

MISSISSIPPI CHILD CARE TEACHERS' WAGES SURVEY 2023 KEY FINDINGS



American workers rely on accessible, affordable child care. Child care accessibility and affordability depend on an adequate child care workforce. A child care crisis in the United States is impacting the ability of workers to seek and maintain employment. Nationally, 32% of working parents with young children lacked access to accessible, affordable child care, and the gap was even wider (35%) in rural areas.¹ Nationally, families spent between 5.1% and 12.9% of their household incomes on child care.² The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services determined that child care is unaffordable if it exceeds 7% of a household's income.



Current child care workforce conditions represent a costly market failure. The current low wages of Mississippi child care teachers create an unstable child care workforce. When comparing the wages of child care workers in Mississippi with those of surrounding states, Mississippi ranked last. Ninety-eight percent of all other occupations pay higher wages than child care. Child care educators are less likely to have health insurance, have higher student debt than the national average, and experience high levels of food insecurity³

In February of this year, the Center for American Progress reported that the child care workforce lost 90,000 workers from February 2020 to July 2022. This exodus from child care was exacerbated by the pandemic, but poverty wages and difficult working conditions for child care teachers have been longstanding problems. A market failure is occurring as child care owners are unable to pay wages high enough to retain an adequate child care workforce, and it is not possible for parents to pay the amount truly required to provide high-quality care for young children.⁴



Mississippi needs a robust child care workforce to support working families. A 2019 U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation survey reported that Mississippi loses an estimated \$120 million annually in tax revenue due to child care issues affecting the workforce.⁵



With 26% of young children (ages birth to five years) in poverty,⁶ Mississippi workers and employers have much to gain from access to high-quality, affordable child care. In the short term, parents can maintain and seek employment and educational opportunities, keeping the Mississippi economy robust. In the long term, employers benefit from a better prepared workforce. The state of Mississippi and its taxpayers also benefit from savings in remedial and special education, as well as overall better health and occupational outcomes for residents.⁷

The first step in finding ways to recruit and retain an adequate child care workforce is to understand the existing workforce.

Currently, the number and characteristics of Mississippi child care workers are unknown. However, the MS Dept. of Human Services and the MS State Dept. of Health are implementing a new online system for capturing information about the child care workforce.

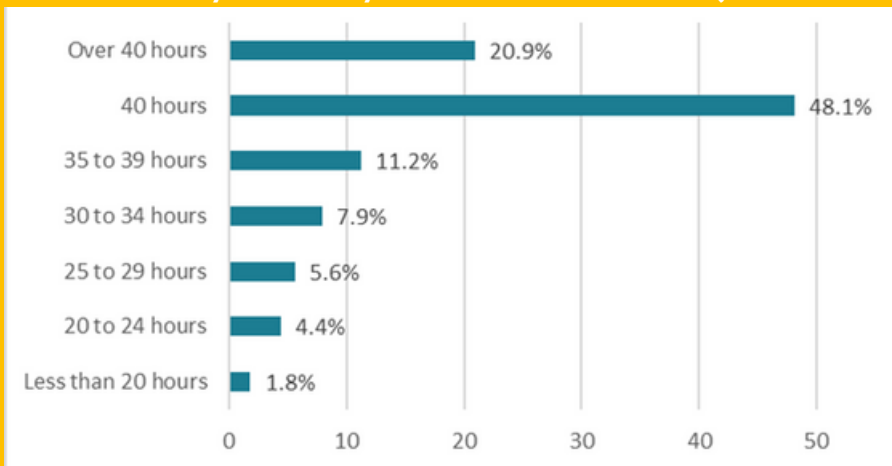
To fill in current gaps in knowledge and provide information for child care policy discussions, the Qualtrics-based 2023 Mississippi Child Care Teacher Wages Survey was administered between July 18, 2023 and August 9, 2023. The survey yielded 661 fully completed responses from Mississippi early childhood teachers. The topics covered in the survey included demographics, wages and benefits, working conditions, workforce stability, reliance on assistance programs, and much more. This brief examines highlights of those survey research findings.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2023 MISSISSIPPI CHILD CARE TEACHERS' WAGES SURVEY

Responding child care teachers are overworked and underprepared.

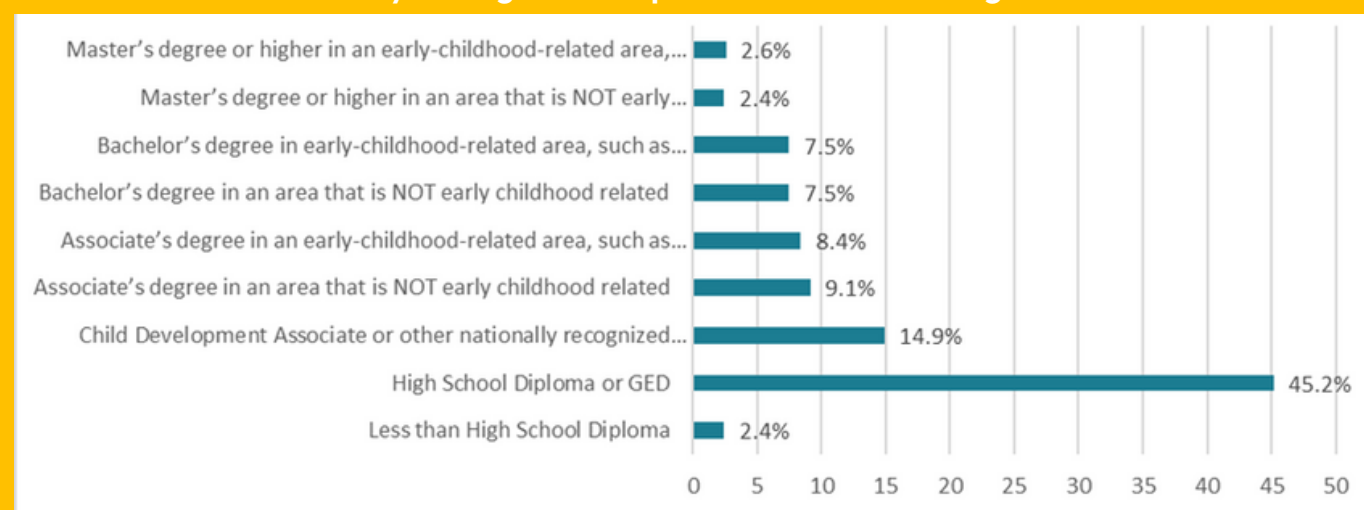
- Child care teachers responding to this survey were most commonly female and working in a center-based facility.
- Almost half (47%) worked with children who have mental, physical, or other disability or delays.
- Respondents worked primarily for center-based facilities (71%), though church-based, home/family-based, and publicly funded (i.e., Head Start, public-school-based, state-funded) facilities were represented as well.

About how many hours per week do you usually work at your current child care job?



Just under 70% of survey respondents reported working 40 hours or more per week.

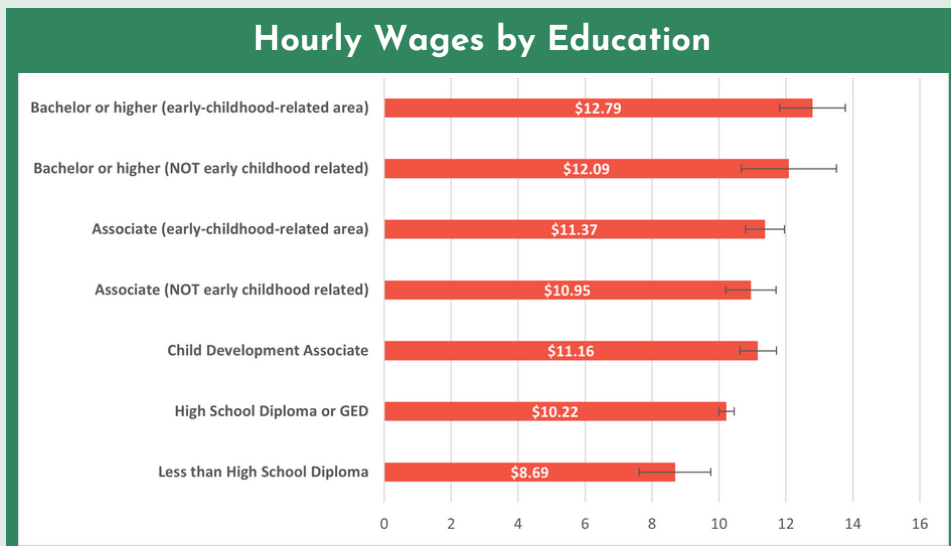
What is your highest completed level of training/education?



Close to half (48%) of survey respondents did not have training beyond high school.

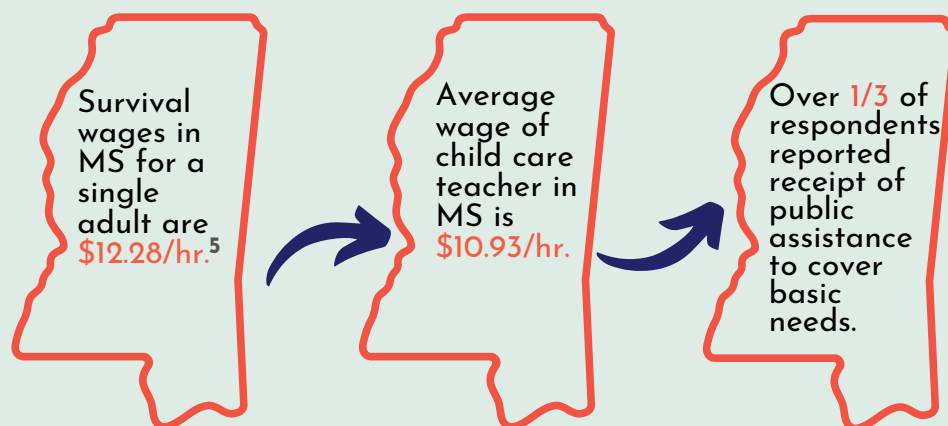
Current child care teacher pay in Mississippi is below "survival wages."

Child care teachers reported an average hourly wage of **\$10.93**, but earnings varied by several factors including job title, geographic location, education/credentials, and child care setting such as home/family-based vs center- or public-based.



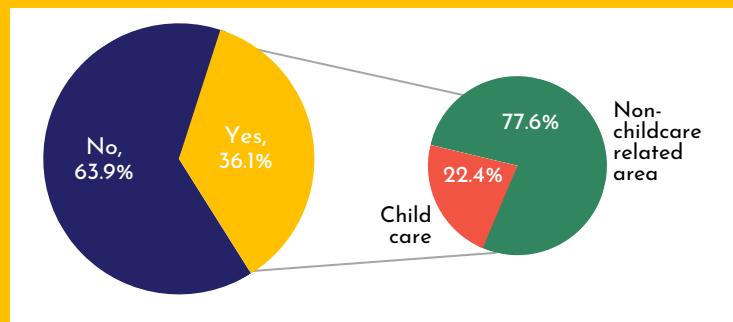
Comparatively, pre-k teachers working for the Mississippi Department of Education start at **\$19.95/hr** with zero years of experience and receive state benefits, though a bachelor's degree is required.

Many retail and fast food jobs requiring only a high school degree pay **\$15.00/hr** or more.



The Mississippi child care workforce is not stable.

In the past three months, have you looked for a new job? If yes, was it a job in child care or an area that is NOT child care related



\$5

A cumulative **57%** of respondents answered that they would consider leaving their current job for a non-child-care-related job for an additional **\$5.00/hr.**



Over one-third (36%) of respondents stated they had looked for a new job within the last three months.

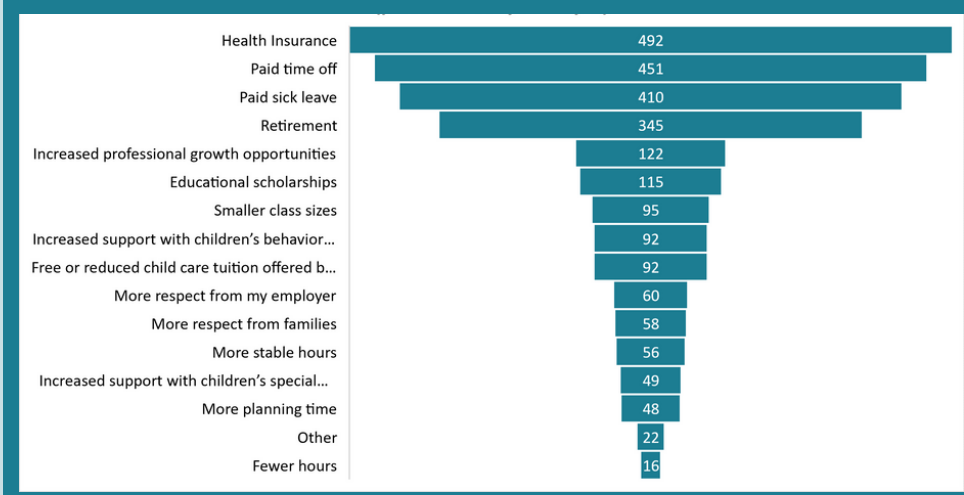
Higher wages and benefits are needed to stabilize the Mississippi child care workforce, incentivize educational advancement, and retain teachers who obtain training through the new Mississippi Quality Support System.

The Mississippi Department of Human Services has been developing, and will soon release, a new Quality Support System of professional development to improve child care teacher knowledge of developmental health promotion. However, without adequate wages to retain qualified staff, child care teachers may continue to seek alternate, less stressful jobs that pay more.

Respondents demonstrate a preference for wage increases over bonuses and use of public assistance.

An additional \$5.00/hr could prevent 57% of respondents from considering a job change.

An additional \$5.00/hr would incentivize 45% of survey respondents to get additional training.



Respondents stated that the most important benefits they can receive are health insurance, paid time off, paid sick leave, and retirement.

SOURCES:

1. *Bipartisan Policy Center. (2021, October 6). Child care in rural America what have we learned?*
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3. *Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2020). Early childhood workforce index 2020: the early childhood educator workforce.*
4. *Center for American Progress. (2022, September 2). The child care sector will continue to struggle hiring staff unless it creates good jobs.*
5. *U.S. Chamber of Commerce. (2020). Untapped potential: How childcare impacts Mississippi's state economy.*
6. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2022). Children in poverty by age group in Mississippi.*
7. *The Heckman Equation Project. (2012). Invest in early childhood development: reduce deficits, strengthen the economy.*

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