

FISCAL POLICY NOTES

NEW NATIONAL REPORT OFFERS SOBERING LOOK AT TRENDS IN NEW YORK'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Qualifications Decline Among Early Childhood Education Workers with Less One-Fourth Now Having College Degrees. Low Pay and Benefits Lie Behind Decline. Educational Quality in Jeopardy.

Since the early 1980s, there has been a large and unsettling dip in the qualifications of the early childhood education workers in New York. The share of New York early childhood educators working in child care centers with at least a four-year college degree fell from 42% in 1980 to 32% in 1990 to 23% in 2000, according to a comprehensive new report published today by the Economic Policy Institute, the Keystone Research Center, and the Foundation for Child Development.

In this report, *Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education*, researchers Stephen Herzenberg, Mark Price and David Bradley analyze data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys for 1979 through 2004 and decennial Census for 1980, 1990, and 2000. The report looks at three groups of Early Childhood Education (ECE) workers: (1) all workers in child care centers (center-based workers), (2) a subset consisting of just administrators and teachers in child care centers (center-based administrators and teachers) and (3) home-based workers. **As part of the study, separate briefing papers were prepared for New York and six other states. The New York briefing paper and the other components of the study are available at www.epi.org.**

The national report finds that declining qualifications have resulted, in part, from persistently low wages and benefits. As more educated women have enjoyed expanded opportunities in other fields, low pay has made it hard for the early childhood education field to hold onto experienced teachers with proper training and educational background. As a result, more teachers are entering ECE without a college degree.

The authors emphasize that these educational trends can reduce the effectiveness of ECE programs and the long-term academic outcomes of preschool children nationwide.

"To succeed in school and life, children need quality early education. But some of them clearly are not getting it," said Herzenberg, executive director of the Keystone Research Center in Harrisburg, Pa. "Although some states have high-quality preschool, we're losing ground in center-based ECE overall. Students and the community as a whole will ultimately pay the price for low teacher quality."

Some of the major findings of the New York report are:

- The share of NY center-based ECE workers with at least a four-year college degree fell from 42% in 1980 to 32% in 1990 to 23% in 2000. Over this same period, the share of workers with a college degree in all industries moved in the opposite direction, increasing from 22% to 33%. *See Figure A.*
- The share of center-based ECE workers with a high school education or less rose from less than 32% in 1980 to 35% in 1990 and up to 44% in 2000. *See Figure B.*

MORE

- Education levels of center-based ECE workers fell in two New York metropolitan areas between 1990 and 2000 --- New York City and the Nassau-Suffolk.¹ *See Figure C.*
- The median pay for center-based ECE workers was about \$9.50 per hour --- some \$20,000 per year for a full-time worker.
- More than a third of center-based ECE workers had family incomes below 200% of the poverty line, roughly the minimum necessary to pay for basic necessities without public assistance. *See Figure D.*
- Just 36% of center-based ECE workers received health care through their jobs. *See Figure E.*

Home-based early childhood educators (for whom consistent data exist only since 2000) have even lower education levels than those who are center-based.

- Currently only one in ten home-based early childhood educators has a college degree. *See Figure F.*
- Less than 40% of home-based ECE teachers have any education beyond high school. *See Figure F.*

For the ECE center-based administrators and teachers in New York, the study found:

- While the share of these New York workers with a college degree is much higher than the national average (50% vs. 30%, second only to Pennsylvania in the 39 states covered in the national study) --- New York has lost ground since 1980 when 60% of these educators had college degrees. *See Figure G.*
- While median hourly wages for teachers and administrators was the highest in the nation (\$12.53 in 2000-2004) it was still only 60% of the \$21.05 median wage of all female college graduates for this same period.

The lack of educational standards is one problem. In addition, some ECE educators are stuck at the bottom of the barrel in terms of wages and quality of life,” said co-author Mark Price, a Keystone labor economist.

The New York briefing book takes a special look at the impact of the New York’s the universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) program that together with the smaller experimental pre-K program now serves about 30% of the four-year olds in New York State. About half of New York’s 60,000 pre-K students are served by center-based programs whose teachers were included in this study while half are taught in school-based programs whose teachers were not a part of the study’s sample. The authors found that center-based teacher and administrator educational levels have eroded further since the expansion of UPK (a nine percentage point drop in the share with a college degree between 1994-1998 and 2000-2003) suggesting that perhaps better paying school-based UPK may be draining more educated teachers out of center-based programs. While cautioning that the data need to be interpreted cautiously, the authors suggest that these indicators underscore the limits to the progress possible from improvements in the quality and work-force standards in one part of ECE (such as UPK) without complementary policies to address industry-wide compensation and workforce challenges.

“Our current policy is penny wise but pound foolish,” said co-author David Bradley, now a policy analyst with the State Fiscal Project at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, DC. “Society can’t afford not to pay more for well-qualified ECE teachers. We need public investment to turn around these

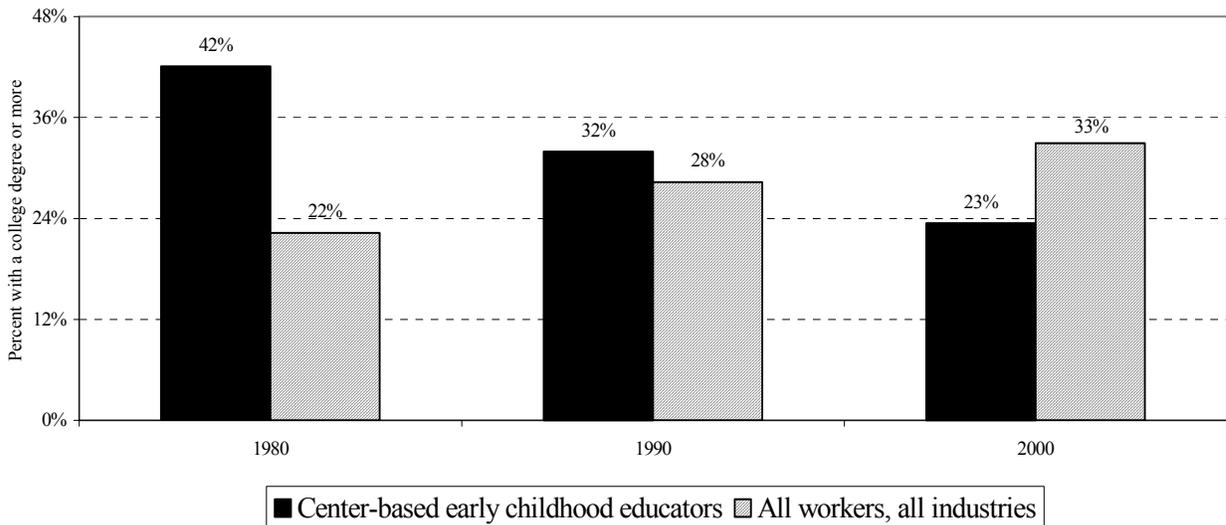
¹ Education levels of ECE workers fell in Buffalo, Rochester and Albany metropolitan areas and increased in Syracuse but these changes were not statistically significant.

trends, improve early childhood education across the board, and deliver benefits that research demonstrates will far exceed the cost.”

To view the complete national report, *Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education*, the executive summary, the seven state reports and the 39-state data table, please visit Economic Policy Institute (www.epi.org), the Foundation for Child Development (<http://www.fcd-us.org/>) or the Keystone Research Center (www.keystoneresearch.org or www.earlychildhoodworkforce.com).

FIGURE A

The decline in college degree attainment of New York center-based ECE workers, 1980-2000.



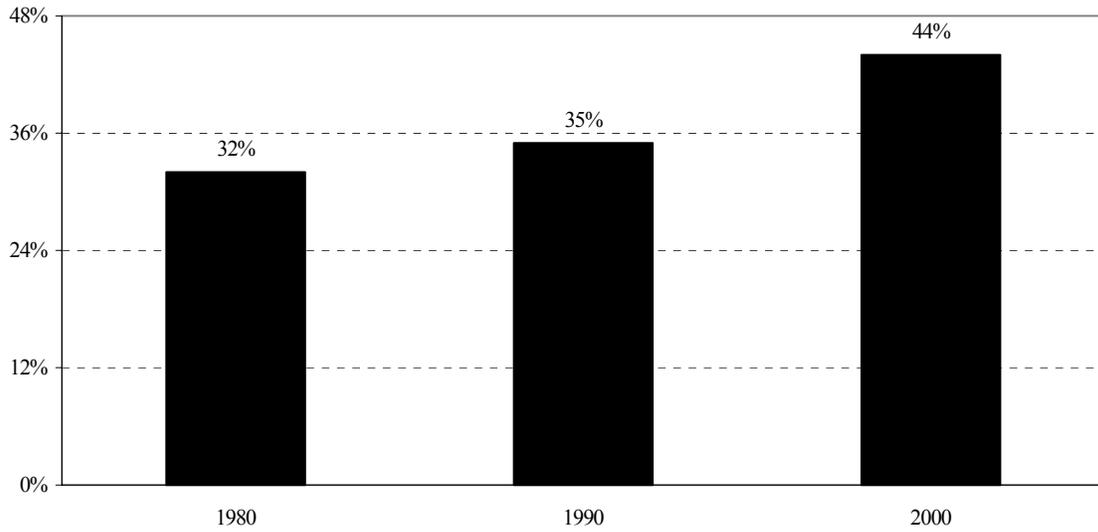
Note: The differences between the share of center-based early childhood educators in 2000 and the same shares in 1980 and 1990 are significant at the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of the Census

MORE

FIGURE B

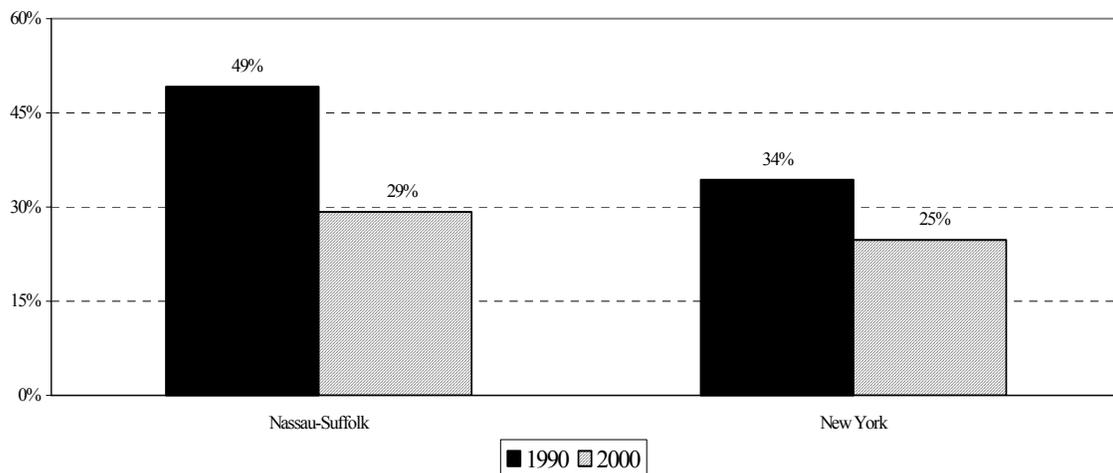
The increase in share of New York center-based ECE workers with a high school education or less, 1980-2000.



Source: KRC analysis of the Census

FIGURE C

The decline in the share of center-based early childhood educators with a college degree in New York City and Nassau-Suffolk metropolitan areas, 1990-2000.

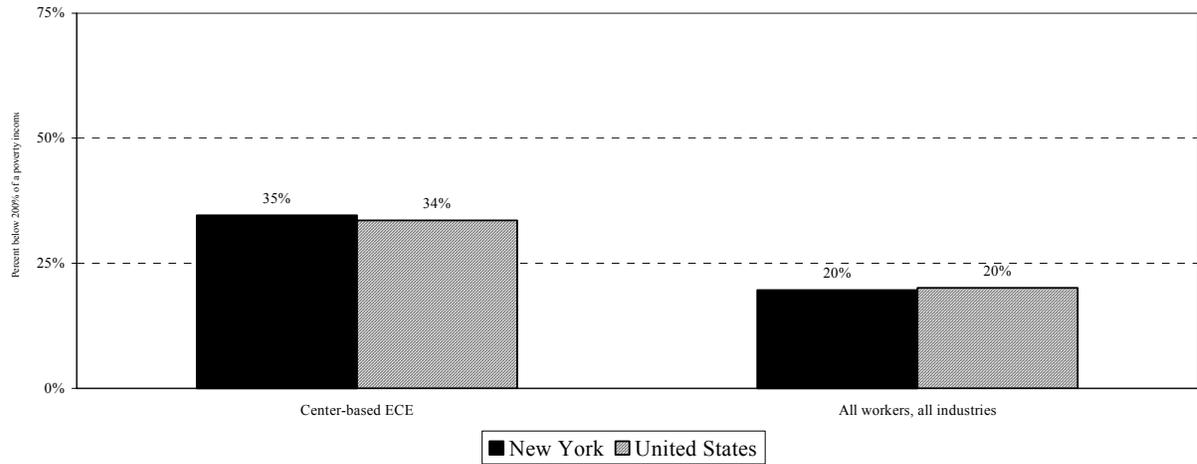


Note: The change between 1990 and 2000 in the percentage of center-based educators with a college degree is significant at the 1% level in Nassau-Suffolk and New York City. The differences over time in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Dutchess Co. are not significant.

Source: KRC analysis of the Census.

FIGURE D

A large share of New York's ECE workforce lives below 200% of a poverty income, 2000.

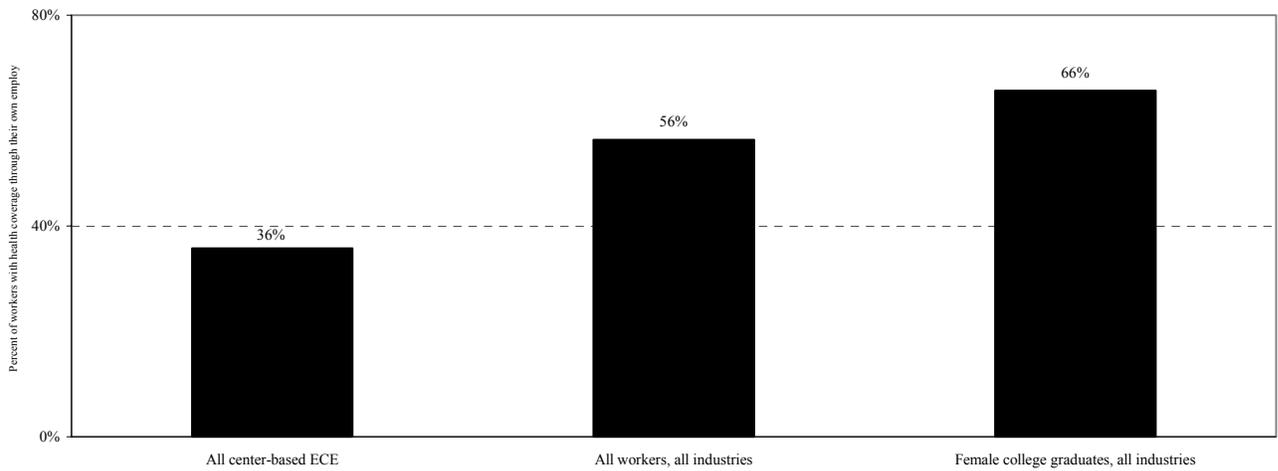


Note: The differences between the share of all workers living below 200% of the poverty threshold and the shares of center-based ECE workers with incomes below 200% of the threshold is significant at the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of the Census.

FIGURE E

Smaller share of New York ECE workers receive health coverage through their own employer than other workers, 2000-04.

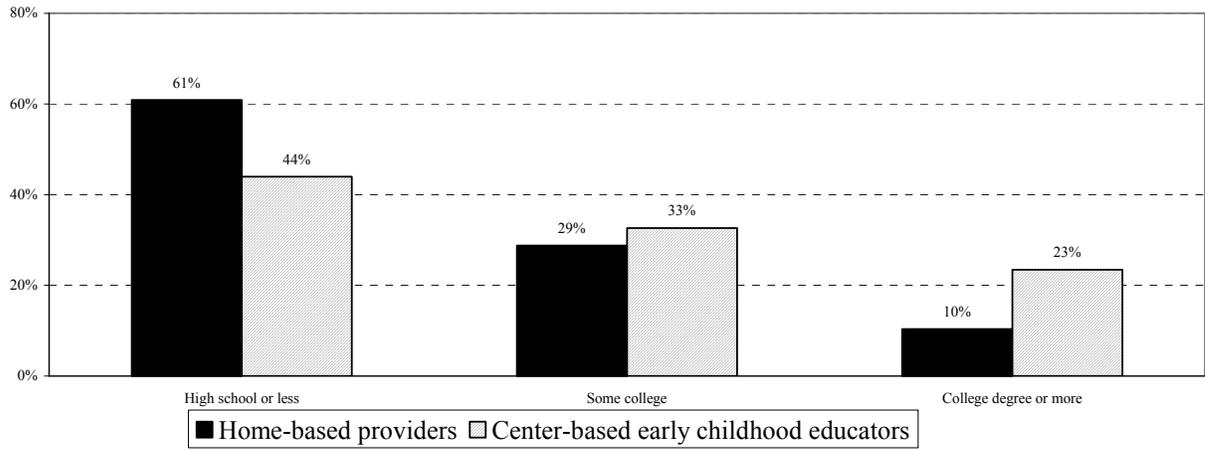


Note: The differences in the share of center-based educators and staff with health coverage through their own employer and the same share of all workers and female college graduates is significant at the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of March CPS.

FIGURE F

Education levels lower in New York home-based ECE than in center-based, 2000-04.

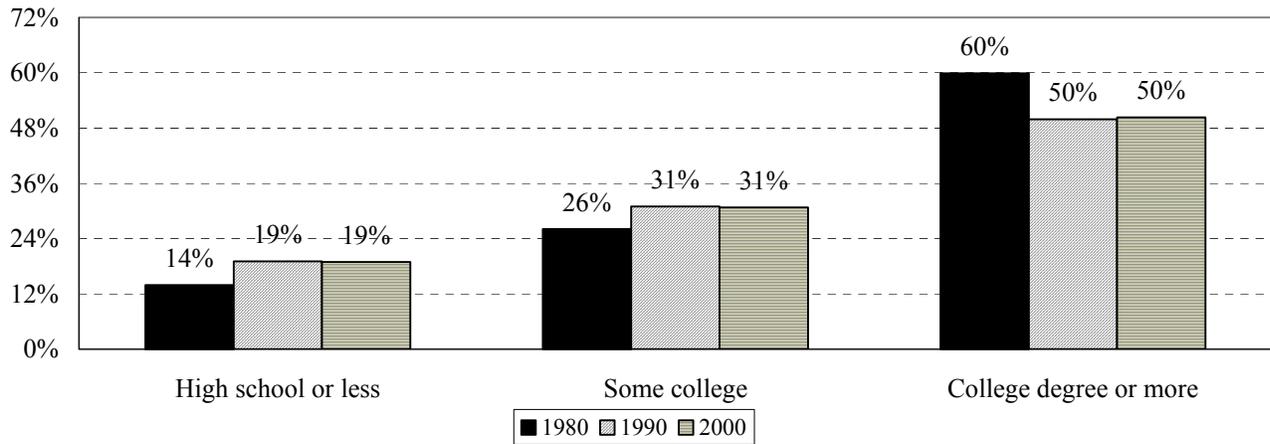


Note: The differences between the share of center-based early childhood educators and home-based providers at each level of education are significant at the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of the Census.

FIGURE G

The decline in educational attainment of New York center-based ECE teachers and administrators with a college degree.



Note: The differences between 1980 and 2000 in the share of teachers and administrators with a college degree or more, some college and a high school degree or less are significant at the 1, 5 and, 10% level, respectively. None of the changes in educational attainment between 1990 and 2000 are statistically significant.

Source: KRC analysis of the Census.