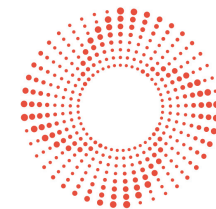


# The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Anchorage: Challenges & Opportunities

Presentation to the Anchorage Child Care & Early Education Fund  
Implementation Team

March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024



Stellar Group  
Research | Strategy | Impact

# Full Report Research Methods

- » Survey of 699 early childhood educators throughout Alaska
- » 23 interviews + 2 focus groups with early childhood educators and administrators
- » 13 interviews with leaders and program managers in other states
- » 11 interviews with educational and professional development key informants
- » Literature review
- » Secondary data
  - » *2023 ROOTS Awards Evaluation*
  - » *Alaska Child Care Program Office (CCPO)*
  - » *Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD)*
  - » *Reports from national early childhood think tanks*
  - » *SEED data*
  - » *Council for Professional Recognition*





## **Objective 11: The early childhood workforce is stable, qualified, compensated, diverse, and supported.**

11.1: Increase cross sector recruitment and retention of early childhood professionals.

11.2: Increase professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals.

11.3: Improve wages and compensation for early childhood professionals.

11.4: Increase diversity across the early childhood workforce.

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA**

## **A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025**

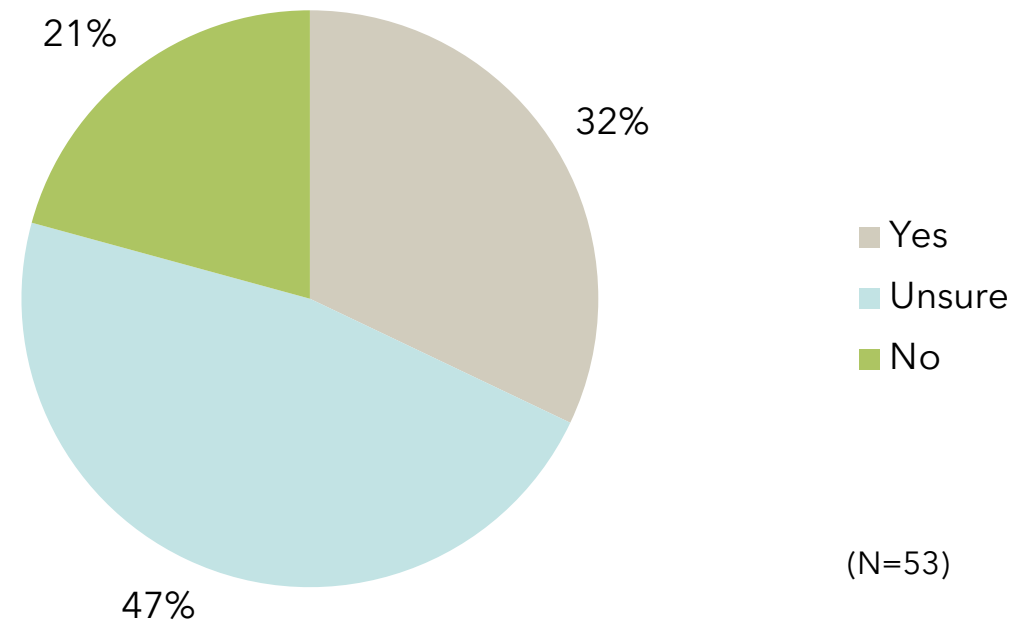
**JUNE 2020**

# Many in the early childhood education workforce want to make it a career

- » 64% of Anchorage respondents see ECE as a long-term career path, with an additional 26% considering it (N=213)

*"I still really wanted to work in early childhood. I really value the importance of education and early education, and I wanted to still be in that field. That's where my heart is at."  
- Former early childhood educator,  
Anchorage*

**Eight in ten respondents in Anchorage who have left the ECE field may be willing to return.**

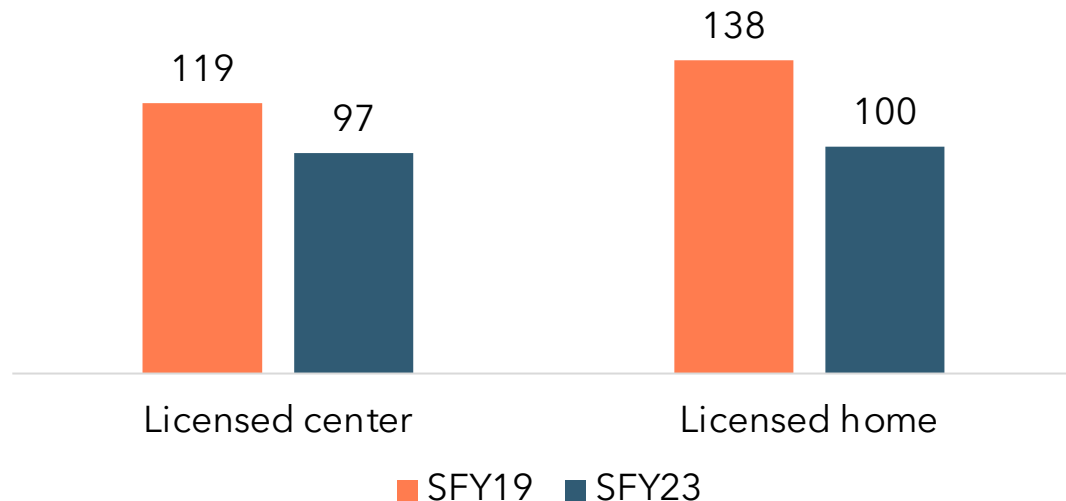


Source: 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey (Anchorage).

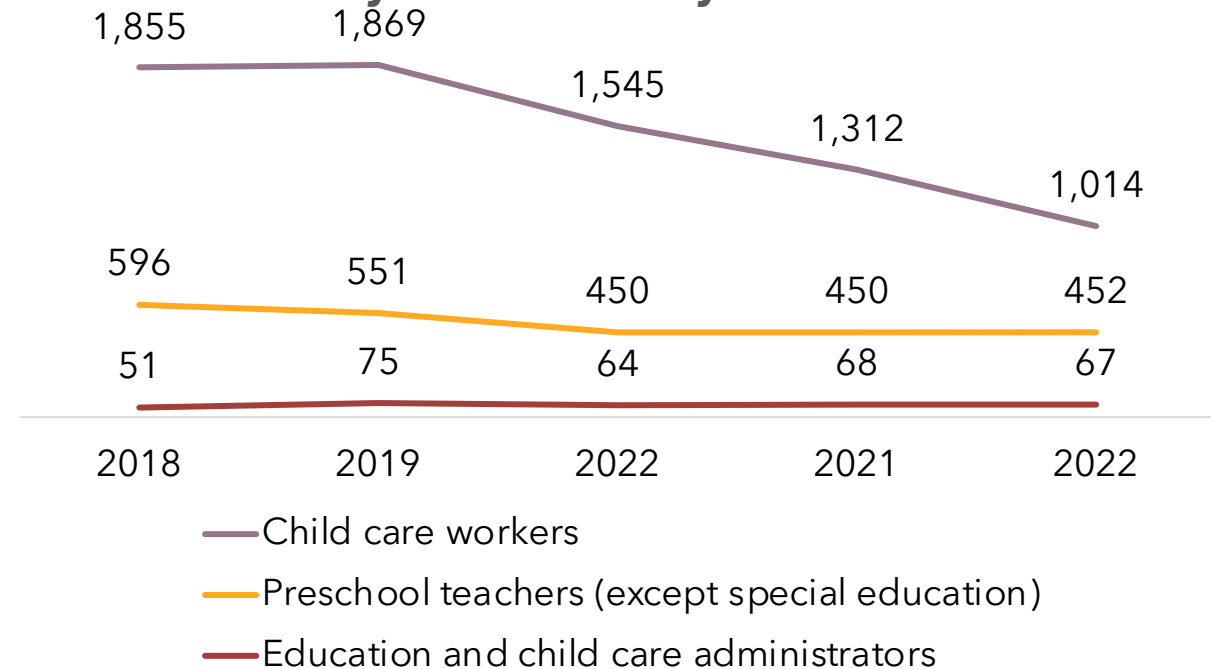
# Yet, the workforce is steadily declining

- » 45% overall decline in childcare workers in Anchorage (highest in state)
- » 42% turnover rate in childcare workers in Anchorage (lowest in state)

**The number of licensed centers and licensed homes in Anchorage have both declined in the last five years.**



**The number of child care workers in Anchorage has fallen by 45% in recent years.**

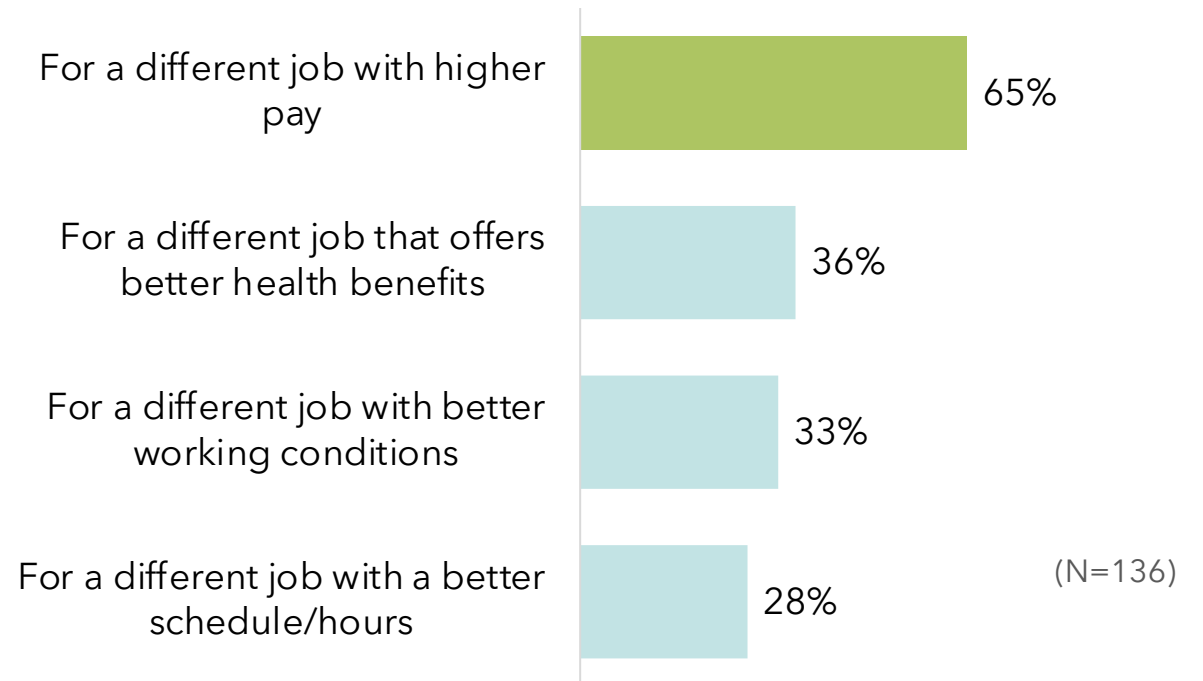


# Why do early childhood educators consider leaving the field?

» The key factors influencing the crisis in Anchorage and statewide are:

- » Low wages
- » Lack of benefits
- » Challenging working conditions

**Higher pay is the most common reason early childhood educators in Anchorage have considered leaving their job.**



Source: 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey (Anchorage).

# Low wages are the most common reason

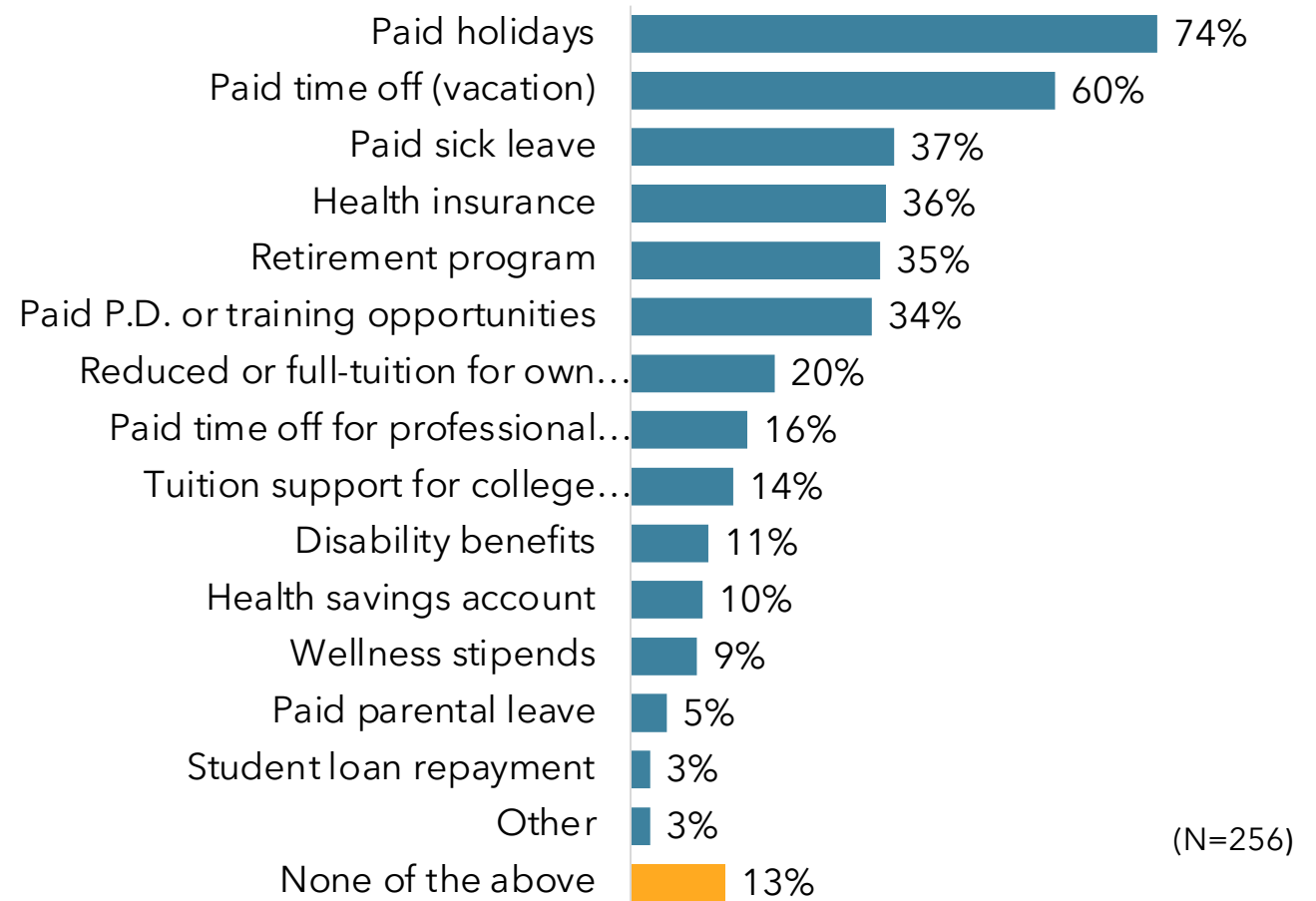
- » Most cited reason among early childhood educators for both those who had left the ECE workforce and those who were considering leaving the workforce
- » Median wage for child care workers and preschool teachers is below the living wage in Alaska for a single adult without children and less than half the living wage for an adult with one child

Median Wages In Anchorage And Living Wage In Alaska	
	Wage
Child care workers (Anchorage)	\$15.14
Preschool workers (Anchorage)	\$14.89
Living wage with 0 children (AK)	\$17.15
Living wage with 1 child (AK)	\$35.46
Living wage with 2 children (AK)	\$45.56
Living wage with 3 children (AK)	\$60.65

# Another reason for turnover is limited or no benefits

- » Although early childhood educators overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of workplace benefits, comprehensive benefits packages are rare
- » 85% of Anchorage early childhood educators called benefits at least “moderately important” to their employment decisions (N=244)

Access to benefits remains low for early childhood educators in Anchorage.



Source: 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey (Anchorage).



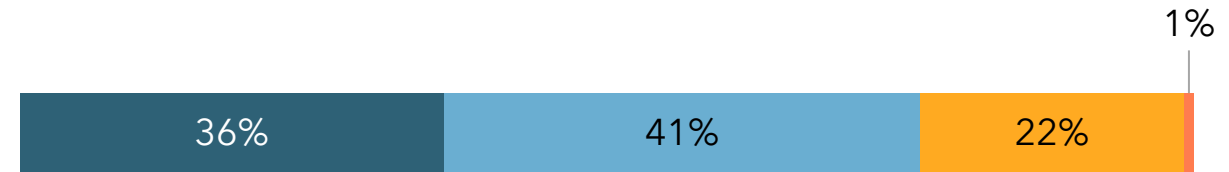
# Many educators feel their job has gotten harder

» 80% of early childhood educators in Anchorage have noticed more behavioral challenges in children since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (N=219)

*"I don't think they know what they're getting themselves into. It's a hard, long day. It's emotionally draining. It's physically draining."*

*- Early childhood educator,  
Anchorage*

**More than three in four early childhood educators in Anchorage feel that their job has become more demanding since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic due to an increase in behavioral challenges.**



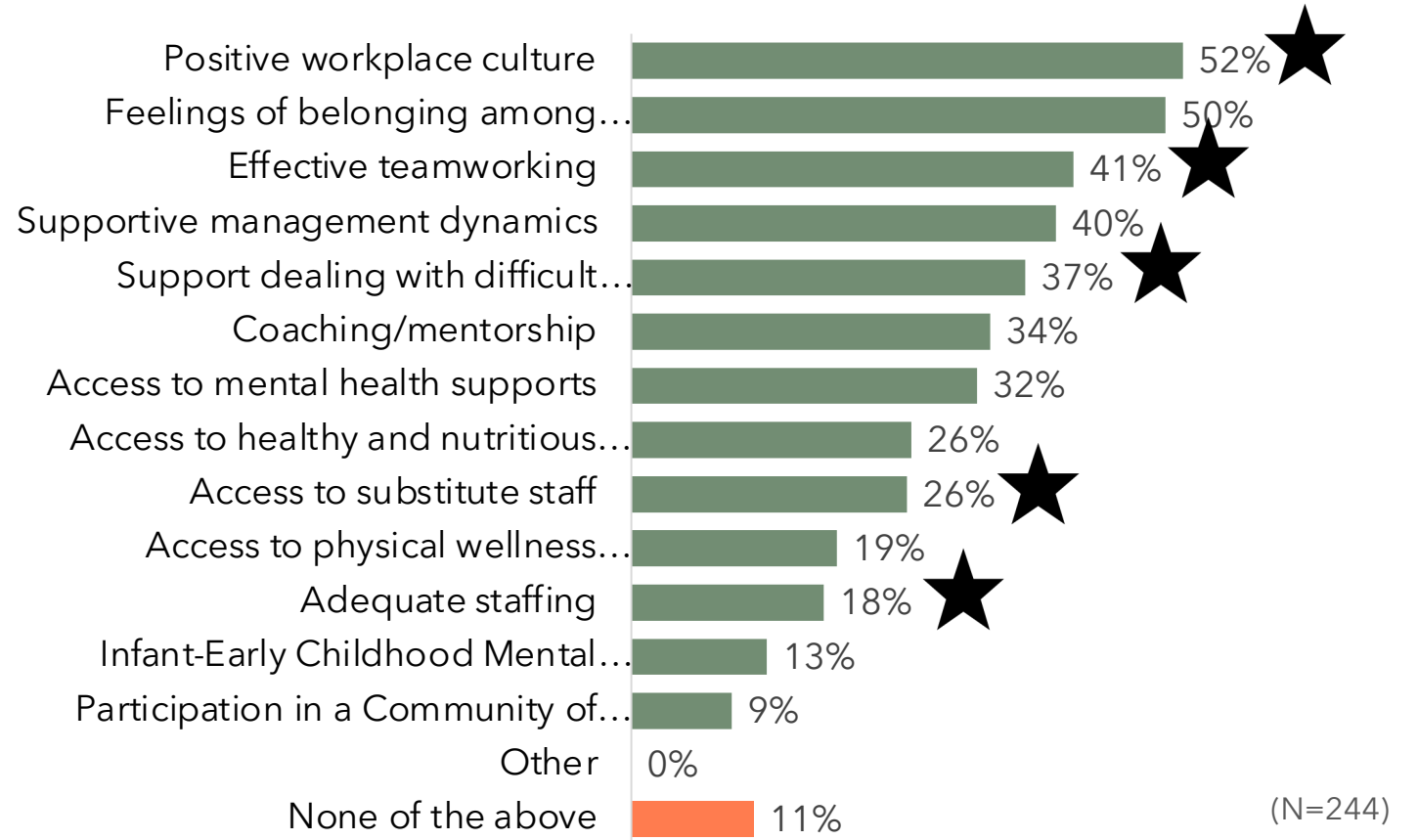
■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Source: 2023 Alaska ECE Workforce Survey (Anchorage). (N=219)

# Challenging workplace conditions also factor in

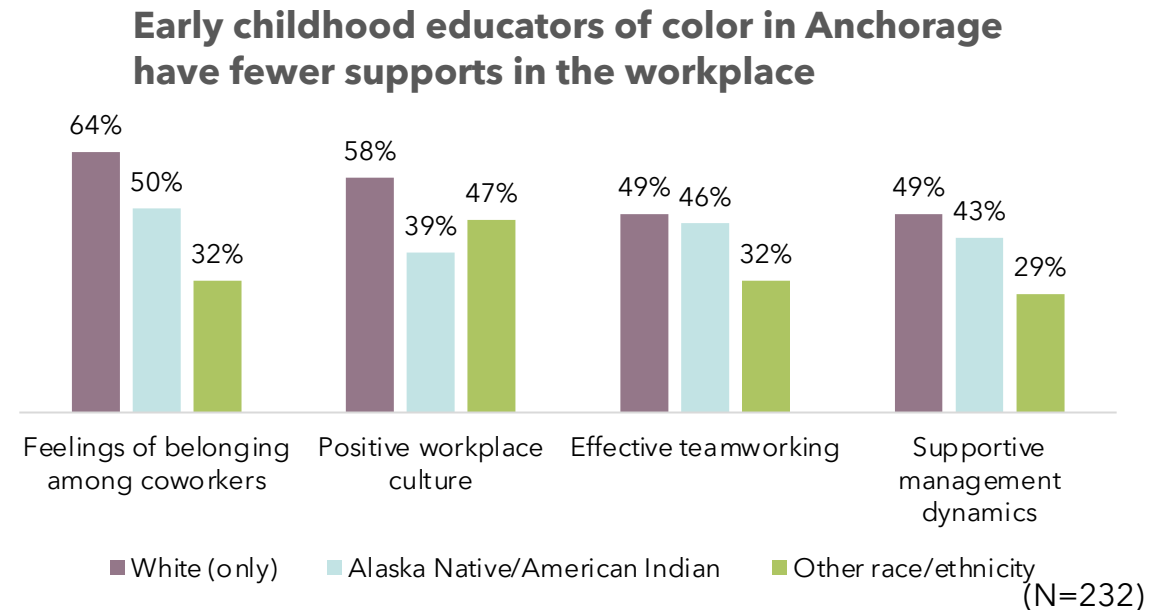
- » 59% of surveyed early childhood educators in Anchorage feel emotionally drained from their work, with 27% selecting “strongly agree” (N=244)
- » Although 71% of Anchorage early childhood educators said they were at least moderately satisfied with the current supports in place to help them navigate the challenges of their work (N=244), **almost all (96%) indicated that improved workplace wellness supports would motivate them to remain in their current position** (N=240)

## Early childhood educators in Anchorage have a range of access to wellness supports.



# Teamwork and management often has room for growth

- » Only half of early childhood educators in Anchorage feel they belong among their coworkers, 52% cite a positive workplace culture, 41% cite effective teamworking, and 40% cite supportive management dynamics (N=244)
- » In Anchorage (and statewide), early childhood educators of color were less likely to feel a sense of belonging among coworkers experience a positive workplace culture, effective teamworking, or supportive management dynamics (N=232)



# There are bright spots

- » **81%** of Anchorage early childhood educators are satisfied with access to professional development opportunities (N=244)
- » **80%** of Anchorage early childhood educators feel their work is adequately appreciated (N=244)

*"I think that it's easier to put out good work when you know what you're doing is appreciated and valued."*

*- Early childhood educator,  
Anchorage*

# Other States' Strategies: Key Findings

- » No strategy stands alone; a multi-faceted, sustainable solution is needed
- » Coordination or consolidation of early childhood programs is needed to leverage funding, align policy, and avoid duplication
- » **Increased funding for the ECE sector is necessary**
  - » *Must rethink early childhood financing strategies*
  - » *Combination of reallocation and generation of new funding sources*
  - » *Pandemic relief funds were effective as relief but were not designed as sustainable solutions*



# Priorities for Generating a Strong Early Childhood Workforce in Alaska

- » Theme 1 Increase Wages
- » Theme 2: Increase Access to Benefits
- » Theme 3: Increase Retention (Quality)
- » Theme 4: Add Supports for In-Home Providers



# Theme 1: Increase Wages



## Permanent/Sustained:

1. State-established minimum wage for ECE workers
2. Union-negotiated minimum wage
  - » *Alaska HB 46 is a pending bill titled Child Care Provider Collective Bargaining which would allow childcare providers that receive state aid to organize and collectively bargain with the Department of Health*
3. Increase state childcare subsidies; require providers use for wage increase
  - » *Pay providers on enrollment for true cost of care*
  - » *Based on quality and number of FTE employees, qualified providers receive that must be used for wages and compensation*

## Subsidized Employment/Retention Bonus:

4. Non-competitive state grants to support wages to providers
5. Employment Subsidy tied to quality and retention
  - » *Establishing a **WAGES** type system or leveraging **ROOTS***

# WAGE\$: Quality and Retention Bonuses

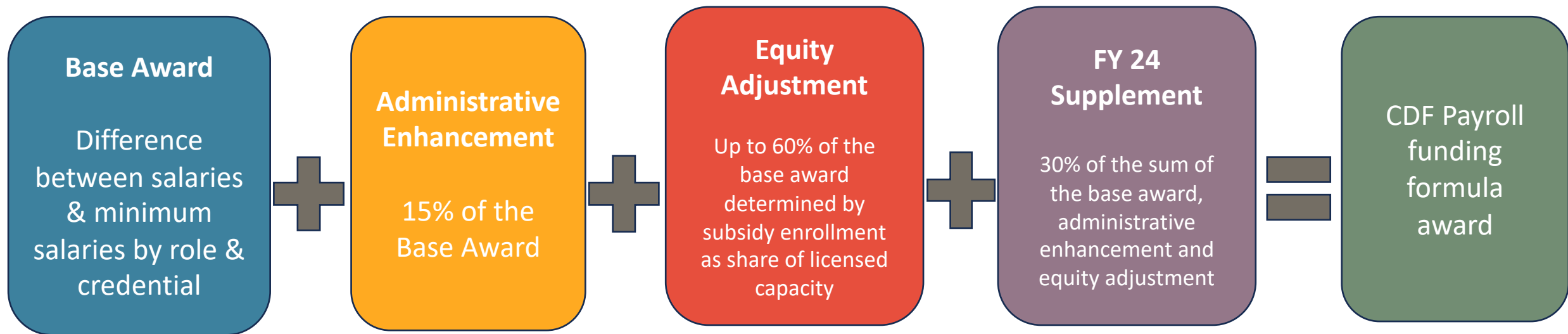
- » An education-based tiered employment subsidy paid to teachers, directors, and family childcare providers
- » Supplement stipend payments to eligible educators twice yearly
- » Combined with grants and scholarships for professional development
- » Details can vary, but typically include:
  - » *Earning less than a locally established income cap*
  - » *Work with children ages birth to five*
  - » *Work at least 10 hours per week in a licensed childcare program*
  - » *Work at least six months in the same childcare program*
  - » *And have a level of education listed on the locally determined salary supplement scale*





# Washington D.C. Pay Equity Fund

- » Codified an Early Childhood Educator Pay Scale
- » Raises by role / credentials (parity with public school teachers)
  - » Assistant Teacher with CDA has minimum annual salary of \$51,005
  - » Lead Teacher with Bachelor's in ECE has minimum annual salary of \$75,103
- » **Starting in FY 24 payments go to providers, who then increase the wages**



# Theme 2: Increase Access to Benefits

## Health Insurance

1. Establish other pooled/group benefits
2. Increase state childcare subsidies; requires provider use for employee health insurance
3. Health insurance premium subsidies on the exchange

## PTO / Leave

4. Substitute pool for small business providers (e.g., in-home providers)

## Other Potential Benefits

5. Presumptive categorical eligibility child care subsidy for early childhood education workers



# Theme 3: Increase Retention (Quality)

## Leadership Development

1. Fund leadership development courses to enhance team management skills; tie to state credentialing requirements
2. Elevate early childhood education as a profession; enhance recruitment
  - » *Awards / raising visibility / expressing appreciation / public recognition / host national conferences*

## Professional Development

3. Develop peer support / communities of practice
4. Continue to offer access to professional development and higher education at no cost

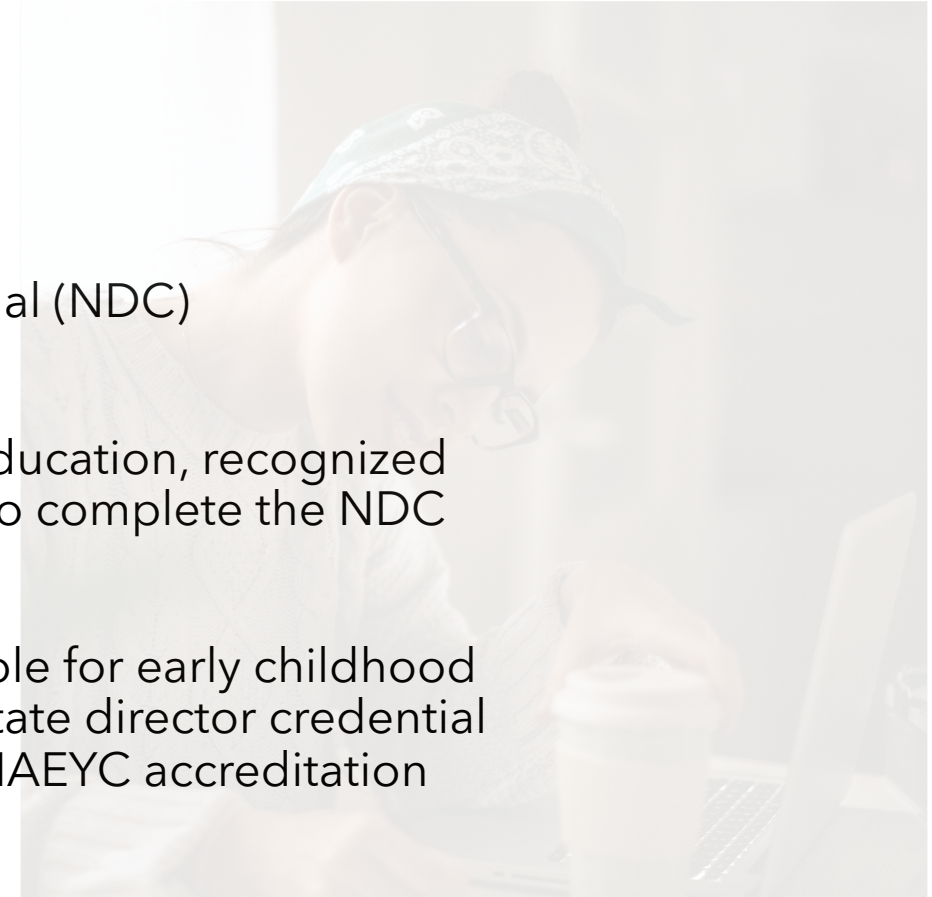
## Other Supports

5. Increase access to coaching and IECMH consultation
6. Offer workplace wellness supports



# Aim4Excellence Leadership Training

- » Community of Practice cohort model
- » Year-long program of 9 self-paced modules fully online
- » Provides pathway toward earning the National Director Credential (NDC)
- » Monthly meetings, a dedicated coach, scholarships for higher education, recognized in the state quality rating system, and with bonuses for those who complete the NDC
- » North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina have funding available for early childhood leadership Aim4 professional development, which meets their state director credential requirements and assist with meeting administrator criteria for NAEYC accreditation
- » Already approved by SEED; add incentive



# Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.)

- » Scholarships for certification or education for early childhood educators working at licensed facilities
- » Tied to QRIS
- » Adopted in 23 states
- » TEACH Early Childhood National Center provides technical assistance to state considering adopting the program
  - » *Identification of possible funding sources*
  - » *Program application for apprenticeships*
  - » *Operational policies*
  - » *Scholarship model*
  - » *Participant recruitment*
  - » *Database designed for the program*
  - » *Annual professional development symposium*
- » Must have a non-profit “administrative home”
- » \$10,000 to start program + annual program licensing and technology fee





# Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators' Program (CHIME)

- » 8-week mindfulness compassion-based program for early childhood educators
- » Train the trainer model
- » Community of Practice model with cohorts based on staff level, generating peer support network
- » Decrease workplace stress through self-regulation and improves environments for children through modeling self-regulation
- » Incorporates local knowledge; foundational concepts within CHIME are being re-considered through an indigenous practices' lens
- » Normalizes the need for regulation and stress management; recognizes the inherent stress of this work
- » Low cost: \$185 for 8-weeks plus the cost of a \$55 manual

# Theme 4: Add Supports for In-home Providers

## Potential Levers:

1. Substitute pools
2. Pooled administration
3. Technical assistance/ coaching on business development
  - » *Assistance with navigating licensing*
4. Grants for infrastructure
  - » *Sponsored mortgages and leases for new in-home child care providers*
  - » *Funding for building renovations*



**ZERO** in-home providers surveyed in Anchorage have access to a substitute if they are sick (N=17)

# Closing Thoughts

- » **First priority: sustainable, substantial wage increase + improved benefits**
- » Prioritization/goals are essential for choosing the right levers/models; there are many possible approaches
- » There is a direct relationship between wages and quality
- » Multi-pronged approach is necessary
- » *System-level* interventions incorporating new funding sources are necessary for sustainable improvements
- » Consolidate and align planning and funding for highest efficiency and impact



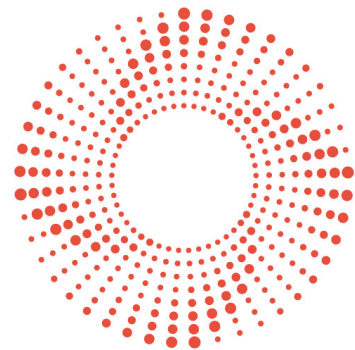


# Questions?

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Iris Matthews  
(907) 440-6418  
[iris@stellargp.com](mailto:iris@stellargp.com)



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