

4E Contra Costa

Enhancing Early Educator Earnings for Contra Costa: An innovative wage-boosting solution for retaining early educators

Early education is in crisis.

Many early educators in our county make an **hourly wage that is one-third** of what is needed to make ends meet; and yet, these professionals are responsible for educating the next generation of learners.

Low pay leads to early educators leaving their jobs, which creates a shortage of programs that working families (and our economy) depend on.

Early education programs are struggling to stay fully staffed, with many closing their doors or enrolling fewer children because they can't meet state-required staff to child ratios. With fewer spaces in early learning programs, parents struggle to stay in the workforce. Recent estimates show that insufficient early education in California costs parents, businesses, and taxpayers \$17 billion each year.¹

The situation is particularly dire in Contra Costa. A survey³ of early educators in our county showed that current wages are far too low for educators to support their own families. Nearly 1 in 10 center-based early educators report not having enough to eat, and 47% of home-based educators report utilizing at least 1 form of public assistance, like SNAP or Medi-Cal. The report also highlighted the startling rate of turnover for early educators: 95% of surveyed programs reported staff turnover in the last year, with 4 of the top 5 reasons related to low wages.



"I don't want to stop my dream and venture somewhere else where the money is... my passion is to help kids. But what do I do with bills that need to get paid?"

Early educator in Contra Costa County

Average
Home-based Early
Educator Wage

**Less than
\$18/hour**

Average
Center-based Early
Educator Wage

**Less than
\$25/hour**

Living Wage in
Contra Costa for
1 Adult with 1 Child²

\$54/hour

*For full time (40hrs/week) work; center-based educator assumes lead teacher role

What works?

Investing in early educator wages.



Wage-boosting programs lead to **higher retention of early educators**⁴



Higher retention leads to **more stability and quality in early care and education**⁵



Access to high quality early care and education leads to **huge returns on investment for children, families, and the local economy**⁶, with each dollar invested generating a boost of \$1.88 in economic activity⁷



"If it takes too long to get funding, a lot of the family child care programs will fail before help arrives."

Home-based early educator in Contra Costa County

Investing in early educator wages is a solid investment strategy, and the right thing to do.

Early educators are an essential, skilled workforce in our county, and they deserve dignity and fair pay for the important work that they do.

State leaders agree that early educators' compensation is drastically low, which is negatively impacting the supply of programs. Since high-quality early learning programs are critical to children's development, the lack of available and affordable programs leaves families scrambling. Although reforms to early education are being considered, given state budget deficits, the horizon for those reforms continue to move further away.

Contra Costa County must act urgently to address the local crisis.

If we don't act, we risk more early educators leaving the profession, fewer early learning programs for families who can't keep their jobs without a quality program for their children, and less access to early care and education for families.

The 4E Contra Costa model: Enhancing Early Educator Earnings for Contra Costa

The 4E Contra Costa model grew out of a community-led, data-informed design process. This included a county-wide workforce survey of over 500 early educators, systematic review of 25 wage boosting programs from across the country, and community input sessions with dozens of early educators. Work was guided by an advisory group of 10 system leaders from across county departments, agencies, and early learning programs.

By piloting a wage-boosting model, our county can ensure stability for hundreds of families who depend on early learning programs to keep their jobs, invest in our economy, and maximize impact of other public funding.

The 4E Contra Costa wage-boosting model is:

Equitable

Prioritizes zip codes where families currently have the fewest early learning program options (so retention of educators is critical), and sites that receive the least assistance from state funding contracts.

Direct

Payments go directly to early educators, no strings attached; can use the money to pay off debts, support their early education business, or invest in their health or retirement.

- 18 payments of \$1,000+ per month
- full- and part-time direct care roles are eligible
- home-based and center-based educators can apply
- sites chosen by lottery

Research-based

The model is based on best practices from existing evidence, informed by local lived experience, and endorsed by local individuals and organizations who want to see the model implemented to address our local crisis.



"[M]any talented teachers...really love their job, they contribute their lives to this field. I think it will really help those teachers to say, 'Okay, I'm gonna still stay in this field'."

Early educator in Contra Costa County



**Caring for tomorrow means
addressing the unmet needs of our
county's early educators today.**

Learn more and stay informed:



Sign on to support this model being implemented in our county and receive updates:
bit.ly/4e-support-letter



Read about our community-centered process: bit.ly/community-centered-process



Learn additional details about the proposed 4E Contra Costa model:
bit.ly/early-learning-workforce

For more information, contact Mackenzie Whipps, First 5 Contra Costa Early Childhood Program Officer at mwhipps@first5coco.org or visit us at First5ContraCosta.org



¹ [The Growing Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis in California](https://www.strongnation.org/research/annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis-in-california), strongnation.org

² [Living Wage Calculation for Contra Costa County](https://livingwage.mit.edu/livingwage-california), California, livingwage.mit.edu

³ [The Early Care and Education Workforce of Contra Costa County](https://cscpe.berkeley.edu/), cscpe.berkeley.edu

⁴ [Reducing Teacher Turnover in Early Childhood Education Settings: Lessons from Research Policy Partnerships in Louisiana and Virginia](https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/research-policy-partnerships-in-louisiana-and-virginia), childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu

⁵ [Understanding teacher turnover in early childhood education](https://medicine.yale.edu/earlychildhood/understanding-teacher-turnover-in-early-childhood-education/), medicine.yale.edu

⁶ [Examining the Significant Return on Investment from High-Quality Early Learning & Care](https://ffv.org/examining-the-significant-return-on-investment-from-high-quality-early-learning-and-care), ffv.org

⁷ [Investing in Early Care and Education: The Economic Benefits for California](https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/investing-in-early-care-and-education-the-economic-benefits-for-california/), laborcenter.berkeley.edu