

Background

Children whose parents must choose out of home care options benefit most when those caregivers develop nurturing, engaging and responsive relationships with them (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2005). However, the high rate of turnover among the early childhood workforce diminishes children's experiences with high quality and stable caregiving relationships.

According to *A Decade of Data: The Compensation and Credentials of Arizona's Early Care and Education Workforce*, "On average, 45% of Teachers had been working for two years or less, with large, for-profit centers experiencing a turnover rate of 59% of their Teachers within two years" (2008).

The survey noted that the lowest rates of turnover were among Head Start and school district pre-school programs. Those programs typically have greater resources and their median hourly salary for teachers is 38-54% higher than the median hourly salary for all types of providers. These programs also typically require higher educational attainment of teachers and teacher assistants. Nationally, turnover among the early childhood workforce ranges between 25 and 40 percent, with Arizona's rate of 59 percent far exceeding even the top end of the national range (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2005).

The connection between higher wages and improved retention is clear. In North Carolina where a wage enhancement program has been implemented, turnover rates have been reduced from 31 percent prior to 2003 to 18 percent in 2006-2007 (Child Care Services Association, 2007). The challenge, however, remains one of affordability. If programs are to increase salaries, financial supports, usually in the form of tuition for care, also must increase. Such increases could drive the cost of care far beyond what is affordable by families who are most in need. Several states have tackled this challenge by subsidizing wage enhancements or salary stipends to the early childhood workforce.

Through quality improvement efforts such as *Quality First!*, expectations for a more highly skilled labor force are increasing. As educational requirements increase, so should the level of compensation. Wages and earnings should be commensurate with education and experience. Early Childhood teachers with a bachelor's degree working in a private early care and education program should be able to expect a wage comparable to a teacher with the same education working in a school district. Furthermore, investing in personnel early in their educational pathway, such as rewarding as few as six credit hours at first, provides encouragement to improve skills and remain in the field.

