



SUSTAINING & ADAPTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Impact of COVID-19 on Early Educators of Color

October 2021

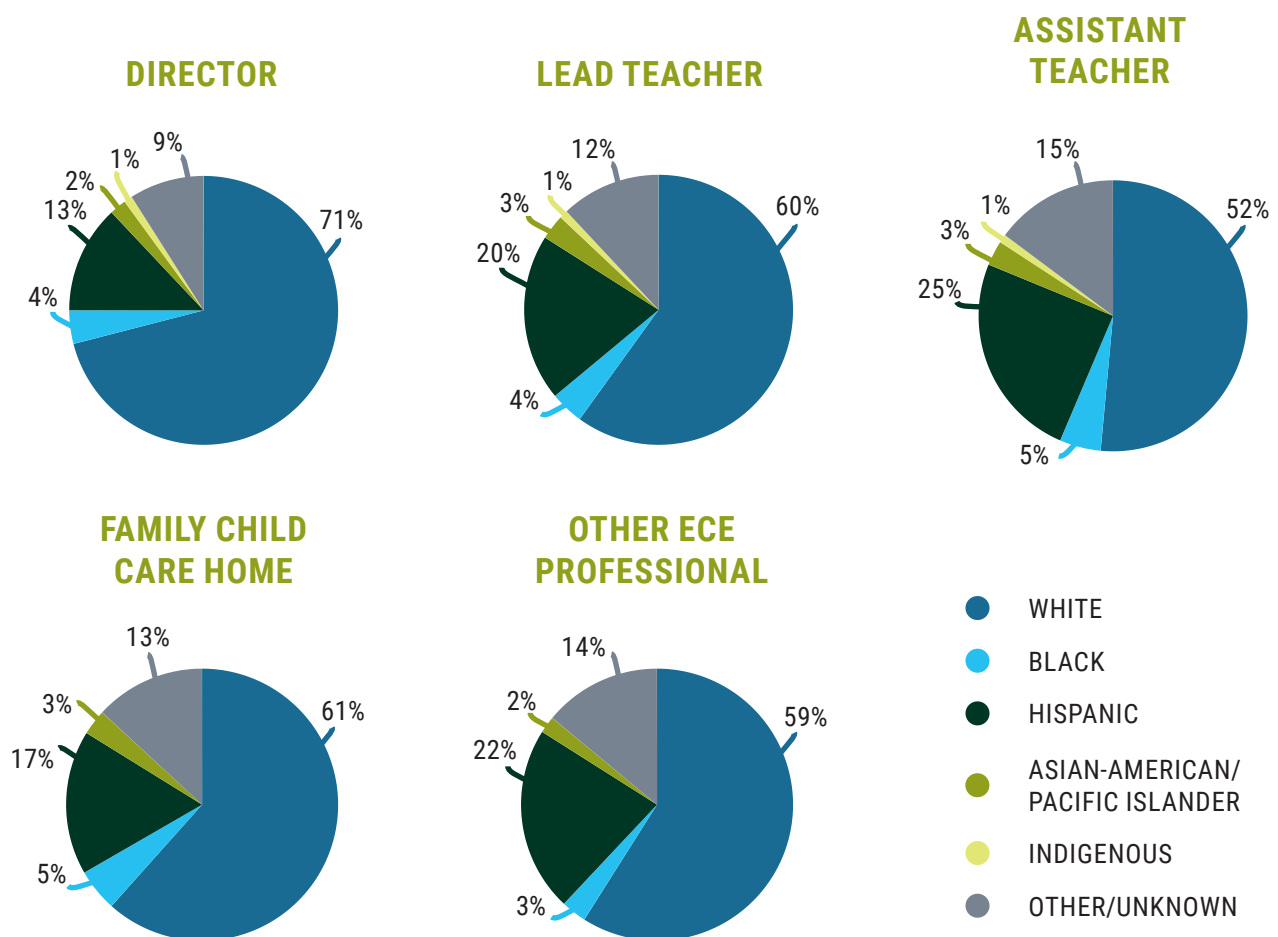


EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

Research by the COVID-19 EC Research Partnership has found that educators of color were particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounding existing disparities in the field. This brief explores unique hardships reported during the second wave of our surveys.¹

43% of Colorado's early childhood education (ECE) professionals in licensed settings identify as people of color.

ECE Role by Race/Ethnicity²



¹ The second wave of the COVID-19 EC Research Partnership workforce survey was completed in March of 2021 and received 4,316 responses.

² LeBoeuf, W. A., Perrin, P., & Kennedy, S. (2020). *Colorado's Early Care and Education Professionals: 2019 Snapshot Report (Report No. 19-02A)*. Denver, Colorado: Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab at the University of Denver.

EMPLOYMENT DISRUPTION

A quarter of ECE professionals who were furloughed or laid off during the pandemic (26%) were out of work for at least four months. Black (33%), Hispanic (29%), and multiracial (64%) educators were more likely to be furloughed for more than three months, compared to their white peers (24%).

“In March I lost all of my jobs in one week...I was left jobless and unable to file for unemployment.”

LEAD TEACHER (IDENTIFIED AS HISPANIC)

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Loss of hours and suspension of raises have been common during the pandemic. One-third of Black educators (32%) had trouble paying bills, compared to 16% of white educators.

“I have to work in-person on two jobs because the district does not pay me enough. I make half of what I paid for my degree.”

LEAD TEACHER (IDENTIFIED AS BLACK)

Nationally, ECE professionals of color earn \$1.70 per hour less than their white peers.³

LACK OF BENEFITS

Many ECE professionals do not have access to benefits offered to their K-12 counterparts, such as paid time off, sick leave, health insurance, and hazard pay. This contributes to high turnover rates and recruitment challenges. Only half of the educators of color surveyed reported having access to sick leave. While 88% of all ECE professionals reported having access to health insurance, Black (32%), Indigenous (26%), and Hispanic (23%) educators were more likely than their white peers (12%) to get health insurance from sources other than an employer, a family member, or the open market (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid).

“I had to quit my job at my old preschool at the end of February 2020, because I was really sick and they wouldn’t let me take any time off.”

ASSISTANT TEACHER/OTHER ROLE
(IDENTIFIED AS HISPANIC)

“No hazard pay... Staff shouldn’t be penalized for not being able come to work because they’re [unable] to find child care for their own children.”

ASSISTANT TEACHER/OTHER ROLE
(IDENTIFIED AS ASIAN-AMERICAN/
PACIFIC ISLANDER)

³ Whitebook, M., Austin, L.J.E., Edward, B., & Chavez, R. (2019). *Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

Looking Ahead

Ensuring Colorado has a stable and qualified ECE workforce is an important challenge facing state and local stakeholders. Below are some strategies that state leaders may consider.

Targeted Recruitment. Families need learning environments that culturally and linguistically represent their communities. Recruiting diverse educators must remain a priority.

Simplified Pathways. Though there are many pathways to an ECE career, navigating them can be a barrier for many candidates. Making sense of different education requirements, certifications, licenses, and programs for attaining them is especially daunting for those who have been historically under-resourced. Stakeholders can invest in expanded apprenticeships, place-based learning, and concurrent enrollment. These have **proven successful** for recruiting diverse candidates in Colorado.

Scholarships & Financial Assistance. Diverse professionals need opportunities to thrive in the ECE field. It is essential that employers and state agencies provide resources to make career advancement more attainable. Scholarships and other financial assistance can reduce barriers that prevent educators of color from pursuing career-advancing credentials.

Career Navigation & Professional Development. Helping diverse candidates with career preparation and navigating complex systems can go a long way toward recruitment and retention. State-level partnerships should continue to innovate programs for career navigation, mentoring, and hands-on professional development.

Compensation & Parity. Low pay and a lack of benefits continue to be key problems in recruiting and retaining quality ECE professionals. COVID-19 recovery funding has created an opportunity for the state to improve compensation across the field. To make ECE careers more attractive to diverse candidates, pay and benefits should be comparable to K-12 positions.

Partners

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Suggested Citation

Thornton, C., Delap, S., Nicolaou, K., & Franko M. (2021) *Sustaining & Adapting During the Pandemic: Impact of COVID-19 on Early Educators of Color*. Denver, Colorado: Early Milestones Colorado.