

The Case for ECE as a Quality Job

Results for America (RFA) has developed a framework for job quality that Early Childhood Workforce Connector (ECWC) is applying as a starting point to consider what job quality means in early childhood education (ECE). High-quality jobs are essential to the economic mobility, stability, and overall well-being of workers, particularly in sectors where wages and working conditions have historically lagged. Using this framework, we examine how ECE careers align with the RFA core principles of **quality jobs** and where opportunities exist to strengthen job quality for EC educators, the “workforce behind the workforce.”

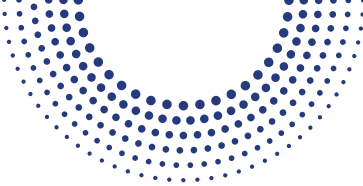
Figure 1: Job Quality Categories



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Job Necessities provide equitable compensation, rights, and protection for all workers

	Results for America Job Quality Framework	Early Childhood Education Job Quality
Earnings	A living wage that provides full-time workers with the financial means to meet basic needs based on their local cost of living.	Wages in ECE remain far below the living standard. This gap reflects a funding model where family contributions cannot cover true ECE program costs. Increased public and private investment is essential to address this principle.
Schedules	Employees are hired with a reasonable and predictable agreed-upon work schedule. They receive advance notice of schedule changes.	High-quality ECE programs prioritize predictable, stable schedules for EC educators that support staff wellness and continuity of care for children.
Safety and Security	Employers implement policies and practices to promote physical safety as well as mental and emotional safety. Clear work expectations are communicated, employees are allowed to take risks, and colleagues are encouraged to care for one another in the workplace.	Licensing and regulation standards in ECE promote physical safety, emotional well-being, and strong anti-harassment policies. High-quality settings reduce stress for EC educators through strong onboarding, mentoring, and clear work expectations.

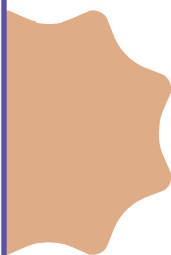


Job Opportunities enable engagement, inclusion, and advancement for all workers


	Results for America Job Quality Framework	Early Childhood Education Job Quality
Learning and Development	Employers provide or enable pre-employment training partnerships, onboarding, technical skill training, cross-training, mentoring and coaching, sponsorship, and upskilling opportunities.	Robust ongoing education and professional development activities are essential to high-quality ECE programs and required by ECE licensing and regulation standards. Early childhood educators are always learning!
Voice and Representation	Employers value and act upon employee input and engagement through surveys, stay interviews, employee resource groups, and meaningful advisory groups or improvement teams. This may also include opportunities for workers to participate in collective action and productive relationships with organized labor.	High-quality ECE programs regularly engage staff through surveys, feedback loops, and collaborative problem-solving, strengthening workplace culture and retention. Strong employee voice and advocacy efforts develop purpose, belonging, and program quality in the ECE field.

Job Features respond to the individual life situations, preferences, and needs of workers

	Results for America Job Quality Framework	Early Childhood Education Job Quality
Benefits	Employers provide access to health insurance, paid leave, employee education benefits, retirement plans, child care subsidies or support, and other benefits, including those that address barriers to work.	Many ECE programs face financial constraints in providing benefits for their staff. Access to benefits varies widely across the sector, limiting their overall impact on job quality. Increased public and private investment is essential to address this principle.
Environment and Culture	Employees are provided with proper tools and technology to be productive, connection with co-workers, input, and some autonomy and control in the performance of duties. This culture is established, modeled, and reinforced by an organization's leadership and management teams.	High-quality ECE programs create respectful, supportive environments where educators feel connected, equipped, and valued. Strong management and positive adult relationships reduce turnover and strengthen program quality.
Purpose and Meaning	Jobseekers and workers feel work tasks are significant, interesting, and challenging. This includes how well a job, career path, specific employer, or industry aligns with an individual's strengths, interests, and values.	For EC educators whose strengths align with relationship-based, child-focused practice, the primary reasons they enter and stay in the field in high-quality ECE programs is that the work is deeply rewarding, energizing, and fun!




ECWC is making the case that ECE jobs and careers are quality jobs and should not be dismissed simply because of wages. ECE employers delivering high-quality services can support the principles of quality jobs that matter for recruitment, retention, and meaningful careers. ECE Registered Apprenticeships (RA) help.



ECWC promotes RA as a powerful workforce development strategy in ECE that advances these principles of quality jobs. ECE RA programs uphold practices that elevate job quality. These programs support preparation and skill building that ensure EC educators feel equipped and supported in their classrooms and provide a foundation for physical safety and emotional well-being. They encourage professional growth through structured career pathways.

RA programs build and strengthen the “workforce behind the workforce,” enabling family stability and community well-being. They address current workforce shortages and advance the goal that EC educators are well compensated, highly skilled, and prepared to provide the highest-quality care and education to our youngest learners.




Sources

Results for America. (2023). *Job Quality Playbook*. <https://jobquality.results4america.org/>

Additional Resources

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2019). *The Model Work Standards*. University of California, Berkeley. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/creating-better-child-care-jobs-model-work-standards>

Bergson-Shilcock, A., and Reichlin Cruise, L. (2025). *Making Care Jobs Good Jobs*. National Skills Coalition. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/making-care-jobs-good-jobs>



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