Child care is now a major feature of early childhood for most American children. About 61% of children ages 0-6 (not yet in kindergarten) – or about 12 million youngsters – receive child care on a regular basis from someone other than their parents. The experiences children have in these out-of-home settings can enrich their lives and advance their development. However, poor quality care can be detrimental to the development of social and cognitive skills, not to mention, being unpleasant, sometimes even dangerous, for the child and unreliable for the parent and employer.

One of the most significant factors in determining the quality of care is staffing. Staff training and experience contribute to quality, as does a less obvious factor – consistency of care. Young children form bonds with child care providers, and it is within these relationships that social, emotional, and cognitive development can occur.
Recent findings about brain development confirm the importance of consistency in early care. Dr. Edward L. Schor, a pediatrician and public health expert, heads the Commonwealth Fund’s Child Development and Preventive Care program and has a special interest in social determinants of child health and family functioning. He notes that “Children need individualized responses. If the caregivers are watching too many children, the child is not getting enough attention; if the child has too many different caregivers, he or she is not getting enough consistency.”

Consistency and individual attention are so important, Dr Schor says, because “learning takes place within the context of relationships. The primary relationship is most often the parent, but many children spend most of their waking hours in the care of someone other than a parent. That relationship has to be a good one too.”

When staff turnover rates are high, it is unlikely that children will experience the predictable, nurturing relationships that foster healthy development.

In addition, high staff turnover impinges on the smooth functioning and financial stability of child care centers. As in any business, it is costly and stressful to have high staff turnover. High turnover increases costs for recruitment, hiring, and training. It increases stress and workload for remaining employees. And, given State requirements for child/staff ratios, it puts constant pressure on the directors of child care centers to maintain sufficient staff to meet State regulations.

In an effort to monitor these concerns, Maryland Committee for Children (MCC) conducts periodic surveys of child care centers in the state to measure the extent of the turnover problem and to explore its impact on the quality of care. In September, 2007, MCC mailed questionnaires to 1,489 full-time centers. The questionnaire asked for data on staffing and invited comments/anecdotes. Responses were received from 372 (25%) of the centers. The workforce employed by the 372 responding centers numbered 4,116, as of January 1, 2006. In the ensuing year (January 1 through December 31, 2006), 1,357 members (33%) of this child care workforce left their positions.

The turnover rate of 33% reported by the 2007 respondents in Maryland is the same as the turnover rate reported in 2005. The rate reported in 2003 was 29%.

As shown in the table 1, the greatest turnover (42%) occurred in the teacher assistant/aide group. This is the same group that had the highest turnover rate in the previous two surveys.

Table 1: Total Staff and Exiting Staff at Responding Child Care Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Level</th>
<th>Number of employees at start of year</th>
<th>Number of employees that left during the year</th>
<th>Number of departing staff that stayed in child care *</th>
<th>Number of departing staff that left child care *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>84 (19%)</td>
<td>35 (42%)</td>
<td>39 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Staff/Group Leaders</td>
<td>1,977</td>
<td>555 (28%)</td>
<td>235 (42%)</td>
<td>258 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Assistant/Aide</td>
<td>1,689</td>
<td>718 (42%)</td>
<td>178 (25%)</td>
<td>403 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Staff</td>
<td>4,116</td>
<td>1,357 (33%)</td>
<td>448 (33%)</td>
<td>700 (52%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: survey conducted by Maryland Committee for Children, September, 2007. *Did not receive responses to stayed/didn’t stay in child care from all respondents.

In 2006, 33% of the child care workforce left their positions. The greatest turnover (42%) occurred in the teacher assistant/aide group – those who have the most contact with children.
Surveys from 159 centers (54% of those centers which responded to this question) indicated that compensation was a significant factor in the decision of employees to leave their jobs. This was higher than the 2005 survey (42%). These 159 respondents were asked to indicate which aspects of compensation played a role in turnover. Wages ranked highest in this regard, followed by other concerns:

- 157 centers cited wages as an issue in turnover;
- 83 centers cited health benefits;
- 28 centers cited paid leave; and
- 24 centers cited various other concerns.

Not all staff turnover was attributed to compensation. Surveys from 138 centers (46% of those centers which responded to this question) reported that compensation was not a factor in turnover. These centers cited various reasons for turnover including life cycle events such as marriage, pregnancy, employee’s desire to stay home with their own children, returning to school, getting a degree and seeking other employment, moving, retirement, etc. Issues related to job performance were also cited frequently in comments about turnover.

Centers reported that staff turnover affected their child care programs in various ways:

- 146 respondents reported that staff turnover led to the hiring of replacement staff with less work experience;
- 104 respondents reported that staff turnover caused changes in the quality of their program;
- 111 respondents reported that staff turnover led to the hiring of replacement staff with less educational attainment;
- 86 respondents reported that staff turnover forced a change in program structure;
- 66 respondents reported that staff turnover caused a decrease in the number of children enrolled;
- 57 respondents reported that staff turnover forced a reduction in the number of activities offered for the children; and
- 12 respondents reported that staff turnover led to a loss of the program’s accreditation.

The 2007 survey addressed the level of credentialing among the center staff. Of the 353 centers that responded to this question in 2007, 46% of the centers reported that they had staff with an Office of Child Care (OCC) credential. In 2005, 358 centers responded to this question with 57% of these respondents indicating that they had staff with an OCC credential. In 2007, about 82% of the responding centers indicated that if the OCC bonus amounts were doubled, there would be an increase in the number of staff with an OCC credential.

Of the 104 centers that reported that turnover caused the quality of their care to change, about 62% of them reported that the turnover facilitated an improvement in quality. In 2005, 97 centers indicated that turnover caused a change in quality with 70% of these respondents reporting that this turnover facilitated an improvement in quality. Based on this data and on respondents’ comments/anecdotes, it is clear that as troublesome as turnover is, it does provide directors with the opportunity to make positive changes in staffing.

The centers reporting an improvement in quality were split in their response to whether compensation was a factor in turnover – with 33% saying compensation was a factor and 67% said it was not a factor. Anecdotal evidence from the directors’ comments suggests that a significant amount of turnover is caused by staff departures related to performance issues. Employees leave or are terminated because they are unwilling or unable to meet the centers standards for reliability, job performance, work ethic, compatibility with other staff, or other disciplinary issues. Predictably, replacing these underperforming employees often has a positive impact on quality. It is possible – although difficult to substantiate with data – that higher compensation might attract better employees in the first place, thereby altering the relationship of turnover to quality improvement.
Conversely, at centers reporting a decline in quality, compensation was cited as an issue in 86% of these centers. In these cases, well-qualified or skilled staff may have left with the expectation of better pay in another job/field. This supposition is supported by director’s comments to the effect that senior staff are hard to find and keep because of the availability of jobs with better compensation and intangible benefits, such as respect.

**Annual Wage Rate Information***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public School Teacher Average (MD)</td>
<td>$56,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpublic School Teacher Average (MD)</td>
<td>$46,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Child Care Provider (MD)</td>
<td>$28,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Center Director (MD)</td>
<td>$33,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Senior Staff/Teacher (MD)</td>
<td>$22,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Aide (MD)</td>
<td>$16,172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Maryland State Department of Education, Oct 2007; Association of Independent Maryland Schools (AIMS), 2006-2007 school year; and Maryland Committee for Children's 2007 Statewide Survey of Family Child Care Providers and Child Care Centers.

**Conclusion**

The 2007 turnover survey reconfirms the belief – already widely accepted – that child care is troubled by a high staff turnover rate and that one of the reasons for this high rate is under-compensation. Reference to other job categories sets these facts in high relief.

The Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) reports that child care workers have a higher concentration of poverty-level jobs than almost any other occupation in the United States. CCW notes that only 22 occupations out of 820 surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2004 reported having lower mean wages than child care workers. Among the job classifications that have average earnings within five percent of child care workers are short order cooks, parking lot attendants, and maids. Low wages result in a high turnover rate. In 2001-2002, there was a national turnover rate of 30% for child care workers, which compared to 6% for public school teachers, 7% for nurses, and 11% for hairdressers. There is no recent national research on child care turnover rates. However, Steve Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, believes that there has been little or no improvement in turnover in recent years.

An annual report issued by the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, Child Care Demographics, tracks the compensation of child care providers in Maryland. In the 2008 edition, Demographics reports that the average annual income for directors of child care centers was $33,935. For senior staff and teachers, it was $22,298. And for aides, it was $16,172.

Taken together, the evidence is clear that the high turnover rate is not good for children, their parents, or the child care centers. The children’s emotional well-being and cognitive development are negatively affected by a revolving door of caretakers. Parents are affected by knowing that both the quality and reliability of their child’s care is less than optimal. And center directors and owners struggle to provide high quality care, meet State standards for staff/child ratios, and do it all at the bottom of the salary scale.

3Twenty percent (20%) of responding centers did not answer the question regarding the relationship of compensation to turnover.
4This refers to credentialing by the Office of Child Care in the Maryland State Department of Education.

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