

# Reducing Teacher Turnover in Early Childhood Settings

## *Findings from Virginia's PDG B-5 Recognition Program*

### SUMMARY

- As part of Virginia's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) initiative, some early educators were selected through a lottery to be offered a \$1,500 Recognition Program payment.
- Eight months later, teachers selected to receive the payment were 11 percentage points less likely to have left their sites, compared to teachers not selected to receive the payment.
- Among teachers who were offered payments, some teachers were offered three payments of \$500 over three months, and others were offered a lump sum after eight months.
- Teachers selected to receive *three* payments were 5 percentage points less likely to have left their sites than those offered the lump-sum payment.
- Effects were particularly large among early educators working in child care settings, who face the lowest levels of compensation.
- These results suggest that investments in early educators can improve employment stability for those working with children at a critical developmental period.

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### TEACHER TURNOVER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

The adults who care for and teach young children play a foundational role, influencing not only children's early learning but their development through life. Unfortunately, early educators in the United States receive low levels of wages and benefits and experience high levels of stress and depression. In turn, early educators, particularly those working in child care settings, leave their jobs at high rates; national estimates suggest that 15-25% of the workforce exits each year. These high levels of employment turnover have negative implications for young children, who benefit from warm, engaging interactions and stable, sustained relationships with caregivers. Practitioners, policymakers, and researchers have argued that increasing wages of early educators is essential to professionalizing and stabilizing the workforce.

## **TWO STUDIES**

Through two studies – one in Fairfax County and one in the other PDG B-5 communities – our project answers two research questions:

- 1) Does offering early educators up to \$1,500 – if they stay at their early care and education (ECE) sites – lead to increased employment stability?
- 2) Does the timing and frequency of payments (3 vs. 1) make a difference in ECE teacher stability?

Through Virginia’s PDG B-5 initiative, and in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, and the PDG pilot communities, the UVA team conducted the first-ever experiments to measure the effects of financial supports on teacher turnover in ECE settings.

### **Question 1: Does a \$1500 payment impact teacher turnover?**

The study in Fairfax addressed the first research question – does the offer of \$1,500 decrease early educators’ likelihood of leaving their sites?

### **HOW DID THE RECOGNITION PROGRAM WORK IN FAIRFAX?**

Any adult employed at a publicly-funded ECE site participating in the PDG could register to participate in the PDG if they were working directly with children ages 0-5 for at least 30 hours per week as of May 1, 2019.

Because funds for the Recognition Program were insufficient to cover payments for *all* registered PDG teachers in Fairfax, a lottery was used to pick half of all Fairfax PDG sites (38 sites) to receive recognition payments. The 338 Fairfax teachers selected could receive up to three payments of \$500, totaling \$1,500 over an eight-month period. Teachers working at the remaining Fairfax PDG sites did not receive recognition payments.

Our partners at the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation contacted site leaders in August 2019, November 2019, and January/February 2020 to verify whether teachers were still employed at their original sites and working 30 hours a week with children 0-5. They then sent \$500 payments to all verified teachers in the Recognition Program. In this brief, we examine whether receiving the payments improved teachers’ employment outcomes eight months later.

### Fairfax Sample: Demographic Characteristics & Turnover Rates

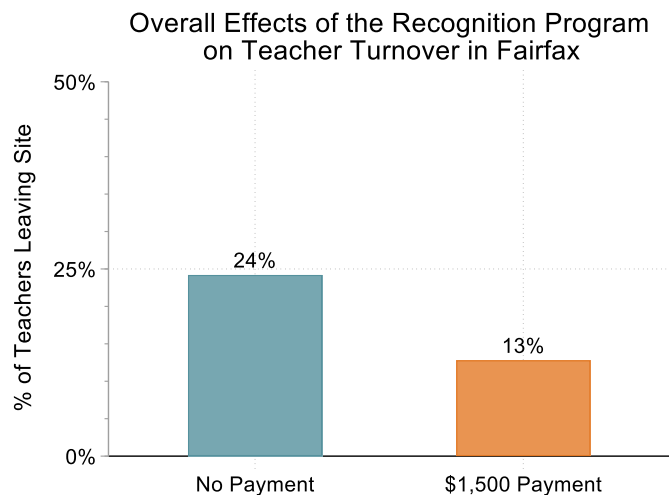
	Overall	Centers		Schools	
		Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers	Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers
Black, non-Hispanic	21%	23%	22%	13%	13%
Hispanic	24%	25%	27%	4%	24%
Has Bachelor's degree or higher	48%	48%	36%	100%	41%
Has Child Development Associate's	32%	33%	38%	0%	36%
Number of teachers	584	253	245	48	38
Left site after 8 months	19%	17%	25%	4%	8%

### WHO WAS IN THE FAIRFAX STUDY?

Nearly 600 early educators in Fairfax registered for the Recognition Program, including lead and assistant teachers working in child care centers and schools. Teacher background characteristics varied considerably across sectors and by roles. For instance, while all school-based lead teachers held a Bachelor's degree, about half of child care lead teachers held a Bachelor's degree. Overall, about 1 in 5 teachers in the study were no longer at their sites eight months later. Teachers working in schools left their sites at far lower rates than those in centers, as did lead teachers compared to assistant teachers. For instance, eight months after registering, 4% of lead teachers in schools had left their jobs compared to 17% of lead teachers in centers.

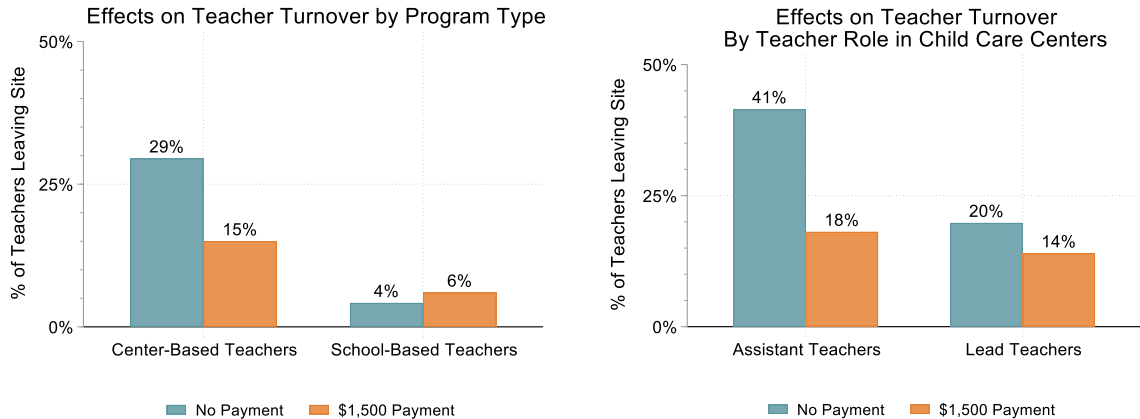
### WHAT DID WE FIND IN FAIRFAX?

Among teachers *not* selected to receive the payments, nearly a quarter were no longer employed at their sites eight months after registration. In contrast, only 13% of teachers who *were* selected had left their sites. This means that teachers selected to participate in the Recognition Program were 11 percentage points less likely to have left their sites eight months later.



## WHICH TEACHERS WERE MOST IMPACTED IN FAIRFAX?

Nearly all school-based teachers, whether they were selected to receive the payments or not, were still at their sites eight months after registration. In contrast, among teachers working in child care centers, where turnover was more common, the Recognition Program had a large effect. Child care teachers selected to receive the payments were 14 percentage points more likely to remain at their registered sites compared to similar teachers not selected. The payments had particularly large effects among assistant teachers in child care settings, who were 23 percentage points less likely to leave their registered sites if selected for the Recognition Program.



## Question 2: Does the timing and frequency of payments matter?

In PDG communities outside of Fairfax, all registered PDG teachers could receive the payments. In those communities, the study examined whether the likelihood of teachers remaining at their sites differed if they received an offer of \$1,500 in *three* payments of \$500 about every three months, as compared to \$1,500 in *one* lump sum after eight months. Given that many early educators – especially in child care settings – receive low wages, more immediate access to the recognition funds may have helped teachers remain in their positions.

## HOW DID THE RECOGNITION PROGRAM WORK?

Similar to Fairfax, any adult employed at a publicly-funded ECE site participating in the PDG could register to participate in the PDG if they were working directly with children ages 0-5 for at least 30 hours per week as of May 1, 2019.

A lottery was used to determine *when* teachers would receive the recognition payments. In all, 976 teachers were selected to receive up to three payments of \$500, totaling \$1,500 over an eight-month period. Another 951 teachers were selected to receive one payment of \$1,500 at the end of the eight-month period.

In August 2019, November 2019, and January/February 2020 the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation contacted site leaders to verify whether teachers were still employed at their original sites and working 30 hours a week with children 0-5. Each time, they then sent \$500 payments to all verified teachers in the three-payment group. The last time, they sent \$1,500 to teachers in the one-payment group who had been verified all three times. In this brief, we examine whether receiving the money in *three* payments instead of one improved teachers' employment outcomes eight months later.

### **WHO WAS IN THE STUDY?**

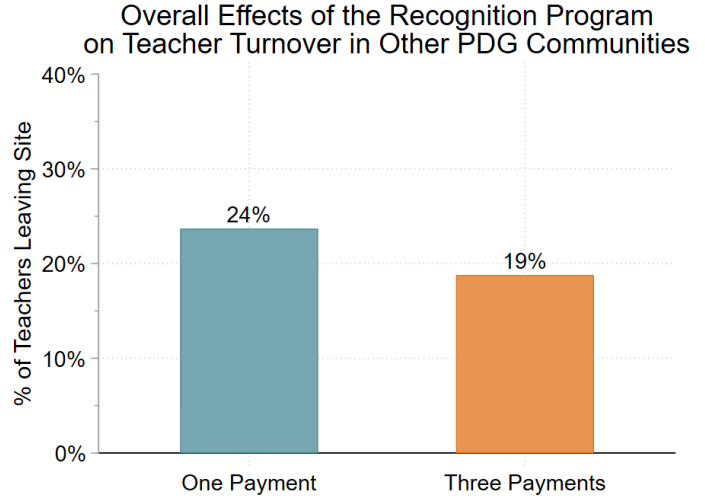
Nearly 2,000 early educators in PDG communities other than Fairfax registered for the Recognition Program, including lead and assistant teachers working in child care centers and schools. Teacher background characteristics varied considerably across sectors and by roles. For instance, while almost all school-based lead teachers held a Bachelor's degree, about a quarter of child care lead teachers held a Bachelor's degree. Overall, about 1 in 4 teachers in the study were no longer at their sites eight months later. Teachers working in schools left their sites at far lower rates than those in centers. For instance, eight months after registering, 8% of lead teachers in schools had left their jobs compared to 28% of lead teachers in centers.

### **PDG Sample (Non-Fairfax): Demographic Characteristics & Turnover Rates**

	Overall	Centers		Schools	
		Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers	Lead Teachers	Assistant Teachers
Black, non-Hispanic	23%	30%	30%	9%	15%
Hispanic	5%	5%	7%	2%	4%
Has Bachelor's degree or higher	42%	25%	17%	98%	34%
Has Child Development Associate's	22%	30%	30%	5%	16%
Number of teachers	1927	694	511	389	334
Left site after 8 months	23%	28%	33%	8%	11%

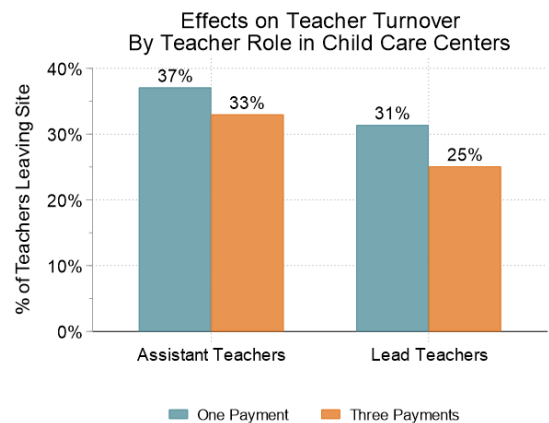
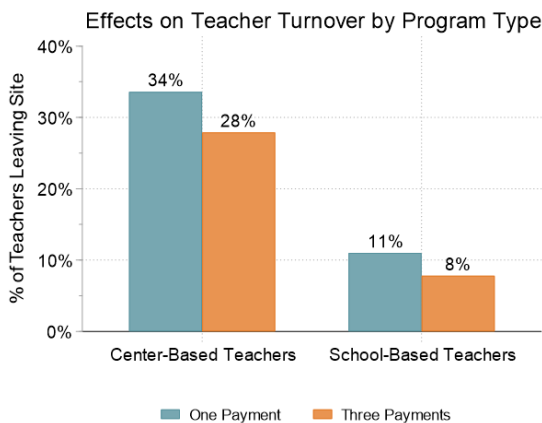
### WHAT DID WE FIND?

Among teachers selected to receive *one* payment, nearly a quarter were no longer employed at their sites eight months after registration. In contrast, only 19% of teachers who were selected to receive *three* payments had left their sites. This means that teachers selected to receive three payments were 5 percentage points less likely to have left their sites eight months later.



### WHICH TEACHERS WERE MOST IMPACTED?

Similar to the Fairfax context, we found that impacts were most pronounced in child care centers, where turnover was more common than in schools. Child care teachers selected to receive three payments were 6 percentage points more likely to remain at their registered sites compared to similar teachers selected to receive one payment. Although assistant teachers in child care centers turned over at higher rates than lead teachers in child care centers, being in the three-payment group affected the turnover rates of both types of teachers.



## TEACHER REACTIONS TO THE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

In May 2020, our team surveyed all teachers in the study. Teachers who received payments answered a set of questions about what the Recognition Program meant to them. Many emphasized the importance of feeling appreciated for the work that they do. One teacher wrote, “It gives us hope that this industry will eventually be **compensated at the level that the work is valued**. Everyone ‘appreciates’ us, but private daycares cannot afford to pay us what we are worth to this nation.” Another shared, “...it was the **first time in my 18 years of teaching that my work has been recognized**.” Another teacher elaborated on the positive effects she sees of this feeling: “Teachers perform better when they feel **validated and valued**.”

Teachers also highlighted the ways the payments helped them meet their basic financial needs. One shared, “My family and I were struggling and I have debt from being a single mom. The program helped me considerably.” Another explained, “It meant I could continue to go to work and not worry about **food, car bills, or my child's care**.” A third wrote, “The grant helped me keep a roof over my head and food on my table and my medication because I’m a diabetic.” Many teachers expressed gratitude and excitement about the program and how it impacted their professional and personal lives:

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I remember the day teachers started receiving their checks and there was such a buzz of excitement. I know for one of the teachers, receiving that check meant she could finally make necessary car repairs after having an accident several months prior. I know all of the teachers who were eligible appreciated it and it definitely made an impact on how long they continued to work at [site].

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## CONCLUSION

Our findings indicate that the offer of \$1,500 payments significantly reduced teachers’ employment turnover, especially among assistant teachers in child care centers. Moreover, receiving the \$1,500 more frequently had a larger effect on reducing teachers’ turnover. These results highlight the potential power of continued investments in supports for early educators.

## QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

This study was conducted by the PDG Evaluation Team at the University of Virginia: Daphna Bassok, Justin B. Doromal, Molly Michie & Vivian C. Wong. If you have any questions, please contact Daphna Bassok, at [dbassok@virginia.edu](mailto:dbassok@virginia.edu).