



Professionalizing the Child Care Workforce: Links between Teacher Outcomes and the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate

Anna J. Markowitz, Amy E. Smith, & Kate Miller-Bains

EdPolicyWorks at the University of Virginia

UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies

Professionalizing the Child Care Workforce: Links between Teacher Outcomes and the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate

Summary:

- In 2019, Louisiana introduced a requirement that all lead teachers in publicly funded child care sites hold an Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC), a new certification designed to equip educators with the skills needed to provide high-quality care and education for young children.
- Using data from 2018 and 2019, this brief examines key teacher outcomes across three groups: (1) teachers who have or are working towards an ECAC through a training program; (2) teachers who hold an ECAC through a qualifying AA or BA degree; and (3) teachers who do not have an ECAC.
- Teachers who hold or are working towards an ECAC score highly on Louisiana's measure of teacher-child interaction quality.
- Teachers who hold or were working towards an ECAC specifically through an ECAC training program reported high levels of agreement with the importance of measuring and improving interactions, as well as satisfaction with – and retention in – their jobs.
- This preliminary documentation of the positive associations between ECAC training and teacher quality and retention should be interpreted cautiously, as these results reflect teachers who decided to pursue an ECAC *before* Louisiana's 2019 requirement went into effect. However, these trends provide a promising baseline for further evaluation.

Early educators play a critical role in shaping young children's academic and social-emotional trajectories, but in the United States, this workforce tends to have low levels of education and limited access to professional supports.¹ In an effort to improve teaching quality and to support workforce professionalization, many states have introduced new training and educational requirements to equip teachers with the skills they need to teach and care for young children.²

In Louisiana, this effort has included the development of a novel early care and education (ECE) credential called the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC). In 2014, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) began

accrediting ECAC training programs, and in 2019, the ECAC became a requirement for all lead teachers working in publicly funded child care settings.

The ECAC was designed to address key challenges early childhood educators often face when pursuing additional training and education. The credential is free for teachers; teachers have two years from date of hire or promotion into the lead teacher position to earn an ECAC, meaning they can start working without one; upon completion, teachers are eligible for a sizeable tax credit of up to \$3,300 per year.

Teachers can earn an ECAC through multiple paths³: through a Bachelor's degree in any field, through an Associate degree in early childhood or related field, or by completing coursework in one of the state-approved training programs. These programs include all requirements associated with the widely-recognized Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, as well as additional instruction and coaching experiences based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) – a commonly-used measure of teacher-child interaction quality. ECAC programs focus on the CLASS because CLASS is the foundation of both Louisiana's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and general quality improvement efforts. Each year, all publicly funded ECE classrooms in Louisiana are observed and rated using the CLASS, making it the primary mechanism for feedback for ECE teachers and sites statewide.

Thousands of Louisiana's early educators have attained the ECAC since it was introduced, but little is known about whether teachers who hold an ECAC differ on key characteristics and outcomes related to professionalization. This brief – produced as part of a longstanding research-practice partnership between LDOE and the Study of Early Education in Louisiana (SEELA) at the University of Virginia (UVA) – provides the first look at characteristics and outcomes of teachers who earned or are working towards their ECAC. We use survey and administrative data to compare this group to teachers who hold a post-secondary degree and teachers who have neither an ECAC nor a qualifying degree on outcomes related to the quality of teacher-child interactions, teacher wellbeing, and teacher retention.

Though this analysis does not provide an evaluation of the impact of the ECAC on teacher outcomes, it does provide an important first step towards understanding the characteristics of teachers who choose to enroll in ECAC programs, and the baseline links between the ECAC and teacher satisfaction, retention, and classroom quality.

Data Sources

To link ECAC training to teacher characteristics and outcomes, we pulled data from two primary sources: a survey of ECE teachers across two parishes in Louisiana and statewide classroom observation data. Both are described in more detail below.

The SEELA Survey

In the fall of 2018, we invited all teachers working in publicly funded ECE sites located in Jefferson and Rapides parishes to participate in a voluntary workforce survey. Across the study communities, 89% of teachers in child care settings returned the survey, which included questions about their education and whether they hold or are working towards an ECAC and/or CDA; their perceptions of the CLASS and teacher-child interactions; their job satisfaction; and their intention to stay in their jobs. We restricted the survey data for this brief to responses from the 359 lead teachers in child care settings who completed the SEELA survey, as these are the teachers who are required to earn an ECAC under Louisiana law.

We used teacher responses to identify three groups of interest:

1. Teachers who earned or were working towards an ECAC by completing a state-approved training program, or those who have earned a CDA but did not hold an advanced degree. Because the ECAC is an “enhanced CDA,”⁴ these teachers have received similar instruction and/or coaching aligned with the ECAC. For ease of reference, we refer to this group as **ECAC-trained teachers**, or **teachers who have received ECAC training**.
2. Teachers who hold a Bachelor’s degree in any field or Associate degree in early childhood or a related field. These teachers have met the necessary qualifications for holding an ECAC by obtaining an eligible post-secondary degree. For ease of reference, we refer to this group as **AA/BA degree teachers** or **teachers who hold an ECAC-eligible degree**.
3. Teachers who did not hold a CDA, ECAC, or an ECAC-eligible degree, and were not working towards earning an ECAC. For ease of reference, we refer to this group as **noncertified teachers** or **teachers who are not certified**.

These groupings are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of teacher groups described in this brief

Group	Characteristics	Number of Teachers
ECAC-trained teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hold an ECAC or CDA <i>or</i> are working towards an ECAC or CDA; <i>and</i> · Do not hold a BA in any field; <i>and</i> · Do not hold an AA in an ECE-related field 	230 teachers 64% of sample
AA/BA degree teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hold a BA in any field; <i>or</i> · Hold an AA in ECE or a related field 	53 teachers 15% of sample
Noncertified teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Do not hold an ECAC or CDA; <i>and</i> · Are not working towards an ECAC or CDA; <i>and</i> · Do not hold a BA in any field; <i>and</i> · Do not hold an AA in an ECE-related field 	76 teachers 21% of sample

Administrative Data from LDOE

As part of Louisiana’s QRIS, all classrooms in publicly funded ECE sites statewide are required to be observed at least twice a year using the age-appropriate version of the CLASS. Scores on the CLASS range from 1 to 7 and are reported to LDOE in Fall and Spring of each year. These scores determine sites’ quality ratings in their public performance profiles; Table 2 shows the rating scale LDOE uses for classifying these scores. For each teacher, we averaged the Fall and Spring observations from the 2018-2019 school year to create a single CLASS score.

Table 2. Louisiana performance ratings for CLASS scores

Score Range	Performance Rating
6.00 to 7.00	Excellent
5.25 to 5.99	High Proficient
4.50 to 5.24	Proficient
3.00 to 4.49	Approaching Proficient
1.00 to 2.99	Unsatisfactory

We used teacher names to link survey data, including teachers' education and certification, to the CLASS data. These data provided us with a measure of teachers' classroom quality and allowed us to estimate year-to-year teacher retention by identifying teachers who appeared in both the 2018-19 school year and in the Fall of 2019, indicating they remained at their site about one year later.

Of the 359 teachers for whom we had survey responses, 212 (59%) appeared in the CLASS data for the 2018-2019 school year. The CLASS scores and retention results presented below are limited to this subset of teachers.

Characteristics of ECAC-Trained Teachers

Teachers who pursued different paths to attain their ECAC had different baseline characteristics. In Table 3 we first describe the demographics and experience levels for teachers in the sample overall, and by ECAC certification.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of teachers

	Overall	AA/BA Degree	ECAC-trained	Noncertified
N	359	53	230	76
Percent Female	99%	94%	100%	100%
Average Age	38 years	41 years	38 years	34 years
Average Time in ECE	9 years	10 years	10 years	5 years
Race: White	47%	49%	44%	54%
Race: Black	45%	33%	50%	37%
Race: Hispanic	5%	10%	3%	6%
Race: Another race or multiracial	3%	8%	3%	3%

The sample was predominantly female (99%) and, on average, 38 years old with 9 years of experience in early childhood education. Forty-seven percent of teachers were White, 45% Black, and the remaining 8% Hispanic, multiracial, or another race.

Across all three groups, AA/BA teachers were the only group to have any male teachers (6% of this group). AA/BA degree teachers tended to be slightly older (41 years) than ECAC-trained teachers (38 years) and noncertified teachers (34 years). Both AA/BA degree and ECAC-trained teachers had worked in ECE for an average of 10 years, whereas noncertified teachers had been in the field about half as long.

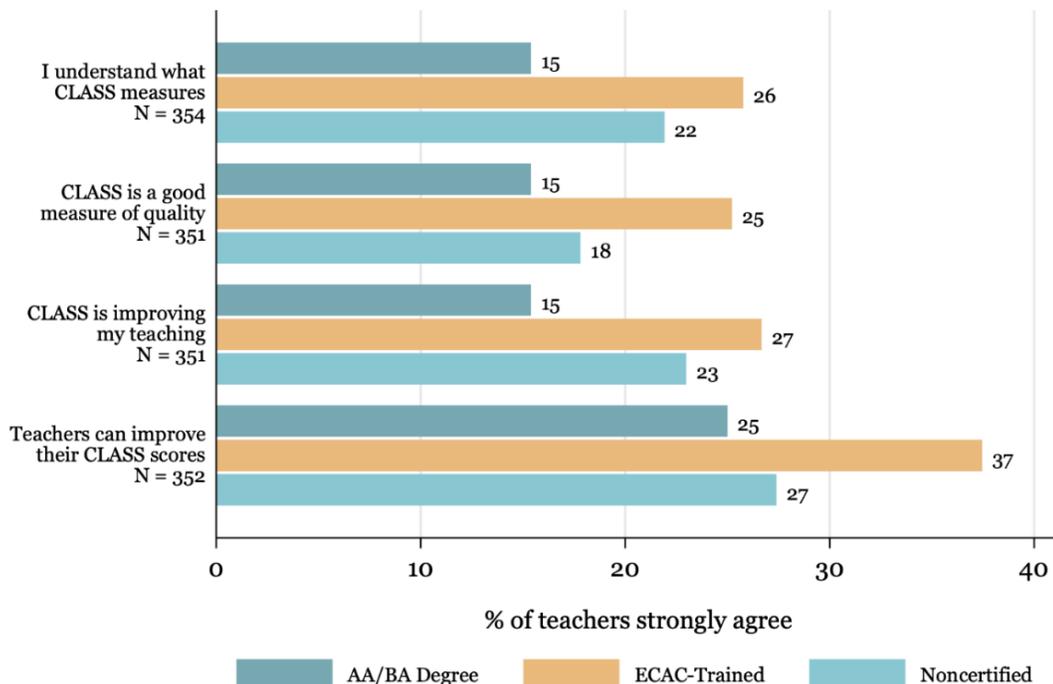
ECAC-trained teachers were more likely to be Black than either AA/BA degree teachers (33%) or noncertified teachers (37%). In contrast, AA/BA teachers were more likely to be Hispanic or of another race/ethnicity or multiracial (18%) than either ECAC-trained (6%) or noncertified teachers (9%).

Perceptions of the CLASS and Ratings of Teacher-Child Interactions

Because of the emphasis on teacher-child interactions as measured by the CLASS in both Louisiana’s QRIS and the ECAC programs, we examined teachers’ perceptions of and performance on the CLASS across the AA/BA degree, ECAC-trained, and noncertified groups.

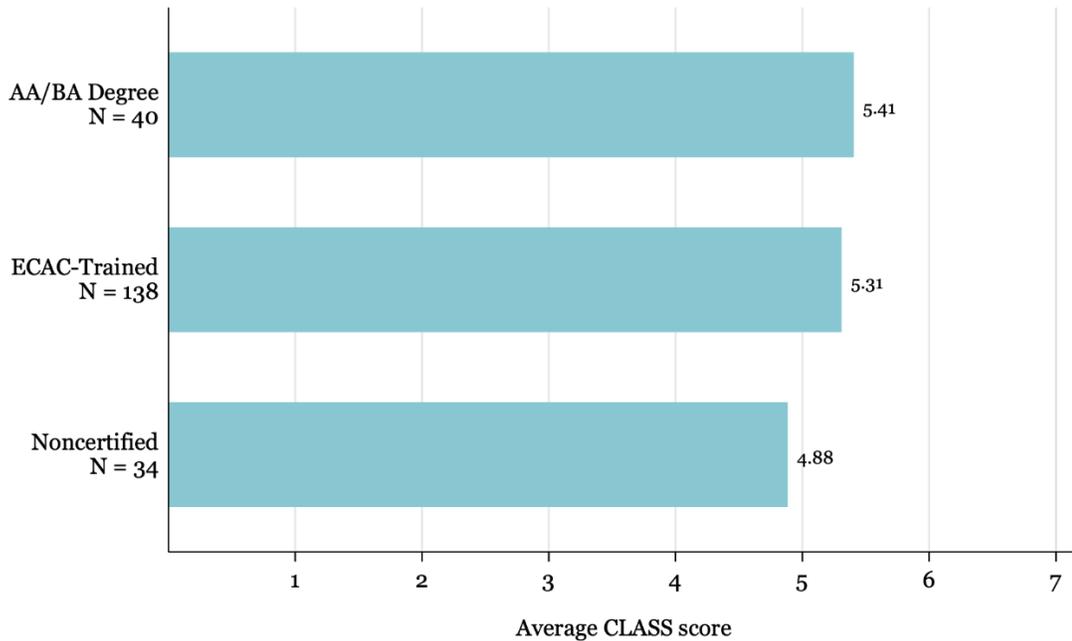
In survey responses, ECAC-trained teachers showed higher levels of CLASS buy-in than both AA/BA degree and noncertified teachers. Figure 1 shows that about one-quarter of ECAC-trained teachers strongly agreed that: they understand what the CLASS measures (26%); the CLASS is a good measure of classroom quality (25%); and the CLASS is helping them to improve their teaching (27%). Thirty-seven percent of ECAC-trained teachers strongly agreed that teachers can work to improve their CLASS scores, which was 10 percentage points higher than noncertified teachers and 12 percentage points higher than AA/BA degree teachers.

Figure 1. Teachers’ attitudes about the CLASS



We also observed CLASS scores for 212 of the survey-takers (Figure 2). During the 2018-2019 school year, AA/BA degree teachers had an average score of 5.41 and ECAC-trained teachers had an average score of 5.31. Both of these scores are considered High Proficient under the LDOE quality rating system. Teachers who were not ECAC-certified had an average CLASS score of 4.88, which corresponds to a rating of Proficient.

Figure 2. Teachers' scores on the CLASS in the 2018-2019 school year⁵

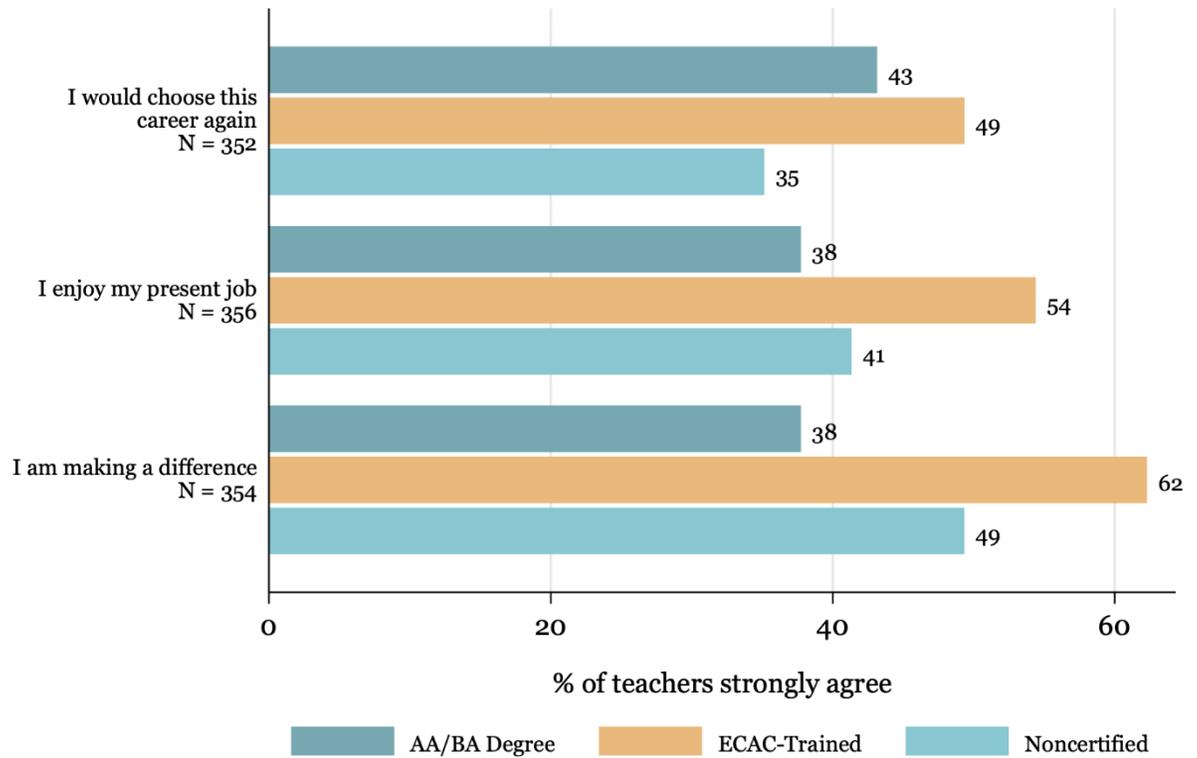


Job Satisfaction and Retention

To achieve the ECAC's goal of building a more skilled ECE workforce, it must combat the high levels of turnover among educators in child care settings, where as many as 50% of teachers leave their positions each year.⁶ Because job satisfaction is a strong predictor of retention,⁷ we first considered whether teachers' satisfaction with their job was associated with the ECAC.

In our sample, ECAC-trained teachers were the most likely of all groups to strongly agree with three items addressing satisfaction (Figure 3). Almost half (49%) of these teachers strongly agreed they would choose this career again; and more than half strongly agreed they enjoy their present job (54%) and are making a difference in the lives of the children they teach (62%). Less than half of AA/BA degree or non-credentialed teachers strongly agreed with any of the items related to satisfaction.

Figure 3. Teachers’ satisfaction with their work



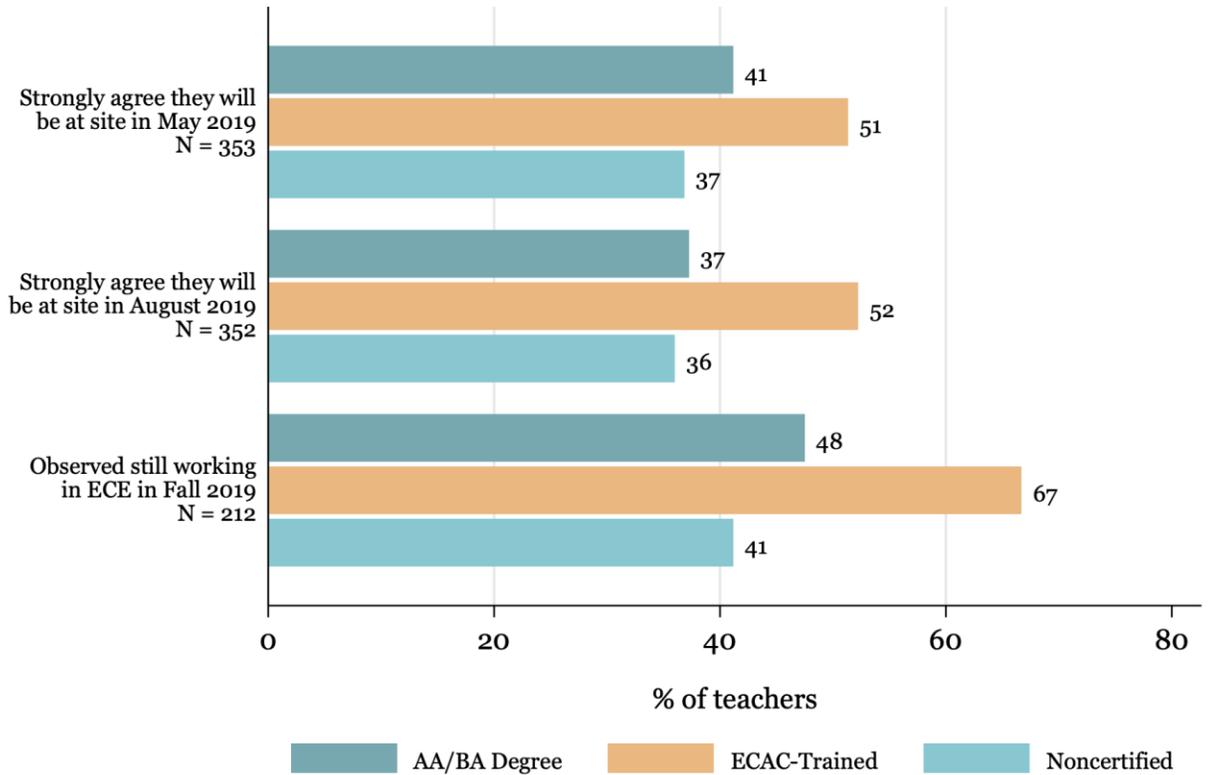
In addition to examining satisfaction as an indicator of teachers’ likelihood to stay in the profession, we looked at teachers’ intent to stay at their site through the 2018-2019 school year and observed retention from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019.

ECAC-trained teachers were the most likely to report intentions to stay in their job on the SEELA survey (Figure 4). About half of ECAC-trained teachers strongly agreed they would be in their position through the end of the school year (May 2019, 51%), compared to 41% of AA/BA degree teachers and 37% of noncertified teachers. When asked about their intention to stay through the end of the summer (August 2019), ECAC-trained teachers were again the most optimistic: 52% strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 37% of AA/BA degree teachers and 36% of noncertified teachers.

We also observed teacher retention in LDOE’s administrative CLASS data. Of the ECAC-trained teachers with a CLASS score during the 2018-2019 school year, 67% percent were still working in a Louisiana ECE site in the Fall of 2019, a retention rate that is higher than the statewide average. Teachers who held an AA/BA degree had a 48% retention rate into fall 2019, and noncredentialed teachers showed the lowest rate of retention (41%). The high retention observed

in the ECAC-trained group is likely due to the highly selective sample,⁸ but the discrepancy between these teachers and the other groups remains notable.

Figure 4. Intended and actual retention through Fall 2019



Implications

This brief provides a first look at the characteristics and outcomes of teachers who enroll in ECAC training programs and how this group compares to teachers with other levels of professional training.

The ECAC was designed to support early educators working in child care by providing professional development related to their classroom practice, and offering the opportunity to earn a sizable tax credit, which may support retention.⁹ This analysis looks at two sets of indicators related to the ECAC’s supports: teachers’ experiences with and performance on CLASS, and teachers’ job satisfaction and retention. The results presented in this brief suggest that along all dimensions, teachers who chose to enroll in ECAC training looked as good as their peers who earned AA or BA degrees, and often better than teachers with no certification. Teachers who participated in ECAC training were also more likely to remain in their positions through the following fall.

These promising initial findings come with several caveats. The timing and design of this study do not allow us to know whether either ECAC training programs or the Louisiana ECAC policy have an effect on teacher outcomes. The data are primarily from 2018, before the ECAC policy went into effect, meaning the ECAC-trained teachers in our sample are a uniquely committed group of teachers. Moreover, because we simply observe teachers' education and credentials, we are unable to account for a variety of factors that influence both the likelihood that teachers pursue training and education and their practice and retention outcomes.

Moving forward, determining the effects of ECAC will continue to be complicated. Most teachers who enroll in an ECAC program do not complete the process; even now, teachers who do earn the ECAC are likely a group with high levels of commitment to early education at the outset. Designing and testing supports for ECAC completion alongside tracking teacher quality and retention will likely be fruitful for both teacher professionalization efforts and better understanding the potential benefits of the ECAC for the workforce and for children.

Nonetheless, the findings do suggest that further study of the ECAC and its potential for Louisiana is warranted. This preliminary evidence suggests the ECAC can provide access to training for educators who are committed to the profession. And, by providing teachers with job-relevant training and financial benefits, the ECAC targets factors that have historically made teachers more likely to continue working in ECE. While additional research is needed to determine if the ECAC investment can yield real returns for the ECE workforce in Louisiana, these results provide a supportive baseline for further evaluation.

Endnotes

¹ McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index2020/report-pdf/>

² Schilder, D. (2016, April). Early childhood teacher education policies: Research review and state trends (Policy Report). New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

³ Additionally, teachers who earned a Childhood Development Associate (CDA) certificate prior to 2018 are eligible for an ECAC.

⁴ Lieberman, A. (Nov 2018). *Lessons from the Bayou State: Three Reforms for Improving Teaching and Caregiving*. Retrieved from: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/lessons-louisianas-early-childhood-system/>

⁵ Scores presented here include both teachers who were observed using the preschool CLASS and teachers observed using the toddler CLASS.

⁶ Bassok, D., Markowitz, A.J., Bellows, L., & Sadowski, K. (2021). New evidence on teacher turnover in early childhood settings. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(1), pp. 172-180. Retrieved from: http://bit.ly/louisiana_teacher_turnover

⁷ 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 Early Education*, 30(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1214652>

⁸ Teachers in our sample must have (1) responded to the 2018 SEELA survey and (2) be present in the 2018-19 CLASS data; in requiring teachers to meet these criteria, our final sample is likely more committed to early education than the child care workforce overall. For example, the average experience in our sample was 9 years.

⁹ Bassok, D., Hall, T., Markowitz, A. J., & Doromal, J. B. (2021). *Teacher Turnover in Child Care: Pre-Pandemic Evidence from Virginia*. Retrieved from: https://bit.ly/see_partnerships_prepandemic_turnover

This report was made possible by Grant Number 90YE0216 from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.