

# North Carolina 2019 Policy Priorities for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Think Babies™ NC Leadership Team



## *Strengthen the Infant Toddler Teaching Workforce by Increasing Compensation and Education Standards*

### Introduction

Babies are learning from birth, and the first three years of life lay the foundation for all of the years that follow. Early experiences actually mold the architecture of the brain, building capacity to learn and grow—cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Infants and toddlers develop and learn through their relationships with the adults in their lives – their parents, family members, *and* their early childhood teachers when they are enrolled in child care programs.

Every day, approximately 15,000 infant toddler teachers are paid to care for and educate approximately 66,085 infants and toddlers enrolled in licensed child care programs across North Carolina. These early educators have the enormous responsibility of safeguarding and facilitating the development of our youngest children while they are spending the majority of their waking hours in child care when their parents work. These infant toddler teachers must have the knowledge, skills, and resources to provide consistent, nurturing, and positive relationships to support their healthy development and learning.

Yet, too many infant-toddler caregivers and teachers are not qualified and lack specific early childhood educational knowledge and skills to appropriately support infant toddler development and learning. Most infant toddler teachers are also woefully underpaid, earning \$10.00 per hour, or less, for the important work they do, which leads to turnover and instability in the baby classrooms, and stressful lives and family economic status. Consequently, infants and toddlers are not always receiving the high-quality early learning experience that is foundational to their future growth, learning, and success.

Updated education standards and compensation strategies are urgently needed to attract and retain qualified early childhood teachers who can support young children's developing and learning. North Carolina's low education standards and inadequate compensation of infant toddler teachers contributes to the lack of quality infant toddler child care programs. Qualifying as a lead infant toddler teacher requires no formal educational training other than one college level course in early education, via the NC Early Childhood certificate that was created in the 1990's. Infant toddler teachers are paid so poorly that one out of five will leave the early childhood field and almost half have relied on some form of public assistance to support themselves and their families.

### Why Is This Important to Do Now?

**All teachers, and especially infant toddler teachers, must have the education and skills to deliver high-quality programs to support young children's development and learning.**

The quality of early care and education young children receive is most closely tied to the quality of the teachers in the classrooms. According to national researchers, early childhood educators having

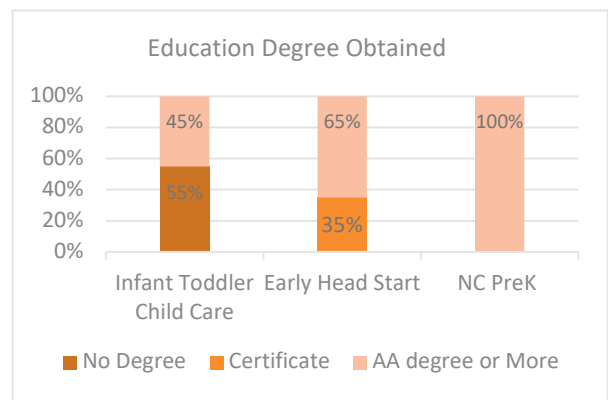
specialized knowledge of child development and early childhood education is correlated with better educational outcomes for young children.<sup>1</sup> This is also true for infant toddler teachers who are supporting the youngest children during the most critical time in their development.<sup>2</sup> Qualified teachers are more likely to have effective, positive interactions with children and their families, offer richer language experiences, use appropriate curricula and teaching practices, and create more high-quality learning environments.

**North Carolina’s early childhood education standard is too low and does not reflect science-based recommendations on teacher education requirements.**

Infants and toddlers make up more than half of children under six on the waiting list, but receive subsidy less frequently than preschool children.<sup>3</sup> The lack of supply for subsidy and long waiting lists means that infants and toddlers remain on the wait list longer to receive subsidy, and many don’t receive subsidy until their preschool years, missing a critical window in their development.

**Infant toddler teachers are the least educated of all early childhood teachers because North Carolina has different standards for child care programs.**

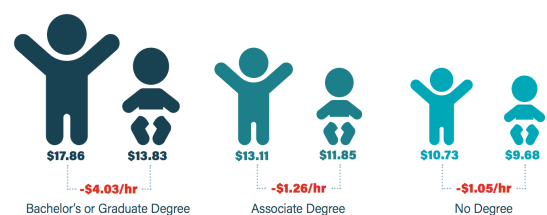
In North Carolina, infants and toddlers do not have access to teachers with the same educational qualifications as young children enrolled in the state’s NC Pre-K program or federal Early Head Start programs. The state’s NC Pre-K program, which serves four-year old children from low-income families, requires all lead teachers to hold a Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education and the B-K license. Early Head Start, a federal program serving the most vulnerable infants and toddlers, requires all center-based teachers to have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or have equivalent coursework in early childhood development with a focus in infant and toddler development.<sup>4</sup> As noted above, infant toddler teachers in child care programs are only required to have one course in early childhood education and there are no requirements for previous training or experience before becoming a lead teacher.



Having different education standards has implications for the quality of the infant toddler programs. Infants and toddlers in child care programs have the least educated teachers. Forty-five percent (45%) of those teaching infants and toddlers in child care programs have earned an associate degree or higher compared to 69% of the NC Pre-K teaching staff who have earned as associate degree or higher, a difference of 24 percentage points.<sup>5</sup> Among Early Head Start infant toddler teachers, 35% hold the CDA certificate, and 65% have earned an associate degree or higher.<sup>6</sup>

**Infant toddler teachers earn such low wages that they are living in poverty and earning the least of all early childhood teachers.**

Among an early education workforce that is already low paid, teachers working with infants and toddlers earn the least, regardless of educational level. According to researchers at the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, infant toddler teachers, even those with a Bachelor’s degree, are paid about \$4 less per hour than similarly qualified early educators working with 3- year olds.<sup>7</sup>



Compensation trends in North Carolina are similar. According to the report, “Who’s Caring for Our Babies,” infant toddler teachers in North Carolina are paid an average of \$10.00 per hour, with a low of \$8.50 per hour to a high of \$11.50 per hour in different regions of the state. These low wages result in the average infant toddler teacher living at or near poverty level and struggling economically: 63% live in families earning less than \$30,000 per year, 11% work a second job, and almost half (44%) have relied on some form of public assistance.<sup>8</sup>

### Low educational standards and inadequate compensation also negatively impact the ability of the early childhood field to attract and retain qualified infant toddler teachers.

Early childhood education is the lowest paid field of almost all other occupations, so it’s not surprising that young students are less interested in this field.<sup>9</sup> In North Carolina, the early childhood teaching workforce is shrinking, with fewer students enrolling in community college early childhood programs and qualified infant toddler teachers moving on to teach preschool or to other professions. Enrollment in early children education programs in the NC Community College system has steadily declined since 2009-2010, from a record high enrollment of 12,538 students down to just 7,147 students in 2017-2018, a 43% drop in enrollment.<sup>10</sup>

“Currently, a Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education occupies the dubious distinction of the college major with the lowest projected lifetime earnings.”  
-Center for the Study of Child Care Employment

Once early childhood teachers enter the classroom, one in five infant toddler teachers (21%) predict that they will leave the field in three years, typically because of low pay and low status.<sup>11</sup> Those who have obtained higher degrees often move on to teach in the state’s NC Pre-K program, public schools, or into other fields that pay better.

### There are fewer high-quality infant toddler programs due to the lack of well-educated and well-compensated infant toddler teachers.

Fewer centers are enrolling infants and toddlers today than they did in 2008, typically because they lack the resources, including finding and affording qualified staff, to maintain these programs.<sup>12</sup> Too many infant toddler programs have lower star-ratings than other child care programs because teachers lack degrees and don’t have the skills to create quality programs. North Carolina’s licensed star-rating system is based on two components – teacher education degree levels and program standards scores. Infant toddler teachers have fewer educational degrees, as noted above, and infant toddler classrooms have lower program quality scores. Just 53% of programs serving infants and toddlers elected to have the Environment Rating Scale administered, and when they did, these programs score an average 4.98 compared to the average 5.51 rating for preschool classrooms.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, overall in North Carolina, there are fewer infants and toddlers enrolled in high quality programs compared to preschool programs. Just 70% of all infants and toddlers are enrolled in high-quality four- and five-star licensed programs versus 78% of all preschoolers. Forty-five percent (45%) of infants and toddlers are enrolled in 5-star programs, compared to 59% of all preschoolers.<sup>14</sup>

### North Carolina has the infrastructure and financial resources to support infant toddler teachers in becoming better educated and compensated. These include:

- **College-level programs:** The Infant-Toddler Certificate and Early Childhood Education Associate degree programs are available in every NC community college, and most universities offer four-year early childhood education degree programs. A new “Leadership in Infant-Toddler Certificate” program, which articulates into the Master’s degree program, has been created at UNC-Greensboro. Students enrolled in any of these programs have access to the T.E.A.C.H. Early

Childhood® scholarship program to support the costs of obtaining these needed credentials and degrees.

- **Compensation programs:** Two compensation programs provide financial relief salary supplements for early childhood teachers who are pursuing higher education. The **Child Care WAGES® Program** provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors, and family child care providers working with children between the ages of birth to five. The Infant-Toddler Educator **AWARDS® Program** provides education-based salary supplements to low paid teachers who have obtained at least an Associate degree and are working full-time in infant toddler classrooms.
- **Child Care Subsidy incentives:** North Carolina’s child care licensing system recognizes the value of educated teachers in its star-rated license system and provides increased child care subsidy reimbursement rates for three-, four- and five-star rated licensed child care programs. Although not specifically tied to teacher education or compensation, this strategy does provide additional resources to centers delivering high-quality programs.



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<sup>1</sup> National Academies of Science. (2015). Transforming the Workforce for Children from Birth Through Age Eight.

<sup>2</sup> NAEYC. (2014). High-Quality Early Childhood Educators Are the Key to Quality Programs for Children. Retrieved from: [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policyadvocacy/201NAEYC\\_Childhood%20Educators.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policyadvocacy/201NAEYC_Childhood%20Educators.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Child Care Service Association (CCSA). (2017). “Who’s Caring for Our Babies.”; DCDEE, 2018b

<sup>4</sup> Head Start. (2016). Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements. Retrieved from: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-91-staff-qualifications-competency-requirements>

<sup>5</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2017). Who’s Caring for Our Babies? Early Care and Education in North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup> Data from the 2018 Program Information Report provided by NC Head Start Collaboration Office.

<sup>7</sup> Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index.

<sup>8</sup> Child Care Services Association, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Early Childhood Education Program Enrollment Data, December 2018, provided by the NC Community College System.

<sup>11</sup> Child Care Services Association, 2017

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

### About Think Babies™ NC:

Think Babies™ NC seeks to advance policies that support the healthy development of North Carolina’s babies and toddlers. It is aligned with the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative and the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. Think Babies™ NC is led by the NC Early Education Coalition with support from the NC Early Childhood Foundation and a Leadership Team of state and local organizations focused on advancing public awareness and policy solutions for infants, toddlers, and their families.