



Staff Turnover in Child Care Centers:

Maryland 2006

Child care is now a major feature of early childhood for most American children. About 61% of children ages 0-6 (not yet in kindergarten) – or about 12 million youngsters – receive child care on a regular basis from someone other than their parents. The experiences children have in these out-of-home settings can enrich their lives and advance their development. However, poor quality care can be detrimental to the development of social and cognitive skills, not to mention being unpleasant, sometimes even dangerous, for the child and unreliable for the parent and employer.

One of the most significant factors in determining the quality of care is staffing. Staff training and experience contribute to quality, as does a less obvious factor – consistency of care. Young children form bonds with child care providers, and it is within these relationships that social, emotional, and cognitive development can occur.

2005 responses

The free responses offered by respondents to the 2005 MCC turnover survey illustrate the complexity and range of experience represented by the wage and turnover statistics.

“It is very hard to find caring and qualified staff. Better pay and training options might help.”

“It is hard to get the good candidates to come to work as an assistant with the pay so little.”

“The turnover affected the quality of my programs. It is difficult to find qualified and committed providers.”

Recent findings about brain development confirm the importance of consistency in early care. According to Edward L. Schor, MD, FAAP, “Children need individualized responses. If the caregivers are watching too many children, the child is not getting enough attention; if the child has too many different caregivers, he or she is not getting enough consistency.” Consistency and individual attention are so important, Dr Schor says, because “learning takes place within the context of relationships. The primary relationship is most often the parent, but many children spend most of their waking hours in the care of someone other than a parent. That relationship has to be a good one too.” When staff turnover rates are high, it is unlikely that children will experience the predictable, nurturing relationships that foster healthy development.

In addition, high staff turnover impinges on the smooth functioning and financial stability of child care centers. As in any business, it is costly and stressful to have high staff turnover. High turnover increases costs for recruitment, hiring, and training. It increases stress and workload for remaining employees. And, given State requirements for child/staff ratios, it puts constant pressure on the directors of child care centers to maintain sufficient staff to meet State regulations.

In an effort to monitor these concerns, Maryland Committee for Children (MCC) conducts periodic surveys of child care centers in the state to measure the extent of the turnover problem and to explore its impact on the quality of care. In June, 2005, MCC mailed questionnaires to 2,098 full-time centers and school-age programs. Responses were received from 362 (17%) of the centers. The workforce employed by the 362 responding centers numbered 3,477, as of January 1, 2004. In the ensuing year (January 1 through December 31, 2004), 1,140 members (33%) of this child care workforce left their positions.

The turnover rate of 33% reported by the 2005 respondents in Maryland is somewhat higher than the 29% turnover rate reported in 2003. This increase is consistent with research indicating that turnover continues to rise nationwide.

As shown in Table 1, the greatest turnover (43 %) occurred in the teacher assistant/aide group. This is the same group that had the highest turnover rate in the previous survey.

In 2005, 33% of the child care workforce left their positions. The greatest turnover (43%) occurred in the teacher assistant/aide group – those who have the most contact with children.

Table 1: Total Staff and Exiting Staff at Responding Child Care Centers

Staff Level	Number of employees at start nationwide of year	Number of employees that left during the year	Number of departing staff that stayed in child care *	Number of departing staff that left child care *
Director	400	79 (20%)	33 (42%)	45 (57%)
Senior Staff/Group Leaders	1,732	481 (28%)	197 (41%)	261 (54%)
Teachers Assistant/Aide	1,345	580 (43%)	154 (27%)	320 (55%)
Total Staff	3,477	1,140 (33%)	384 (34%)	626 (55%)

Source: survey conducted by Maryland Committee for Children, June 2005 *Did not receive responses to stayed/didn't stay in child care from all respondents.

“My staff hardly makes enough to survive, yet we’re credentialed, MMSR trained, and dedicated to our communities’ children.”

“I cannot hire the quality of staff I would like because I cannot afford to pay them what they deserve.”

“Many qualified people leave the industry due to low pay, benefits and an overall lack of appreciation and respect from parents and employers.”

“Aides drift in and out. We can’t pay them enough to make the job worthwhile and they don’t like what they have to do.”

Surveys from 152 centers (42% of responding centers) indicated that compensation was a significant factor in the decision of employees to leave their jobs. This was the same percentage as the 2003 survey. Respondents were asked to indicate which aspects of compensation played a role in turnover. Wages ranked highest in this regard, followed by other concerns:

- 139 centers cited wages as an issue in turnover;
- 78 centers cited health benefits;
- 29 centers cited paid leave; and
- 12 centers cited various other concerns.

Not all staff turnover was attributed to compensation. Surveys from 123 centers (34% of responding centers) reported that compensation was not a factor in turnover. These centers cited as reasons for turnover: returning to school, relocation of spouse’s career, moved, pursuit of other interests, and changes in family status.

Centers reported that staff turnover affected their child care programs in various ways:

- 105 respondents reported that staff turnover led to the hiring of replacement staff with less work experience;
- 97 respondents reported that staff turnover caused changes in the quality of their program;
- 69 respondents reported that staff turnover led to the hiring of replacement staff with less educational attainment;

- 82 respondents reported that staff turnover forced a change in program structure;
- 39 respondents reported that staff turnover caused a decrease in the number of children enrolled;
- 47 respondents reported that staff turnover forced a reduction in the number of activities offered for the children; and
- 2 respondents reported that staff turnover led to a loss of the program’s accreditation.

The 2005 survey addressed the level of credentialing among the center staff. Of the 358 centers that responded to this question, 57% of the centers reported that they had staff with an Office of Child Care (OCC) credential. More than 90% of the responding centers also indicated that if the OCC bonus amounts were doubled or made annual, there would be an increase in the number of staff with an OCC credential.*

Of the 97 centers that reported that the turnover caused the quality of their care to change, about 70% of them reported that the turnover facilitated an improvement in quality. Based on available data, it is not possible to know with any certainty the cause(s) for this unexpected finding.

* Since this survey was completed, OCC has annualized the bonus for providers who qualify for the upper levels of the credential.



Only 18 occupations out of 770 surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2003 reported having lower mean wages than child care workers.

Those who earned higher wages than child care workers included service station attendants, bicycle repairers, and locker room attendants.

The centers reporting an improvement in quality were split in their response to whether compensation was a factor in turnover – with 42% saying compensation was a factor and 58% said it was not a factor. Anecdotal evidence from the free comments suggests that, when compensation was not a factor, employees were leaving for personal reasons such as health issues or a decision to return to school. This group of workers might include those with lower skill levels, with little commitment to the child care field, or little work ethic (the latter being a common complaint voiced in the free comments). Turnover in workers such as these would, as one respondent put it, present the center with the opportunity to “prune deadwood.”

Conversely, at centers reporting a decline in quality, compensation was cited as an issue in about 20 to 25 centers. In these cases, well-qualified or skilled staff may have left with the expectation of better pay in another job/field.

Annual Wage Rate Information

Public School Teacher Salary Average (MD)	\$52,330
Nonpublic School Teacher Average (Maryland)	\$43,164
Family Child Care Provider (Maryland)	\$24,891
Child Care Center Director (Maryland)	\$30,438
Center Senior Staff/Teacher (Maryland)	\$21,470
Center Aide (Maryland)	\$14,850

Sources: MSDE, Oct 2004; Association of Independent Maryland Schools (AIMS), 2005-06 school year, and MCC's 2005 Statewide Survey of Family Child Care Providers and Child Care Centers.



Recipient of the Standards of Excellence Award in 2003

Conclusion

The 2005 turnover survey reconfirms the belief – already widely accepted – that child care is troubled by a high staff turnover rate and that one of the reasons for this high rate is under-compensation. Reference to other job categories sets these facts in high relief.

The Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) reports that child care workers have a higher concentration of poverty-level jobs than almost any other occupation in the United States. CCW notes that only 18 occupations out of 770 surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2003 reported having lower mean wages than child care workers. Those who earned higher wages included service station attendants, bicycle repairers, and locker room attendants. This results in a national turnover rate of 30% for child care workers, which compares to 6% for public school teachers, 7% for nurses, and 11% for hairdressers.

An annual report issued by the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, Child Care Demographics, tracks the compensation of child care providers in Maryland. In the 2006 edition, Demographics reports that the average annual income for directors of child care centers was \$30,438. For senior staff and teachers, it was \$21,470. And for aides, it was \$14,850.

Taken together, the evidence is clear that the high turnover rate is not good for children, their parents, or the child care centers. The children suffer as their emotional well-being and cognitive development are negatively affected by a revolving door of caretakers. Parents are affected by knowing that both the quality and reliability of their child's care is less than optimum. And center directors and owners struggle to provide high quality care, meet state standards for staff/child ratios, and do it all at the bottom of the salary scale.



MARYLAND
COMMITTEE
FOR
CHILDREN

Maryland Committee for Children
608 Water Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202-4079
Phone: 410-752-7588
www.mdchildcare.org

Maryland Committee for Children, Inc. (MCC) a private, non-profit organization founded in 1945, is an advocate and catalyst for the development of a strong system of quality child care, early education and family support on a local, state, and national level.