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THE LOW WORKFORCE QUALIFICATIONS IN FLORIDA'S EXPANDING PRIVATE CHILD-CARE INDUSTRY, 1980-2004

by Stephen Herzenberg, Mark Price, and David Bradley

Introduction

“Parents can’t afford to pay, teachers can’t afford to stay, there’s got to be a better way” goes the lament of professionals in the field of early childhood education (ECE). This report shows that the Florida private-sector early childhood education industry has struggled to attract and hold onto a qualified workforce throughout the last 25 years.¹

The qualifications of early childhood educators matter because, first, high-quality ECE improves long-term academic outcomes for children and delivers benefits to the community that far outweigh the costs;² and, second, high-quality ECE programs require educated and experienced teachers (Bowman, Donovan, and Burns 2000).

This issue brief uses new data that track Florida’s center-based ECE (the vast majority of it in the private sector) for a 25-year period (see note on the data). For home-based ECE, data are available for 2000-04.

Main findings

Analysis of this newly available data produces the following findings:

Fewer than one in five center-based early childhood educators have a four-year college degree. The share of Florida early childhood educators (a group including teachers, administrators, assistant teachers, and teacher aides) with a four-year college degree was only 12% in 1980 and remains at or near 13% today. By comparison, 25% of early childhood educators nationally had a college degree in 1980 and only 17%-18% do today.

NOTE ON THE DATA

The data analyzed in this Issue Brief come from the 1983-2004 Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of 60,000 U.S. households, and the 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial U.S. Census. While the national companion report relies exclusively on the CPS, the state-level reports, like this one, rely more on the Census data due to sample size reasons. The Florida center-based industry on which we focus excludes school-based pre-kindergarten programs and is 95% in the private sector (compared to 92% nationally). It includes for-profit and not-for-profit child-care centers, Head Start programs, and stand-alone preschools and nursery schools. We look at trends for two different groups of center-based staff. “Early childhood educators” includes all occupations with primary responsibility for children, such as center directors (also called administrators), teachers, assistant teachers, and teacher aides. The second group includes just teachers plus administrators. (We pool all early childhood educators to increase sample size and combine teachers with administrators for the same reason.)

Roughly half of Florida’s early childhood educators have a high school degree or less. The share of center-based Florida early childhood educators with a high school education or less was 67% according to the 1980 Census and close to half today.

In the year 2000, less than one in four center-based early childhood educators had a college degree in every one of 12 metropolitan areas. In Pensacola, Melbourne, Fort Myers, and Lakeland as few as one in 10 (and sometimes fewer) center-based early childhood educators had a college degree. In Orlando, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, West Palm Beach, and Jacksonville one in five (or fewer) had a college degree.

Education levels are similarly low in home-based ECE. Only 10% of the staff members in Florida’s home-based ECE has a college degree or more, and 55% have a high school degree or less.

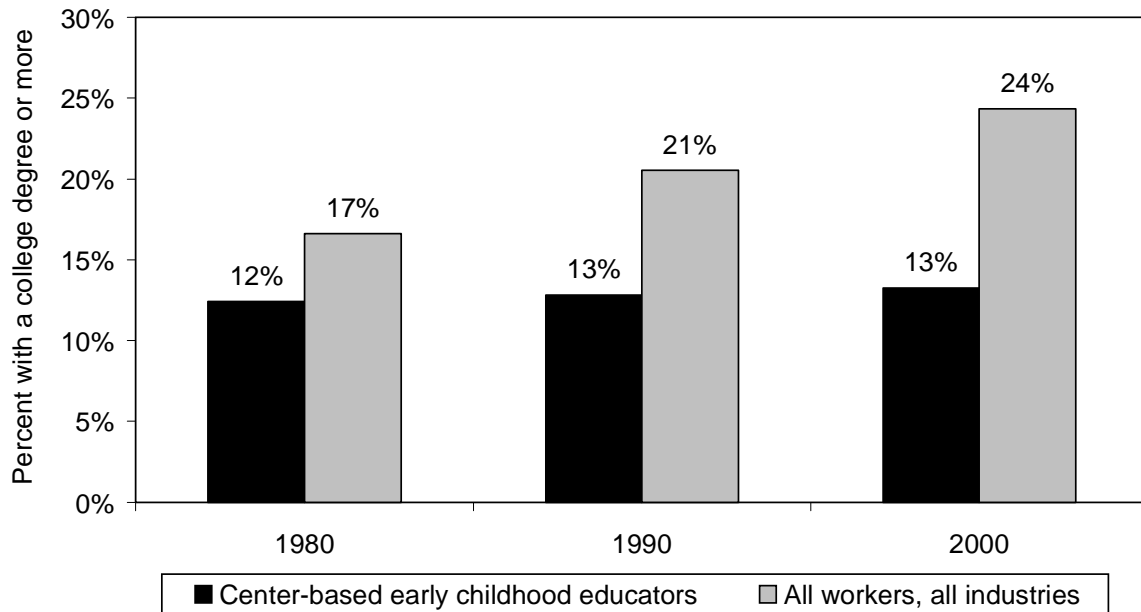
Low wages and benefits help explain ECE education levels in Florida. The low education levels of early childhood educators stem from low pay and benefits. In center-based ECE, for example, median pay remains around \$8 per hour, less than \$17,000 per year for a full-time worker.

Education levels in Florida ECE were low in 1980 and have remained low as the center-based industry expanded from less than 20,000 workers in 1980 to nearly 50,000 in recent years. Unable to offer good salaries, administrators in Florida ECE often find that they must hire individuals with low education levels and no specialized training in early childhood development.

These data underscore the critical need for Florida’s new voluntary pre-kindergarten program to meet higher workforce quality standards. In this program and throughout all of ECE, Florida needs early childhood educators with the skills necessary to help children succeed. This requires high skill standards for all teaching staff and compensation adequate to retain qualified teachers.

FIGURE A

The persistently low level of four-year college degree attainment among Florida's center-based early childhood educators



Note: The differences between the share of all workers living below 200% of the poverty threshold and the shares of center-based ECE and home-based ECE living below the threshold is significant at the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of Census data.

Educational levels in center-based ECE are consistently low

In the United States, the CPS and U.S. Census reveal a reduction since the early 1980s in college degrees among staff who work in center-based early childhood education. In Florida, college degree attainment was low at the start and has remained so through 2004.

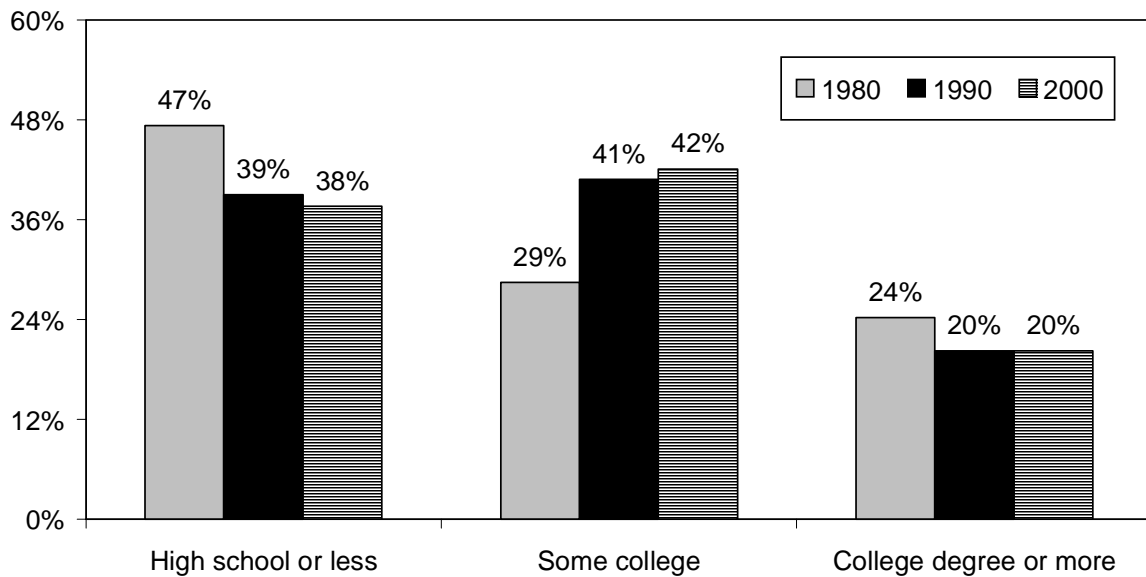
- According to the Census, the share of Florida early childhood educators with a four-year college degree was 12% or 13% in 1980, 1990, and 2000 (**Figure A**).³
- The share of Florida early childhood educators with a high school education or less was 67% according to the 1980 Census and close to 50% in 1990 and 2000.⁴

The educational attainment of center-based early childhood educators has dropped relative to the education of the workforce as a whole (see Figure A).

- Two decades ago, the share of early childhood educators with a bachelor's degree was comparable to the share of all workers with a bachelor's degree in any industries. Today, early childhood educators in Florida are about a third as likely to have a college degree as workers overall.

FIGURE B

Percent of teachers and administrators with at least a college degree in Florida



Note: The differences between 1980 and 2000 and between 1990 and 2000 in the share of teachers and administrators with a college degree or more are not statistically significant. The differences between 1980 and 2000 in the share with a high school education or less and the share with some college is significant at the 1% level. The change between 1990 and 2000 in the percent with a high school degree or less and in the percent with some college are not statistically significant.

Source: KRC analysis of Census data.

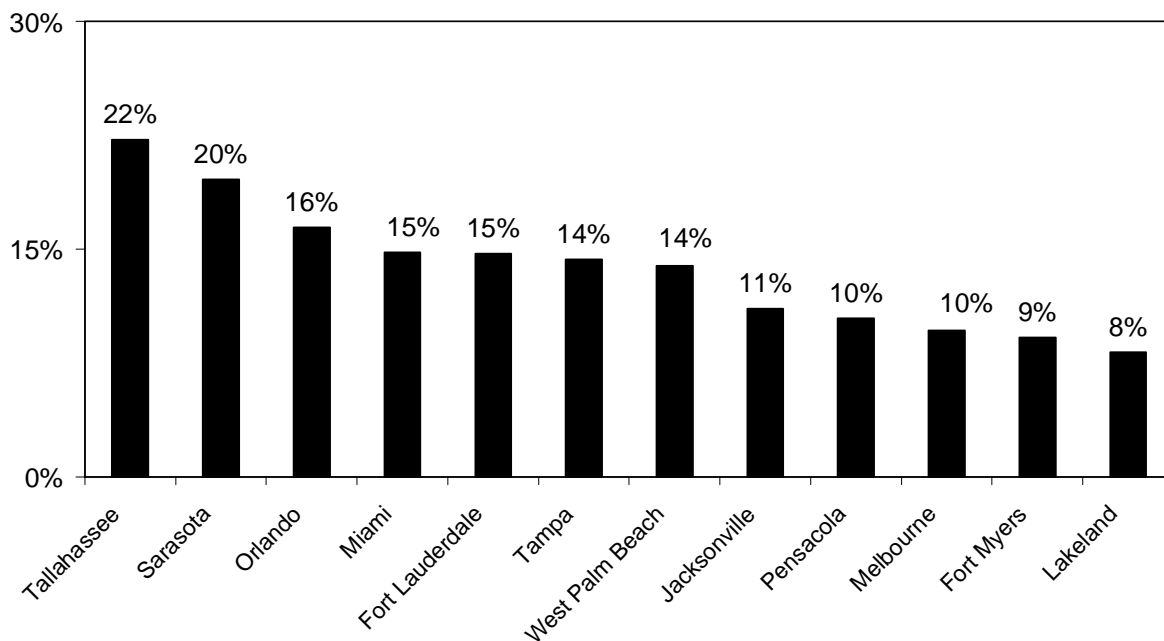
College degree attainment also low among center-based teachers and administrators

Narrowing the focus from all center-based early childhood educators to just teachers and administrators reveals similarly low levels of educational attainment as well as some evidence of a decline over time, as has taken place nationally.

- According to the Census, the share of center-based ECE teachers and administrators with a four-year college degree in Florida fell from 24% in 1980 to 20% in both 1990 and 2000 (**Figure B**).⁵ In 2000, Florida ranked 36th out of 39 states analyzed based on the share of center-based teachers and administrators with a college degree.⁶
- On a consistent basis since 1980, according to both the Census and the CPS, roughly 40% of teachers and administrators in Florida have a high school degree or less.
- Since 1990, again according to both data sources, about 40% of center-based teachers and administrators have had intermediate levels of education, that is, more than a high school education, but less than a four-

FIGURE C

Low levels of college degree attainment in Florida's metropolitan areas



Note: Tampa includes Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater; Miami includes Miami and Hialeah; Fort Lauderdale includes Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, and Pompano Beach; West Palm Beach includes West Palm Beach, Boca Raton, and Delray Beach; Melbourne includes Melbourne, Titusville, Cocoa, and Palm Bay; Lakeland includes Lakeland and Winterhaven; Fort Myers includes Fort Myers and Cape Coral.

Source: KRC analysis of Census data.

year degree. In 2000, only a quarter of this middle group—11% of all teachers—had completed a (usually) two-year associate's degree. Adding this group to the college-educated one, only 31% of center-based ECE teachers and administrators had completed a two-year degree or more in 2000.⁷

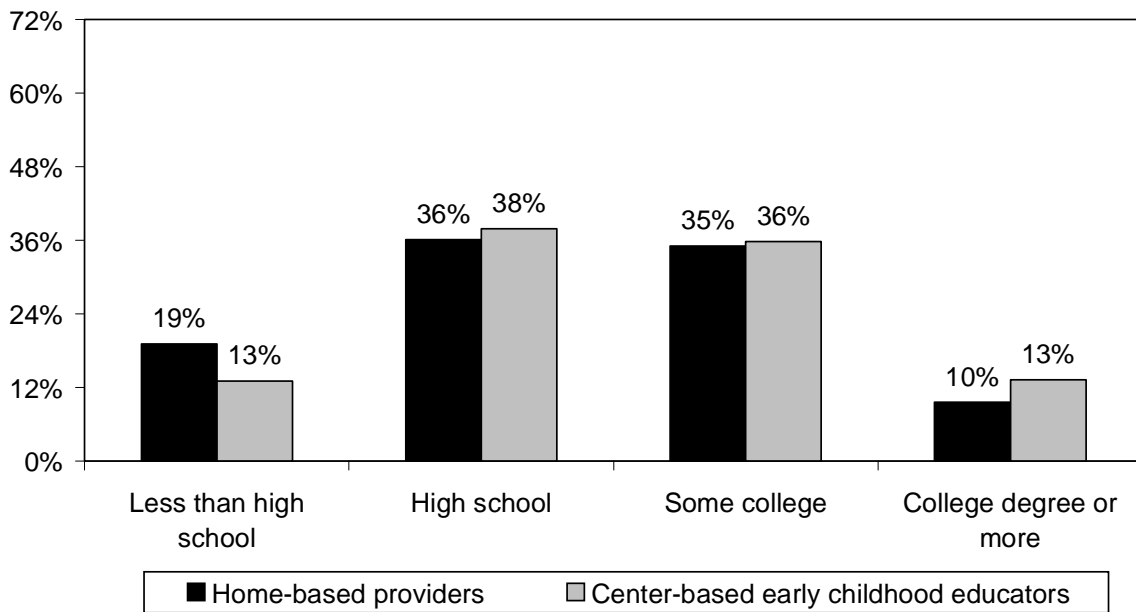
ECE education levels low in all Florida metropolitan areas

In the year 2000, less than 25% of center-based early childhood educators had a college degree in every one of 12 Florida metropolitan areas for which data exist (**Figure C**).

- In Pensacola, Melbourne, Fort Myers, and Lakeland, 10% or less of center-based early childhood educators had a college degree, compared to the national average of 17%.
- Orlando, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, West Palm Beach, and Jacksonville also trailed the national average for the share holding a college degree.
- In Tallahassee and Sarasota, the college degree share was 22% and 20%, respectively.

FIGURE D

Education levels even lower in home-based ECE in Florida, 2000-04



Note: The differences between shares of center-based early childhood educators and home-based providers with less than a high school education and with a college degree or more are each significant at the 1% level. The differences between the two groups in the share with a high school education and the share with some college are not significant.

Source: KRC analysis of Census data.

Education levels also lower in home-based early childhood education

Education levels are also low in home-based ECE in Florida and are very similar to the national average (**Figure D**). (Both the Census and the CPS data show home-based ECE to employ about 20,000.⁸)

- According to the Census, only 10% of Florida home-based ECE workers in 2000 had a college degree or more, similar to the national average of 11%.
- Nineteen percent have less than a high school degree, and 36% a high school degree or less, which is again similar to the national averages of 17% and 36%.

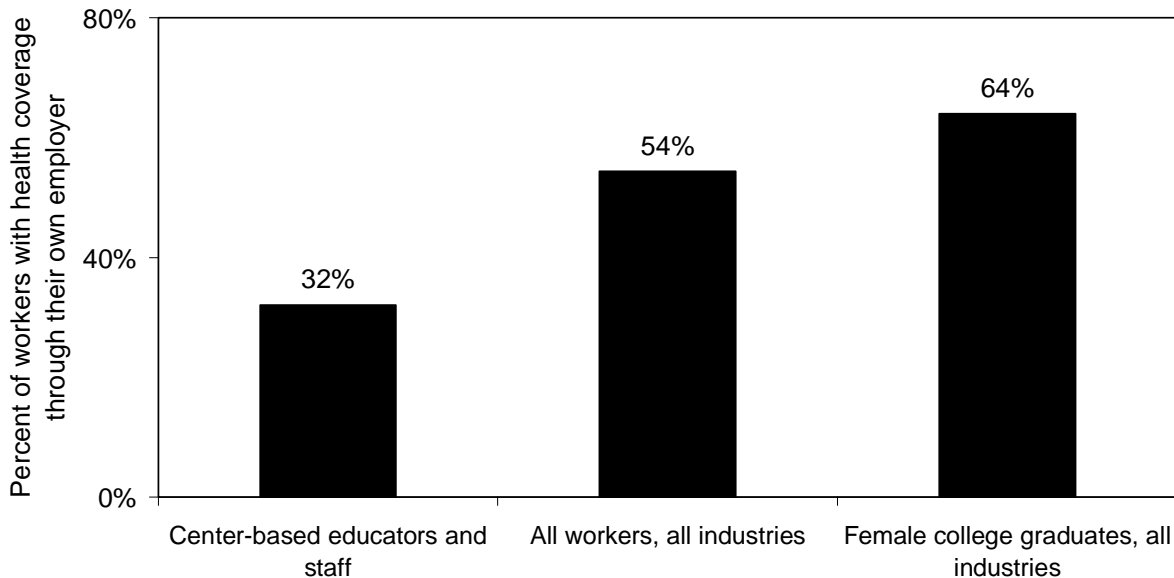
Low wages and benefits help explain educational attainment in ECE

Wages

Since the 1980s, the wages of Florida's center-based early childhood educators have remained stuck relative to those of other workers. (Unfortunately, sufficient wage data are not available for the largely self-employed home-based educators.)

FIGURE E

A smaller share of center-based early childhood educators in Florida receive health insurance through their own employer than other workers, 2000-04



Note: The differences in the share of center-based educators and staff with health coverage through their own employer and the same share of all workers and female college graduates is significant that the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of the March CPS.

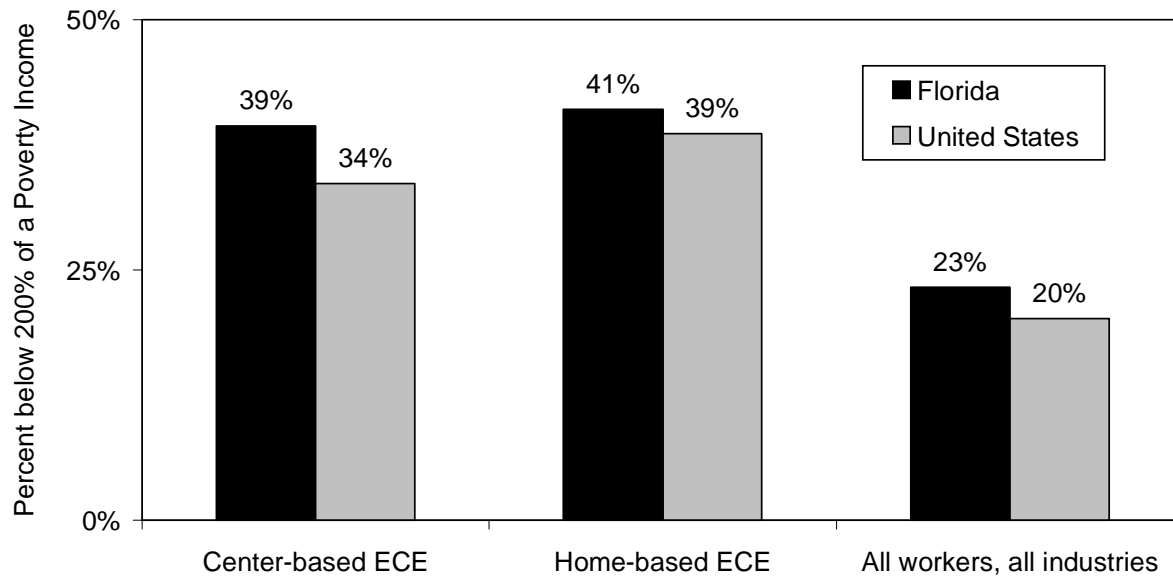
- Center-based early childhood educators have consistently earned roughly 59%-65% of the wages of all Florida workers. Even in 2000-04, early childhood educators earned only \$8 per hour compared to \$12.60 for all Florida workers.
- Even early childhood teachers and administrators earned a median hourly wage of only \$8.64 in 2000-04, just 48% of the \$17.97 median wage of all female college graduates.
- Since 1983-87, female college graduates in Florida have seen their median wage rise by \$3 compared to a 42 cent increase for ECE teachers and administrators.

Health and pension benefits

- About 32% of Florida center-based early childhood educators obtains health insurance through their job compared to 54% of all workers and 64% of female college graduates (**Figure E**).
- According to the most recent five years of data, 20% of center-based early childhood educators had no health insurance coverage versus 9% of female college graduates.
- Only 11% of Florida center-based early childhood educators participate in any kind of pension plan at work, versus 39% for all workers and 55% for female college graduates.

FIGURE F

A large share of the early childhood education workforce lives below the 200% poverty threshold



Note: The differences between the share of all workers living below 200% of the poverty threshold and the shares of center-based ECE and home-based ECE living below the threshold is significant at the 1% level.

Source: KRC analysis of Census data.

Share of workers below a basic necessity income

- In 2000, early childhood educators in both Florida and the nation as a whole were over one-and-a-half times as likely as workers in all industries to live below 200% of the poverty threshold (**Figure F**). Two hundred percent of the poverty line is considered roughly equivalent to an income high enough to cover the cost of basic necessities without public assistance.
- A third of ECE teachers and administrators in Florida live below 200% of the poverty threshold compared to only 1-in-10 female college graduates.

New policies needed

For 25 years, Florida has consistently employed staff in center-based and home-based ECE with education levels below those necessary to help children succeed in life and in school. The state’s voluntary pre-kindergarten program represents a critical opportunity to raise standards for teachers and other early childhood educators.

A pragmatic and systemic approach to achieving better staff qualifications in voluntary pre-kindergarten—throughout Florida and nationally—should not only mandate higher standards, but also include phase-in periods and research and evaluation that deepen our understanding of the long-term benefits of different approaches to

teacher education and professional development. (See the national companion study, *Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education*, for elaboration of this recommendation.)

Any approach to improving staff standards in ECE will fail unless it also raises compensation to keep more qualified people in the field. The present reality will persist, with many ECE staff having low education levels, no meaningful training in early childhood development, and no opportunities to learn from experienced and qualified peers. It is well past time to recognize that society can't afford not to pay more for ECE teachers. Only with public investment can the community as a whole reap the long-term benefits that accrue to high-quality early childhood education.

This Issue Brief is a companion to Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education , a longer study that covers national-level trends and that is available on the Web sites of the Economic Policy Institute (www.epi.org), the Foundation for Child Development (www.fcd-us.org), and the Keystone Research Center (www.keystoneresearch.org).

Endnotes

1. By private sector in this briefing paper we mean ECE that operates outside the public school system. We adopt this terminology for the Florida briefing paper because of its currency in the state.
 2. These benefits include lower costs for subsequent education, increased taxes paid once children mature and enter the workforce, and reduced social costs (Lynch 2004).
 3. Although it fluctuates year to year, the average college degree share based on for the CPS for the full 1983-2004 period is almost identical.
 4. The CPS average for 1983-2004 was just over 50%.
 5. According to the CPS, the college degree share for Florida teachers and administrators averaged 25% during 1983 and 1989, to 17% between 1998 and 2004.
 6. States were included in the rankings if there were 50 or more observations for center-based teachers and administrators in 1990 and 2000.
 7. According to the 1990 Census, 20% of teachers and administrators had a four-year college degree or better and 12% had an associate's degree.
 8. Industry experts believe that both the Census and CPS likely undercount home-based employment because they miss some unlicensed and unregulated providers.
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References

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- Lynch, Robert. 2004. *Exceptional Returns: Economic, Fiscal, and Social Benefits of Investment in Early Childhood Development*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.