

# Respecting Early Learning

## Giving Early Childhood Education Directors and Teachers a Voice

BY: HANNAH LIDMAN, SENIOR POLICY ASSOCIATE  
JOHN BURBANK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Summary

**Early learning is the basis for our children's success in school, in work, and life.** High-quality early learning relies on the most critical factors in teacher-child interaction: the teacher's own professionalism, education, compensation, and morale.<sup>1</sup>

But the market for child care is fundamentally broken in Washington State. Demand for high-quality care far outstrips supply; families can barely afford to pay existing prices for child care<sup>2</sup>, let alone for the true cost of high-quality care. Fees have reached their maximum, directors and owners see little if any profit, and there are no other funds to put to work to increase quality.

The public, that is, our government, has a responsibility for the provision of high-quality early education and care, as it does for K-12 education. But it will take public and political will to ensure this responsibility is fulfilled.

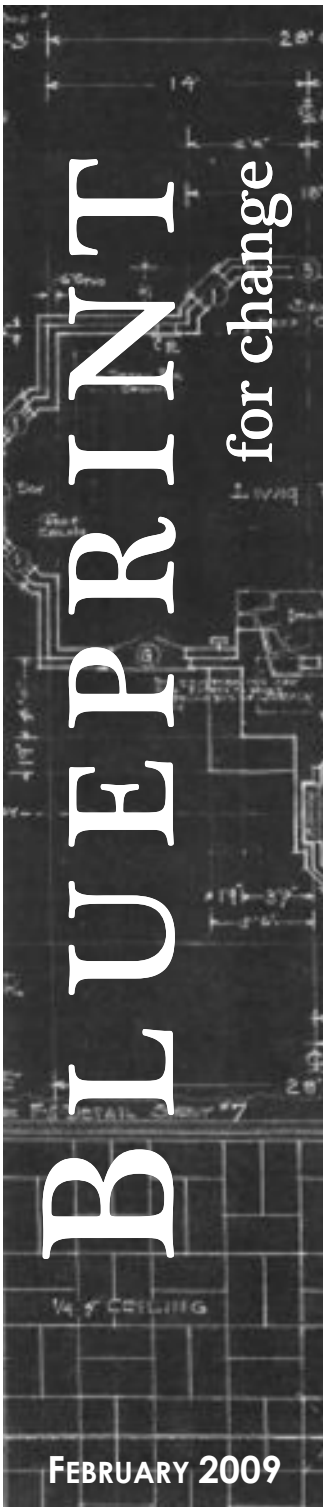
Fortunately, there is already a template for success in the child care market that is ready to be replicated. The union of family child care providers is already working together to build public will and increase the quality of care. The child care center workforce now has an opportunity to do the same.

### Improving Access to Quality Care for Low-Income Children

Low-income families in Washington State are eligible to receive financial assistance, or subsidies, to partially or fully cover the high cost of child care.

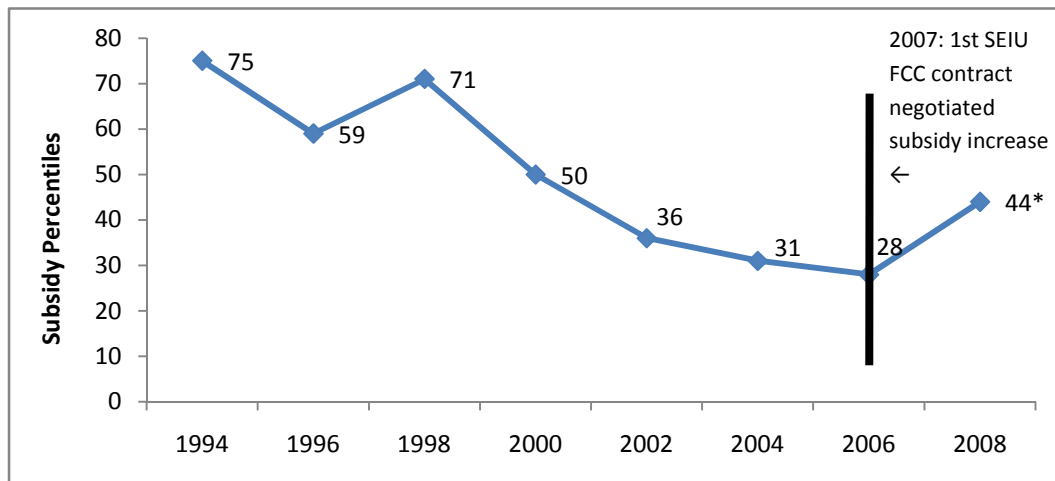
Low subsidy rates provide less incentive for providers to care for subsidized children. Federal requirements used to ensure subsidy rates were equal to the 75th percentile of market rates. With the repeal of those standards, Washington State's subsidy rates for family child care (FCC) providers declined from the 75th percentile in 1994 to the 28th percentile in 2006.

Subsidy percentiles declined even during good economic times and state budget surpluses. Only after FCC providers organized together to negotiate a contract with Washington State did the subsidy percentile increase, to the 44th percentile.<sup>3</sup>



## AVERAGE FAMILY CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PERCENTILES

WASHINGTON STATE, 1994-2008



Source: *Child Care in Washington State reports 1994-2008*, Department of Early Learning.

Note: The figure above was obtained through analysis of data in the 2008 report using methodology consistent with analysis conducted to reach findings in previous years' reports.

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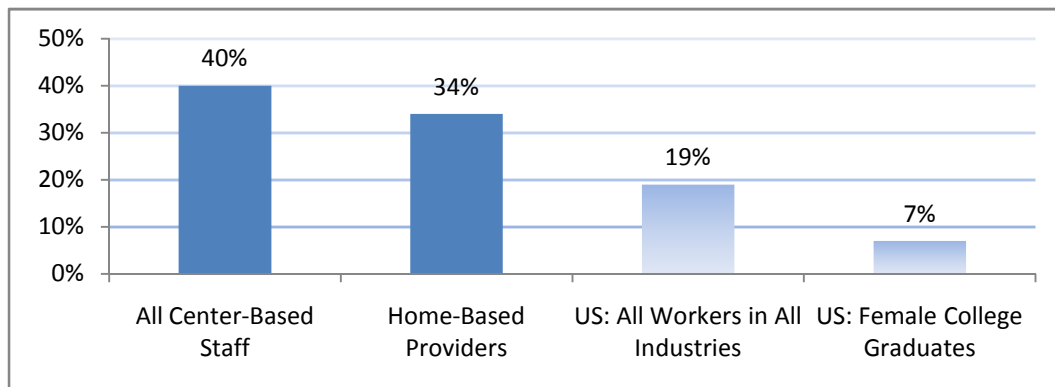
## Solving Problems in the Child Care Center Workforce

Wages for child care center staff generate poverty, not professionalism. Assistants make an average \$9.72/hour (\$20,218/year), and lead teachers earn only \$10.82/hour (\$22,506/year)<sup>4</sup> – a stark contrast to the salaries of kindergarten teachers (\$47,971/year)<sup>5</sup> and crossing guards (\$15.34 /hour)<sup>6</sup>.

40% of Washington's early learning workforce in child care centers live near poverty and receive no benefits through their jobs. A high percentage of staff is newly hired each year – a symptom of high turnover and discontinuity of care.

### POVERTY: PERCENTAGE OF EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE WITH INCOMES BELOW 200% OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL

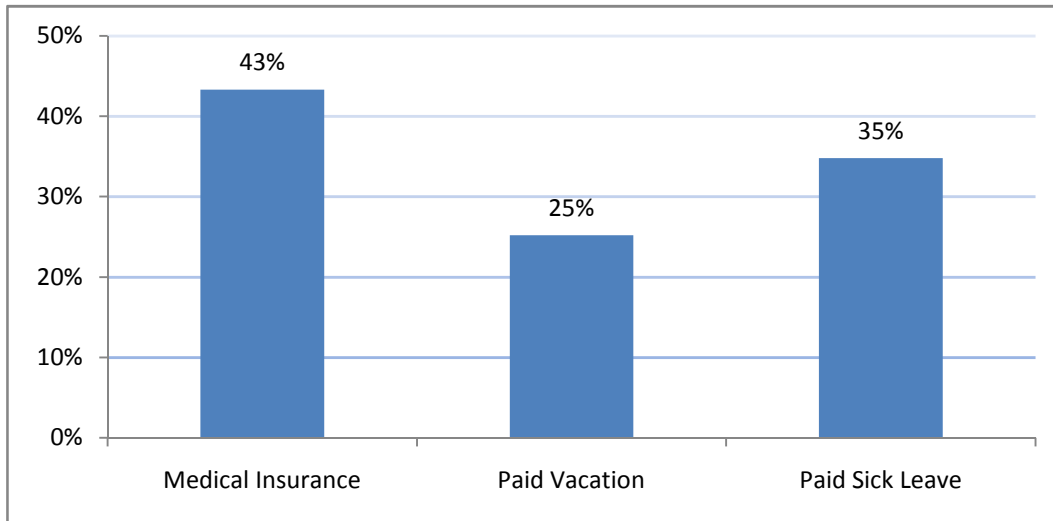
WASHINGTON STATE, 2004



Source: Herzenberger, S., Price, M., & Bradley, D. (2005). *Losing ground in early childhood education: Declining workforce qualifications in an expanding industry, 1979-2004*, Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, p. 25 and summary tables 1-3. The state-by-state summary data tables are not part of the printed report but are provided separately with the report online: <http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/ec>.

## BENEFITS: PORTION OF LEAD TEACHERS WITHOUT ACCESS TO BENEFITS

WASHINGTON STATE, 2008

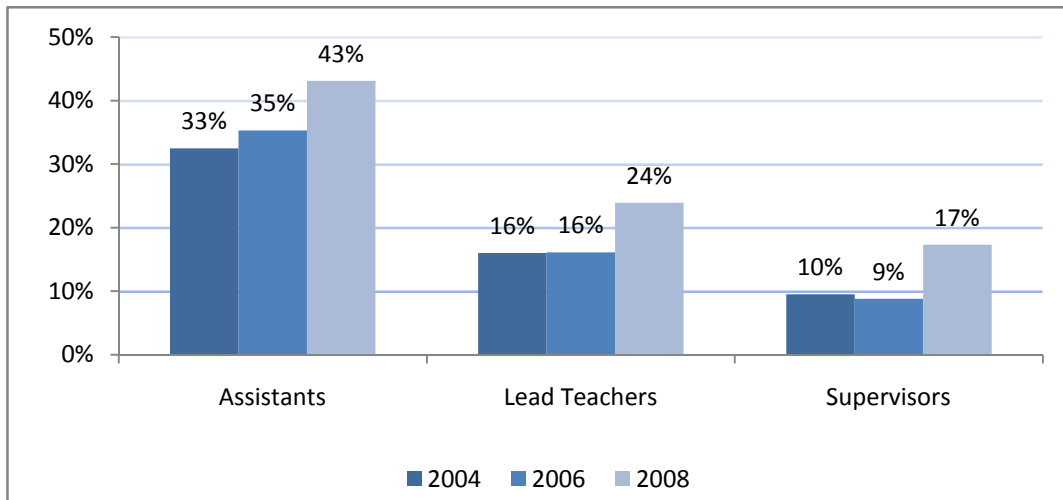


40% of Washington's early learning workforce in child care centers live near poverty and do not receive benefits through their jobs.

Data from Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc. (2008), Washington State 2008 child care survey. Olympia, WA: Department of Early Learning

## TURNOVER: PERCENTAGE OF CENTER STAFF HIRED IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR

WASHINGTON STATE, 2004-2008



Source: data from Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc. (2008), Washington State 2008 child care survey. Olympia, WA: Department of Early Learning

## Union of Family Child Care Providers Makes Unprecedented Gains

In 2006, the Washington State Legislature granted family child care providers the opportunity to form a union, and having done so, the right to collectively bargain with the state over subsidy rates, health benefits, and funds for training and education.

FCC providers chose SEIU Local 925, and successfully negotiated a first contract that included workforce advancements providers had been unable to attain before:<sup>7</sup>

The people providing for the care and education of Washington's children should be given the opportunity to bring their experience to the table.

- A 10% subsidy increase for licensed providers (both centers and homes);
- A 7% subsidy increase for license-exempt providers who care for subsidized children;
- Funding for a health insurance pool;
- Funding for tiered reimbursement;
- Bonuses for non-standard hours care;
- A minimum 15% infant rate differential above the toddler rate; and
- Resources for training license-exempt providers.

## Duplicating Success with a Child Care Center Union

Two bills currently before the Legislature (HB 1329 and SB 5572) would grant child care center directors and teachers the opportunity to form a union and collectively bargain for minimum subsidies, educational assistance, and health benefits.

With twice as many children cared for in centers than in family homes, this presents an important and unique opportunity for the entire child care center workforce to work in partnership to improve education and professionalism in the field.

The union will allow the people caring for and educating Washington's children to participate in decisions about how best to increase the quality of care and early childhood education in Washington State.

## Basic Facts About Child Care Center Unionization

**Purpose:** The union will negotiate for increased public investment in early learning, not to require centers to do more work without the funding to support them. The union will not seek to create “unfunded mandates” for child care centers.

**Choice:** Both child care center directors and child care center teachers across the state will be given the opportunity to vote on whether or not to form a union for child care centers. Further, everyone will maintain their individual right to choose union membership. Union membership is an individual decision and will not be mandatory for any employee of a child care center. If and when a center director chooses to become a member of the union, their decision has no bearing on whether teachers in that center decide to join.

**Benefits:** Union members will have the opportunity to vote on any contract negotiated with the state. And, all child care directors and teachers in the state, whether union members or not, will receive all of the benefits negotiated by the union in collective bargaining with the state.

**Legality:** The proposal to combine employers and employees into one unit to bargain with the state is unique, historic, and legal. According to the former General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board, it does not violate or preempt the standards of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).<sup>8</sup>

**Limits:** Because the proposed union combines employers and employees together, the representative unions will be barred from organizing individual centers or engaging in individual workplace disputes such as hiring, firing, and grievance procedures.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the union will negotiate with the state for supports for subsidies, professionalization, education, training pathways, and benefits, and for the funding to implement them.

**Funding:** The union will receive funding for its work from a combination of service fees and voluntary membership dues. Service fees will take the form of a small, to-be-determined percentage of the subsidy rate which will be paid by the state directly to the union. (The service fee for family home providers is 2%.) Membership dues are contingent upon joining the union. Those who have chosen not to join the union will not be expected to pay membership dues.

**Finally, and most importantly, the union will give both directors and teachers a strong and united voice in public decisions about early learning in Washington State. This is the crucial missing link in ensuring high-quality child care for all of our young children.**

**Union membership is an individual decision and will not be mandatory for any employee of a child care center.**

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Brandon, R.N. & Scarpa, J.P. (2006). Supply, demand, and accountability: Effective strategies to enhance the quality of early learning experiences through workforce improvement. Seattle, WA: Human Services Policy Center; Gallinsky, E. (1990). The costs of not providing quality early childhood programs in Reaching the Full Cost of Quality in Early Childhood Programs (p. 27). National Association for the Education of Young Children; Whitebook, M., et al. (1989) Who cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America, executive summary of the National Child Care Staffing Study (p. 12). Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project.
- <sup>2</sup> The median cost of full-time care for an infant and a toddler in child care center eats up over 30% of the median household income in Washington State. Analysis of data in: Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network. (2008) *Child care & early learning data reports: Washington State*. Tacoma, WA: Author.
- <sup>3</sup> The Department of Early Learning 2008 market rate survey data does contain an average statewide subsidy percentile for FCC providers. The 44<sup>th</sup> percentile figure was obtained through analysis of data in the 2008 report using methodology consistent with analysis conducted to reach findings in previous years' reports. The average statewide subsidy percentile across all types of care (FCC and centers) is the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile - Personal Communication with Lynne Shannafelt, Assistant Director - Parent Support and Programs Division at the Department of Early Learning.
- <sup>4</sup> Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc. (2008). *Washington State 2008 child care survey*. Olympia, WA: Department of Early Learning, pp 17-18.
- <sup>5</sup> Employment Security Department. (2008). *March 2008 occupational employment and wages estimates*. Olympia, WA; Author.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> SEIU Local 925. (n.d.). *Contract for Washington family child care providers—Summary*: [http://www.seiu925.org/Early\\_Learning/FCCP\\_Summary/default.aspx](http://www.seiu925.org/Early_Learning/FCCP_Summary/default.aspx)
- <sup>8</sup> "NLRA preemption rules generally have no application to these kinds of substantive state regulations, even where labor standards are the subject of those regulations. States are therefore free to establish substantive standards and programs – e.g., set wage and hour standards, establish public benefit programs, assist low income individuals, etc. The NLRA establishes a bargaining process about how an employer will exercise its lawful authority, and NLRA preemption principles do not limit state governments in their establishment of substantive standards and government programs, even if they create the state law backdrop against which bargaining may occur.": Testimony on SB 5572 by Fred Feinstein, Former Presidentially-appointed General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board before the Washington State Senate Committee on Labor, Commerce, and Consumer Protection, 2/10/2009 1:30 P.M.
- <sup>9</sup> "The NLRA would preclude that representative from also being a private sector representative of those employees": Ibid.