

# Leading Colorado's Early Care and Education Workforce

Qualistar Colorado surveyed early care and education leaders\* about their work experiences, staff and businesses. Overall, we found that these women – and they are predominately women – work very hard to provide quality care and education and to support their staff. However, the amount of responsibility of leaders and the teachers who work for them is not reflected in their compensation, presenting significant staffing challenges and, most importantly, impacting the quality of care and education children receive.

**Early care and education leaders, administrators and teachers provide an invaluable service, but their compensation does not reflect their critical role in children's lives and in the community.**

Colorado's early care and education leaders are highly skilled and trained professionals. In fact, 82 percent have a college degree and 63 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. When compared to other professionals with similar educational backgrounds and work responsibilities, we can see that early care and education leaders are grossly underpaid.

For example, food service managers earn an average of \$61,090 per year. Colorado's early care and education leaders earn on average \$41,195 for a role that directly impacts the lives of families and children.

The vast majority of teachers earn between \$10.00 and \$15.00 per hour, which translates to \$20,800 to \$31,200 per year. In all but one county, Adams County, teachers earn less than what is needed to be self-sufficient. The Colorado Center on Law and Policy defines self-sufficiency as the costs for housing, child care and food for a single parent and one preschool-age child. While a good baseline to understand differences among Colorado counties, the self-sufficiency standard is not a complete budget given families with young children have far more expenses and financial responsibilities.

Average Income of a Leader Compared to Colorado Self-Sufficiency				
Geographic Designation	County Examples	Average per Geographic Designation	Required Income to Meet Basic Needs	Difference (+/-)
Urban	Denver	\$41,253	\$47,914	-\$6,661
	Jefferson		\$51,888	-\$10,635
	Larimer		\$46,552	-\$5,299
Rural	Archuleta	\$38,365	\$38,511	-\$146
	Morgan		\$31,606	+\$6,759
	Rio Blanco		\$40,817	-\$2,452
Rural Resort	Grand	\$47,814	\$43,617	+\$4,197
	Routt		\$58,808	-\$10,994
	Summit		\$59,595	-\$11,781

*Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado (2015). Family is defined as one adult and one preschool age child and basic needs include, but are not limited to, housing, child care and food.*

Average Hourly Teacher Wage Compared to Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado				
Geographic Designation	County Examples	Average per Geographic Designation	Required Income to Meet Basic Needs	Difference (+/-)
Urban	Denver	\$13.70	\$22.69	-\$8.99
	Jefferson		\$24.54	-\$10.84
	Larimer		\$22.04	-\$8.34
Rural	Archuleta	\$14.04	\$18.23	-\$4.19
	Morgan		\$14.96	-\$0.92
	Rio Blanco		\$19.33	-\$5.29
Rural Resort	Grand	\$16.69	\$20.65	-\$3.96
	Routt		\$27.84	-\$11.15
	Summit		\$28.22	-\$11.53

*Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado (2015). Family is defined as one adult and one preschool age child and basic needs include, but are not limited to, housing, child care and food.*

\*Qualistar surveyed 471 self-identified early care and education leaders who work at child care centers and public preschool programs.



“Leaders play an instrumental role in helping care and education professionals strengthen their core competencies and in creating a work environment in which they can fully use their knowledge and skills.”  
- Institute of Medicine and National Research Center, 2015

**Low teacher wages make it challenging for early care and education leaders and administrators to find, hire and retain qualified professionals.**

Nearly 70 percent of respondents experienced some turnover of teaching staff in the past 12 months. The most common reason for the turnover was the need for more money.

The survey also identified a severe lack of qualified professionals to fill vacancies. Sixty percent of leaders reported that the lack of qualified professionals was the top challenge in hiring. Another 25 percent reported low wages as the top challenge. Leaders are currently struggling not only to find qualified professionals, but to also find ways to successfully retain the teams they have.

When a workforce is chronically underpaid, severe and negative repercussions exist, including challenges in recruiting qualified staff and high turnover of positions that are both costly to the business and, more importantly, to children. Children thrive with secure, attached adult relationships and interruption in such relationships can negatively impact children’s social and emotional well-being.

**Leaders need support during this time of historic change.**

Recently, there have been historic federal and state investments in early care and education that have set forth significant change in a short period of time. Leaders and administrators bear great responsibility in implementing a wide array of new policies, regulations, expectations and standards, and ensuring their teams of teachers and other staff members are equipped to execute changes in curriculum and safety and sanitation procedures.

The state’s Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System factors in leadership, management and administration practices as one of five separate standard criteria for earning a quality rating designation along with workforce qualifications and professional development, family partnerships, learning environment and child health promotion.

To ensure that more programs benefit from skilled leaders and administrators, access to resources in business management and professional development is critical.



Find the full report online at [Qualistar.org/workforce](http://Qualistar.org/workforce).