II

THEMES AND CASE STUDIES

THEME 2: WORKFORCE & PROVIDER SUSTAINABILITY

A clear theme across interviews was the strain on the child careworkforce and the growing instability facing providers. Participants described ongoing staffing shortages, difficulties recruiting qualified educators, and compensation levels that make it difficult for workers to remain in the field. Providers also spoke about burnout, isolation, and the challenge of sustaining programs while managing rising operational costs. These pressures are especially acute for small and home-based providers, who often have limited access to flexible funding and business support services. In some cases, these conditions have led to reduced program capacity or closures, further constraining the supply of child care. Together, these experiences highlight the critical role of workforce stability in the broaderchild caresystem and underscore the need for policies that strengthen compensation, improve retention, and support the long-term sustainability of the early childhood workforce. The case studies that follow examine how wage equity initiatives and salary supplement programs can help address these challenges.

THEME 2: WORKFORCE & PROVIDER SUSTAINABILITY

CASE STUDY 3: WASHINGTON, D.C. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR PAY EQUITY FUND

Inland Empire interview connection:
"Our early educators are not paid enough for the hard job they have. That causes turnover, which is not good for children, not good for families." — Early childhood systems interview [C3]

Washington, D.C.'s Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund is one of the strongest examples of a public policy designed to address early educator compensation directly. This case is especially relevant to the Inland Empire because interview participants consistently connected workforce instability to low pay, burnout, and provider sustainability. Providers described losing staff to jobs with better wages, benefits, and less emotional labor. Others described the difficulty of operating a family child care business while paying employees, payroll taxes, workers' compensation, insurance, supplies, food, and licensing costs.

The D.C. Pay Equity Fund recognizes that early educators are part of the education workforce and should not be paid poverty-level wages for highly skilled developmental work. Under the program, participating child development facilities must pay eligible early educators minimum salaries established by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. The policy aims to bring early educator compensation closer to the salaries of public-school teachers with comparable credentials.

Implementation approach:
The Washington, D.C. Pay Equity Fund (PEF) was created through the Birth-to-Three for All DC Act to address longstanding compensation disparities between early childhood educators and public school teachers. The program recognizes that early educators perform complex educational work but have historically earned significantly lower wages despite similar responsibilities.

The Pay Equity Fund operates through a two-phase approach. Initially, eligible educators received direct supplemental payments. The long-term model shifted toward program-level funding, where licensed child development facilities voluntarily participate in the program and receive funding through the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Participating providers agree to pay educators according to an established salary scale based on role, credentials, and experience.

Rather than requiring providers to independently raise wages, the District provides funding that allows programs to increase compensation while maintaining affordability for families. This approach was intentionally designed to avoid passing additional labor costs directly to parents through tuition increases

Funding strategy:
The Pay Equity Fund (PEF) is a publicly funded compensation initiative established through the Birth-to-Three for All DC Act and administered by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Funding is provided through annual District government appropriations and distributed to participating child development facilities that opt into the program. Rather than requiring providers to increase tuition to raise educator salaries, the District uses public funds to offset payroll costs and support compensation increases. This approach recognizes that the private child care market alone cannot generate wages comparable to those earned by public school educators while maintaining affordability for families.

Outcomes and impacts:

The Equitable Compensation Task Force recommended annual supplemental payments of $10,000 for assistant teachers and $14,000 for lead teachers during the program's initial phase, with the long-term goal of implementing a compensation scale based on educator role, credentials, and experience.

The Pay Equity Fund was specifically designed to address compensation disparities affecting educators working in child development centers and family child care homes serving infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. By creating a publicly funded compensation system, the District sought to improve educator recruitment, retention, and financial stability while preventing increased labor costs from being passed directly to families through higher tuition.

The initiative has received national attention as one of the first large-scale efforts in the U.S. to pursue compensation parity between early childhood educators and public school educators, positioning Washington, D.C. as a national leader in early childhood workforce policy.

Limitations:

The program has faced political and budget pressures, showing that compensation reform requires protected, sustainable funding. Wage equity programs can lose impact if they are treated as optional annual expenditures rather than core infrastructure.

Key lessons for the Inland Empire:

The Inland Empire cannot solve child care shortages without solving workforce pay. A local or state policy agenda should include salary supplements, wage floors, or publicly funded compensation contracts for infant/toddler educators. D.C.'s model also shows that workforce funding must be designed so that parent tuition does not rise. This case supports recommending compensation reform as an access strategy, not just a workforce benefit.

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CASE STUDY 4: MAINE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR WORKFORCE SALARY SUPPLEMENT SYSTEM

Inland Empire interview connection:
"Providers are experiencing high levels of stress and burnout, which directly impacts the availability and quality of care for young children." — Provider systems interview summary [C4]

Maine's Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement System offers a more administratively modest but highly relevant workforce model. Unlike D.C.'s large-scale pay equity approach, Maine provides monthly salary supplements to eligible early childhood educators and licensed family child care providers. The supplement is tiered based on education and experience levels.

This case is useful for the Inland Empire because many providers are small centers or home-based. Interview participants explained that small and home-based providers often lack access to flexible grants, business support, and sustainable funding. They also face burnout, isolation, administrative burdens, and language barriers. A salary supplement model can be easier to implement than a full wage-scale overhaul while still providing immediate relief.

Implementation approach:
Maine administers the salary supplement through its Office of Child and Family Services. Eligible educators must work in licensed child care settings or be licensed family child care providers. The state uses registry levels to determine supplement tiers, connecting compensation support to professional development and experience.

Funding strategy:
The program uses state-administered public funding. Maine increased appropriations for the supplement system, allowing monthly payments to rise. Current listed monthly amounts are tiered, with higher supplements for educators at higher registry levels.

Outcomes and impacts:
The program's goals are to increase regular compensation, reduce turnover, support retention, and recognize professional experience. Maine's model is especially useful because it shows that wage supplements can be built into a state system without requiring every provider to redesign their entire payroll structure.

Limitations:
Salary supplements are helpful but may not be enough if base wages remain too low. They can also become unstable if funding levels change year to year. Supplements should therefore be treated as one part of a broader workforce strategy that includes reimbursement reform, benefits, training, and paid planning time.

Key lessons for the Inland Empire:
Maine's model could be adapted for California or piloted regionally through county partnerships. The Inland Empire could prioritize supplements for infant/toddler educators, bilingual providers, providers serving subsidized families, and home-based providers in child care deserts. This case also supports a recommendation for tiered workforce supports tied to training, language access, infant/toddler specialization, and years of service.

References

Theme 2

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