THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY 2.0
BRIEF 1: SURVEY PROCESS OVERVIEW

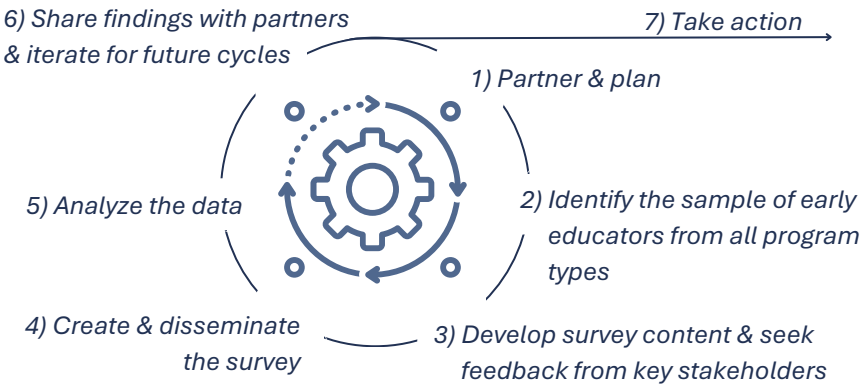
The Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey (Cambridge Pulse) is a collaboration between the Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative and the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Cambridge Pulse is a ~30-minute, online survey for all early educators and family support professionals working in formal, group-based settings in Cambridge, MA.

Cambridge Pulse is designed to:

- *Chart the composition of the city's early care and education programs and workforce*
- *Seek out, describe, and share the experiences of Cambridge's early education workforce, across all setting types*
- *Support data-driven early childhood decision-making and system building*

Cambridge Pulse aims to learn about and share the strengths and challenges facing the community's early education workforce, and to use those findings to support policy development through the steps below.

SURVEY PROCESS



TAKING ACTION

Cambridge OEC used findings from Cambridge Pulse 1.0 in the following ways to support the September 2024 launch of the Cambridge Preschool Program:

- To help determine salary ranges and credentialing requirements for UPK early educators
- To support the design of professional development opportunities and experiences that respond to early educator needs and preferences
- To inform the development of educational opportunities for existing and emerging early childhood leaders

The first round of the Cambridge Pulse Survey (Cambridge Pulse 1.0) was conducted in Spring 2022; you can learn about the process and findings in our first round of briefs here. **To create Cambridge Pulse 2.0,** researchers at the Zaentz Initiative and our partners at OEC refined and iterated the survey design and content based on input from key stakeholders such as early educators, directors, and family child care providers working in the city, many of whom had participated in the first survey.

This process led us to revise our approach to eligibility, accessibility, and outreach.

SURVEY DESIGN PROCESS: WHAT CHANGED BETWEEN CAMBRIDGE PULSE 1.0 & 2.0?

Cambridge Pulse 1.0 launched in May 2022 and closed in July 2022, while Cambridge Pulse 2.0 launched in November 2023 and closed in March 2024. The following design and process changes were made together by the Zaentz Initiative and the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood, based on focus groups with early educators and leaders conducted in Summer 2023.

	PULSE 1.0	*PULSE 2.0*
ELIGIBILITY	Eligibility to participate in Cambridge Pulse 1.0 was limited to **early educators and early education leaders** working with children from birth to age five, either in programs licensed by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) or in early education classrooms embedded in elementary schools.	Eligibility to participate in Pulse 2.0 was expanded to include **early childhood family support professionals**, such as early intervention specialists, home visitors, family advocates, and more.
ACCESSIBILITY	The survey was available only in **English**. It was open for responses for **2.5 months.**	The survey was translated into both **Spanish and Portuguese** based on the most common languages other than English spoken by Pulse 1.0 respondents.* The Survey was open to responses for 3.5 **months**.
OUTREACH	Our outreach to eligible respondents was conducted through **emailing, flyers and postcards, visits to virtual Communities of Practice, and in-person visits** to programs. **An incentive of $35** was given to each participant who submitted a complete response.	We expanded our outreach approach to include **more targeted messaging** and dissemination through the **Office of Early Childhood mailing list and newsletter.** The incentive for a complete survey response **increased to $40 per respondent.**

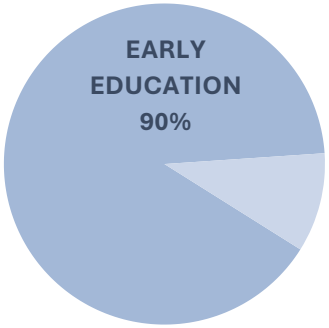
**Thank you to the Language Justice Division of the Cambridge Human Rights Commission for their collaboration and work in making these translations available for Cambridge Pulse 2.0.*

35% INCREASE IN RESPONSES

After making these changes in survey design and outreach approach, Cambridge Pulse 2.0 received 35% more responses than the first round of Cambridge Pulse.

Ninety percent of the responses were from early educators and early education leaders, while 10% were from family support professionals.

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES BY ROLE TYPE



The following briefs document what we learned from these responses.

THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY 2.0
BRIEF 2: FAMILY SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

As the city works to strengthen its early childhood ecosystem, it is important to learn about the experiences of everyone who supports young children and their caregivers—both within and beyond formal settings—in order to build a responsive, inclusive system for children, families, and the professionals who work with them.

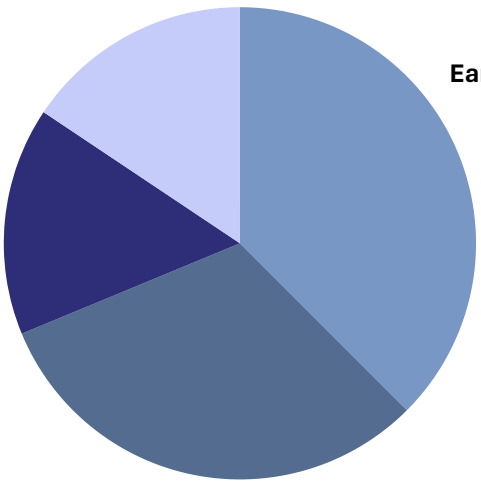
With that goal in mind, the Office of Early Childhood and the Zaentz Initiative expanded eligibility for Cambridge Pulse 2.0 to include **family support professionals**. This change allowed us to capture the perspectives of individuals working in a variety of essential roles across the early childhood ecosystem, in addition to early educators in program or classroom settings. This brief summarizes the responses from this population across survey categories.

DEFINITION OF ROLES

In the context of the City of Cambridge, family support professionals are those who work directly with young children's families to help them access resources, build skills, and strengthen family well-being. Family support professionals often work outside traditional classroom or childcare settings but play a vital role in the city's early childhood system.

Family support professionals who responded to Cambridge Pulse 2.0 fulfilled a wide variety of roles.

Primary Role



Including roles such as:
Case Manager
Early Learning Specialist
Family Advocate

Including roles such as:
Program Supervisor
Infant Program Coordinator
Family Engagement Supervisor

*"Home Visitors' primary purpose is to support and encourage parents and caregivers, share information, and connect to resources in their home and/or convenient location." **

"Early Intervention (EI) is a program for children from birth to three who have an established condition, developmental delays, or are at risk of developmental delays.

*EI providers support families and caregivers and enhance the development and learning of infants and toddlers through individualized, developmentally-appropriate activities in the child's and family's everyday lives."***

**Cambridge Office of Early Childhood's Home Visiting Guide*
***MA Commonwealth's Early Intervention Webpage*

IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE

Family support professionals bring a wealth of experience and dedication to their work with young children and families. With backgrounds spanning clinical care, early development, and mental health, they constitute a deeply skilled workforce shaped by years of on-the-ground practice.

Education & Credentials

39% hold a master's degree (highest degree of education)

10% hold a clinical license

6% have a developmental specialist credential

15% hold an infant/early childhood mental health credential

Identity (gender, race, ethnicity)

97% identify as female.

81% identify as White; **9%** as Asian; **6%** as Black or African American*

18% identify as Hispanic, Latine, or of Spanish origin

Experience in the Field

Average years working in family support: **10**

Minimum: **Less than 1** Maximum: **40**

* A small percentage of respondents identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native. This was a "check all that apply" question.

ROLE DETAILS

Family support professionals work with a diverse population of children and families in different environments, often traveling to a variety of settings or meeting families in their homes. They provide critical support from the prenatal period through kindergarten, with a significant focus on infants and toddlers.

Employment type

76% work full-time

12% work at multiple sites

Age groups served

79% infants

88% toddlers

36% preschoolers

Languages spoken with children and families

97% English **6%** Portuguese

24% Spanish **6%** French

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Like early educators, family support professionals often earn incomes that fall short of what is needed to live comfortably in Cambridge and surrounding towns with high costs of living. Respondents to this survey reported access to relatively stable and comprehensive benefits through their employer.

"It is challenging to keep staff when they cannot afford to pay their bills, yet work extremely hard for many hours."

"This work is not well paid for the impact it has on families and the emotional presence that is needed to do the work well."

*Income**

Average annual household income: **$75-100K**

73% of Family Support Professionals report more than 1 contributing income per household

Average hourly rate range: **$26-28**

Average annual salary range**: $50-60K**

Benefits

80-85% of family support professionals report having the following benefits through their job:

- Paid sick leave
- Paid vacation & personal days
- Health & dental insurance
- Professional development

To put these numbers in context, the **living wage—the hourly income needed to meet basic expenses— for those living in Middlesex County is $31.19** (livingwage.mit.edu) and the **median household income in Cambridge, MA is $126,469** (census.gov).

*Respondents selected their income from a list of predefined hourly or salary ranges; therefore, findings are presented in range format.

WELLBEING & BURNOUT

Cambridge's family support professionals report some symptoms of burnout and stress in the course of their work. Symptoms of stress and burnout are common in caring professions; without structural supports, symptoms of burnout and stress can lead to decreased engagement or negative feelings toward work.

Burnout

27% report feeling emotionally drained by their work at least once per week, while
33% report feeling "used up" at the end of the workday at least once per week.

Stress

33% report experiencing moderate or severe stress caused by lack of control over decisions /matters related to their job
33% report experiencing moderate or severe levels of stress caused by lack of opportunities for professional improvement

Qualitative responses highlight additional sources of burnout and stress. When asked what they wish they could change about their role, most indicated that they wish the role received **better compensation**, while some said that their work can feel **isolating and under appreciated.**

Recent reports explore ways to support the well-being of those working with young children. Beyond structural changes like ***improved pay***, these reports underscore that ***strong workplace relationships, greater respect, and increased recognition*** are key to enhancing the well-being of those working with young children.

"It is a taxing and isolating role. We work very hard but it is also very rewarding."

"There isn't a lot of information about [family support work]. I wish there was a way to let people know that this work brings a lot of satisfaction. It can get stressful at times but you are making a difference."

APPRECIATION FOR THE WORK

When asked what they enjoy most about their role, family support professionals emphasized the value of **relationships,** both with their colleagues and with the families they serve. They also highlighted the fulfillment they find in working with families from **diverse cultural backgrounds** as well as serving as a **vital resource** within the community.

"I love working with families and seeing them grow. I love the program and people I work with."

"It's great to visit families from around the world in Cambridge and learn about different traditions and cultures. It's great to support development and learning in all kinds of forms."

"The amount that I learn every day. I love, love, love spending time in classrooms with very young children. It's my happy place. I love being a supportive thinking partner with others."

"I enjoy being able to provide enrichment to the lives of the families I work with. I enjoy connecting families with resources, supports, and ideas."

THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY 2.0
BRIEF 3: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND PROGRAMS

EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

We identified **117** group-based, licensed early care and education programs across the city— a slight increase from 114 in Cambridge Pulse 1.0. These 117 settings comprise five main program types.

1) Public School PreK (PSP)

2) Center-Based Child Care (CCC)

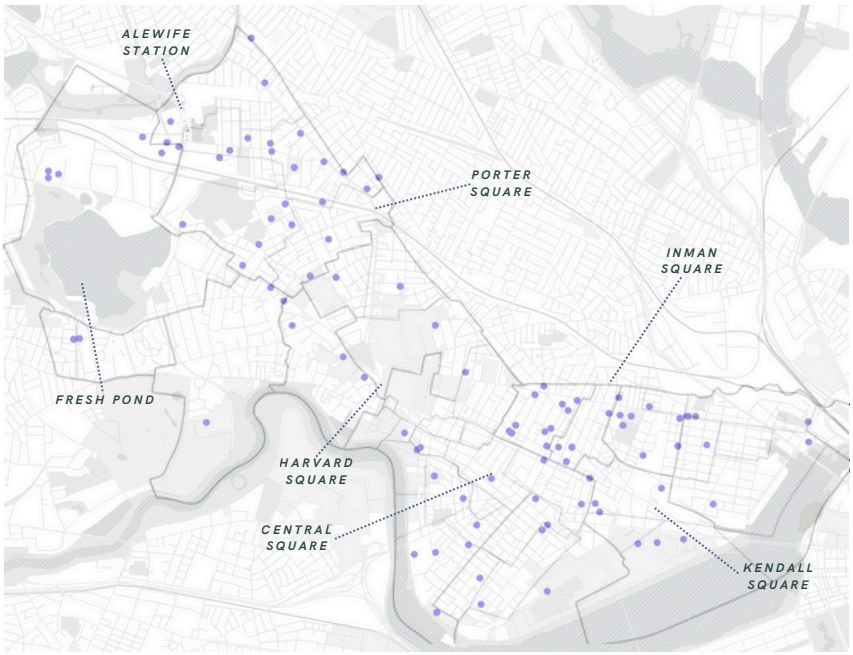
3) Family Child Care (FCC)

4) Head Start (HS)

5) Embedded Programs (EP)

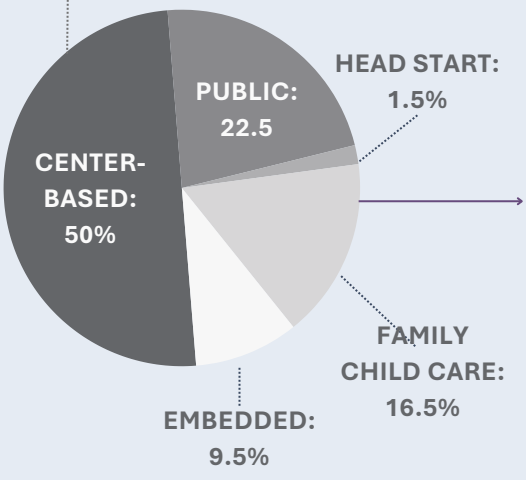
(See the following page for definitions of each program type and percentages of responses by type.)

DISTRIBUTION OF 117 EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN CAMBRIDGE (AS OF FALL 2023)

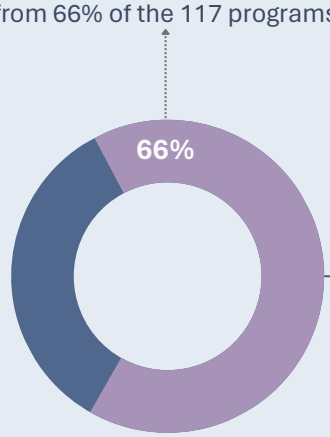


SURVEY RESPONSE OVERVIEW

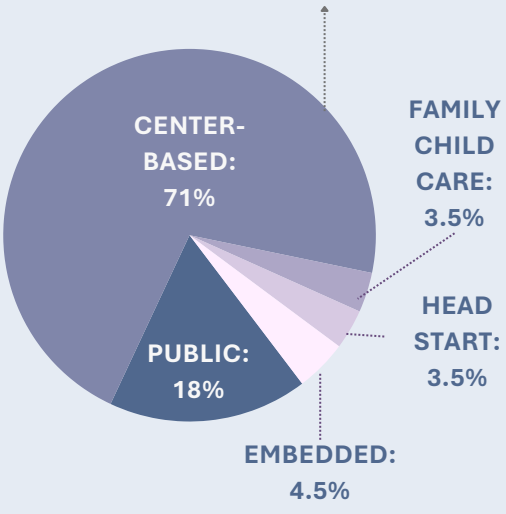
Cambridge's 117 programs fall into the following percentages, by type:



Cambridge Pulse 2.0 received responses from 66% of the 117 programs



Cambridge Pulse 2.0 received responses from every program type



Cambridge Pulse 2.0 received an **average of 4 responses per program.**

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDING PROGRAMS

Cambridge's early education ecosystem comprises a variety of program types, each with their own specific structures and processes. Cambridge Pulse 1.0 & 2.0 included all formal and group-based program types across the city. These formal, group-based care settings are made up of five types.

DEFINITIONS OF PROGRAM TYPE

1) PUBLIC SCHOOL PREKINDERGARTEN (PSP):
Refers to Public School or Department of Human Services programs; eligible to residents of Cambridge, slots determined via lottery.

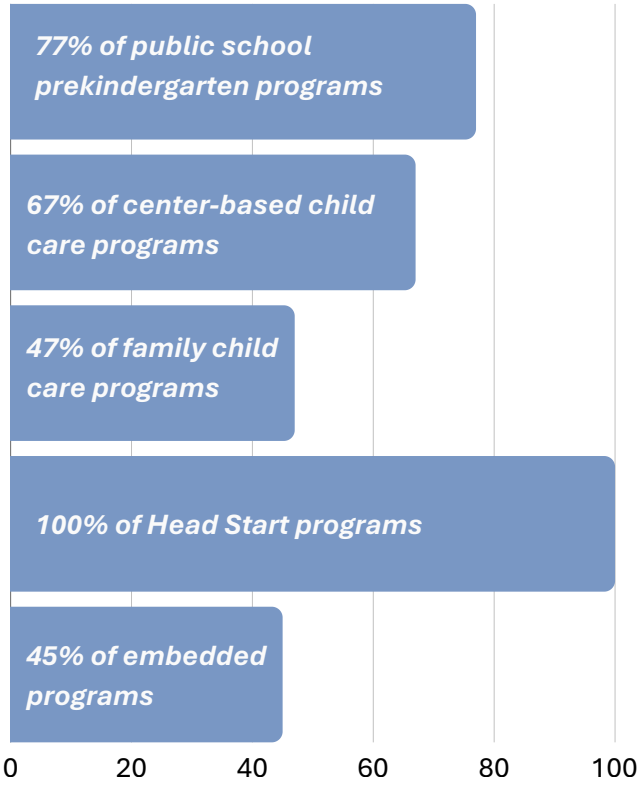
2) CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE (CCC)
Refers to all private programs, both for- and non-profit, that serve children age 5 or below.

3) FAMILY CHILD CARE (FCC)
Refers to all licensed home-based programs.

4) HEAD START (HS)
Refers to federally funded programs for children from low-income families; eligibility is based on income.

5) EMBEDDED PROGRAMS (EP)
Refers to classrooms that serve children from birth to age five that are embedded in a private elementary or middle school.

RESPONSE RATES BY PROGRAM TYPE



Although center-based child care programs contributed the largest number of responses, the chart above highlights the strong representation of all program types in Cambridge Pulse 2.0. Compared with Cambridge Pulse 1.0 (2022), Cambridge Pulse 2.0 (2024) saw higher participation from those working in Head Start and family child care programs, while response levels from public school pre-k and center-based child care programs remained similar across both waves.

Features of Responding Programs (across all types)

- **56%** serve infants (less than 15 months)
- **69%** serve toddlers (15-36 months)
- **89%** serve preschoolers (3- and 4-year-olds)
- **71%** operate on a full-year calendar
- **17** average number of program employees, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 70
- **34%** are Cambridge Preschool Program partners

IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE

Identity (gender, race, ethnicity, age)

93% identify as female

67% identify as White; **20%** as Black or African American; **14%** as Asian*

19% identify as Hispanic, Latinx, or of Spanish origin

18% speak a primary language other than English, including **Spanish, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Arabic, and Bangla.**

The average age was **40** (with a minimum of **20** and a maximum of **76**)

* A small percentage of respondents identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native. This was a "check all that apply" question.

Education & Credentials

10% Associate's Degree

27% Bachelor's Degree

31% Master's degree

Experience in the Field

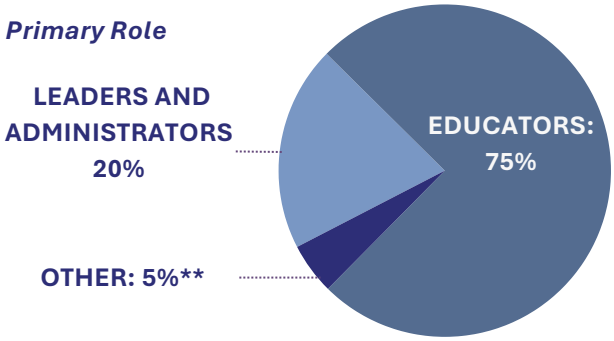
Average years working in Early Education: **14** (max of 40)

Average years worked in current setting: **9**

24% of respondents have worked in their current setting for less than 1 year.

ROLE DETAILS

Primary Role



** Including: school psychologist, coach, subject specialist, etc.

Primary Age Group Served

20% Infants
32% Toddlers
47% Preschoolers
6% Kindergarteners

Status

91% full time
9% part-time

Average Hours Worked per Week: **40**

INCOME & RESIDENCE

Income of Early Educators*

54% of early educators are salaried; **46%** receive an hourly rate.

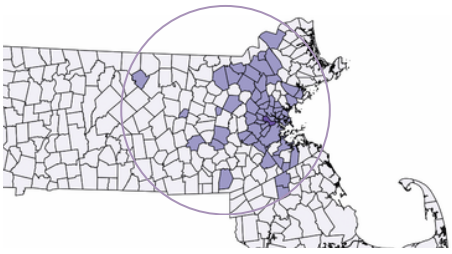
Median hourly range: **$26-27**

Median annual salary range: **$50,00–$75,000**

Average annual household income: **~$70K**

60% of early education respondents report **more than one contributing income per household**

Distribution of Early Educators' Place of Residence



29% of respondents live in Cambridge.

The majority of respondents live in cities or towns with lower costs of living than Cambridge.

While Cambridge's wages for early educators exceed national averages, they remain low compared to area averages overall. Early educators report income-related stress due to low wages, noting that the high cost of living in the area is not reflected in their wages. Brief 4 explores connections between economic status and overall well-being.

*Respondents selected their income from a list of predefined hourly or salary ranges; therefore, findings are presented in range format.

THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY 2.0
BRIEF 4: EARLY EDUCATOR WELL-BEING AND BURNOUT

Overall well-being of educators and caregivers working with young children is an important factor in ensuring their capacity to provide high-quality care. We asked a series of questions across a number of dimensions of wellbeing, including financial health, stress, burnout, and access to professional supports. **Note**: Responses were collected before the Cambridge Preschool Program launched in September 2024, so these data reflect pre-universal pre-k conditions.

FINANCIAL WELLBEING SNAPSHOT

Cambridge's early education workforce continues to earn much less than area averages.

The average annual household income of survey respondents (for all early education roles including teachers, leaders, administrators, subject specialists, and coaches) is **about $80,000,** while the average annual household income in Middlesex County is **$126,469.**

60% of respondents report having more than one adult contributing to household income, and **35%** of respondents report having children under the age of 18 living with them.

Findings from Cambridge Pulse 2.0 indicate that early education professionals' wages fall short of what's needed to afford living in the area.

20% of respondents hold a second job in addition to their full-time early education role, a **5% increase from 2022**. Educators work an average of **12 hours per week** at their second jobs.

38% of respondents receive SNAP or TANF public assistance supports.

"I wish that I made a living wage. I babysit 3 days a week or more just to make rent in this area. I know that my school pays a better wage than most, and I still can't make ends meet with rent, car payment, car insurance, and other basic needs. I love the work that I do, and I want to continue to do it, but the financial stress can be too much."

A higher percentage of early educators report having access to stable benefits through their employer compared to Cambridge Pulse 1.0 (2022). These benefits include:

- Paid sick leave
- Paid vacation or personal days
- Dental insurance
- Funds for professional development
- Child care benefits
- Retirement Plan

"[I wish we] had more paid sick and vacation time: being surrounded by young children often means that you get sick more often... The responsibilities are huge, and so should be the time to rest!"

Some early educators express the desire for increased paid time off, given the physically strenuous nature of the job, and exposure to illness.

BURNOUT SNAPSHOT

Early education and care environments often place high demands on educators due to the intensity of daily work and external pressures; without support, these stressors can lead to burnout. Below are trends and insights related to burnout from early educators and early education leaders. Burnout was measured using Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES), which includes three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Burnout Trends

Role: *Burnout levels are* ***higher for those who work directly with children*** *vs. those in administrative roles. Burnout is* ***higher among full-time*** *vs. part-time employees.*

Ratios: *Burnout levels are* ***higher for those who are responsible for more children*** *in their settings vs. those who have fewer children in their care.*

Benefits: *Burnout levels are* ***lower for those whose programs offer the following benefits*** *vs. those that do not: tuition reimbursement, overtime pay, and higher numbers of paid vacation days.*

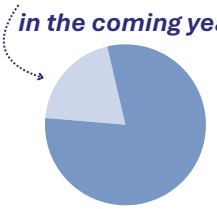
Turnover*: Respondents who had* ***higher levels of burnout*** *were* ***more likely to report plans to leave*** *their programs the following year.*

Overall, reported **levels of burnout were lower in Cambridge Pulse 2.0 (2024) than in Pulse 1.0 (2022)**. While the exact reasons are unclear, qualitative responses suggest that pandemic-related impacts were more acute for early educators in 2022 than in 2024, which may help explain some of the improvement. Further research is needed to better understand this change.

RETENTION & TURNOVER

Retention of the early education workforce is a high priority for communities like Cambridge that are working to create a stable and sustainable early education and care system. Below are insights on turnover and its connection to compensation and burnout.

One in five early education respondents (20%) indicated they were definitely or possibly planning to leave their program in the coming year.



Most respondents cited one or more of the following as reasons for leaving:

- Insufficient compensation
- Burnout
- Challenging working conditions

"I'm living paycheck to paycheck and often feel like other jobs in other fields would pay me a lot more for my time."

Educators who reported having access to interpersonal supports were more likely to plan to stay in their program the following year.

Respondents who **participated in a community of practice** were **more likely to report plans to stay.**

Respondents who **met with a coach or mentor** were **more likely to report plans to stay**.

Structural features such as compensation, benefits, and staff-to-child ratios, as well as interpersonal supports—such as strong workplace relationships and access to coaching—play a key role in promoting early educators' well-being. These insights from Cambridge Pulse 2.0 indicate that **further investment in educator salaries, coaching, mentoring, and communities of practice** may support educators' well-being and retention.

Suggested Citation: Petty, C.H., Ramos-Draper, J., Mozaffari, A., Fritz, L., Jones, S.M., Lesaux, N.K. (2025). Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey 2.0 (Briefs 1-5). Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education.