McDowell Technical Community College
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

MCDOWELL TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM EQUITABLE WORKFORCE PLAYBOOK

DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST GRANT

McDowell Technical Community College

Early Childhood Program

Equitable Workforce Playbook

Dogwood Health Trust Grant

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Grant Outcome Addressed through the Playbook:

Engage five WNC Community Colleges to share learned experiences from the developed playbook on creating more equitable workforce solutions for early childhood environments.

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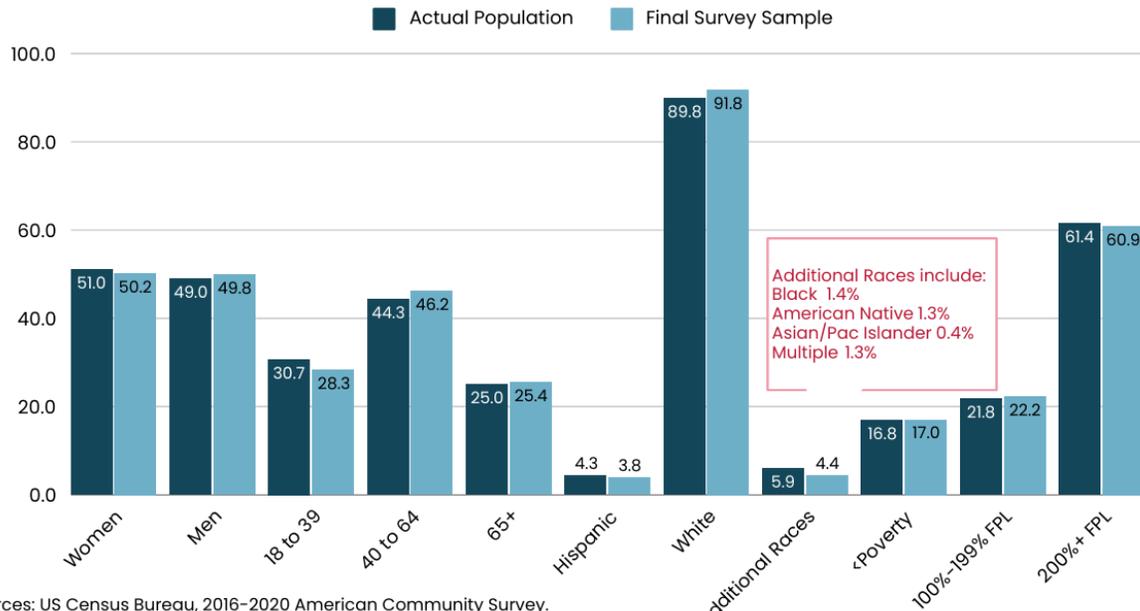
Equitable Workforce Development

We view equity as a means and an end for our work. Achieving equity requires us to address the imbalances and burdens that existing systems can create, particularly for individuals and communities that have been historically marginalized. Equity exists when all people have unconstrained opportunities to live lives of dignity and well-being, when the pathways and systems on which progress depends are strong and accessible and when adverse social systems or circumstances do not predetermine a person's health and life chances. (Dogwood Health Trust)

Effects of the Equitable Early Childhood Workforce in the Classroom

All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning settings in which they work and when they, along with their wider communities, embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019)

Population Demographics for McDowell County, North Carolina

Population & Survey Sample Characteristics
(McDowell County, 2024)

Legend: ■ Actual Population ■ Final Survey Sample

Category	Actual Population	Final Survey Sample
Women	51.0	50.2
Men	49.0	49.8
18 to 39	30.7	28.3
40 to 64	44.3	46.2
65+	25.0	25.4
Hispanic	4.3	3.8
White	89.8	91.8
Additional Races	5.9	4.4
<Poverty	16.8	17.0
100%-199% FPL	21.8	22.2
200%+ FPL	61.4	60.9

Additional Races include:
Black 1.4%
American Native 1.3%
Asian/Pac Islander 0.4%
Multiple 1.3%

Sources: US Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey.
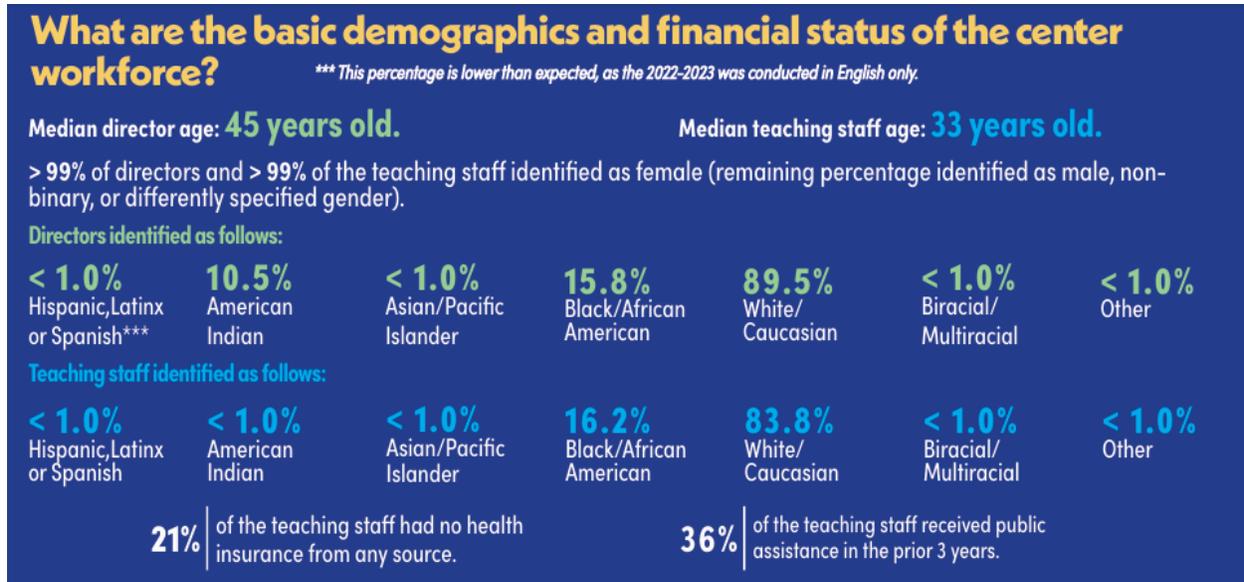2024 WNC Healthy Impact Community Health Survey, WNC Health Network, Inc.
Notes: All Hispanic respondents are grouped, regardless of identity with any other race group. Race reflects those who identify with a single race category, without Hispanic origin. "Additional Races" includes those who identify as Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or as being of multiple races, without Hispanic origin.

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FOOTHILLS
HEALTH DISTRICT

(Foothills Health District, 2024)

Population Demographics for McDowell County Early Childhood Workforce

What are the basic demographics and financial status of the center workforce? *** This percentage is lower than expected, as the 2022-2023 was conducted in English only.*

Median director age: **45 years old.**

Median teaching staff age: **33 years old.**

> **99%** of directors and > **99%** of the teaching staff identified as female (remaining percentage identified as male, non-binary, or differently specified gender).

Directors identified as follows:

| < 1.0% Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish*** | 10.5% American Indian | < 1.0% Asian/Pacific Islander | 15.8% Black/African American | 89.5% White/ Caucasian | < 1.0% Biracial/ Multiracial | < 1.0% Other |

Teaching staff identified as follows:

| < 1.0% Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish | < 1.0% American Indian | < 1.0% Asian/Pacific Islander | 16.2% Black/African American | 83.8% White/ Caucasian | < 1.0% Biracial/ Multiracial | < 1.0% Other |

21% of the teaching staff had no health insurance from any source.

36% of the teaching staff received public assistance in the prior 3 years.

(NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2023. *early years*)

The Early Years NC 2022-2023 Data

Comparison of County Demographics and McDowell County Early Childhood Workforce Demographics

The data for the population demographics of McDowell County, NC, were collected in 2024, and the data for the early childhood workforce were collected from 2022 to 2023. Due to the nature of data collection, the data is considered valid for comparison as the McDowell County population has remained stable over several years. (United States Census Bureau)

When comparing the data from the two populations, the White/Caucasian population of early childhood center directors and teachers (89.5% and 83.8%) closely reflects the White/Caucasian population of McDowell County (89.8%). However, the Hispanic population in the Early Childhood Center's workforce (less than 1.0%) is considerably lower than the Hispanic population in McDowell County (4.3%). The Black/African American population in the Early

Childhood workforce is higher (15.8% as directors and 16.2% as teachers) than the Black/African American population in McDowell County (5.9%).

Do the Early Childhood workforce demographics reflect the current child population in the Early Childhood Centers?

Using the McDowell Tech Community College Child Development Center as a demographic snapshot for the spring of 2025, the teacher population totaled six (85.7) White/Caucasian teachers and one (14.2%) Hispanic teacher. The child population consisted of 38 (92.6%) White/Caucasian individuals, 3 (7.3%) Hispanic individuals, and zero Black/African American individuals. This snapshot reflects both the current workforce and the current child population in ECE centers.

Historical Roadblocks for the Early Childhood Workforce Pre and Post COVID

When addressing roadblocks to hiring and sustaining a reflective demographic of the early childhood workforce that best supports the equitable learning and nurturing environment of the county's children, many factors come into play. The most common of these roadblocks is listed below.

Historical and Current Roadblocks for the Early Childhood Workforce Statewide and in McDowell County Pre- and Post-COVID

- Low Compensation
- Lack of benefits
- Lack of respect for the profession
- Lack of Resources, including support in the classroom and an adequate supply of substitutes
- High-stress work environment and high individual responsibility
- High requirements for continuing education and training.
- Insufficient training for lead teachers

All of the above-listed roadblocks contribute to the instability and high teacher turnover rates in the early childhood field. North Carolina's turnover or separation rates for the Early Childhood

Education (ECE) field have increased dramatically between 2019 and 2023 for all positions. (NCDHHS, *2023 Workforce Study*, 2024, p. 31). The 2023 Workforce study, "Working in Early Care and Education in North Carolina," highlighted statewide separation rates as well as high percentages of Early Childhood Education workforce members who plan to leave the field within the next three years. Statewide data collected through surveys, interviews, and questionnaires assessed the concerns of those working in the field. The changes below are the most common factors that would encourage teachers and teacher assistants to stay in the field.

These factors included:

- Better Pay
- Better Benefits
- More support for children with behavioral challenges
- More respect for the profession
- More opportunities for professional growth
- More support for children with special needs
- Smaller class size

(NCDHHS, *2023 Workforce Study*, 2024, p.33)

These factors have been consistent roadblocks to the ECE field for a very long time and directly correspond to the historical factors previously listed. The top motivating factors for teachers and assistant teachers either leaving or remaining in the Early Childhood Workforce are the need to earn a living wage, benefits for both physical, emotional, and financial health; more support to adequately care for children with behavioral and other special needs; and respect for the profession and the requirements of the field.

Top concerns for ECE Administrators include:

- Finding qualified teachers and substitutes
- More respect for the profession
- More pay
- More benefits
  (NCDHHS, *2023 Workforce Study*, 2024, p.32)

Exploring Roadblocks in McDowell County Early Childhood Workforce through utilization of the Dogwood Health Trust Grant

For the purposes of this Playbook, we will discuss the following factors and concerns, and then explore how the MTCC Early Childhood Education Department addressed these areas through the implementation of the Dogwood Health Trust Grant. Successfully addressing these factors will support the development of more equity in the Early Childhood workforce and result in a more equitable classroom environment. These combined factors or roadblocks address administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants.

To ensure that McDowell Technical Community College's Early Childhood department addresses real-time issues in the McDowell County workforce, we presented a survey during the countywide training session. We were able to collect 80 surveys addressing the county's early childhood workforce concerns and comments on working in the classroom. The survey presented the following questions:

1. Are you currently employed in the early childhood workforce?

2. If so, what is your current position?

3. How long have you worked in the field? Are you full-time/part-time?

4. Do you plan to be employed in the field in five years?

5. Please share the top three reasons why you plan to stay in the field or leave the field.

6. Please share the top three concerns you have if you stay in the field.

7. What support would be most valuable to you in the classroom?

8. Please provide one suggestion on how McDowell Tech's Early Childhood Department can provide support for your continued employment in the early childhood workforce.

9. Please provide one piece of information from this workshop that you can apply in the classroom.

10. If you would like to share any thoughts on the early childhood workforce in McDowell County, please do so below.

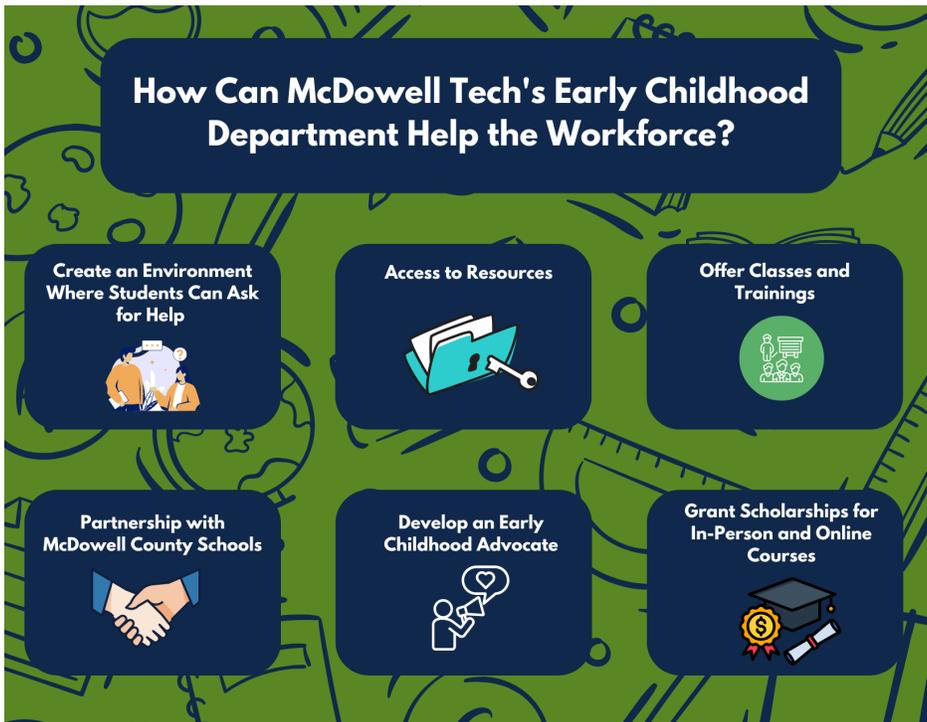11. May this information be shared in our playbook? Yes/No

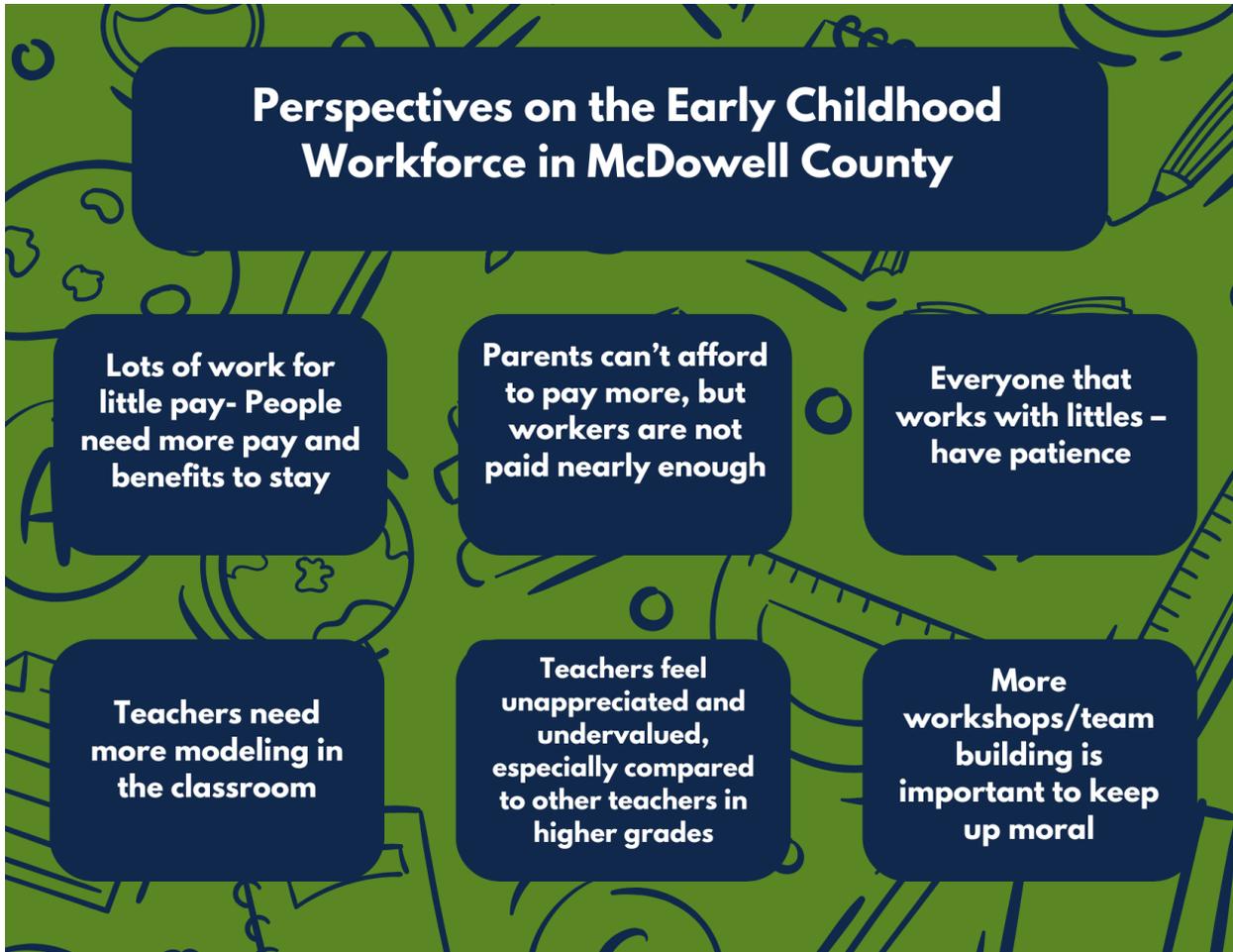12. Please sign your name below, or you can choose to remain anonymous.

The survey results closely matched the data presented in the Workforce Study. The participants who completed the survey were employed in McDowell County Pre-K, Head Start, McDowell Tech Child Development Center, and private centers. All of the McDowell County early childhood workforce were invited to participate in the training funded through the Dogwood Grant. Highlights of the survey results are listed below.

Of the eighty surveys submitted, 63 participants indicated they plan to be employed in the field in five years. Seven participants answered "no" to staying in the field, and 8 stated "maybe". Of the 15 "no/maybe" answers, 4 participants listed retirement as the main reason for leaving the field. Low pay, little to no benefits, and classroom stress were the other reasons listed for considering leaving the workforce. Two participants did not answer this question.

Of the sixty-three participants who stated they would stay in the field, the majority worked for Head Start, NC PreK or were full-time in centers that offered some benefits. Reasons listed for staying in the early childhood workforce included "love working with children and making a difference", "love my work environment and my coworkers", "my schedule works for my family", and "I have opportunities for advancement." When asked about concerns for staying in the field, 39 participants listed low pay as a top concern, followed by concerns over children's behaviors in the classroom and a lack of training and support for addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Twenty-six participants reported a lack of administrative support, and twenty-five expressed concern about keeping up with the demands of the classroom (e.g., Lesson planning, record-keeping, and meeting all NC state rules and regulations). Additionally, ten surveys listed a lack of parental support as a major concern.

The surveys highlighted for the McDowell County early childhood workforce the overwhelming number of current employees who plan to stay in the field for at least five years. Other highlights from the participants included:

Perspectives on the Early Childhood Workforce in McDowell County

Lots of work for little pay- People need more pay and benefits to stay

Parents can't afford to pay more, but workers are not paid nearly enough

Everyone that works with littles – have patience

Teachers need more modeling in the classroom

Teachers feel unappreciated and undervalued, especially compared to other teachers in higher grades

More workshops/team building is important to keep up moral

These combined factors or roadblocks address administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants.

Factors discussed in more depth include:

- Earning a living wage
- More benefits
- More classroom support for teachers working with children who have special needs
- Support finding qualified teachers
- Support finding substitutes
- Respect for the profession

Earning a living wage is necessary for maintaining a residence, a means of transportation, health care, food, and overall supporting an independent life. The following chart indicates the current 2025 living wage required for independent living in McDowell County, North Carolina.

Family Type	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
1 Adult	$19.38	$31.98	$39.24	$47.96
2 Adults (1 Working)	$27.49	$32.05	$35.44	$39.90
2 Adults (Both Working)	$13.74	$18.32	$22.18	$25.75

Although the current minimum wage in North Carolina is $7.25 an hour, a single adult with no children needs to earn $19.38 an hour to be self-supportive.

According to Indeed (Indeed, 2025), the average hourly salary for a childcare teacher in Marion, NC, ranges from $12.10 to $15.72 per hour.

The model salary scale for early childhood education teachers, published in May 2023 by the NC Early Compensation Collaborative, found the recommended salaries for an early childhood teacher with a B.A./B.S. in ECE to be $19.18, an ECE Associate degree to be $15.14, and a Certificate in Preschool or Infant/Toddler to be $11.98. Only the salary for the B.A./B.S. in ECE would exceed the living wage required. The chart from the collaboration is attached below. (North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education, 2021)

ATTACHMENT B. MODEL SALARY SCALE FOR EARLY EDUCATION TEACHERS

B–K LICENSE PUBLIC SCHOOL			
Hourly Salary	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary (10 mo.)	Annual Salary (12 mo.)
$20.19	$3,500	$35,000	$42,000

	BA/BS	ECE/Child Dev.1	
$19.18[2]	$3,325		$39,900

	AAS	ECE/Child Dev.	
$15.14[3]	$2,625		$31,500

	Infant/Toddler or Preschool Certificate[4]		
$11.98[5]	$2,044		$24,523

After studying the data, concerns about the ECE workforce's salary are definitely warranted and fact-based. Qualified Early Childhood Educators cannot be expected to remain in a field that does not provide a living wage. Many educators in the field are dedicated to their classrooms and the children they care for, but they often need to supplement their income to remain in the profession.

More Benefits for Early Childhood Education Employees

Employee benefits are defined as:

Employee benefits are non-wage compensations provided to employees in addition to their regular salaries or wages. These benefits can include health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, and various other perks and incentives. Employee benefits play a crucial role in attracting, retaining, and motivating employees, while also enhancing their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Benefits can include, but are not limited to

- **Health Insurance:** Medical, dental, and vision insurance plans that cover employees' healthcare needs.
- **Retirement Plans:** Savings and investment plans, such as 401(k) or pension plans, to support employees' retirement goals.
- **Paid Time Off (PTO):** Paid vacation, sick leave, and holidays to provide employees with time to rest and recharge.
- **Life and Disability Insurance:** Insurance plans that provide financial protection in the event of death or disability.
- **Wellness Programs:** Programs and initiatives that promote physical and mental well-being, such as fitness memberships and stress management resources.
- **Additional Perks:** Other benefits such as flexible work arrangements, tuition reimbursement, and employee discounts.

[Employ Benefits Defined](#)

Concerns about better pay and more benefits have deep roots in the ECE field and the education field as a whole. Upon closer examination of any paycheck, numerous factors are at play. The employer must pay 1.0% in unemployment taxes, and both the employer and employee each pay around 6.2% in social security tax. When factoring in the cost of adding benefits such as medical, retirement, sick leave, and vacation pay, the employer's costs rise

significantly. A commonly used formula estimates that the total cost of an employee is 1.25 to 1.4 times their base salary. This figure considers the additional expenses employers incur, such as benefits, payroll taxes and even recruitment costs. (https://www.venasolutions.com/blog/how-much-does-an-employee-cost).

 In McDowell County, benefits offered differ among each ECE center, with some centers being public and others private. For public systems, such as the public school system, NC-PreK, Head Start, and the Child Development Center at McDowell Tech, hiring a full-time teacher at $16.00 per hour, which translates to an annual salary of $33,600, would cost the employer approximately $50,000 per year. The benefits provided to the employee would include medical insurance, retirement (with the employee contributing 6% of their salary), sick leave, and other flex benefits determined by the state agency. Private ECE centers often struggle to compete with state agencies, so they offer various combinations of benefits according to budget constraints.

While solving the complex issue of earning a living wage and better benefits will take time and collaboration among agencies, the ECE department at McDowell Tech has brainstormed several ideas for addressing these roadblocks.

Ideas included:

- Know your employees and their needs
- Involve employees in the decision-making as to what benefits are more important for the employee
- Allow employees to select flexible benefits
- Create an employee salary scale based on experience and education
- Collaborate with other area centers for the best group rates for health benefits
- As a collective group, we seek support and special rates from local businesses, such as gyms and restaurants.

What would these suggestions look like in the ECE workplace?

 Basically, the employer is getting to know their employees in the center. What do the employees need? Do the majority already have their own health insurance? Would the employees prefer sick leave and/or vacation pay? Would the employees prefer to be paid more per hour and not have employer-offered health benefits? Can flex benefits be offered? Can some employees choose to be paid more per hour and not have medical benefits, or can other employees choose the medical benefits over the pay increase? Having a checklist of all available benefits would allow employees to select their preferred benefit package, addressing the needs of employees in a more equitable manner. Addressing roadblocks in a collaborative manner between the employer and employees would offer them more input and a sense of community in the workplace. Being part of the solution can be very empowering for the ECE workforce.

Develop an employee salary scale that is based on workforce experience and education in the early childhood field. The employee will then have a method to evaluate the steps that can be taken to receive a pay increase. This again allows the employee to be part of the solution to the roadblock. The salary scale could be part of the employee's yearly evaluation. A sample salary scale is provided in the artifacts section included in the playbook.

Collaboration between centers in more rural areas could enhance the benefits package that employers can offer their employees. Offering group rates to the entire area may lower the costs of health insurance and attract more companies interested in sharing available health plans. To accomplish this, a strong collaboration between the centers would be necessary. This group could also contact local gyms, restaurants, and other establishments to inquire about potential rate reductions or group discounts. These suggestions are more closely aligned with the private centers, as the public centers already have benefits mandated by the State of North Carolina for their benefit packages. Private centers often lack a collective voice to attract benefits options, but working together will give them access to more resources. At McDowell Tech, the Early Childhood Department and the Child Development Center collaborated to host

countywide director meetings on campus, providing a space for group discussions and collaboration.

More classroom support for teachers working with children who have special needs

How can the Early Childhood Department best support teachers working with children who have special needs? Brainstorming produced the following suggestions. Allow high school and college students enrolled in Early Childhood Programs and Teacher Education programs to intern in early childhood classrooms. This would provide additional support for both teachers and children in the classroom.

Provide training/workshops on discipline and classroom management through a countywide training. The McDowell Tech ECE department has offered two countywide trainings on Conscience Discipline, using funds provided through the Dogwood Grant. Collaborate with the county's Resource and Referral to provide training on policies and laws related to working with children with identified special needs. Provide classroom teachers with more support in the classroom through close collaboration between the director and parents. Provide a secured, confidential space in the center for therapists to work with children in an uninterrupted manner. Ensure that classrooms have the supplies and materials needed to provide all children with an engaging, stimulating, and nurturing environment. A prepared and organized environment supports security and calmness for the children, as children with behavioral and other special needs are often more sensitive to a well-organized environment.

Support finding qualified teachers and support finding substitutes

The main concerns for the Early Childhood Administrators in McDowell County were finding qualified teachers and classroom substitutes. This a largely due to the NC state requirements for working in the early childhood classroom as a teacher or a substitute. These requirements include, but are not limited to:

Required for all employees:

- NC GENERAL STATUTE 110-90.2 Mandatory Child Care Provider Criminal Record Checks ∝A criminal history check must be conducted on all persons who provide child care in a licensed or regulated child care facility.

- No person can be an operator of or be employed in a child care facility who has been convicted of a crime involving child neglect, child abuse, or moral turpitude, or who is a habitually excessive user of alcohol or who illegally uses narcotic or other impairing drugs, or who is mentally or emotionally impaired to an extent that may be injurious to children.

- All staff must have on file, within 60 days of the date of employment, a statement signed by a licensed physician or an authorized health professional under their supervision, indicating that the person is emotionally and physically fit to care for children.

- A test to determine that each employee, including the administrator, is free of active tuberculosis is required prior to employment.

- All staff must have emergency medical care information on file.

- Each staff member is required to submit an annual health questionnaire, providing information about their health status.

Required for teachers:

- All lead teachers must be at least 18 years of age.

- All lead teachers must have, or complete, the NCECC or its equivalent/All lead teachers must begin work towards a NCECC or its equivalent within 6 months of assuming the duties of lead teacher/All lead teachers must complete a NCECC or its equivalent within 18 months.

- All lead teachers must have a high school diploma or its equivalent and have one of the following: · One year experience in a licensed child care center or two years experience as a licensed family child care home operator · Successful completion of a two year high school program of Child Care Services Occupational Home Economics · Twenty hours of training in child development taken in the first six months of employment.

- Staff in the Department of Public Instruction programs are deemed to meet or exceed all minimum licensing requirements in the child care rules.

Required for the center to maintain for some employees:

- Each childcare center must have at least one person on the premises at all times and at least one person who accompanies the children whenever they are off the premises, who has successfully completed a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course within the last 12 months. The CPR course must be taught by either the American Red Cross, American Heart Association or other organizations approved by the Division.

- Staff who have completed a course in basic first aid must be present at all times when children are present. ∝ First aid training must be renewed on or before the expiration of the certification, or every three (3) years, whichever is less. The basic first aid course must address principles for responding to emergencies, and techniques for handling common childhood injuries, accidents, and illnesses such as choking, burns, fractures, bites and stings, wounds, scrapes, cuts and lacerations, poisoning, seizures, bleeding, allergic reactions, eye and nose injuries and sudden changes in body temperature.

- At least one staff person must be knowledgeable of and able to recognize common symptoms of illness.

- Staff must complete at least four (4) clock hours of training in safety.

- In centers licensed to care for infants aged 12 months and younger, the center director and any child care provider scheduled to work in the infant room, including volunteers counted in the staff-child ratio, must complete ITS-SIDS training. The training must be completed within 4 months of the individual assuming responsibilities in the infant room or as an administrator and must be repeated every 3 years from the completion of the previous ITS-SIDS training.

- Each staff member who is expected to have contact with children must receive at least 16 clock hours of on-site training and orientation. Some topics must be covered within the first 2 weeks of employment, and others within the first 6 weeks of employment.

(North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education, *Chapter Two*)

These bullets highlight the majority of the NC state requirements; however, additional requirements can be found on the ncchildcare.gov website. The information supports the frustrations childcare administrators can face in finding both teachers and substitutes. Other factors that influence the decision to employ teachers and substitutes include some of the original roadblocks, such as compensation and feeling prepared to meet the classroom's needs.

Addressing Roadblocks in McDowell County Early Childhood Workforce through utilization of the Dogwood Health Trust Grant

The McDowell Tech Early Childhood Department utilized a Dogwood Health Trust Grant to enhance and expand the early childhood workforce in McDowell County, NC. The goal is to increase enrollment in the ECE program for residents in Dogwood's service area, with a focus on first-generation students, students of color, and those facing financial barriers. We are working toward growing a more inclusive population of teachers in the Early Childhood Field who represent the children and families we serve. We have addressed this goal through various avenues. The following initiatives address the goals of the Dogwood Health Trust Grant and the top concerns listed for the early childhood workforce.

- Earning a living wage
- More benefits
- More classroom support for teachers working with children who have special needs
- Support finding qualified teachers
- Support finding substitutes
- Respect for the profession

1. Free tuition and books at McDowell Technical Community College

Providing free tuition and books removes financial barriers that often prevent individuals from pursuing higher education or workforce training. This initiative increases access, supports equity in education, and helps attract and retain students who may otherwise be unable to afford

program participation. By reducing costs, we ensure a more prepared and sustainable early childhood workforce.

The process included all prospective students completing a McDowell Tech application, as well as the FAFSA and an application for the Dogwood Health Trust Early Childhood Education Grant. Students who receive the grant monies are required to maintain a 2.0 GPA while enrolled in the programs. This initiative was particularly successful for students who were not eligible for FAFSA funding. Ineligibility may be due to being out of state, having an income above the eligibility level, already holding a two-year degree, or having already exhausted FAFSA funds. Students with a GPA below 2.0 were eligible to receive the grant funds, provided they maintained a GPA of 2.0 or higher after receiving the funds. The Early Childhood Department promoted free tuition and books by hosting a Scholarship Day for early childhood students. Flyers were posted and shared with community partners and involved College partners. When students/prospective students attended the event, representatives from financial aid, the registrar, advisors, and language support were available to assist them in completing registration and enrollment in one visit to the College. This method proved successful in increasing enrollment in the Early Childhood Programs, allowing students to enter the workforce with little to no educational debt.

2. Collaboration between trainings in the district / Required continuing education and safety credits

Partnering with local districts to align trainings ensures consistency, efficiency, and accessibility. We have already demonstrated success in this area through the Conscious Discipline training, which brought together both private and public centers and schools, with over 100 participants in attendance. Offering required continuing education (CE) and safety credits through district-supported collaboration reduces duplication of efforts and provides participants with meaningful, relevant training. This strengthens the professional pipeline and ensures educators remain compliant with state and federal requirements while also fostering a culture of shared learning across the community. These trainings, sponsored through Dogwood Health Trust's

funds, allowed the county to fulfill state training requirements in one day. Additionally, the College covered the costs of the training, thereby freeing up training funds for the agencies that attended. The collaboration resulted in high-quality training for early childhood teachers and administrators. A positive outcome of the training was the networking that occurred among the participants. The Early Childhood Department participants strengthened their connections between community partners and students by opening up the College campus for the training. These trainings support the development of professionalism and the acquisition of knowledge on best practices in the early childhood classroom.

3. The Early Childhood Academy

The Early Childhood Academy serves as a hub for innovative teaching practices, hands-on training, and community collaboration. By offering workshops, model classrooms, and mentoring opportunities, the Academy supports professional development while promoting high-quality learning experiences for young children. This structure empowers educators with tools and strategies grounded in best practice. The overall goal of the EC Academy is to have students work-ready for the early childhood classroom. The Academy was designed to cover all expenses for the various requirements discussed earlier, enabling individuals to be employed in early childhood classrooms. This allows prospective teachers to move more quickly to actual employment and also saves valuable time for the employers. The Academy design chart is posted below.

Early Childhood Academy		
Required Components		
Task	**Provider**	**Cost**
EDU 3119 and Class Materials	McDowell Tech	$250
Child Care Background Check	McDowell Tech/DCDEE/Sheriff's Dept.	$26 -$75
Tuberculosis Test & Health Assessment	Health Care Provider/DHHS	$110
NCID/Upload Certificate	McDowell Tech/DCDEE	$0
CPR/FA	McDowell Tech	$26
Fire Safety	McDowell Tech	$0
Recognizing and Responding to Suspicions of Child Maltreatment	DCDEE/Partnership for Children of the Foothills	$0

The Early Childhood Academy is being offered on a regular basis.

4. Job/Employment Opportunities – Live Document

A live, continuously updated document of job and employment opportunities will connect graduates and current students directly with local employers. This resource ensures immediate access to openings in the early childhood sector, bridges workforce gaps, and supports retention by linking trained professionals with career pathways in their community. Since this is a live document, employers and prospective employees can access the document and connect for further information. This document is maintained by the McDowell Tech Early Childhood Department. Program graduates must grant permission for their information to be added to the document.

5. Opportunities for the Community to Use Facilities for Meetings and Countywide Training

Opening facilities for community meetings fosters partnerships and positions the program as a trusted resource. We use our advisory meetings and BILT framework. This promotes inclusivity, builds stronger relationships with families and organizations, and ensures the facilities serve multiple purposes beyond instruction. Shared spaces become a foundation for networking, support, and collaboration across the county. Countywide training ensures that professional development is equitable and accessible to all educators, regardless of location. Centralized training opportunities reduce isolation between districts and create consistency in professional standards. This initiative strengthens collaboration, builds a shared vision of quality education, and supports educators at all career stages.

The facilities at McDowell Technical Community College are regularly utilized for countywide CPR, SIDS, and various continuing education trainings at no cost to the county. The facilities are open for monthly director meetings and meetings related to statewide licensing updates. The Beginning Teachers for McDowell County schools also meet at the college.

6. Support the McDowell Technical Community College Child Development Center as a Model Childcare Center

Strengthening the Child Development Center through facility upgrades, dedicated meeting spaces for therapists and families, and professional resources for staff will establish it as a model childcare center. This provides an environment where children thrive, families feel supported, and educators have the tools they need to grow professionally. A model center also serves as a demonstration site for best practices in early childhood education. The center serves as a platform for student internships, observation assignments, and hands-on practice lessons for early childhood students enrolled at the College. Volunteering opportunities are available for local high school students interested in a career in early childhood education.

7. Brainstorming meetings with colleagues and the community

Regular brainstorming sessions with colleagues and community partners create an ongoing dialogue about workforce challenges and solutions. These meetings will identify emerging needs, share innovative practices, and ensure decisions reflect diverse perspectives. This collaborative approach strengthens relationships and creates sustainable strategies to support the early childhood workforce. These meetings enable the College to focus on the local needs of the early childhood workforce. One result has been the early childhood department at McDowell Tech creating a lending library for the community centers, which includes licensed resources and NCFELD books. The licensing resources include the ITERS and ECERS rating scale books. These books support classrooms in offering best practices and achieving high scores on the environmental rating scales observations.

All of the initiatives discussed above are ongoing and evolving as needed to meet the needs of students, the community, and the early childhood workforce. McDowell Technical Community College's Early Childhood Department will continue to work towards a more equitable early childhood classroom in which all children and teachers are supported and valued. For more information on the Early Childhood Education program at McDowell Technical Community College, contact Katherine Dowdle at ksdowdle13@go.mcdowelltech.edu

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Appendix

Additional Classroom Support Websites:

https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/dap/10-effective-dap-teaching-strategies Every Child

Belongs: Welcoming a Child with a Disability

https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/sep2017/every-child-belongs

EIExcellence at https://www.eiexcellence.org/ offers numerous links and articles that address

working with children with disabilities and their families.

More Research at the Early Years

https://www.earlyyearsnc.org/research/in-depth-studies/

https://www.earlyyearsnc.org/wp-content/uploads/Dogwood-Health-Trust-Report-research-FIN
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Sample Salary Scale Form

Years of Experience	High School Diploma & EDU-119	Associate's Degree (Any)	ECE Certificate	ECE Certificate & Additional 13 Credits	ECE Diploma	ECE Associates	ECE Bachelors	ECE Masters
0-2								
3-5								
6-10								
11-15								
16-20								
21-25								

Created by Rhonda Steele and Chelsie Arrowood

Project Activity Ideas for the Early Childhood Classroom, developed and compiled by Julianna Juarez Baez

We have small groups on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Here are some ideas. We have small groups from 10:45 to 11:00 a.m. on Monday. Here are some ideas for small groups, developmentally appropriate lessons.

SEPTEMBER 4-8 2023	I focused on colors in Spanish. I had apples that were red, green, and yellow. I called out the colors while holding up the colored apples. I said the colors in Spanish and had them repeat them back to me. Then, I handed them out to the group and said, "Who has the rojo/verde/amarillo apple?" Then I asked them to point out other things that are *rojo/verde/amarillo?*
SEPTEMBER 11-15 2023	The theme of the week was parts of the apple. We had flashcards with parts of apples and their Spanish counterparts underneath them. I showed them a flashcard and said it in Spanish, and had them repeat it back to me. Then, I handed them out and said it in Spanish. I asked them who had the part of the apple I needed in Spanish.
SEPTEMBER 18-22 2023	The theme of the week was the life cycle of an apple. We had flashcards with the parts of the life cycle and put them in order, then recited the part of the cycle in Spanish. Then I handed out some flashcards and called out the ones I needed in Spanish. Example: "Who has the arbol?"
SEPTEMBER 25-29 2023	The theme for the week was apples. My group focused on numbers 1-5 in Spanish. I had apples that were red, yellow, and green. First, we went over our numbers in English, up to 5. Then, I had them recite them in English and Spanish. I also showed them the number of apples corresponding to the number in Spanish. Then, I handed out some apples to the group and would prompt them by saying, "I need *dos* apples, who has *dos* apples?" and would do the same for different numbers.
OCTOBER 2-6 2023	The theme for the week was leaves. My group focused on the Spanish words for *big* and *little*. We used fake leaves in two sizes: large and small. I had them repeat the words "*chico*" and "*grande*" while holding up the big or little leaf. Then, I had them compare their hand sizes with those of their friends, as well as my own, while asking, "Who has the *grande* hand?" or "Who has the *chico* hand?"

"Colors in a Jar"

Materials Needed:
- Colors in Spanish Flashcards.
- Jar printout with corresponding color.
- Items are printed out in various colors.
- Color by number (3 colors only & optional)

NC-FELD Objectives:
- LDC-2i and LDC-2l: Demonstrate an understanding that people communicate in many ways.

- LDC-15f: Use a variety of writing tools and materials with purpose and control.
- CD-1n: Organize and use information through matching, grouping, and sequencing.
- CD-11j: Sort familiar objects into categories with increasing accuracy.
- CD-11p: Sort a group of objects (0-10) using one attribute with increasing accuracy.

- Children will first be shown flashcards with the colors they are learning. We will be using blue, red, and yellow as examples. They will hear the teacher say the colors on the flashcards. The teacher will hold up the flashcards while saying the color.
- Next, the teacher and the children will repeat the colors out loud together. Then, the children will practice saying it out loud by themselves.
    - The teacher may make the experience more meaningful by asking the children to name objects that are the same as the one the teacher is saying. For example, "What in our classroom is *rojo*?" "Yes, that object is *rojo*."
- The teacher will then introduce the jars printed on paper with colored lids as well as the colored objects, and say what the group will be doing next. "Next, we are going to sort these items into these jars, (if needed, explain what sort means). You will need to put the object where it matches. When you put it down, I want you to say the color in Spanish, just as we practiced it. If you need help, I can help you." The teacher will demonstrate how to sort objects into the jars.
- The teacher will then place one of the colored jars on the table. The teacher will then hand out a couple of colored objects to each child. She will then prompt each child individually to add an object to the jar and encourage them to say the color in Spanish.
- Once the activity is over, the teacher will go over the colors one last time. Then, the teacher will go over them with the group. Last, the group will say the color by themselves.

"Counting with Pipe Cleaners & Beads"

Counting with
**Pipe Cleaners
& Beads**

www.laughingkidslearn.com

Materials Needed:
- Pipe Cleaners
- Beads
- Paper with numbers

NC-FELD Objectives:
- _HPD-5k_: Engage in activities that require hand-eye coordination.
- _HPD-5n_: Engage in complex hand-eye coordination activities with a moderate degree of precision and control.
- _CD-10k_: Count up to 5 objects arranged in a line using one-to-one correspondence with increasing accuracy and answer the question, "How many?"
- _CD-10p_: Count up to 10 objects arranged in a line using one-to-one correspondence with increasing accuracy and answer the question "How many?"
- _LDC-2i_ and _LDC-2l_: Demonstrate an understanding that people communicate in many ways.

Instruction:
- Children will go over numbers 1-5 with beads. We will recite them in English first, then in Spanish.
  - For example, I will have 5 groups of beads laid out. I will then ask how many are in this group and point to it. When a child answers, we will count how many are in the group. Then, we will count them again in Spanish.
- Then, I will show them the pipe cleaners we have. I will show that every pipe cleaner has a number attached to it, and we will put that number of beads on the pipe cleaner. I will tell them we are going to focus on saying our numbers in English first, then in Spanish.
- We will put some beads on pipe cleaners as a group, then work on doing it independently. The teacher will be nearby to help scaffold.
- To conclude the activity, I will bring out the 5 groups of beads, and we will review the numbers in Spanish this time.

Numbers 5-10
- Children will practice counting numbers 5-10 using beads. We will recite them in English first, then in Spanish.
- For example, I will have 5 groups of beads laid out. I will then ask how many are in this group and point to it. When a child answers, we will count how many are in the group. Then, we will count them again in Spanish.
- Then, I will show them the pipe cleaners we have. I will show that every pipe cleaner has a number attached to it, and we will put that number of beads on the pipe cleaner. I will tell them we are going to focus on saying our numbers in English first, then in Spanish.
- We will put some beads on pipe cleaners as a group, then work on doing it independently. The teacher will be nearby to help scaffold.
- To conclude the activity, I will bring out the 5 groups of beads, and we will review the numbers in Spanish this time.