

# California Early Care and Education Workforce Study:

**Licensed Child Care Centers  
and Family Child Care  
Providers**

**Merced County  
Highlights, August 2006**

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Recognizing the critical role that early childhood educators play in the lives of children and families, First 5 California commissioned in 2004 a statewide and regional study of California's early care and education (ECE) workforce in licensed child care centers and licensed family child care homes. The overall goal of the study was to collect information on the current characteristics of this workforce—particularly its educational background, and its potential needs for further professional development. This study provides a baseline for measuring future progress toward attaining a well-educated and diverse ECE workforce; it does not, however, assess teachers' and providers' overall knowledge and skills, or the content of training and coursework they have completed.

First 5 California sought statewide information about licensed family child care providers and about teachers, assistant teachers and directors employed in licensed child care centers, as well as regional comparisons with respect to demographics and child care supply. The statewide study sample included providers and center staff from every county in

the state, but there were not sufficient numbers of providers in the sample to generate county-specific reports. Counties were invited, however, to contract for additional local interviews in order to build a representative sample, and First 5 Merced County agreed to commission a local study of its early care and education workforce, building on the statewide study.<sup>1</sup>

The survey population included the 406 active licensed homes and 73 active licensed centers in Merced County, serving children from birth to five years, that were listed as of January 2004 with state-funded child care resource and referral agencies. These lists were updated in 2005 before interviews began. The Field Research Corporation, Inc., collected data from 156 licensed family child care homes and 32 centers, using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) system. Family child care interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, and center interviews were conducted with the director in English. For more information about methodology, see the full study reports at the First 5 California website, <http://www/ccfc.ca.gov>.

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<sup>1</sup> Eight other counties (Alameda, Los Angeles, Marin, Mono, Sacramento, San Francisco, Santa Barbara and Santa Clara) contracted for county-specific studies of their licensed child care homes and centers. These study reports are available at the First 5 California website, <http://www.ccfc.ca.gov>.

## Who are the providers, teachers, assistant teachers and directors in Merced County’s licensed child care homes and centers?

Merced County’s ECE workforce includes approximately 1,097 people, predominantly female, who educate and care for about 6,165 infants (birth to age 2) and/or preschoolers (ages 2-5, pre-kindergarten). This workforce includes about 406 providers and 109 paid assistants in licensed family child care homes, and 327 teachers, 184 assistant teachers and 71 directors in licensed child care centers.

### *Age and Tenure*

The typical licensed family child care provider is in her early forties, and has been taking care of children in her home for nearly 8 years; 8% are age 29 or younger, and 14% are age 55 or older. Average tenure is 13 years for providers licensed to care for 14 children, and 6 years for those licensed for 8 children.

Center teachers and assistants are younger, on average, than providers, and have typically been on the job for less than five years.

### *Teacher Wages and Staff Turnover*

Among ECE center staff, wages are low and job turnover is high, particularly among directors:

- Average annual salary for centers’ highest-paid teachers with a BA or higher degree is \$31,117, nearly \$28,422 less than that of the average Merced County elementary school teacher, who typically works a shorter year and earns better benefits.
- Average wage for centers’ highest-paid assistant teachers is \$9.32 per hour.
- Annual ECE teacher turnover (14%) is somewhat higher than that of California public school K-12 teachers (11%) (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). ECE assistant teacher turnover is at 18%, and director turnover 26%, per year.

The study did not collect data about family child care provider earnings.

### *Ethnicity*

Merced County’s ECE workforce is ethnically diverse, far more closely reflecting the ethnic distribution of the county’s young children than K-12 public school teachers. Family child care providers, teachers and assistant teachers are more likely than directors to be women of color. Centers holding a contract with the California Department of Education (CDE) or Head Start typically employ the most ethnically diverse staff.

### *Language*

Family child care providers were asked whether they could speak fluently with children and families in a language other than English; directors were asked whether they or any of their teachers or assistant teachers could do so. Our

Table 1. *Age and Tenure of Center-Based Teachers and Assistant Teachers*

	Teachers	Assistant Teachers
29 or younger	29%	33%
50 or older	10%	16%
Employed at center 5 years or more	43%	33%

**Table 2. Ethnicity of Merced County ECE Workforce, K-12 Teachers and Children Birth to Five**

	Family Child Care Providers	Center Teachers	Assistant Teachers	Directors	K-12 Teachers	Children 0-5 Years
White, Non-Hispanic	32%	35%	30%	52%	75%	25%
Latina	53%	52%	60%	35%	18%	64%
African American	8%	5%	3%	0%	2%	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%	2%	3%	7%	4%	5%
Other	6%	6%	4%	7%	1%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

description of language ability is based on these reports. Further, directors' reports did not permit us to assess whether staff who spoke a language other than English also spoke English fluently.

Licensed family child care providers, and assistant teachers in centers, are more linguistically diverse than the Merced County adult population, 57% of whom speak English only (U.S. Census Bureau,

2000). Providers (50%), teachers (53%), and assistant teachers (57%) are the most likely, and directors (30%) are the least likely, to be able to communicate fluently with children and families in a language other than English. Eighty-four percent of centers employ at least one teacher, 75% employ at least one assistant, and 35% employ at least one director, with such language ability. After English, Spanish is the language most commonly spoken.

### **What are the characteristics of children served by California's licensed family child care providers and child care centers licensed to serve infants and/or preschoolers?**

Licensed family child care programs in Merced County serve approximately 2,138 children, and licensed centers serve approximately 4,030 children, from birth to age five.

#### *Family Child Care*

- 67% of children are not yet in kindergarten.
- 40% of children are age 2 or younger.
- 68% of providers care for at least one child receiving public child care subsidy.
- 19% of providers care for at least one child with special needs.

#### *Centers*

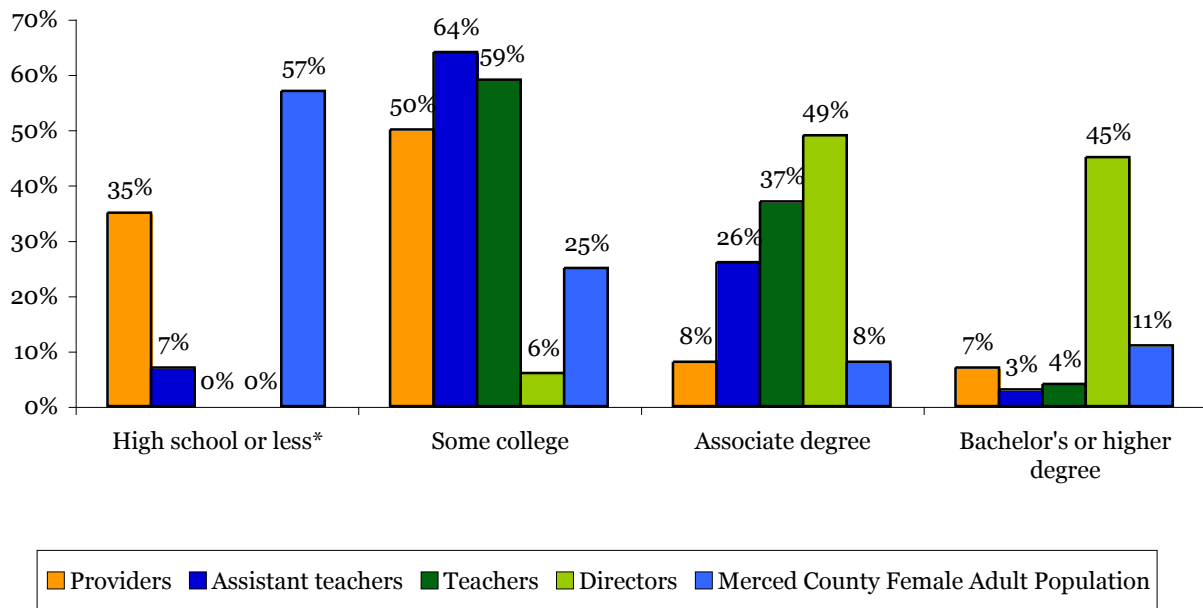
- 62% of children in centers licensed to serve infants and/or preschoolers are between the ages of 3 and 5.
- 81% of centers care for at least one child receiving public subsidy, either through a contract with CDE or Head Start (53%) or a voucher (28%).
- 52% of centers care for at least one child with special needs.

## What is the level of educational attainment and early childhood development-related training for California’s ECE workforce?

Educational requirements vary for the California ECE workforce, depending on whether they work in licensed homes or centers, and whether centers hold a contract with CDE or Head Start. Licensed family child providers are required only to complete 15 hours of non-credit training on preventive health practices, whereas teachers and directors in licensed centers, but not assistants, must complete 12 college credits of early childhood education. In centers holding contracts with CDE, teachers and directors are required to complete 24 credits of early childhood education and 16 credits of general education at the college level, and directors must also complete at least 8 credits related to administration.

Reflecting these requirements, center staff have attained higher levels of education than family child care providers, but on average, both family child care providers and center staff exceed state requirements. Compared to Merced County’s overall adult female population, center teachers are slightly less likely and center directors more likely to have completed a bachelor’s or higher degree, and licensed family child care providers and assistant teachers are more likely to have attended college and/or completed an associate degree. Eighty percent of centers employ no teachers with a BA or higher degree.

Figure 1. *Estimated Educational Attainment of the ECE Workforce Compared to Merced County’s Female Adult Population*



\*Because of the wording of the questionnaire, some assistant teachers in this category may have taken college credits unrelated to ECE.  
 Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

## ***ECE-Related Degrees and Foreign Degrees***

### *Family Child Care Providers*

- 21% of licensed family child care providers with an associate degree or higher hold a degree related to early childhood education.
- 27% of providers with a bachelor's degree earned the degree from a foreign institution.

### *Center-Based Teachers*

- 20% of center-based teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher, and 84% of teachers with an associate degree, hold a degree related to early childhood education.
- 17% of teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher earned the degree from a foreign institution.

## **How do levels of overall educational attainment, and training related to early childhood development, vary among members of the ECE workforce?**

Levels of education among teachers vary by age. Among teachers and providers, educational levels also vary by ethnicity and language; and among centers by the ages of children served and centers' public subsidy status.

### ***Variation by Age, Ethnicity and Language***

*Age.* Family child care providers' educational backgrounds do not vary by age. In contrast, more center teachers with BA or higher degrees are age 50 or older (25%) than teachers with AA degrees (16%) or teachers with less education (5%).

*Ethnicity.*<sup>2</sup> White, Non-Hispanic teachers and providers, compared to the ethnic distribution of their counterparts in the ECE workforce as a whole, have attained a BA degree or more at a higher rate. Latina teachers and providers, however, compared to the ethnic

distribution of their counterparts in the ECE workforce as a whole, have attained a BA degree or more at a lower rate.

- White, Non-Hispanics comprise 38% of all licensed family child care providers, and 40% of providers with a AA or higher; they comprise 35% of all center-based teachers, and 67% of teachers with a BA or higher.
- Latinas comprise 62% of all providers and 60% of providers with a BA or higher; they comprise 51% of all teachers, but 0% of teachers with a BA or higher.

Compared to Merced County adults of their ethnicity (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), Latina and White, Non-Hispanic licensed providers have attained a BA or higher degree at a lower rate, while Latina and White, Non-Hispanic teachers attained a BA or higher degree at a lower rate:

- Among Latinas/Latinos: 6 % of providers, 0% of teachers, and 4% of Merced County adults have a BA or higher.

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<sup>2</sup> Because of sample size among other ethnic groups, our analysis focuses only on Latina and White, Non-Hispanic providers.

- Among White, Non-Hispanics: 6% of providers, 9% of teachers, and 17% of Merced County adults have a BA or higher.

### ***Variation by Ages of Children Served and by Public Funding Status***

The most significant variations along these dimensions are the following:

#### *Age of Children Served*

- In centers serving both infants and preschoolers, 0% of teachers have a BA degree or higher; in centers serving preschoolers only, 9% of teachers have such a degree.
- There are no differences in educational level among providers serving children of different ages.

#### *Public Funding Status*

- In centers with a CDE or Head Start contract, 3% of teachers have a BA or higher; in centers receiving public subsidy through vouchers, 5% have such a degree; in centers receiving no public subsidy, 9%.
- There are no differences in educational attainment between providers who care for at least one child receiving public child care assistance and providers who do not care for any children receiving subsidies.

## **How well prepared are licensed providers and center teachers to serve young children who are dual language learners or who have special needs?**

To answer this question, we measured the number of non-credit training hours and college credits that providers and center teachers had received.

### ***Training and Coursework Related to Dual Language Learners***

In 2005, nearly one-half of children entering public kindergarten in Merced County were estimated to be dual language learners (California Department of Education, 2006), and it is likely that soon most young children in ECE programs will be dual language learners and/or live with family members who do not speak English. Yet very few members of Merced County's ECE workforce have participated in non-credit training or college coursework related to dual language learning:

- Only 17% of licensed providers have received non-credit training, and only 15% have completed college coursework, in this subject;
- 54% of centers employ at least one teacher with relevant non-credit training, and only 29% employ at least one teacher with relevant college coursework.

### ***Training and Coursework Related to Working with Children with Special Needs***

Over the last thirty years, ECE settings have become much more involved in providing services to children with special physical and developmental needs and/or disabilities, due to new understanding of and ability to identify developmental challenges, coupled with changes in federal law (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Much of the state's ECE workforce has participated in some level of professional development related to working with children with special needs – especially in programs serving at least one such child – largely because California law has provided funding for such training since 2000:

- 40% of licensed providers have received relevant non-credit training, and 18% have completed college coursework, in this subject.
- 67% of centers employ at least one teacher with relevant non-credit training, and 63% employ at least one teacher with relevant college coursework.
- Centers serving at least one child with special needs employ a higher percentage of teachers with relevant training.

## Reflections on Key Findings

### *Educational Attainment*

The varied educational profile of Merced County's ECE workforce – with some home-based providers and center staff achieving two-year college degrees, and others holding high school diplomas and/or completing a few college credits – largely reflects the relatively low standards currently set by California law, as well as the differing standards governing various types of ECE programs. But while educational attainment and professional preparation vary by type of program, it is notable that for much of the ECE workforce, current levels of education and training exceed what the law requires.

### *Workforce Diversity*

Merced County's ECE workforce is more ethnically and linguistically diverse than its K-12 public school teachers. But while this diversity is a promising foundation on which to revamp and expand services for young children, the comparison with K-12 teachers can also obscure the stratification by ethnicity that does exist in the ECE workforce. Our data reveal substantial divisions by ethnicity and language that require attention: most child care center teachers and assistant teachers are Latina, for example, whereas few Latinas are directors. Similarly, about one-half of assistant teachers, teachers and home-based providers can communicate with children in a language other than English, whereas this is true for less than one-third of directors.

Merced County's challenge will be to intentionally maintain and expand its ECE workforce diversity, hand in hand with continuing efforts to upgrade the knowledge and skills of this workforce – in particular, proposals to increase educational standards for teachers in publicly funded preschools. This can only be done by investing in a range of appropriate supports that will truly allow people from a wide spectrum of cultural, educational and financial backgrounds to access professional development opportunities. A proactive strategy will be essential, including scholarships, tutoring, conveniently scheduled and located classes, and resources for students learning English as a second language. The goal must extend beyond building a diverse workforce to ensuring that such diversity is well distributed across all positions and all types of child care programs.

### ***Recruitment and Retention***

Given the documented relationship between staffing stability and program quality (Helburn, 1995), the persistence of high turnover in Merced County's ECE workforce is of serious concern. The earnings gap between kindergarten and ECE teachers, in particular, is likely to continue to fuel such turnover, particularly among those who have made the greatest investment in education and training. This study has also confirmed previous findings that the most educated segment of the center teacher workforce is older than the teacher population as a whole (Herzenberg, Price & Bradley, 2005). Teachers with a BA or higher degree are more likely than others to be over age 50 and approaching retirement, at a time when the demand is rising for teachers with such qualifications. This suggests that in addition to helping current members of the ECE workforce achieve college degrees, Merced County needs a strategy to recruit college graduates to ECE teaching positions, including improvements in compensation, in order to make such employment more attractive to well-educated young candidates.

The age of the family child care workforce also raises questions about the supply of child care services in the future. Less than ten percent of licensed providers are under 30, underscoring the need for more proactive recruitment strategies than are now in place.

### ***Preparation to Work with Dual Language Learners and/or Children with Special Needs***

Our data show that the majority of Merced County's ECE workforce has not engaged in coursework or non-credit training related to dual language learning, largely because such training and coursework are not generally available. This finding highlights the need to update courses of study at California's training institutions, both college- and community-based, and to expand the pool of instructors who are knowledgeable about this subject (Whitebook, Bellm, Lee & Sakai, 2005).

By contrast – reflecting an intentional strategy backed by state resources – many more teachers in the state have received training or college coursework related to serving children with special needs. A similar effort around dual language learning is much needed. Additionally, more advanced coursework and training in these subjects must be offered if we hope to build an ECE workforce that is well prepared to meet the diverse needs of Merced County's young children.

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## References

In the last five years, with the availability of more resources for children from birth to age five flowing through local and state First 5 Commissions and other sources, there has been a concerted effort to expand professional development opportunities for the early care and education workforce, and to make these offerings more relevant and accessible. In the process of expanding resources, however, many of the limitations of the state's current professional development infrastructure have become more visible.

Now, as counties embark on creating publicly funded preschool programs, there is an opportunity to develop comprehensive state and local plans for professional development that are inclusive of teachers and providers in a variety of settings. As their foundation, such plans should reflect the latest information about what practitioners need to know and do in order to help children realize their potential.

This study has provided a snapshot of Merced County's early care and education workforce, capturing current strengths and areas in need of improvement. It is to be hoped that future assessments will document great strides toward creating an even more diverse, culturally competent workforce, well prepared to meet the needs of Merced County's young children.

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