The US Department of Education has issued a report highlighting the stark contrast between the value early childhood education offers to the nation’s children, and the relatively low wages early childhood educators receive for their work, which can make attracting and retaining high quality teachers a challenge.

The report asserts that quality early childhood education is an economic issue—both for parents and children, stating:

“For many working families, access to affordable, reliable, and high-quality child care and early education is both a necessity to attaining and maintaining a job and to fostering the learning and development of their young children.”

Some of the major points from the report include:

- Early childhood development is vital to future success in school and life.
- Research shows that “high-quality providers and educators are the single most important factors in these early experiences.” As a result, the Institute of Medicine recommends that all early childhood educators have a bachelor’s degree or higher by 2025.
- While early childhood educators with a bachelor’s degree make more per hour than their less educated counterparts, their wage is half the median wage earned with a Bachelor’s degree overall.
- On average, child care teachers earn $20,320, preschool teachers $28,570, Head Start teachers $28,995, and elementary school teachers $54,890 across the country.
- A child care teacher making the median wage of $20,320 or less would qualify for SNAP benefits for a family of three.
- To ensure that families with young children have access to high quality educators, the Department of Education recommends professional development supports for the early childhood workforce, competitive wages that reflect the value provided and attract qualified candidates to the field, and pay parity across settings.

In the infographic below, hover over a state of interest to learn more about the annual wages earned by early childhood educators. To read the full report from the Department of Education, click here [2].

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