

## NSECE Snapshot:

# Employment Experiences of the 2019 Center-based Child Care Workforce during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Key Findings by Race and Ethnicity

OPRE Report #2022-291

September 2022

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The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for center-based child care and early education (CCEE) providers—and the CCEE workforce—serving young children. Data show, for example, that parental unemployment and concerns about children’s health and safety may have contributed to reduced enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Most CCEE providers closed temporarily at the start of the pandemic. In the months that followed, CCEE center-based providers that were open struggled to retain workers due to the low wages, lack of benefits, and feelings of burnout that are common in CCEE programs.<sup>2</sup> Higher wages offered during the pandemic in other industries, such as retail, may have made it more challenging to attract workers back to the CCEE workforce.<sup>3</sup> One way to understand the impact of the pandemic on the 2019 CCEE workforce is to examine their **employment experiences** during the pandemic—whether they experienced any work disruptions (in CCEE or another field) during the first year of the pandemic and whether they were working in CCEE in October 2020.

### Summary Findings.

NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up data show that 91% of 2019 center-based CCEE workers were working in the CCEE field in February 2020, which was about nine months after their initial interview for the 2019 NSECE survey at a CCEE provider, but before the COVID-19 pandemic started. Just 67% of 2019 center-based CCEE workers were employed in the field seven months into the pandemic (October 2020). Over half (55%) of workers had experienced at least one period (i.e., two weeks or more) of not working from March 2020 through early 2021. Compared with individuals who had been aides/assistant teachers, teachers/lead teachers were more likely to be working in the CCEE field in October 2020; however, the two groups reported similar levels of work disruptions. Differences in employment experiences by race/ethnicity were evident for teachers but not for aides/assistant teachers. Specifically, Hispanic teachers were less likely than non-Hispanic White teachers to be working in CCEE in October 2020 and were also less likely to experience any work disruptions from March 2020 through early 2021.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. (2020). Piecing together solutions: The importance of childcare to U.S. families and businesses. [https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/EarlyEd\\_Minis\\_Report6\\_121420\\_Final.pdf](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/EarlyEd_Minis_Report6_121420_Final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> RAPID-EC Project (2021). Child care shortages weigh heavily on parents and providers. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7cf2f62c45da32f3c6065e/t/61a51257cb3aea5591b7aedd/1638208087990/child-care-shortages-nov2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, The Economics Daily, 24 percent of establishments increased pay or paid bonuses because of COVID-19 pandemic at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/24-percent-of-establishments-increased-pay-or-paid-bonuses-because-of-covid-19-pandemic.htm> (visited May 20, 2022).

### About the data for this report.

This snapshot draws from data collected in the 2019 (Jan. 2019 – July 2019) and NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up Center-based Workforce Surveys (Jan. 2021 – Mar. 2021). The sample in 2019 was comprised of one or two classroom-assigned instructional staff members from each center-based provider that completed a Center-based Provider interview. A classroom serving children birth to 5 and not yet in kindergarten was selected at random from one of the age groups the center-based program reported serving and the workforce respondent was selected at random from a list of classroom staff. This snapshot uses data from 2,805 individuals who participated in the NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up Workforce Survey. This set of individuals is a subset of 5,192 cases that participated in the participating in the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey, for an unweighted response rate of 54%.

Nationally representative data from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) and its NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up surveys allow us to describe the employment experiences of the 2019 center-based CCEE workforce during the early months of the pandemic and examine workers' experiences by race/ethnicity. The health and economic consequences of COVID-19 hit Black and Hispanic populations particularly hard.<sup>4 5</sup> With a third (33%) of CCEE workers in 2019 identifying as Black or Hispanic, it is essential to understand how employment experiences may have varied by race/ethnicity. It is also important to look at differences in workers' roles within centers, given that Hispanic CCEE workers are more likely to work as an assistant teacher or aide, and less likely to work as a lead teacher, compared with White or Black workers.<sup>6</sup>

In 2019, approximately 1.36 million teachers and caregivers worked in center-based CCEE programs, serving at least one child age 5 years or under, not yet in kindergarten. In March 2020, many center-based CCEE providers closed or moved to virtual programs. Although many providers had reopened by fall 2020, many were operating with limited capacity and increased costs due to enhanced health and safety requirements.<sup>7</sup>

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Risk for COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death by race/ethnicity. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

5 Padilla, C., & Thomson, D. (2021). More than one in four Latino and Black households with children are experiencing three or more hardships during COVID-19. Child Trends. 2021. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/more-than-one-in-four-latino-and-black-households-with-children-are-experiencing-three-or-more-hardships-during-covid-19>

6 Austin, L. J., Edwards, B., Chávez, R., & Whitebook, M. (2019). Racial wage gaps in early education employment. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

7 Workman, S., & Jessen-Howard, S. (2020). The true cost of providing safe child care during the Coronavirus pandemic. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/true-cost-providing-safe-child-care-coronavirus-pandemic/>

## KEY TERMS

**Center-based Providers** A center-based provider is an organization providing CCEE services to at least one child age five and under, not yet in kindergarten, at a single location. Center-based providers offer care at least three hours per day at least twice per week, where parents are not present. Care provided at these centers is not only drop-in care, after-school, or single activity arrangements.

**Center-based Workforce** The center-based workforce refers to individuals working in a center-based classroom in 2019 for at least five hours per week, working primarily with children 5 years and under, not yet in kindergarten.

**Worker Role** In 2019, a center's director or instructional leader identified the role of the worker as (1) a teacher, lead teacher or instructor or (2) an assistant teacher or aide.

**Work Disruption** A work disruption was an unplanned period of two weeks or more that a worker was not working (in CCEE or any other field), either onsite or remotely, from March 2020 (start of the pandemic) through early 2021 (when they participated in the interview). For example, a disruption could be a public health-mandated closure of at least 2 weeks that prevented a worker from providing care on-site or remotely. Workers may have been paid or not during a disruption.

## Overview of the Data

This snapshot describes the 2020 employment experiences of 1.35 million individuals who were teachers, lead teachers, assistants and aides in center-based CCEE provider classrooms in 2019.<sup>8</sup> Data come from interviews conducted in the first three months of 2021 with participants in the 2019 NSECE workforce survey. Among the 2019 workers,<sup>9</sup> more than half (58%) were non-Hispanic White, less than one in five (17%) were non-Hispanic Black, and less than one in five (17%) were Hispanic of any race. More than half (62%) of CCEE workers were teachers/lead teachers,<sup>10</sup> and more than one third (38%) were aides/assistant teachers.<sup>11</sup> The racial/ethnic distribution within worker role was similar to the overall distribution among all 2019 workers.

Exhibits 1, 2, and 3 describe the percentage of 2019 center-based CCEE workers who were working in CCEE in February 2020 (prior to the pandemic), the percentage who were working in CCEE in October 2020 (seven months into the pandemic), and the percentage who experienced a work disruption, in any field of work, of at least 2 weeks' duration at any time from March 2020 through the interview date in early 2021 (January through March), disaggregated by role and race/ethnicity. Comparisons by race/ethnicity,<sup>12</sup> by role, and by race/ethnicity within role were conducted, and significant differences are noted.

<sup>8</sup> Please note that these estimates exclude 17,000 workforce members from CCEE providers that are part of public school districts for which data was not collected. This represents a small portion of all workers associated with CCEE providers that are part of public schools.

<sup>9</sup> We use workforce and workers interchangeably to refer to all 2019 NSECE workforce without distinguishing their roles.

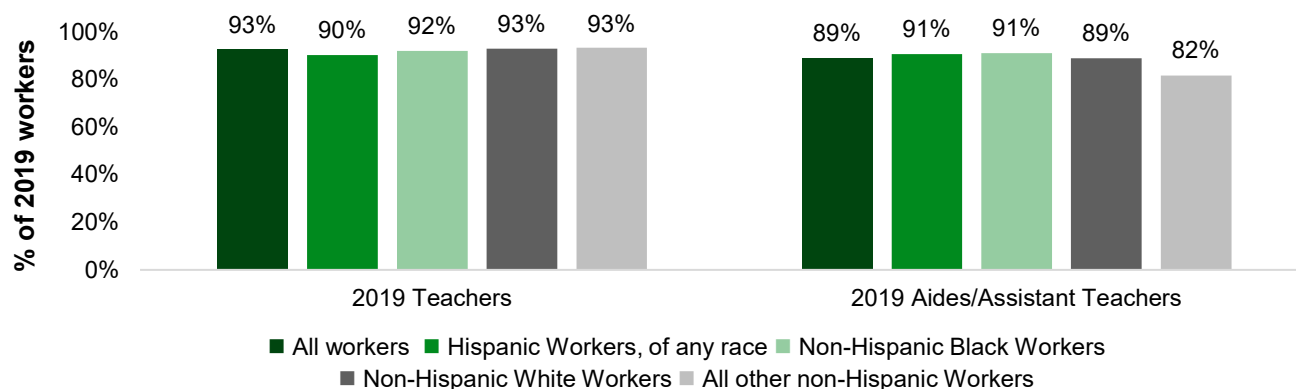
<sup>10</sup> For simplicity, we refer to all teachers and lead teachers as teachers in the remainder of the snapshot.

<sup>11</sup> (*forthcoming*). Workers in Center-based Child Care and Early Education Classrooms in 2012 and 2019: Counts and Characteristics OPRE Report, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/national-survey-early-care-and-education-2019-2017-2022>

<sup>12</sup> Although comparisons by race/ethnicity are not shown in the exhibits, all significant differences are noted in the text.

## Exhibit 1. Percentage of all 2019 center-based CCEE workers who were working in CCEE in February 2020, by role and race/ethnicity within role

Source: NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up Center-based Workforce Survey, Wave 1

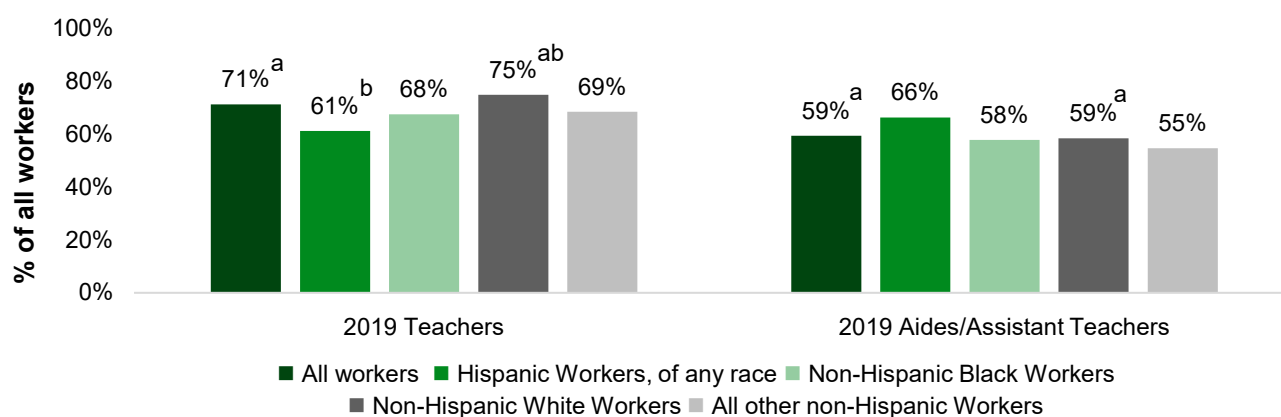


**Note:** Significance testing was conducted by (1) role (i.e., all 2019 teachers working in February 2020 versus all 2019 aides/assistant teachers working in February 2020) within race/ethnicity and overall, and (2) race/ethnicity (relative to non-Hispanic White workers) within worker role. "All other non-Hispanic workers" includes Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and individuals with multiple races and no race specified. No significant differences were detected. February 2020 was before the pandemic started.

(See Appendix Table 1)

## Exhibit 2. Percentage of all 2019 center-based CCEE workers who were working in CCEE in October 2020, by role and race/ethnicity within role

Source: NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up Center-based Workforce Survey, Wave 1



**Note:** Significance testing was conducted by (1) role (within race/ethnicity and overall) and (2) race/ethnicity (relative to non-Hispanic White workers) within worker role. "All other non-Hispanic workers" includes Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and individuals with multiple races and no race specified.

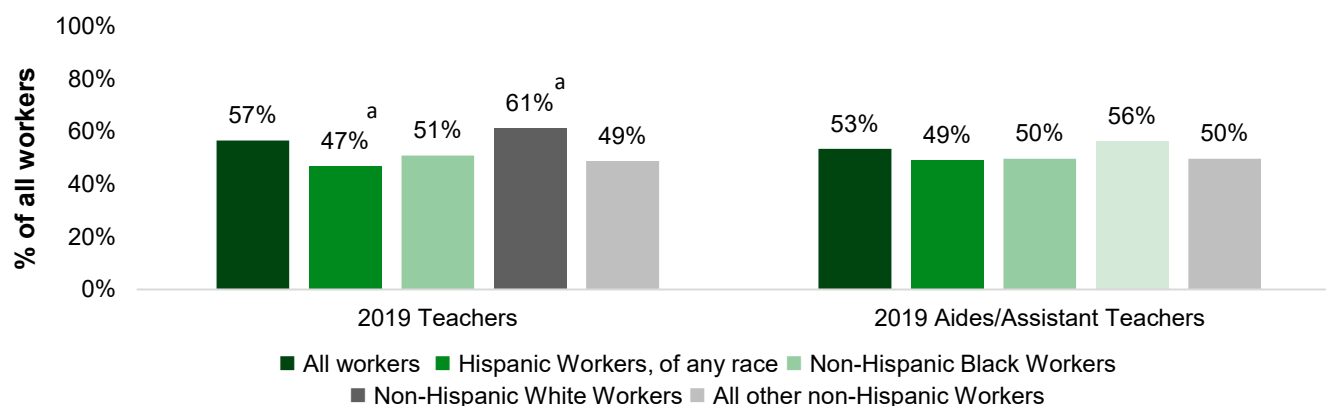
<sup>a</sup> The percentages are statistically different between teachers and aides/assistant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>b</sup> The percentages are statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) relative to non-Hispanic White teachers.

(See Appendix Table 2)

### Exhibit 3. Percentage of all 2019 center-based CCEE workers who experienced work disruptions between March 2020 and early 2021, by role and race/ethnicity within role

Source: NSECE COVID-19 Longitudinal Follow-up Center-based Workforce Survey, Wave 1



**Note:** Significance testing was conducted by (1) role (within race/ethnicity and overall) and (2) race/ethnicity (relative to non-Hispanic White workers) within worker role. “All other non-Hispanic workers” includes Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and individuals with multiple races and no race specified.

<sup>a</sup> The percentages are statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) relative to non-Hispanic White teachers.

(See Appendix Table 3)

## What do the data show?

- ▶ In February 2020, before the pandemic started, almost all (91%) 2019 center-based CCEE workers were working in CCEE. There were no substantive differences by workers’ role (i.e., teacher or aide/assistant teacher) or race/ethnicity.
- ▶ About two-thirds (67%) of 2019 workers were working in CCEE in October 2020, but over half (55%) had experienced work disruptions between March 2020 and early 2021.
- ▶ In October 2020, whether 2019 workers were working in CCEE varied by workers’ role and race/ethnicity.
  - Across roles, 2019 teachers were more likely to be working in CCEE (71%) than 2019 aides/assistant teachers (59%).
    - Among non-Hispanic White workers in particular, teachers were more likely to be working in CCEE (75%) than aides/assistant teachers (59%).
  - Across race/ethnicity categories, non-Hispanic White teachers were more likely to be working in CCEE (75%) than Hispanic teachers (61%).
- ▶ The share of 2019 workers who experienced any work disruptions from the start of the pandemic to early 2021 differed by workers’ race/ethnicity, but not by their 2019 role.

- Hispanic workers (48%) were less likely to experience work disruptions than non-Hispanic White workers (59%).<sup>13</sup> The racial/ethnic difference in work disruptions was primarily observed among teachers—47% of Hispanic teachers compared to 61% of non-Hispanic White teachers experienced work disruptions.
- 2019 teachers and aides/assistant teachers had similar likelihoods of work disruptions.

## Conclusion

In early 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic started, almost all center-based CCEE workers who had been working in 2019 were working in CCEE. In October 2020, however, about one-third of workers were no longer working in CCEE. From March 2020 to early 2021, more than half had experienced at least one period of work disruption. Some of the experiences of the 2019 CCEE workforce during the pandemic varied by workers' roles and race and ethnicity: teachers were more likely than aides/assistant teachers to be working in CCEE in October 2020, and Hispanic teachers were less likely than non-Hispanic White teachers to be working in CCEE in October 2020. In addition, Hispanic teachers were less likely to experience work disruptions (in CCEE or any other field) than non-Hispanic White teachers. This analysis does not describe why Hispanic teachers were less likely to experience work disruptions and less likely to work in CCEE in October 2020. Potential reasons could include that they chose to move to non-CCEE jobs where they would face less COVID exposure, or their new jobs may have led to fewer work disruptions. Racial/ethnic differences in employment experiences, especially in the CCEE field, should continue to be monitored to evaluate current efforts to build and strengthen the CCEE workforce and to provide high-quality, culturally and linguistically sensitive child care and early education.

<sup>13</sup> Results are not shown in the exhibits.



**Suggested Citation:** Sara Amadon, Joshua Borton, Ying-Chun Lin, Rebecca Madill, Jing Tang, Ilana Ventura, Grace Xie (2022). NSECE Snapshot: Employment Experiences of the 2019 Center-based Child Care Workforce during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Key Findings by Race and Ethnicity. OPRE Report #2022-291, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/national-survey-early-care-and-education-2019-2017-2022>

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HHSP233201500048I,  
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## Connect with OPRE



## Appendix 1

**Table A1. Percentage of all 2019 center-based CCEE workers who were working in CCEE in February 2020, by role and race/ethnicity within role**

	Teachers		Aides & Assistants	
	Col %	SE of %	Col %	SE of %
All workers <sup>†</sup>	92.6%	1.32%	89.0%	2.13%
Hispanic workers, of any race	90.4%	3.28%	90.7%	3.72%
Non-Hispanic Black workers	92.1%	2.22%	91.2%	2.44%
Non-Hispanic White workers	93.1%	1.93%	89.0%	3.27%
All other Non-Hispanic workers, including multiple races and no race specified	93.4%	2.97%	81.7%	6.73%

<sup>†</sup>This total does not include 17,000 WF members from public school district ECE providers for which data was not collected.  
Significance Testing:

<sup>a</sup> The percentages are statistically different between teachers and aides/assistant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>b</sup> The percentages are statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) relative to non-Hispanic White teachers

**Table A2. Percentage of all 2019 center-based CCEE workers who were working in CCEE in October 2020, by role and race/ethnicity within role**

	Teachers		Aides & Assistants	
	Col %	SE of %	Col %	SE of %
All workers <sup>†</sup>	71.3% <sup>a</sup>	2.66%	59.4% <sup>a</sup>	4.19%
Hispanic workers, of any race	61.2% <sup>b</sup>	4.38%	66.3%	5.12%
Non-Hispanic Black workers	67.5%	6.58%	57.9%	7.83%
Non-Hispanic White workers	74.9% <sup>ab</sup>	3.84%	58.5% <sup>a</sup>	6.34%
All other Non-Hispanic workers, including multiple races and no race specified	68.5%	8.78%	54.7%	8.34%

<sup>†</sup>This total does not include 17,000 WF members from public school district ECE providers for which data was not collected.  
Significance Testing:

<sup>a</sup> The percentages are statistically different between teachers and aides/assistant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>b</sup> The percentages are statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) relative to non-Hispanic White teachers



**Table A3. Percentage of all 2019 center-based CCEE workers who experienced work disruptions between March 2020 and early 2021, by role and race/ethnicity within role**

	Teachers		Aides & Assistants	
	Col %	SE of %	Col %	SE of %
All workers <sup>†</sup>	56.6%	2.60%	53.4%	3.84%
Hispanic workers, of any race	46.9% <sup>a</sup>	4.47%	49.0%	5.77%
Non-Hispanic Black workers	50.9%	6.05%	49.7%	7.10%
Non-Hispanic White workers	61.3% <sup>a</sup>	3.63%	56.2%	5.72%
All other Non-Hispanic workers, including multiple races and no race specified	48.8%	8.23%	49.7%	8.76%

<sup>†</sup>This total does not include 17,000 WF members from public school district ECE providers for which data was not collected.  
Significance Testing:

<sup>a</sup> The percentages are statistically different between teachers and aides/assistant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>b</sup> The percentages are statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) relative to non-Hispanic White teachers.