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### **Retention in the Early Childhood Workforce**

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The shortage of teachers in Colorado is no secret. Students enrolling in teaching programs across the state have dropped by over 300 people between the 2018-19 and the 2019-20 school years. There has also been a decline in the number of teachers engaging in alternative licensure programs. While this data, provided by the Colorado Sun, is speaking to all grade levels. The shortage of professionals in education is just as apparent in early childhood. There are numerous reasons why people may choose to avoid, or leave, early childhood education. There are just as many reasons why they choose to stay.

Retention is a large concern with early childhood professionals across the state, including Chaffee County. Between February 2021 to March 2022, Chaffee County early childhood directors report a 40% turnover rate. Moreover, all directors have expressed difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. Lack of retention immediately creates short-staffed programs, but it also creates long-term difficulties. Jingzi ‘Ginny’ Huang, Ph. D, Associate Dean University of Northern Colorado states “If the retention does not look good, it would deter new teachers, new people, from getting into the profession.” We don’t tend to enter situations that have been demonstrated as undesirable.

In general, teachers don’t go into education for money. The pay for early childhood educators is even more dismal, creating a situation in which professionals often cannot afford to stay. In February 2022, the median sale price for a home in Chaffee County was \$605,000. An



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early childhood workforce survey, conducted in 2017, shows the average pay for an early childhood professional at \$29,869, with directors averaging \$38,938 and assistant teachers reporting \$23,275. While these reports are separated by 5 years, the change in wages has been minimal. With this discrepancy, it is not surprising that many leave the field for areas that are more affordable or fields with better compensation.

With low pay and constant turnover, why would anyone want to work in this field? Several reasons, one of which is intrinsic motivation. Professionals that choose to stay in early childhood report that they enjoy working with students and families. They believe that affecting the lives of young children far outweighs the negative aspects. This belief that they are making a difference sustains many professionals.

A sense of community also plays a part. Individuals that stay, feel they belong, and are valued. This can be fostered through professional development and mentoring programs. Program directors must also have access to professional development as workers cite high-quality management and working conditions as reasons they stay.

Many local early childhood workers also feel a sense of obligation to the families in the community. They see a need and want to be part of the solution. Some professionals see that many around them are leaving, possibly for the reasons mentioned above, and they don't want to add to this trend. They are committed to continuing to provide this service to the community despite the difficulties.

In the end, early childhood matters. Children practice many developmental skills ranging from social/emotional to physical. They learn to interact with others, follow directions, and participate in routines, all of which are important skills as they grow. The United States



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Department of Education also states, “Children who attend high-quality preschool programs are less likely to utilize special education services or be retained in their grade, and are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers than those who have not attended high-quality preschool programs.” There are 931 children under the age of 5 residing in Chaffee County and 63 professionals working in early childhood programs and home childcare. There are clearly not enough professionals to adequately serve these children. With the future of our children at stake, we must find a solution.

<https://coloradosun.com/2022/06/07/colorado-education-teacher-shortages-schools-teacher-pipeline/>

For more information about support for early childhood professionals visit [www.ccecc.org](http://www.ccecc.org).