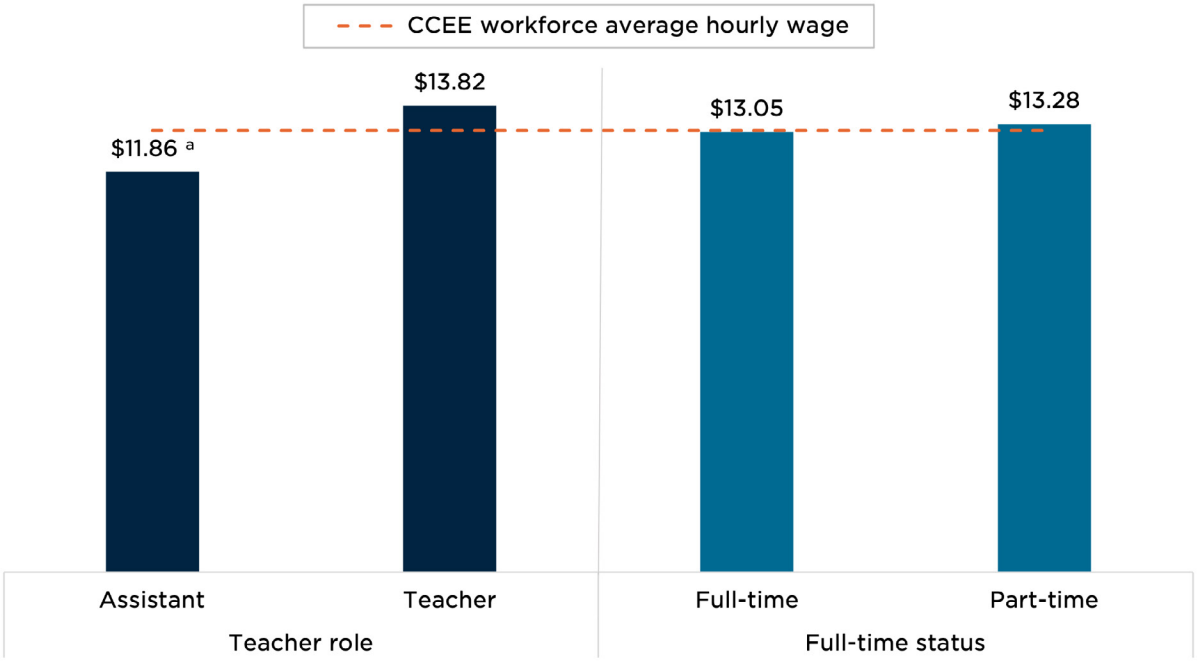
- **Children with Disabilities:** Wages were not differentiated by whether the teacher did or did not support mostly children with disabilities ($13.67 and $13.03, respectively; see Figure 4).
- **Infant and Toddler Teacher:** Teachers who only worked with infants and toddlers ($11.73) earned significantly lower wages than those who worked in mixed age or preschool classrooms ($12.94 and $14.21, respectively; see Figure 4).
- **Teacher Role:** Aides or assistant teachers ($11.86) earned significantly lower wages than teachers/instructors/lead teachers ($13.82; see Figure 5).
- **Full-time Status:** Wages were not differentiated by full-time or part-time status ($13.05 and $13.28, respectively; see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Average hourly wages, by working with children with disabilities (left panel) and ages of children (right panel)



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who worked with infants and toddlers only ($p<0.05$).

Figure 5. Average hourly wages, by teacher role (left panel) and full-time status (right panel)



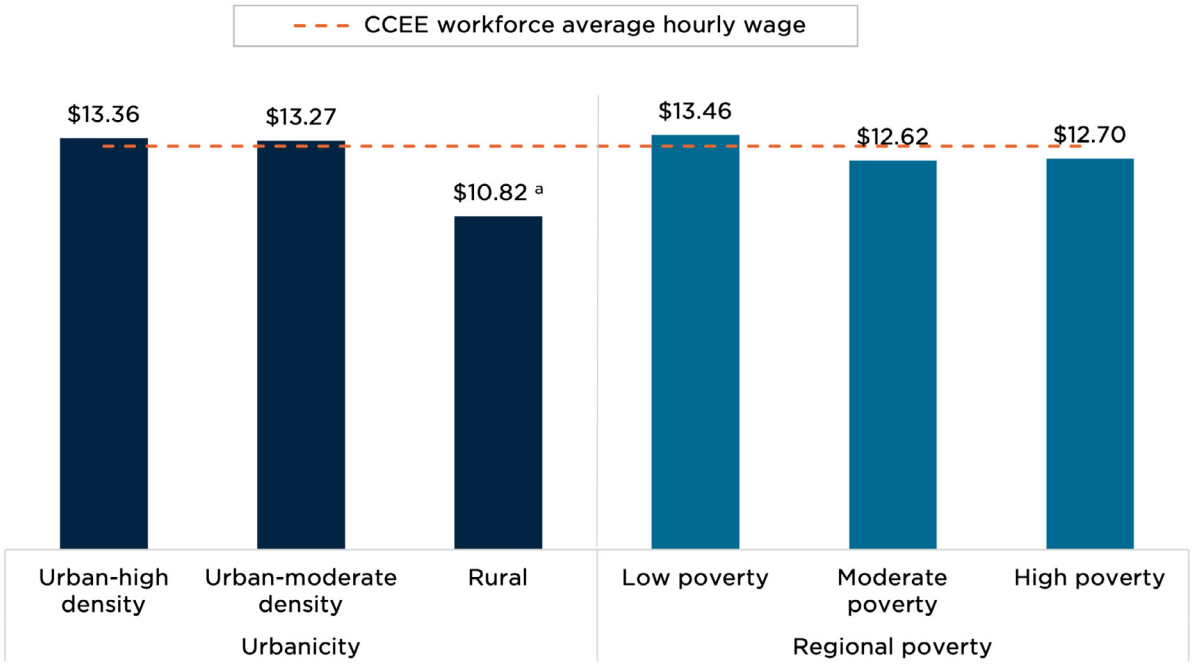
Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who were lead teachers ($p<0.05$).

Did Teachers' Wages Vary by Center and Community Characteristics?

The hourly wages for CCEE teachers differed by some community and center characteristics.

- **Urbanicity:** Hourly wages among teachers in centers in rural areas ($10.82) were significantly lower than the wages of teachers in areas with a high density urban population ($13.36; see Figure 6).[7]
- **Regional Poverty:** Teachers had similar wages in high- (>20% population below the federal poverty level; $13.46), moderate- (13.9-20% of population below federal poverty level; $12.62), and low-poverty communities (0-13.8% of population living below the federal poverty level[8]; $12.70; see Figure 6).
- **School Sponsorship:** Hourly wages did not differ for teachers in centers that were school-sponsored ($15.96) or centers that were not school-sponsored ($12.78 - $13.92; see Figure 7).
- **Public Funding:** Center funding differentiated worker hourly wages. Teachers in centers that served children who received a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy (whether they did or did not also receive Head Start and/or public pre-K funding; $11.61 and $12.20) earned significantly lower wages than those in centers with funding from Head Start and/or public pre-K but no CCDF funding ($16.13; see Figure 7). Teachers in centers serving children with a CCDF subsidy also earned significantly lower wages than teachers in centers that received no public funding ($14.34; see Figure 7).

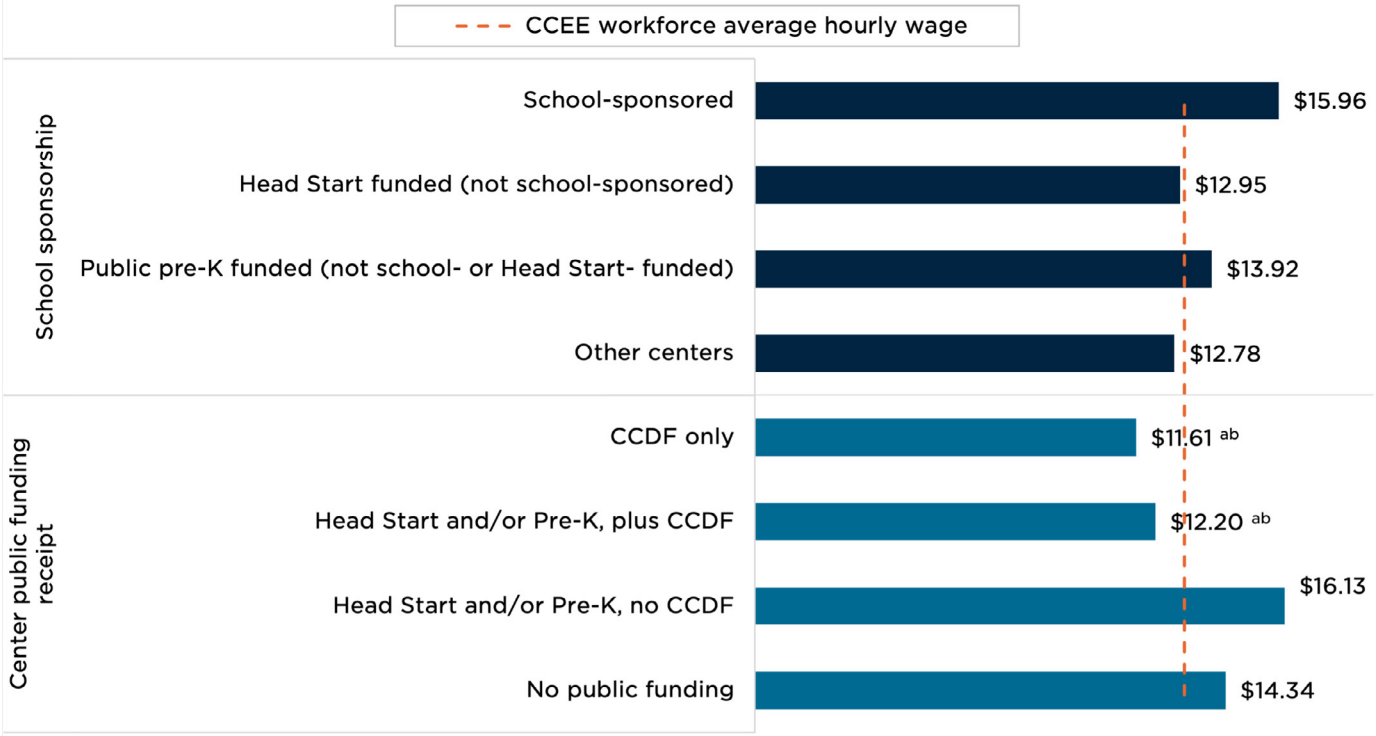
Figure 6. Average hourly wages, by urbanicity (left panel) and regional poverty (right panel)



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates a significant difference from teachers who work in high-density urban areas ($p<0.05$).

[7] Urbanicity definitions were derived from the 2010 Census.
[8] Federal poverty levels were extracted from the 2012-17 American Community Survey database, at the Census-tract level.

Figure 7. Average hourly wages, by school sponsorship (top panel) and public funding (bottom panel)



Source: Results from the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey.
Note: [a] Indicates a significant difference from teachers in a Head Start and/or pre-K setting with no CCDF ($p<0.05$).
[b] Indicates a significant difference from teachers in a care setting with no public funding ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to secure a stable, well-compensated CCEE workforce. This snapshot provides a look at the distribution of pre-pandemic wages across center-based CCEE teachers and shows the differences in hourly wages related to teacher demographics, classroom roles and responsibilities, and center or community characteristics. While these findings are purely descriptive, they provide a glimpse at the wide variation of wage levels across the CCEE workforce and may inform efforts to increase compensation to improve equity and sustainability for CCEE teachers.

Suggested Citation

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