

Wages for Assistant Teachers and Center Directors Vary by Education and Subsidy Participation, But Not by Provider Quality

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Collected Data from More than 34,000 Child Care Workers to Better Understand Child Care Service Costs

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) produces wage estimates annually for more than 830 occupations identified as Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC).¹ The estimates are organized by job characteristics and geographic location, including national, state, and metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. Among the occupations of interest to child care cost modelers are Education and Child Care Administrators, Preschool and Daycare (SOC 11-9031); Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education (SOC 25-2011); Teaching Assistants, Preschool, Elementary, Middle, and Secondary School, Except Special Education (SOC 25-9042); and Child Care Workers (SOC 39-9011). Occupational estimates are also available at the national level for specific industries, including Child Day Care Services (NAICS 64400).

Seeking to advance its child care cost modeling efforts, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) identified an opportunity to improve on the BLS estimates and better understand the drivers of wage differences to build an alternative methodology for establishing state child care subsidy rates. As part of its STABLE 4WARD stabilization grants, funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), DECAL obtained quarterly reports between 2022 and 2024 from 3,677 providers including their employees' hourly wages and education credentials. The reports also included each provider's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) rating and their level of participation in Georgia's child care subsidy program, which the agency considered important for understanding wage differences. To date, DECAL has collected data on more than 34,000 active workers in the child care industry. Its analysis can guide other states on how to interpret wage statistics along these parameters.

DECAL was able to disaggregate assistant teacher wages from lead teacher wages, and center director wages from those for other education administrators.

This analysis is a companion to the separately reported analysis of lead teacher wages.² By collecting data for 16 different roles common to child care providers, DECAL was able to disaggregate wage statistics by lead teachers, assistant teachers, and floater-aides. Similarly, it disaggregated wage statistics for center directors, assistant directors, and executive directors. Furthermore, wages for teachers in Georgia's Pre-K Program, the state's free, lottery-funded educational program that prepares four year olds for kindergarten, were separated from wages for teachers working in private preschool or serving other age groups.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/oes/>

² Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2024). *Wages for Lead Teachers Vary by Education and Subsidy Participation, But Not Provider Quality*. https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CostofCareReport_WagesforLeadTeachers.pdf

Table 1: Comparison of DECAL Hourly Wage Estimates for Lead Teachers, Assistant Teachers, and Center Directors to BLS Estimates for Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education (SOC 25-2001); Child Care Workers (SOC 39-9011); and Education Administrators, Preschool and Private Center/Program (SOC 11-9031)

Hourly Wage Percentile Statistic	May 2021 BLS Wage Estimate (SOC 25- 2011)	Lead Teachers			May 2021 BLS Wage Estimate (SOC 39- 9011)	Assistant Teachers			May 2021 BLS Wage Estimate (SOC 11- 9031)	Directors
		2022 DECAL Wage Estimate	Georgia's Pre- K Wage Estimate	Wage Excluding GA's Pre-K		2022 DECAL Wage Estimate	Georgia's Pre- K Wage Estimate	Wage Excluding GA's Pre-K		
10th Percentile	\$10.72	\$10.00	\$16.95	\$10.00	\$8.29	\$9.50	\$11.00	\$9.30	\$14.43	\$12.13
25th Percentile	\$12.40	\$12.00	\$18.76	\$11.55	\$9.02	\$11.00	\$12.00	\$10.50	\$17.53	\$16.00
50th Percentile	\$14.45	\$14.50	\$22.12	\$14.00	\$11.04	\$12.25	\$13.00	\$12.00	\$22.20	\$20.00
75th Percentile	\$22.31	\$17.50	\$26.00	\$16.10	\$13.28	\$14.50	\$15.00	\$14.50	\$23.90	\$25.83
90th Percentile	\$29.70	\$21.50	\$29.00	\$19.00	\$14.36	\$16.00	\$16.00	\$16.00	\$28.86	\$32.69

Table 1 shows a comparison of BLS and DECAL wage statistics for assistant teachers and center directors, with lead teachers included for reference. DECAL observed that neither the BLS estimates for preschool teachers (SOC 25-2011) nor for child care workers (SOC 39-9011) aligned with the wage distribution for assistant teachers in Georgia.³ Wages for Georgia assistant teachers, excluding those in Georgia's Pre-K Program, were roughly 10% higher than the BLS estimates for child care workers at the same percentiles. In the case of center directors, the median hourly wage observed in the DECAL data was 10% lower than the median reported by the BLS for education administrators (SOC 11-9031), and the distribution was wider than that reported by the BLS.

DECAL observed a clear progression in the distribution of wages by education credentials for assistant teachers but not for center directors with less than a BA degree.

DECAL takes teacher education credentials into account as part of its QRIS assessments and can use this information to vary wage assumptions in its cost models. The distribution of assistant teacher wages and center director wages by education credential is shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. For assistant teachers, DECAL observed a clear progression in the distribution of wages by education credentials, but for center directors it observed a progression only between those

Table 2: Hourly Wage Statistics by Education Credentials for Assistant Teachers at Child Care Centers, Excluding Georgia's Pre-K Assistant Teachers (n=5,829)

Hourly Wage Statistics	BA Degree or Higher in ECE/CD	BA Degree or Higher non- ECE/CD	AA Degree in ECE/CD	AA Degree Non-ECE	CDA or Equivalent (TCC or TCD)	No Credential or Degree	Total
10th Percentile	\$11.00	\$11.00	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$9.00	\$9.25
25th Percentile	\$13.00	\$13.00	\$11.00	\$11.00	\$11.00	\$10.00	\$10.50
50th Percentile (Median)	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$13.12	\$13.00	\$13.00	\$11.94	\$12.00
75th Percentile	\$17.00	\$16.83	\$15.15	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$13.50	\$14.50
90th Percentile	\$19.60	\$18.50	\$17.69	\$17.00	\$16.50	\$15.00	\$16.00
Average Hourly Wage	\$15.40	\$14.96	\$13.61	\$13.40	\$13.11	\$11.99	\$12.60
Count (n)	165	530	217	228	661	4,028	5,829

Note: Bachelor of Arts (BA); Early Childhood Education or Child Development (ECE/CD); Associate of Arts (AA); Child Development Associate (CDA); Technical Certificate of Credit in Early Childhood Education (TCC); Technical College Diploma in Early Childhood Education (TCD).

³ The BLS did not report statistics for teaching assistants (SOC 25-9042) in its May 2021 wage estimates for Georgia, so statistics for SOC 39-9011 are shown instead.

who have a BA degree and those who do not. A more detailed summary of the distribution of assistant teacher and center director wages by education credential is provided in Appendix A and B, respectively.

Table 2: Hourly Wage Statistics by Education Credentials for Child Care Center Directors (n=1,776)

Hourly Wage Statistics	BA Degree or Higher in ECE/CD	BA Degree or Higher non- ECE/CD	AA Degree in ECE/CD	AA Degree Non-ECE	CDA or Equivalent (TCC or TCD)	No Credential or Degree	Total
10th Percentile	\$15.00	\$14.50	\$12.05	\$13.80	\$11.50	\$12.00	\$12.00
25th Percentile	\$18.50	\$18.00	\$15.00	\$16.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$16.00
50th Percentile (Median)	\$24.04	\$24.00	\$19.00	\$20.00	\$18.37	\$20.00	\$20.00
75th Percentile	\$29.92	\$30.00	\$24.04	\$25.00	\$22.60	\$24.01	\$26.00
90th Percentile	\$36.04	\$36.28	\$31.23	\$30.13	\$27.03	\$28.91	\$33.00
Average Hourly Wage	\$24.83	\$24.70	\$20.48	\$21.08	\$19.22	\$20.65	\$21.93
Count (n)	294	456	162	79	565	220	1,776

Note: Center directors possessing No Credential or Degree can still meet state minimum qualifications by completing a 40-hour director training course approved by DECAL and having at least five years of experience as an onsite center director, or by completing 15 semester hours in ECE/CD from an accredited college or university and 6 months of qualifying child care experience. A complete list of qualifications required for center directors can be found at <https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CCLCRulesandRegulations.pdf>.

DECAL was also able to establish wage factors linking credentials to geographic region and participation in its child care subsidy program as illustrated in Tables 4 and 5. Only statistics representing sample sizes of 20 or more are shown. DECAL was not able to establish wage factors for quality ratings independent of education credentials; in the case of assistant teachers, most (70%) possess no credential or degree, and within that grouping the agency observed no increase in wages as a function of quality rating level. Sample sizes for higher credentialed assistant teachers and center

Wages also varied consistently by geography and participation in child care subsidy programs—but not by quality rating independent of education credentials.

Table 4: Median (50th Percentile) Wage Factors for Assistant Teacher Education Credentials, by Geographic Location, and Employer's Child Care Subsidy Participation; Excluding Georgia's Pre-K Assistant Teachers

	BA Degree or Higher in ECE/CD	BA Degree or Higher non- ECE/CD	AA Degree in ECE/CD	AA Degree Non-ECE	CDA or Equivalent (TCC or TCD)	No Credential or Degree	Total
MRZ 1 - No Subsidies	1.38	1.29	1.36	1.25	1.25	1.17	1.25
MRZ 2 - No Subsidies		1.17	1.06		0.96	0.92	0.92
MRZ 3 - No Subsidies						0.77	0.79
MRZ 1 - Receives Subsidies	1.18	1.17	1.08	1.04	1.08	1.02	1.04
MRZ 2 - Receives Subsidies	1.02	1.08	1.00	0.85	1.00	0.88	0.92
MRZ 3 - Receives Subsidies					0.87	0.82	0.83
Total	1.25	1.25	1.09	1.08	1.08	0.99	1.00

Note: Georgia divides its geographic regions into three market rates zone (MRZs): MRZ 1 represents the larger urban and suburban areas of the state; MRZ 2 represents smaller urban and suburban areas; MRZ 3 represents the remaining, more rural areas of the state. A list of counties by MRZ can be found at <https://caps.dec.al.ga.gov/assets/downloads/CAPS/AppendixC-CAPS%20Reimbursement%20Rates.pdf>. Blanks indicate unreported values due to small sample sizes (n<20).

*Example: If the median wage for assistant teachers in Georgia is \$12.00, then the estimated wage for assistant teachers with a CDA working at centers in Market Rate Zone 1 serving no children on subsidy is 1.25 * \$12.00 = \$15.00*

directors were too small (i.e., <20) to derive reliable statistics by quality level, while also controlling for geographic region and subsidy participation. DECAL concluded that while a more highly educated workforce may be a hallmark of higher quality, individual workers with the same level of education can generally expect to be paid similarly regardless of their program's quality rating. Therefore, DECAL believes the providers' cost of quality can be modeled not from simply paying workers more but from employing a greater proportion of more highly educated staff.

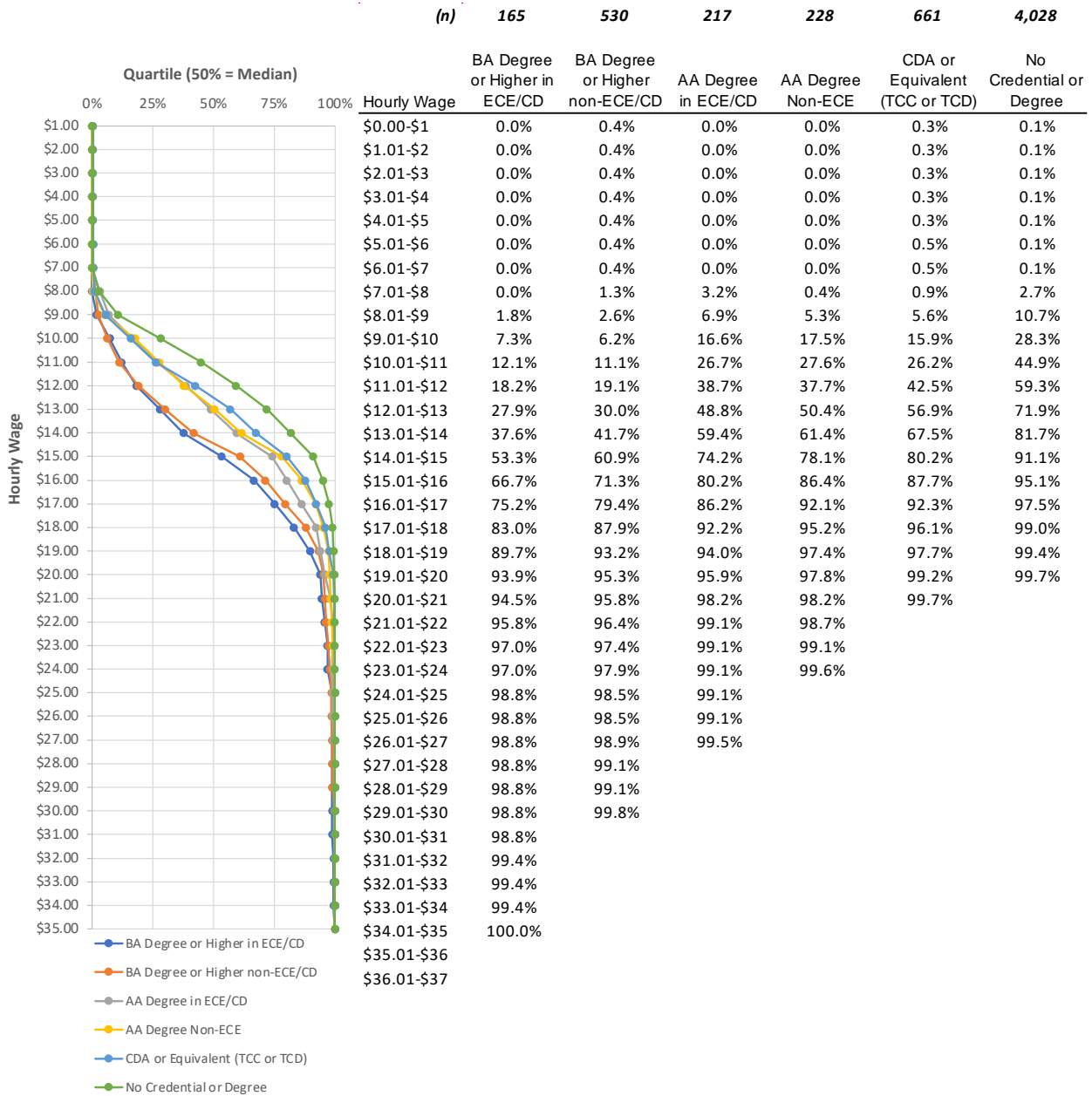
Table 5: Median (50th Percentile) Wage Factors for Center Director Education Credentials, for Geographic Location, and Employer's Child Care Subsidy Participation

	BA Degree or Higher in ECE/CD	BA Degree or Higher non- ECE/CD	AA Degree in ECE/CD	AA Degree Non-ECE	CDA or Equivalent (TCC or TCD)	No Credential or Degree	Total
MRZ 1 - No Subsidies	1.34	1.32	1.50		1.08	1.15	1.25
MRZ 2 - No Subsidies	1.19	0.99	0.82		0.88		0.92
MRZ 3 - No Subsidies					0.65		0.75
MRZ 1 - Receives Subsidies	1.20	1.24	0.95	1.10	0.98	1.05	1.08
MRZ 2 - Receives Subsidies	1.06	0.96	0.95		0.90	0.94	0.94
MRZ 3 - Receives Subsidies					0.75		0.75
Total	1.20	1.20	0.95	1.00	0.92	1.00	1.00

Note: Georgia divides its geographic regions into three market rate zones (MRZs): MRZ 1 represents the larger urban and suburban areas of the state; MRZ 2 represents smaller urban and suburban areas; MRZ 3 represents the remaining, more rural areas of the state. A list of counties by MRZ can be found at <https://caps.dec.state.ga.us/assets/downloads/CAPS/AppendixC-CAPS%20Reimbursement%20Rates.pdf>. Blanks indicate unreported values due to small sample sizes (n<20).

Wage factors such as those shown above can be useful to other states seeking to estimate their child care costs. DECAL believes that participation in child care subsidies can serve as a proxy for the socioeconomic circumstances faced by providers and that those who serve children on subsidy may have greater difficulty in paying higher wages because they are more likely to lower their tuition rates to align with what their families can afford. This hypothesis was overwhelmingly supported in the data DECAL collected, particularly in the large urban and suburban areas of the state but also, to a lesser extent, in the smaller urban and suburban areas. Small samples sizes complicated the analysis, but overall DECAL found these results to be consistent with the more detailed wage factors it derived for lead teachers.

Appendix A: Cumulative Distribution of Hourly Wages for Center-Based Assistant Teachers in Georgia, Excluding Georgia's Pre-K Assistant Teachers, by Education Credential (n = 5,829)



Appendix B: Cumulative Distribution of Hourly Wages for Child Care Center Directors in Georgia, by Education Credential (n = 1,776)

