



RESEARCH REPORT

Early Educators' Reflections on the DC Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund

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Executive Summary

Early childhood educators play an essential role in providing child care for families and learning and development supports for young children, yet they have long faced challenges due to low wages. Recognizing this, the District of Columbia (DC) introduced the Early Childhood Pay Equity Fund in 2022. This first-of-its-kind initiative aims to bridge the pay gap between early educators and teachers at public schools, addressing historical inequities and improving recruitment and retention efforts.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) implemented the Pay Equity Fund in three phases:

- one-time supplemental payments in FY 2022;
- quarterly payments in FY 2023; and
- in FY 2024, funds were distributed to child care facilities that opted into the Pay Equity Fund, which in turn, must meet minimum salary scales for early educators set by OSSE.

To examine the implementation and outcomes associated with the Pay Equity Fund, the Urban Institute partnered with OSSE under a 2022 Child Care Policy Research Partnership cooperative agreement from the federal Administration for Children and Families. Through various research methods, including surveys, interviews, data analysis, and focus groups, the study aims to:

- document the mission, goals, and early implementation of the Pay Equity Fund,
- raise up the experiences of early educators eligible for and receiving the Pay Equity Fund payments and the experiences and views of their employers, and
- disseminate findings to DC and national audiences to inform future innovations in compensation strategies for this workforce.

This report provides an in-depth exploration of early educators' experiences with the Pay Equity Fund during its initial year of implementation. Drawing on data from surveys conducted in May 2023 and follow-up focus groups, the report offers insights into the transition from direct payments to an opt-in payment structure by employers in FY 2024. It covers educators' introduction to the Fund, their application and payment experiences, financial impacts, and perceived benefits for child care programs and the broader early childhood education field.

Educators' Perspectives on Navigating the Pay Equity Fund

Educators described how they learned about the Pay Equity Fund, their initial impressions, their experiences applying, and what the payments meant to them.

Initial Awareness

Clear information from a trusted source was important for awareness, understanding, and uptake of the Pay Equity Fund. Early educators primarily learned about the Pay Equity Fund through employers (49 percent), coworkers (21 percent), and OSSE outreach (17 percent). OSSE held workshops and information sessions and sent emails to eligible educators. Many participants were informed about the Fund by their center directors and other program administrators.

First Impressions

When reflecting on their first impressions of the Pay Equity Fund, most early educators expressed initial skepticism, confusion, and disbelief. They were surprised that such a program could be real and doubted whether they would actually receive the funds. However, initial doubts and concerns were almost always followed by excitement and satisfaction once early educators received clear information and guidance from a trustworthy source.

Many expressed a sense of satisfaction that their hard work, commitment, and dedication were finally being recognized through this increased compensation. Others saw it as a step toward making early education a more respected profession. A few others voiced concerns about the sustainability of the fund. They expressed doubts regarding how the Pay Equity Fund would evolve over time and what it would mean for them. In focus groups, educators who had received information and support from their program directors or from OSSE tended to report a clearer understanding of the Pay Equity Fund from the start. District-wide training workshops and information sessions, and staff meetings at individual centers, explained the details and helped clear up initial confusion.

Application Concerns

Although overall uptake was high, early educators mentioned several concerns about applying. Tax implications were a top reason. Although losing benefits eligibility could have been a problem for participants, DC established interagency agreements to avoid benefit cliffs—an often-unexpected loss

or reduction of public benefits because of increased income, which can ultimately harm workers' overall financial well-being. The agreements provided exceptions to DC residents, meaning any income received from the Pay Equity Fund could not be counted against them. This exception did not apply to nonresidents coming from neighboring states to work in DC.

For a few others, confusion and misinformation about the initiative and eligibility impacted early uptake. Some educators were initially hesitant due to concerns about spam, phishing, or privacy. After receiving additional information and confirmation of the legitimacy and safety of the process, those who were initially concerned or confused usually decided to apply—if not for the first payment, then for subsequent payments.

Application Process

Overall, early childhood educators reported ease in applying for and receiving payments from the Pay Equity Fund. The online application process was designed to minimize the burden, and materials were provided in multiple languages. Eligibility data streamlined verification, requiring documentation only if discrepancies arose. Over half of the survey respondents rated the application process as “very easy.” Educators in child development centers were more likely to report greater ease than those from child development homes licensed for up to six children and expanded homes licensed for up to 12 children. Although most found the application process manageable, a few struggled with computer literacy, technical difficulties, or repetitive questions.

When seeking information about the application, early educators turned to their coworkers and center directors as trusted sources of information. A few credited their positive application experiences to OSSE-led workshops and training sessions held when the Pay Equity Fund was first announced.

Experiences Receiving Payments

Receiving payments was equally smooth, with options for direct deposit or prepaid debit cards. Educators reported receiving the payments on time and could access the funds quickly.

Problems filing taxes later emerged, however, with some educators surprised by the need to self-report taxes on the payments (despite language included in the application about OSSE-funded technical assistance). The distribution of incorrect tax forms to payment recipients meant some early childhood educators overpaid on taxes, leading to financial burdens during tax season.

Although not directly related to their experiences receiving payments, several focus group participants reflected on the eligibility requirements for the Pay Equity Fund, citing other role types that they felt should be eligible. They realized not everyone in their programs were eligible as they were applying themselves, which caused some discomfort.

Perceived Benefits of Pay Equity Fund Payments

Early educators shared the many ways they saw the Pay Equity Fund payment benefiting themselves and others, including financial well-being, stress reduction, feelings of respect, and work performance.

Financial Well-being

The Pay Equity Fund emerged as a crucial lifeline for early educators, addressing immediate financial needs and fostering long-term stability. Survey data highlighted how payments helped cover essential expenses like housing and food, easing financial worries and empowering educators to plan for the future. By offering relief from paycheck-to-paycheck living, the Fund facilitated greater financial security and enhanced overall quality of life.

Stress Reduction and Improved Mental Health

Early educators experienced significant stress relief through the Pay Equity Fund, alleviating financial burdens and improving emotional well-being. Payments provided respite from the cycle of financial strain, leading to improved mental health outcomes. Assistant teachers, in particular, described having improved mental health because of less financial stress.

Improvements in Job Satisfaction and Job Prestige

Many educators noted that the Pay Equity Fund has made early educators feel genuinely appreciated and acknowledged for their essential role in the workforce. Educators described how this elevated their feelings of value, respect, professionalism, and recognition for their contributions, both within their programs and the broader community. Some educators spoke of how the Pay Equity Fund is shifting public perceptions of what it means to be an early childhood educator, as teachers and not babysitters.

Many educators also acknowledged the positive impact of the Pay Equity Fund on their job satisfaction. The boost in their financial security shifted their views toward their jobs. There were few

significant differences in aspects of job satisfaction between payment recipients and nonrecipients, with those receiving payments reporting greater satisfaction with job security and relationships with supervisors.

Enhanced Professional Growth and Child Care Quality Improvement

Educators perceived the fund as a crucial initial step toward continuous self-improvement within the teaching profession. They recognized the significance of investing in their own development to enhance their instructional quality. As they discussed benefits to the broader workforce, and not just themselves, many early educators stated their belief that the Pay Equity Fund is motivating early educators in DC to pursue higher education and training, which will contribute to their being more professionally equipped and, in turn, improve overall care quality.

Most respondents agreed that they can better focus on the children they work with because of the Pay Equity Fund, with 41 percent agreeing “a lot” and 30 percent agreeing “somewhat.” Moreover, several educators shared experiences of how the fund enabled them to provide more supplies for their students and classrooms, thereby enhancing students’ learning experiences.

Reflections on How the Pay Equity Fund is Shaping the Field

Champions of the Pay Equity Fund aimed to achieve workforce goals in DC, including fair pay and workforce stability (Greenberg et al. 2023). Early childhood educators were asked to consider whether the Fund helped achieve these goals.

Fair and Equitable Pay

Fair and equitable pay has long been a concern for early childhood educators, some of the lowest-paid workers in the United States. On our survey, about 36 percent of early childhood educators reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their wages, even though only 8 percent indicated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their job overall, demonstrating the ongoing need for wage supplements.

Indeed, the Pay Equity Fund—as delivered as a direct supplemental payment to early educators in its early implementation—appears to have contributed to educators’ beliefs that they are now being compensated fairly. Overall, many survey respondents agreed that they were being paid what they

should because of the Pay Equity Fund, given the credentials required of their job. However, not everyone believed the payments were enough or equitable relative to the requirements and responsibilities of their roles. In focus groups, lead teachers expressed more frustration than assistant teachers about the adequacy of payments, particularly regarding recognition of professional experience and parity with public school salaries.

Workforce Retention

Survey and focus group responses suggest that the Pay Equity Fund is retaining early educators in their jobs and the child care field. Sixty percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they intend to stay in their current job longer because of the Fund, while a similar share plans to remain in child care in DC longer than expected. Early childhood educators working in home-based settings agreed at a somewhat higher rate, even among educators who did not necessarily own or operate the program where they work.

Educators emphasize the importance of higher wages for retention, citing turnover due to low pay. Some educators view the Fund as an opportunity to retain talent, preventing good teachers from leaving for better-paying jobs elsewhere.

What's Next for the Pay Equity Fund

The evolution of the Pay Equity Fund is far from complete. In FY 2024, distribution shifted from direct payments to a new revenue stream model, in which child care facilities that opt in receive formula funding and must, in turn, meet minimum salary scales for early educators set by OSSE. In February 2024, OSSE began reconvening the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Task Force for ongoing guidance (Greenberg et al. 2023). Meanwhile, the Pay Equity Fund is facing possible cuts following calls from the District's chief financial officer to "replenish a reserve fund depleted during the pandemic years." Despite successful implementation, innovation can be vulnerable without stable funding. As the Pay Equity Fund continues, our work documenting the challenges and successes of fund implementation will continue, too. New evidence can inform continuous improvement.

Early Educators' Reflections on the DC Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund

Early childhood educators play an essential role in providing child care for families and learning and development supports for young children. Yet, historically low wages in the child care sector have led to challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified early childhood educators, and in turn, building sustainable high-quality child care programs.

In 2022, the District of Columbia (DC) passed legislation to tax the wealthy, generating revenue to increase compensation for early educators working in licensed DC child care programs. The first of its kind nationwide, the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund (“Pay Equity Fund”) represents an innovative, long-term, and sustainable strategy for addressing early childhood educator compensation. Specifically, the Pay Equity Fund aims to achieve pay parity between early educators in child care programs licensed by DC’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and teachers in DC public schools. DC child care experts also describe the Pay Equity Fund as a valuable opportunity to address gender discrimination and systemic racism that have historically plagued the child care field as well as improve staff recruitment and retention and program quality (Greenberg et al. 2023).

OSSE implemented the Pay Equity Fund in three phases.¹

- In FY 2022, it provided one-time supplemental payments to early educators in licensed centers and home-based programs—\$14,000 for full-time lead teachers and \$10,000 for assistant teachers and associate caregivers, and half those amounts for part-time teachers.
- In FY 2023, payments were distributed quarterly, totaling the same amount as the previous year.
- In FY 2024, funds were distributed to child care facilities that opted into the Pay Equity Fund, which in turn, must meet minimum salary scales for early educators set by OSSE. Facilities could apply during one of four application windows during the fiscal year. Facilities that opt in to the program receive quarterly payments calculated using a payroll funding formula.

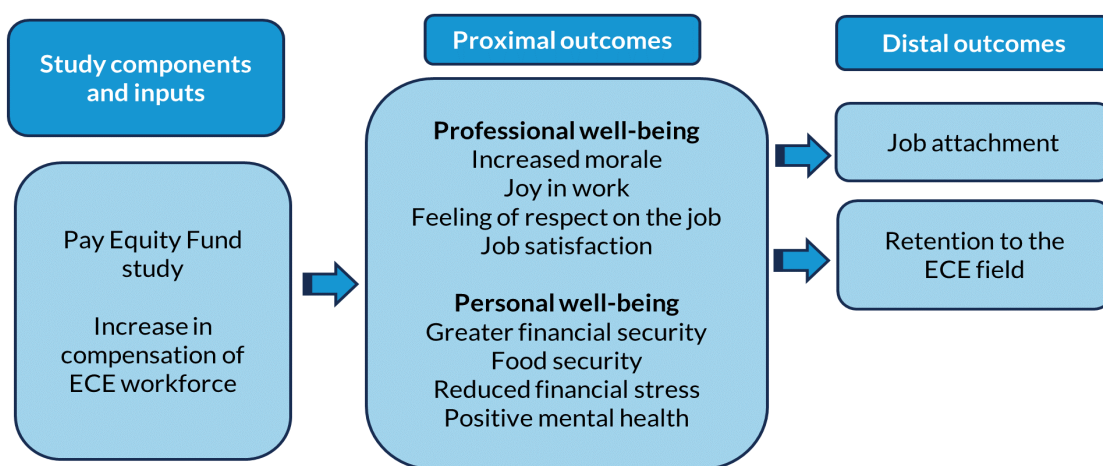
Overview of the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Study

To examine the implementation and outcomes associated with the Pay Equity Fund, the Urban Institute partnered with OSSE under a 2022 Child Care Policy Research Partnership cooperative agreement from the federal Administration for Children and Families. The funded study aims to:

- document the mission, goals, and early implementation of the Pay Equity Fund,
- raise up the experiences of early educators eligible for and receiving the Pay Equity Fund payments and the experiences and views of their employers, and
- disseminate findings to DC and national audiences to inform future innovations in compensation strategies for this workforce.

A combination of new survey data collection, interviews and focus groups, and analyses of administrative data from OSSE provides a detailed picture of the PEF fund's implementation successes and challenges, and for whom this new initiative is working well or not, and reasons why. The research team designed a simple conceptual framework (figure 1) to illustrate the expected associations between increased compensation, proximal outcomes of improved professional and personal well-being, and more distal outcomes of job attachment and worker retention to the early childhood education (ECE) field.

FIGURE 1
Conceptual Framework



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Source: Conceptual framework developed by the authors in advance of this research.

Structure of This Report

In this report, we present research findings describing early childhood educators' experiences with the Pay Equity Fund during its first year of implementation. We surveyed early childhood educators in May 2023—about one year after the Pay Equity Fund was formally announced and after the FY 2022 and first two FY2023 direct payments to early childhood educators had been dispersed. We conducted follow-up focus groups with 30 survey respondents to learn more about their experiences and their thoughts on the pending transition in FY 2024 from the direct payment system to the new payment structure where employers opt in and use funds to raise staff wages to required minimums.

We first describe how early educators learned about the Pay Equity Fund and their initial reactions. We then describe their experiences applying for and receiving the FY 2022 and FY 2023 payments and the relative ease or difficulty of the process. Early educators reported what affected their decisions to apply or not apply and concerns they had, which we summarize. We also detail how the payments helped early educators financially and other perceived benefits of the Pay Equity Fund for child care programs and the broader early childhood education field.

Throughout the report, we will interweave findings from a web survey of about 1,600 early educators across licensed child development centers and homes and follow-up focus groups with 30 survey respondents. Box 1 provides more detail on the study methods. A companion technical report (Doromal et al. 2024) describes the survey data collection and sampling procedures in more detail.

BOX 1

Summary of Study Methods and Sample Demographics

Early Educator and Home Caregiver Surveys

In May 2023, we invited all teachers, assistant teachers, home caregivers, and associate home caregivers who were listed as being employed in a licensed child development facility in DC in late 2022 to participate in a voluntary web survey. This sample is intended to approximate the population eligible for either the FY 2022 one-time Pay Equity Fund payment or the first of two FY 2023 quarterly payments; however, it should not be considered an exact representation of the true population of eligible educators due to data limitations. Specifically, our sample may include some DC early educators ultimately deemed ineligible by OSSE because of their job position, hours worked, or date of employment as well as others who would be considered ineligible had they applied.

This survey included educators in all facility types (child development centers, child development homes licensed to serve up to six children, and expanded homes licensed to serve up to 12 children). Recruitment lists were based on administrative records obtained from OSSE and included educators

currently employed in licensed child care facilities in DC (“current early educators”) as well as educators who may have been eligible at some point for Pay Equity Fund payments but were no longer employed in a child care facility at the time of the survey (“former early educators”). We used early educators’ email addresses available in administrative data files to contact and recruit.

The survey was self-administered and conducted through Qualtrics. Respondents could complete their survey in either English, Spanish, or Amharic, and received a \$20 e-gift card as a thank-you gift. The survey was designed to take about 20 minutes to complete and asked about perceptions of the Pay Equity Fund, application experiences and receipt of payments, current wages and benefits, workplace culture, food insecurity, financial security, mental health, and health care coverage. For survey respondents who indicated they were owners or operators of licensed homes, the survey also collected information on the counts of support staff in their programs and compensation levels.

We invited 3,890 early educators to participate and 1,638 responded for a response rate of 42 percent. In analyzing survey responses, we developed weights to account for survey nonresponse and to adjust estimates to better reflect the population of targeted early educators. See survey technical report (Doromal et al. 2024) for more detail on survey methods and sample characteristics.

Focus Groups with Early Educators

In fall 2023, we followed up with 30 early educators (19 lead teachers; 11 assistant teachers) who worked in child development centers and had completed the survey. No home caregivers were included in these focus groups because of recent interviews conducted with this demographic as part of the study. The focus groups were designed to cover similar topics as the survey but probe more deeply on early educators’ experiences. During the focus groups, we asked participants about how they learned about the Pay Equity Fund, the benefits of and challenges with receiving payments, and their views on whether and how payments have advanced equity. We also asked about early educators’ perspectives on their jobs, such as their overall job satisfaction, aspects of their jobs that they like or wish they could change, and what attracted them to work in DC child care.

We held both virtual (via Zoom) and in-person focus groups, facilitated in both English and Spanish. Virtual focus group participants received a \$60 e-gift card as a thank-you gift for participating. We offered a higher (\$75) gift card amount to in-person participants to account for travel costs and the extra burden associated with participating in an in-person event on a weekend. We audio-recorded and fully transcribed responses, and then coded and analyzed key themes relevant to each research topic using NVivo software. Table 1 displays survey and focus group characteristics.

TABLE 1

Work and Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

| | Population (%) (N = 3,890) | Percent (%) of Survey Participants, Unweighted (N = 1,638) | Percent (%) of Focus Group Participants (N = 30) |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Role^a | | | |
| Lead teacher | 51 | 56 | 63 |
| Assistant teacher | 49 | 44 | 37 |
| Facility type | | | |
| Child development center | 94 | 97 | 100 |
| Child development home/expanded home | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| Race/ethnicity | | | |
| <i>Hispanic or Latino Identity</i> | | | |
| Hispanic or Latino | 29 | 29 | 27 |
| Not Hispanic or Latino | 68 | 68 | 70 |
| Prefer not to answer | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| <i>Race (alone or combined with Hispanic or Latine/x identity)</i> | | | |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 0.8 | 0.7 | |
| Asian | 5 | 5 | |
| Black/African American | 57 | 55 | 60 |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0.4 | 0.3 | |
| White | 17 | 20 | 7 |
| Other race or ethnicity | 0.4 | 0.2 | |
| Two or more | 9 | 9 | 3 |
| Prefer not to answer | 11 | 9 | 3 |
| Highest educational attainment | | | |
| No Child Development Associate (CDA), no degree | | 16 | 21 |
| CDA but no degree | | 33 | 38 |
| Associate degree | | 18 | 7 |
| Bachelor's degree | | 24 | 31 |
| Master's degree or higher | | 9 | 3 |

Source: Survey data from 2023 Urban Institute survey of early educators. Focus group data from 2023 Urban Institute focus groups of early educators. Population data obtained by Urban research team through a data sharing agreement with OSSE. Population data come from the Division of Early Learning Licensing Tool (DELLT) and administrative data from AidKit to implement the Pay Equity Fund.

Notes: Demographic characteristics are self-reported from the early educator survey. The survey technical report (Doromal et al. 2024) includes more details on the sample characteristics, including age, gender, primary language, state of residence, and years of work experience.

^a Definition of role aligns with definition used in the implementation of the Pay Equity Fund. "Lead teacher" includes teachers, expanded home caregivers, home caregivers, and Montessori teachers. "Assistant teacher" includes assistant teachers, associate home caregivers, Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion (PKEEP) Program assistant teachers, and Montessori assistant teachers. Based on our study design, the survey sample includes home caregivers. The focus groups, however, only included center-based teaching staff, so we could explore commonalities among that sector of the workforce.

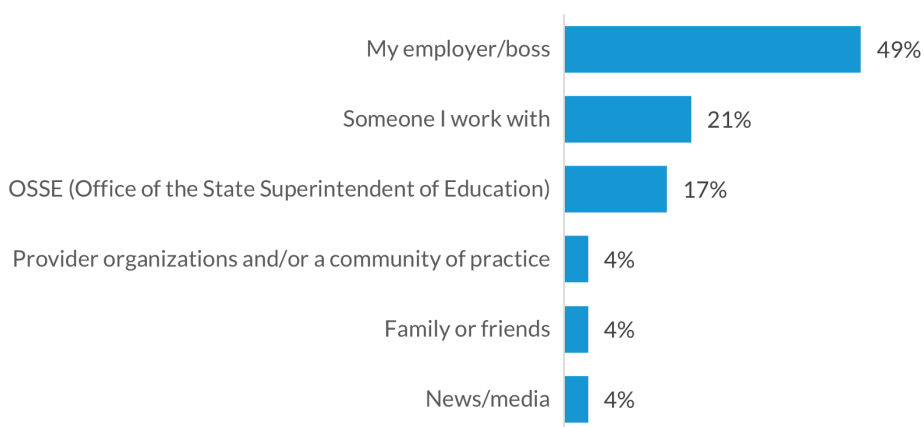
Findings

When the Pay Equity Fund was first announced, OSSE partnered with multiple District agencies and grantees to spread the word and encourage participation. Our 2023 case study report (Greenberg et al. 2023) documented these efforts to raise public awareness and clarify the eligibility and application requirements. To request payments (either the FY 2022 annual payment or FY 2023 quarterly payments), early childhood educators were required to submit an application to AidKit—a vendor contracted by OSSE to distribute payments. Once an application was approved, educators remained in the payment system and continued to receive subsequent payments throughout FY 2023, if they still met the eligibility criteria. Educators described for us how they first learned about the Pay Equity Fund and how they felt at the time, their experiences applying, and what the payments meant to them.

How Early Educators Learned about the Pay Equity Fund

Early educators learned about the Pay Equity Fund through various sources. According to survey respondents, the most common sources of initial information included employers (49 percent), coworkers (21 percent), and formal outreach conducted by OSSE (17 percent). Less common sources included the media (4 percent), family and friends (4 percent), or provider organizations or communities of practice (4 percent; see figure 2). Clear information from a trusted source was essential to overall awareness, understanding, and uptake of the Pay Equity Fund.

FIGURE 2
DC Early Educators First Learned about the Pay Equity Fund from Employers, Coworkers, and OSSE



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Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators, unweighted N = 1,562. Categories may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

To share information about eligibility and how to apply, OSSE sent announcement emails directly to early educators registered in their licensing database and held workshops and information sessions. In focus groups, some early educators described first learning about the Pay Equity Fund through these OSSE communications. They explained how OSSE's information sessions helped them clearly understand the Pay Equity Fund and the process for applying for and receiving funds.

Beyond receiving direct communication from OSSE, many focus group participants described how their center directors and other program administrators informed them about the Pay Equity Fund through written announcements, one-on-one meetings, and group discussions during staff meetings. These interactions with directors and other program leaders were crucial in establishing the legitimacy of the Pay Equity Fund for early educators who were wary of the initial OSSE correspondence. As one lead teacher shared:

Honestly, I thought [the email regarding the Pay Equity Fund] was SPAM ... I just thought it wasn't actually a real thing, and I ignored it. Then ... I heard from our administrator who reached out to faculty to say, "You may have seen this, and this is what it is" ... I'd never heard of anything like it ever before. Anyway, I was cautious ... Then, once I felt—well, our administrator, our leadership would have vetted it out... I am glad it was a real thing and not SPAM.

Several focus group participants learned about the Pay Equity Fund through informal channels, such as discussions among coworkers, friends, or family members. In some cases, they confirmed initial information they heard from coworkers with their program leadership before trusting its validity. Many described how their coworkers enthusiastically discussed the Pay Equity Fund during the information dissemination period before the application opened. A few others mentioned first hearing about the Pay Equity Fund through local TV news sources, with one citing a statement made by DC's mayor and publicized by the local nightly news program.

Only two percent of surveyed early educators said they had never heard about the Pay Equity Fund. Center-based educators and home-based owners/operators were more likely to be aware of the Pay Equity Fund than other home-based educators (98, 100, and 88 percent, respectively). We might expect a high percentage of survey respondents to be aware of the Pay Equity Fund, because survey recruitment materials mentioned the Pay Equity Fund as the focus of the survey and educators who did not know about it may have been less motivated to respond. Also, overall uptake of the Pay Equity Fund was high, as described in a later report section, so general awareness was also high.

Early Educators' Initial Impressions of the Pay Equity Fund

When reflecting on their first impressions of the Pay Equity Fund, most early educators expressed initial skepticism, confusion, and disbelief. They were surprised that such a program could be real and doubted whether they would actually receive the funds. For some, a history of disenfranchisement—being a part of an underpaid and underappreciated segment of the workforce constantly asked to do more—made them skeptical of another government initiative and the motivation behind it. “They’ll run out of money” and “Nobody gives you free money” were comments shared describing their skepticism.

However, initial doubts and concerns were almost always followed by excitement and satisfaction once early educators received clear information and guidance from a trustworthy source. As one assistant teacher explained,

When I heard of the Pay Equity Fund, I had doubt. I didn't really believe that it would happen. When we started going through the process, I was still not too sure that I would have gotten that amount, but then, yes. As time went on, when my boss confirmed that it was real, and it was going to happen, it was sounding too good to believe.

Most early educators in focus groups expressed excitement about the prospect of receiving additional pay, despite their initial skepticism.

I was very excited when I heard about it, because everybody in the center was buzzing about it, including the director. She hyped us all up about, “It's coming! It's coming!”

Many expressed a sense of satisfaction that their hard work, commitment, and dedication were finally being recognized through this increased compensation.

When we finally heard the news that they were going to increase them, that's the first thing that I remember saying, “Finally! After struggling so much and hearing that teachers needed a raise, it became a reality.” I think that was justice.

In addition to a sense of just compensation, several early educators described the Pay Equity Fund as a long-awaited step to make early education a more respected and attractive profession. By paying early educators in child care programs a fair wage, they explained, the Pay Equity Fund helps communicate the professionalism and skill required for the job. Some also believed this higher compensation and increased respect would attract new educators to the early childhood field—and specifically, to licensed child care programs. As one lead teacher described,

Overall, my view was positive, and it still is positive. I think it's making important steps toward making child care, the field in general, more respected and more attractive for people to come into.

A few others expressed positive feelings about the Pay Equity Fund but voiced concerns about the sustainability of the fund. They expressed doubts regarding how the Pay Equity Fund would evolve over time and what it would mean for them. As a lead teacher pointed out, this issue often weighs on their minds:

I just wonder how long it will last and the sustainability. Yeah, it's been almost three years. It's about to start the third. Is that gonna last forever? Am I gonna go back to making peanuts for hard work? It's always at the back of my mind because it could dry up. We just don't know.

A few early educators specifically mentioned being worried about arranging their finances around a higher income without having some guarantee that the wage supplements would continue. At the time, some educators did not seem aware of the pending transition to the new payment structure in FY 2024 and how their employers would need to opt into the Pay Equity Fund and commit to meeting new wage minimums for educators. They were unsure of what boost they would see in their pay. An assistant teacher expressed this cautious optimism:

We'll see how it works out. Then, I wonder what the next steps will be after it ends ... I love this for me right now, because I really could benefit from it.

Early educators' comments also suggested some confusion about the funding source, such as questioning whether a new federal administration could end the payments. Some also described their initial confusion about eligibility because communications were unclear regarding who was eligible and the amount of money they would receive based on their role.

In focus groups, educators who had received information and support from their program directors or from OSSE tended to report a clearer understanding of the Pay Equity Fund from the start. District-wide training workshops and information sessions, and staff meetings at individual centers, explained the details and helped clear up initial confusion. One assistant teacher at a child development center said:

Everything was really clear because, like I said, we had training, and they were bringing it up... My center was very prepared. Then, [the District] did the citywide training ... and they talked about that ... half of the day really went to the Pay Equity [Fund].

Uptake of the Pay Equity Fund

Uptake of payments was high in both FY 2022 and early FY 2023 (table 2). According to OSSE payment records and estimates for the total number of eligible educators, 99 percent of eligible educators received the FY 2022 one-time payment, and 96 and 98 percent received the FY 2023 first quarter and second quarter payments, respectively.

TABLE 2

Take-up Rates for Pay Equity Fund Payments

| | Number of educators who received payments | Percent (%) of OSSE-estimated eligible educators who received payments |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| FY 2022 one-time payment | 3,174 | 99 |
| FY 2023 first quarterly payment | 3,470 | 96 |
| FY 2023 second quarterly payment | 3,551 | 98 |

Source: Data and estimates reported in the Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023 Performance Oversight responses. For the full reports, see: Christina Grant, “Responses to Fiscal Year 2022 Performance Oversight Questions,” (Washington, DC: Government of the District of Columbia, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2023),

https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/FY22%20OSSE%20Performance%20Oversight%20Hearing%20Council%20Responses.pdf; and Christina Grant, “Responses to Fiscal Year 2023 Performance Oversight Questions,” (Washington, DC: Government of the District of Columbia, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2024), https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/FY23%20OSSE%20Performance%20Oversight%20Hearing%20Council%20Responses_0.pdf.

Notes: In FY 2022, OSSE estimated a total of 3,200 eligible educators as of the application cut-off (employment start date on or before May 16, 2022). In FY 2023, OSSE estimated a total of 3,610 eligible educators as of January 2023; this estimate is used for both the FY 2023 first and second quarterly payment take-up rate calculations.

Concerns about Applying

Although overall uptake was high, early educators mentioned several concerns about applying. Tax implications was a top reason. When asked about reasons why some educators did not apply, survey respondents most frequently cited issues with taxes. They believed that some educators may have been deterred from applying without the taxes being taken out. In focus groups, the issue of taxes also emerged, and a few educators also mentioned concerns that the payments might make them ineligible for means-tested public assistance benefits, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (known as WIC), Medicaid, housing assistance, or child care subsidies. As a lead teacher explained,

I knew of people who, in the beginning, were saying they were not going to take it ... They would say, “Oh, but later on, that’s going to affect me for social funds. It’s going to affect me for health insurance, and here and there.”

Although losing benefits eligibility could have been a problem for participants, DC established interagency agreements to avoid benefit cliffs—an often-unexpected loss or reduction of public benefits as a result of increased income, which can ultimately harm families’ overall financial well-being. The agreements provided exceptions to DC residents, meaning any income received from the Pay Equity Fund could not be counted against them. This exception did not apply to nonresidents coming from

neighboring states. According to payment records, 42 percent of survey-eligible early educators live outside DC. Uptake was higher among DC and Maryland residents than for Virginia residents, according to administrative records (94 and 95 percent compared with 90 percent for nonresidents).

For a few others, confusion and misinformation about the initiative and eligibility impacted early uptake. One early educator explained how some coworkers who appeared to not be eligible told her that the Pay Equity Fund was not real—a dynamic that may have limited early uptake.

Some people said that it was a lie ... They weren't appearing on a list [of eligible staff]. They were missing requirements. It was very confusing.

As mentioned above, some educators shared they were skeptical of receiving “free money,” or thought they may be expected to pay back the money later. A few educators also shared a fear of SPAM or phishing and a hesitancy to disclose personal information such as bank account numbers. Some of these individuals did not interact with OSSE’s early outreach efforts or receive guidance from another trusted source, which may have led to their concerns. A couple heard rumors from coworkers or were unaware of the initiative and, therefore, suspicious of the email encouraging them to apply.

These feelings of concern, confusion, and mistrust seemed more likely to result in delayed application than a total lack of participation. After receiving additional information and confirmation of the legitimacy and safety of the process, early educators who were initially concerned or confused usually decided to apply—if not for the first payment, then for subsequent payments (table 2).

With take-up rates so high, most surveyed educators (91 percent) shared that they did not know of any eligible early educator who did not ever apply for the payments. Similarly, no one in our focus groups knew of someone eligible for payments who chose never to apply, and because of the design of the focus groups, every early educator recruited to participate had applied for at least one payment.

Experiences Applying for and Receiving Pay Equity Fund Payments

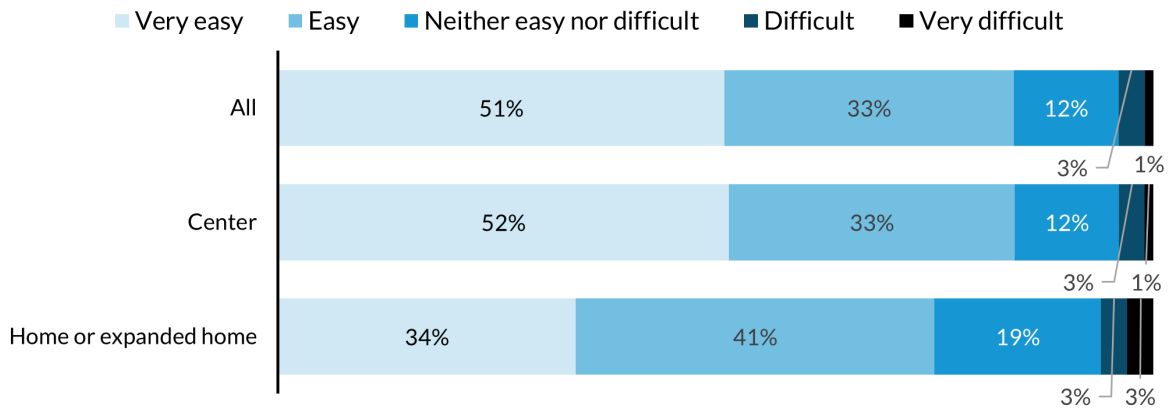
Overall, early educators reported ease in applying for and receiving payments from the Pay Equity Fund. Applications were completed online, and the process was designed to reduce burden on applicants. Materials were provided in multiple languages to support the application process. Because the Division of Early Learning Licensing Tool (DELLT) captured eligibility information for workers in every licensed child care facility, including staff position and date of employment, applicants did not have to provide documentation to verify eligibility. Only if DELLT data were inaccurate or not aligned

with the AidKit application, or generally if an application was denied, did the burden fall on applicants and their employers to document eligibility.

EASE OF APPLICATION PROCESS AND PAYMENT RECEIPT

Survey respondents were asked to rate the ease of the application process. More than half (51 percent) rated the process “very easy” and another 33 percent rated it “easy” (figure 3). Educators working in child development centers were more likely to report greater ease than those working in licensed homes. This may be due in part to factors such as age, challenges with technology, and confusion about whether home-based operators were eligible. Additionally, center-based educators may have had more opportunities to receive information and assistance from program leadership than home-based educators.

FIGURE 3
The Ease of Early Educators’ Experiences Applying for Pay Equity Funds by Program Type



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted center N = 1,203, home N = 36, total N = 1,239.

Many educators in focus groups expressed that the application process was easy, especially for those who felt comfortable with computers and online applications. When seeking information about the application, early educators turned to their coworkers and center directors as trusted sources of information. A few credited their positive application experiences to OSSE-led workshops and training sessions held when the Pay Equity Fund was first announced. These workshops played a pivotal role in disseminating information directly to eligible early educators, contributing to their confidence in the application process. As one assistant teacher shared,

The application form was easy because before we even apply, I think they had people that met us on the same Zoom, and they walked us through the process, so it was not hard at all.

Following the Pay Equity Fund's launch, educators cited several additional sources of support for the application process. A few educators credited their employers or program directors with their positive application experience, because program administration was responsible for updating employee information in the DELLT system to verify payment eligibility and often advised their staff on how to apply. Other educators expressed that assistance from staff at DC Child Care Connections, the District's child care resource and referral program, further eased their application process. Early educators could seek in-person assistance at DC Child Care Connections' office locations when filling out the online application.

The application process was pretty easy. As a matter of fact, I was one of the first to go to ... [DC] Child Care Connections ... We went there. Me and a coworker, we went there, and it was actually very easy.

One educator also emphasized the benefits of an automatic re-enrollment process for each payment point after their initial application, which limited the administrative burden on educators. This feature ensured continuity in funding for eligible educators without the need for repetitive application or renewal procedures. As one lead teacher said, "It's been all right, because those of us who applied did not need to reapply. I thought that worked well."

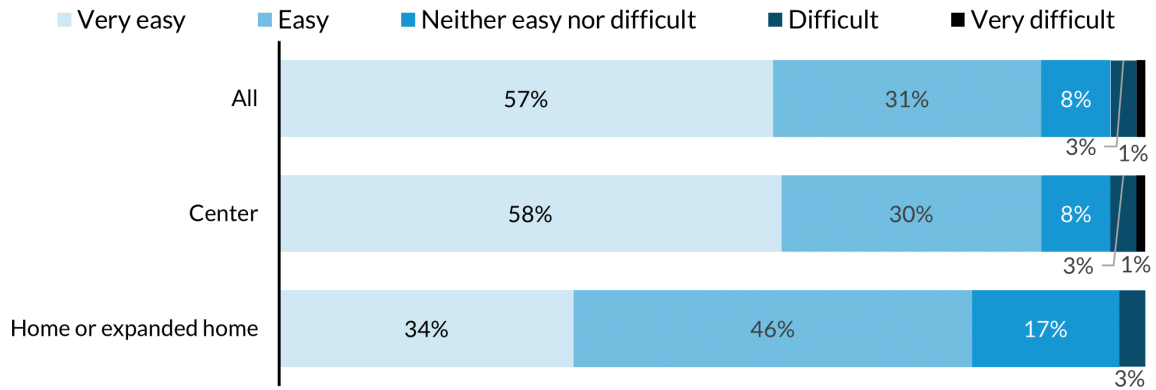
Similar to the application process, most educators had no issues receiving their payments. Educators had two options for receiving Pay Equity Fund Payments. They could either set up a direct deposit to their bank account (which 97 percent did) or receive a debit card loaded with the funds (which 3 percent did). They could receive debit cards by mail or pick them up at a DC Child Care Connections location. They reported receiving the payments on time and could access the funds quickly. "It worked out for me. I didn't have problems with the payment coming in or anything, nothing like that," shared one assistant teacher. One participant noted that OSSE offered the alternative to direct deposit in the form of a prepaid debit card in case some early educators were concerned about sharing their bank account information.

There were people who were afraid to enter their bank information, because other people would tell them that it could be a scam, so they preferred to receive everything at home through the debit card they got.

Only a small share of survey respondents overall (4 percent) reported their experience receiving payments was "difficult" or "very difficult" (figure 4). Similar to the process of applying, the experience of receiving payments appeared somewhat easier for early educators in centers compared with child

development homes and expanded homes. Age and education did not explain this difference, suggesting home-based educators may have other specific needs, necessitating additional outreach and assistance.

FIGURE 4
The Ease of Early Educators’ Experiences Receiving Pay Equity Funds by Program Type



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted centers N = 1,202, homes and expanded homes N = 36, total N = 1,238.

APPLICATION AND PAYMENT CHALLENGES

Although most focus group participants described positive experiences with the application process, some shared challenges. A few had less experience and comfort with operating computers and navigating the internet, making the process feel onerous. They expressed frustration with the lack of options for a paper application. Others reported that they found the application questions repetitive, prolonging the time they took to complete the application.

I don’t do well with the computer ... I would throw this thing out the window. I just can’t. Then, they keep going, asking me the same questions over and over and over ... I’m like, “Hmm-mm. This ain’t gonna work for me. This is not gonna work. They can keep their money ‘cause they’re asking me too many questions.”

Technical difficulties caused a few early educators who wanted to apply or who attempted to apply to miss one or more payments or experience delays in receiving payments. They shared stories of dealing with tricky bureaucratic processes that required extra effort on their part. Because payment eligibility was determined by how program leadership entered educators’ statuses into the DELLT database, a few educators said they had difficulty, not because of the application itself but because system errors such as misspellings, missing data, or incorrect information resulted in an “ineligible”

determination. In some cases, teachers' roles were not entered correctly in the system. Lead teachers incorrectly marked as assistants received less money than they should have for their positions (an annual difference of \$4,000 for full-time educators or \$2,000 for part-time educators). Some educators were told they were ineligible for the Pay Equity Fund because they were incorrectly listed in a role that did not qualify for the payments. Educators often discovered these errors after their peers had begun receiving payments and they had not, which led to some frustration. For example, one educator felt uneasy and inquired about the status of her application, only to be told that she had made a small error and needed to correct it before her application could be approved, yet no one had informed her.

When I called to inquire about my status, they was like, "We just reviewed your application, and your last name was wrong, so can you please go and correct your last name?" I never would have known if I didn't inquire. Contacting them is a headache. They need to do better in regard to communicating with people.

Having the correct job title in the system appeared to be a common challenge. An assistant teacher shared this experience:

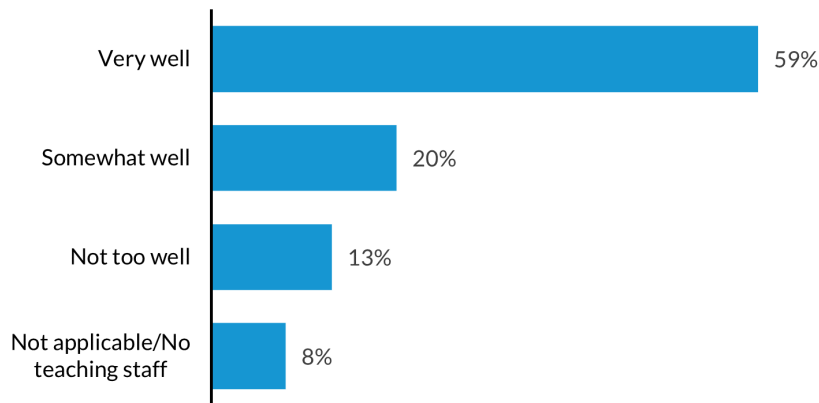
For me, it was a lot of challenges... I was so disappointed when everyone else was getting theirs, and I didn't get mine. I'm calling, trying to find out what's going on, why didn't I receive mine. They were saying something in the DELLT system didn't—wasn't adding up... My director had to take over. What she did, she had to go in the system and redo all my information, I guess. She fixed everything, and [OSSE staff] agreed on it and was like, "Yeah, we see it in there, so you will get the next check that comes out," but I didn't. I had to go back to the director... That was really frustrating for me 'cause I was like, "Listen. I've been here for longer than anybody here at this center. I've worked. I've done dual roles. I'm the one that you go to. If you come into the center, you're gonna look for me, okay?" I was like, "How can this be?" I was so happy for everybody else, and I didn't get anything?

Getting job titles right was particularly challenging for home-based programs. Our survey specifically asked owners and operators of child development homes and expanded homes how well the staff types available in DELLT worked for staff in their programs. We included this question following concerns from Pay Equity Fund architects that the "lead" and "assistant" role types may not apply easily in home-based settings, where roles are often more fluid (Greenberg et al. 2023). Although most home owners and operators reported that these role types worked "very well" (59 percent) or "somewhat well" (20 percent), 13 percent said, "not too well," suggesting some home owners and operators believe "lead" and "assistant/associate" titles do not accurately reflect roles in home-based settings (figure 5).

Some educators found the initial application straightforward but found the application review and approval process prolonged and unclear. They expressed frustration about the delayed timing of receiving payments, as their colleagues were able to access funds weeks or months earlier than they could. At the time of the focus group, a few participants were still unsure of what the problem had been.

However, these issues and delays were not experienced by most, and educators who experienced problems were generally able to recoup the funds they did not initially receive. Center directors appeared to play a crucial role in solving payment challenges, as noted in the quote above.

FIGURE 5
How Well DELLT Staff Types Work for Teaching Staff at Home-Based Programs



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents home-based owners/operators. N = 24.

A less common concern related to debit card security. Two educators who opted to receive payments through a physical debit card rather than direct deposit to a bank account shared concerns with the security of this method. One educator received her card in the mail, with no notice that it had been sent, and expressed concern about the chance of it being lost or stolen. The other educator had money from her card stolen; funds were there one day but not the next. She reported it immediately, received assistance from AidKit, and recovered the funds in full. To safeguard against such issues, AidKit subsequently instituted protection measures for physical payment distribution methods, including sharing PINs in separate communication and requiring card activation before funds are available to recipients (Greenberg et al. 2023). Additionally, educators had the option to have the debit cards mailed to DC Child Care Connections, where they could pick them up directly rather than mailing them to their home.

UNSEEN TAX IMPLICATIONS

Across focus groups and open-ended survey responses, the most prevalent reported challenge had to do with taxes. OSSE’s communications about the Pay Equity Fund and the AidKit application itself instructed applicants that the payments would count as taxable income (Greenberg et al. 2023). Some

educators indicated that they or their coworkers did not initially understand that the payments would not come pretaxed and that they could owe taxes on the payments. This became a surprise when they went to file their paperwork during tax season.

Some educators were frustrated by the idea of paying taxes on these supplemental wages, because it felt like “returning a lot” of the money they had been promised. Others were aware that they would later owe taxes on the payments but found it difficult to estimate how much and budget for this purpose since the amount they owed was not calculated until they filed. As one assistant teacher explained,

It was clear that taxes were not going to be taken out of it, so the next bit of information that we got right then and there was that we would have to just estimate and save some and put it to the side. But we didn't know how much exactly to put to the side. I think it would have been nice to know that about one-third or something like that to put to the side.

Unfortunately, due to confusion with how the payments would be counted, educators initially received the wrong tax form. Some educators had already filed their taxes by the time AidKit reissued the correct form, meaning they had to refile, reducing the amount they owed.

I thought it was a lotta money that I paid in taxes. It was nearly \$3,000. After that, when I got the new form ... It was nearly \$1,200 difference in what I owed and what they originally said I owed.

Though these educators were able to resolve issues with their tax filing and received money back because of overpayment, they expressed frustration with the process. In fact, a few educators who did not themselves have tax problems indicated that if they had, they would have been discouraged from accepting subsequent payments. One lead teacher who knew she would be responsible for paying taxes explained,

I figured I would try it for a year and, I thought, if it gets too much of a headache for the tax piece of it, then I can always decline it. I decided to try it for a year, and it worked out.

CONCERNS ABOUT ELIGIBLE ROLES

Although not directly related to their application experiences, several focus group participants reflected on the eligibility requirements for the Pay Equity Fund, citing other role types that they felt should be eligible. They realized not everyone in their programs were eligible as they were applying themselves, which caused some discomfort. For example, one educator mentioned that Early Head Start home visitors who worked in their agency were not eligible for the funds:

Home visitors weren't allowed to get it. That's another thing that kind of messed us up, because they do just much work as we do going in people houses ... teaching the kids. When they told us that, we really couldn't understand.

Some educators discussed the fact that center directors were not eligible to receive payments, even though many play a classroom teaching role. One educator conveyed the issue of wage compression—with center directors suddenly earning the same or even less than some of the teachers in their programs—and challenges to the director pipeline in early education as a result of the Pay Equity Fund:

If the teacher pay gets bumped up and now the teacher salaries are touching the director salaries, how is that going to affect admin? I know some directors are actually considering going back into the classroom unless their pay is altered in some way, so it might change the dynamics or the structure of specific centers.

In fact, in a 2023 survey of center directors about the implementation of the Pay Equity Fund, 25 percent of directors reported that, because of the Pay Equity Fund, most teachers at their facilities earn more than them. Another 31 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they have considered changing their role to be eligible for payments (Nikolopoulos et al. 2024).

Perceived Benefits of Pay Equity Fund Payments

Early educators shared the many ways they saw the Pay Equity Fund payment benefiting themselves and others. In this section, we describe some of these perceived benefits for their financial well-being, stress reduction, feelings of respect, and work performance.

Benefits to Financial Well-being

Early educators participating in the survey and focus groups expressed overwhelming gratitude for the Pay Equity Fund. The payments reportedly helped eligible early educators address basic needs that were otherwise difficult to manage given their low wages and the high cost of living in the DC metro area. Survey respondents reported median annual wages of \$35,000 (\$38,225 for lead teachers; \$32,000 for assistant teachers)—equivalent to \$19 per hour before Pay Equity Fund payments. Though higher than the median annual earnings of child care workers nationally (\$28,520), it is still far below the median wage in DC (\$74,426 for all workers with earnings.)² For this reason, the Pay Equity Fund aims to address wage inequities and relieve the financial strains often faced by early childhood educators. A payment of \$14,000 was about 37 percent of teachers' median wages—a large boost in their overall pay.

Survey respondents were most likely to report that the Pay Equity Fund helped them afford basic needs such as housing and utilities (96 percent) and food and groceries (95 percent). They also reported that the fund contributed to their financial well-being, helping them pay off debts (83 percent), save or

pay for emergencies (83 percent), and build their savings (69 percent). Other important costs the payments helped early educators afford included medical (73 percent) and car-related expenses (78 percent; figure 6).

FIGURE 6

Reported Benefits of Pay Equity Fund Payments to Early Childhood Educators’ Financial Well-being
With the payments you received from the Pay Equity Fund, has it been or was it easier to do or pay for any of the following? (“Yes” responses)



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Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,280.

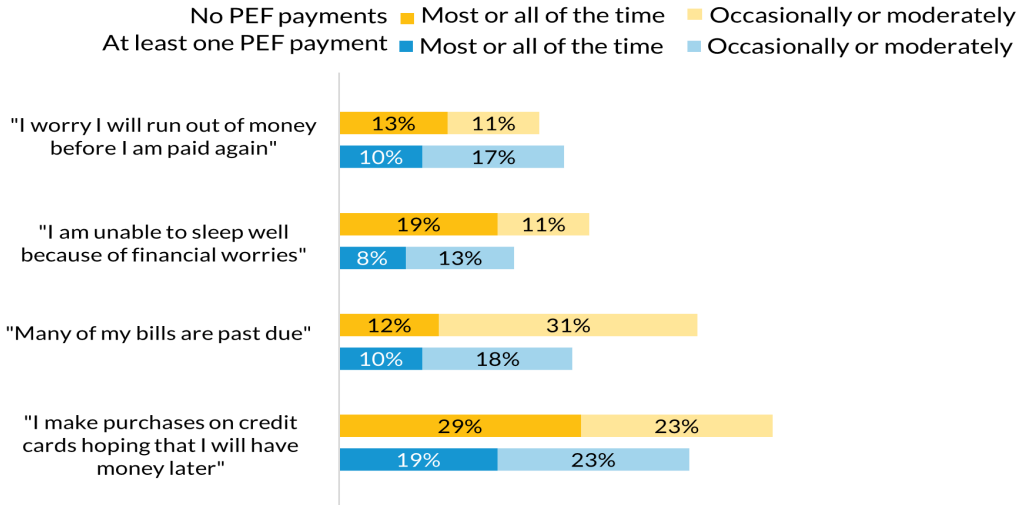
Survey findings also suggest that receipt of Pay Equity Fund payments was associated with less financial stress. Early educators who received at least one payment, for example, were 38 percent less likely to say they worry money will run out before their next paycheck “most or all of the time” compared with educators who received no payments (figure 7). Similarly, early educators who received at least one payment were 51 percent less likely than those who received no payments to say they had “difficulty sleeping due to financial worries” or “occasionally or moderately.”

Educators who received the payments were slightly less likely to say it was “somewhat” or “very difficult” to live on their current income (64 percent compared with 72 percent). They were also less likely to be food insecure than early educators who did not receive any payments (figure 8). Not shown, the number of payments received negatively correlated with food insecurity, such that 63 percent of educators that received all three observed payments were food insecure compared with 70 percent of educators that received no payments (though they were still much higher than the national food insecurity rate of 13 percent).

FIGURE 7

Early Childhood Educators’ Report of Financial Stress

Please indicate how often you felt this way during the past three months



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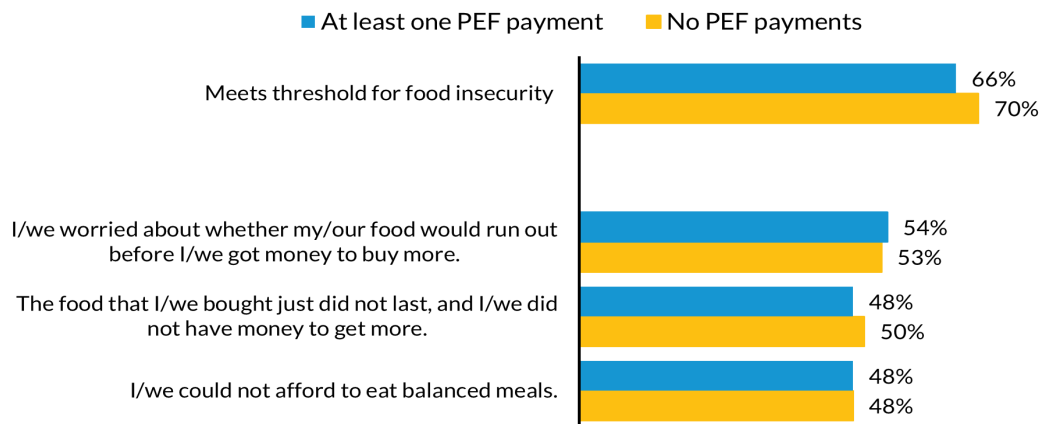
Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,486.

FIGURE 8

Early Childhood Educators’ Report of Food Insecurity

How often were the following statements true for you and your household within the past month? (“Often true” or “sometimes true” responses)



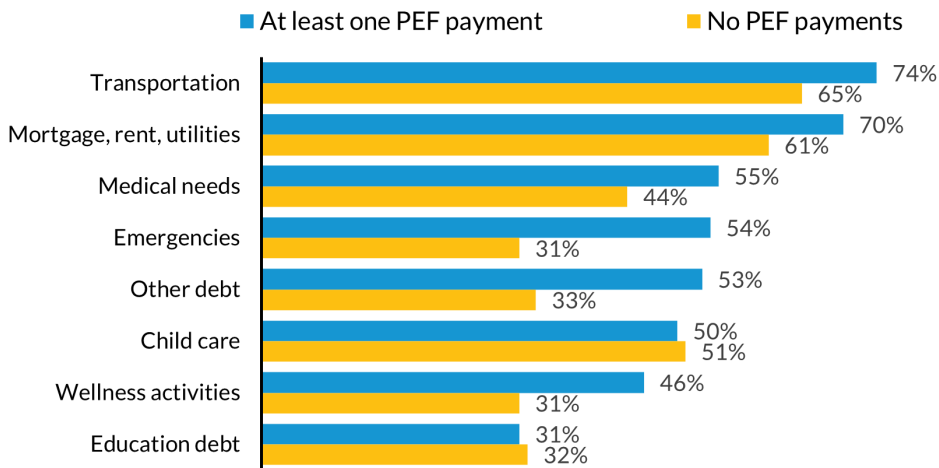
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Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,472. To meet the food insecurity threshold, respondents must answer “sometimes true” or “often true” to at least one of the three food insecurity measures. Out of all survey-eligible educators, and survey-eligible educators who received at least one payment, 66 percent reported food insecurity.

Educators in the sample who reported receiving at least one Pay Equity Fund payment were significantly more likely to say they had enough money to pay for emergencies, debts, wellness, medical needs, housing costs, and transportation than those who did not receive any payments (figure 9). However, we note that even educators who did receive the funds still reported persistent financial difficulties related to educational debt, child care, and wellness support.

FIGURE 9
Early Childhood Educators’ Report of Financial Security
In the last three months, did you have enough money to pay for the following? (“Yes” responses)



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Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Note: Percentages indicate the weighted share of survey-eligible educators who indicated that they had enough money to pay for that expense among those for whom the expense was applicable. Unweighted N values as follows: Full sample (current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators) N = 1,638; No Pay Equity Fund payments N = 83; any Pay Equity Fund payments N = 1,486; missing N = 69.

In focus groups, early educators elaborated on how the Pay Equity Fund provided financial relief and stability in their lives. Participants described how the funds helped them pay their bills and accumulated debts, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many educators used the funds to address immediate financial needs, allowing them to live with less financial stress and not paycheck to paycheck. Some educators shared instances where the money helped them navigate unforeseen challenges and unexpected expenses, such as car repairs, medical expenses, and unexpected bills. The funds served as a safety net for these types of circumstances, preventing further financial setbacks. As a lead teacher noted, the Pay Equity Fund aided with expenses outside of regular bills.

If you're just livin' from paycheck to paycheck, just enough to pay your regular bills, what happens when the car breaks down? What happens when you gotta get your car—I just got my car registered. It's \$206. Had it not been for Pay Equity, I wouldn't have had \$206.

Participants also shared how the Pay Equity Fund enabled them to take control of their financial situation. They often emphasized how these payments allowed them to better manage personal finances, plan for upcoming expenses, and contribute to their savings for the future. Several educators pointed to the Pay Equity Fund as a catalyst for future planning and financial freedom. The funds provided a sense of security and the opportunity to plan for a more stable financial future. As an assistant teacher reflected, the Pay Equity Fund not only aided with past debts but also shifted their mindset on their finances.

Of course, it helped me to pay debts I had in the past. What was left helped me a lot to change my mind. To be able to think a little bigger, to save something to have up ahead—the down payment for an apartment or something that can help my family.

Beyond significant financial considerations, many educators stressed the positive impact on their overall quality of life, allowing them not to worry as much about small expenses. Some participants mentioned using the funds for leisure activities that were previously unaffordable. As an assistant teacher illustrated in a focus group, the Pay Equity Fund offered educators like her financial freedom.

It changed my life ... like I said, it would be days when I had no money ... even something very simple that cost 25 bucks, I would have to really consider if I could spend this money. It gave me freedom. It gave me relief. It took a lot of stress away...because I just felt like I was workin' to pay bills. I didn't have a life. I didn't go out. I didn't go to restaurants. I didn't do a lotta things, even though I said, probably, to myself, "It's okay. You have everything you need." It changed my life. I really can say that.

This newfound financial freedom extended beyond educators' individual needs to include support for family members, such as helping their dependent and adult children or their own parents with their education or medical expenses. Saving for or paying for college was a common theme, as illustrated in these two quotes.

I had a son in his second year in college, so that really helped me a lot and to help my other three kids to do what we had to do.

I put something away for my children for their schooling ... for my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren or whomever, I can do that now.

Others described needing to help family members in moments of crisis or instability and now having the ability to do that.

It ended up a blessing. My daughter lost her job through COVID... she had just had the baby, so helping her out with her house, with her bills in her house. I was helping her. I really got to bless her and my grandchildren with money. I'm really, really thankful for that.

Stress Reduction and Improved Mental Health

The Pay Equity Fund also emerged as a vital source of stress relief for some early childhood educators, alleviating the pervasive anxiety they felt juggling finances and the high demands of their job. As described above, in focus groups, they shared the significant burden of financial stress stemming from low wages and the escalating cost of living. The relentless cycle of living paycheck to paycheck, dealing with unexpected expenses, and constantly struggling to make ends meet often took a toll on their emotional well-being. The receipt of supplemental payments through the Pay Equity Fund appeared to bring a sense of respite and improved the emotional well-being of educators. As one educator noted, "Seems like you just pay one bill and somethin' else comin'. It's, like I said, a struggle, anxiety, depression, stress for me ... Bein' able to get this money, it was a lotta relief, a lotta burden off of me." Another shared, "The biggest difference for the money is just improved quality of life for people in general in terms of mental health."

They also spoke to the multifaceted challenges early educators in child care programs face, highlighting the daily stressors inherent to their job, from managing the evolving needs of children to navigating relationships with coworkers and parents. The cumulative effect of these pressures often led them to experience feelings of anxiety, depression, and overwhelming stress.

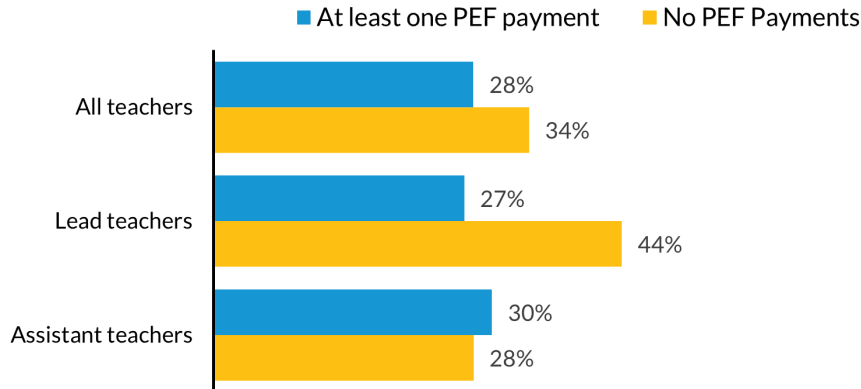
It's literally blood, sweat, and tears that you're dealing with ... I'm on the floor. You're lifting this, you're lifting that. It's emotionally and physically demanding of a job. Just getting paid a suitable amount would be amazing.

Survey respondents responded to questions about their recent mental health, such as poor sleeping, poor appetite, sadness, depression, lack of motivation, feeling like everything is an effort, and trouble focusing. These items, taken from the brief Center for Epidemiological Studies–Depression scale (CES-D-SF), screen for major depression. Combining them, we observed that 29 percent of early childhood educators overall screened positive for major depression, with a larger share among early educators that received no Pay Equity Fund payments (34 percent) compared with those that received at least one payment (28 percent; figure 10). Lead teachers who received no PEF payments were most likely to screen positive for major depression (44 percent). Early childhood educators also reported several high job stressors. About 30 percent agreed or strongly agreed that children in their care have problem behaviors that are hard to deal with and attending to the many needs of children they work with is challenging (figure 11).

FIGURE 10

Prevalence of Depressive Symptoms among Early Childhood Educators

Percent of survey respondents meeting the criteria for possible major depression based on screener



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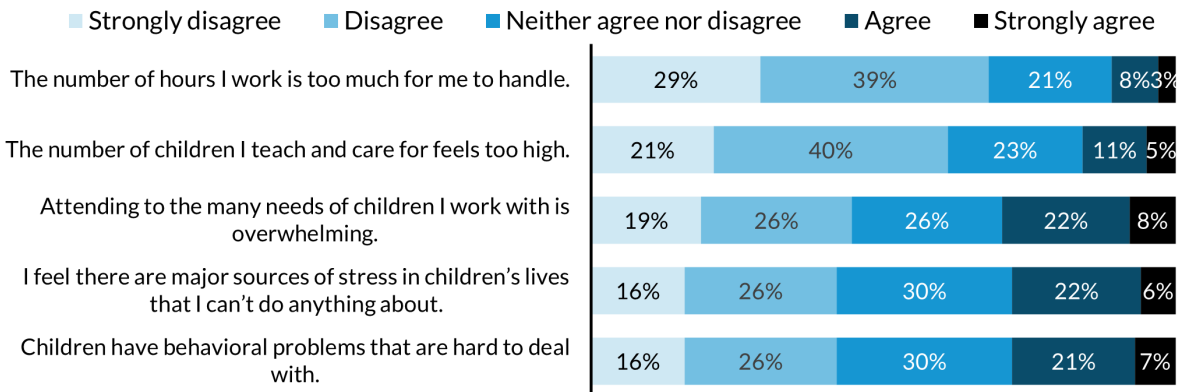
Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Percentages indicate the weighted share of educators who met the criteria for major depression based on the CES-D-SF. Respondents were asked “how often you have felt this way during the past week” across 7 symptoms of depression. Response options were “Rarely or never,” “Some or a little,” “Occasionally or moderately,” “Most or all of the time,” and “Don’t know.” Responses of “Don’t know” were treated as missing. Responses were coded from 0 “Rarely or never” to 3 “Most or all of the time” and summed across the items. Totals were adjusted based on the number of items answered and a total score of 8 or higher was considered to reflect clinically relevant symptoms of depression. Unweighted N = 1,497.

FIGURE 11

Early Educators’ Report of Job Stressors

How much you agree with the following statements about your job?



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Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current early educators and home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,471.

Assistant teachers emerged as a particularly vulnerable group, with a higher proportion highlighting the impact of the Pay Equity Fund on stress reduction and well-being compared with lead teachers, underscoring the unique challenges assistant teachers face in the educational workforce. Eight out of the 11 assistant teachers that participated in a focus group (72 percent) discussed how the initiative improved their overall well-being, while only 6 of the 19 lead teachers (32 percent) mentioned this theme. This discrepancy may be driven by the fact that assistant teachers are more likely to be younger, have lower wages, and be currently enrolled in courses toward a degree or credential contributing to educational debt.

Improvements in Job Satisfaction and Job Prestige

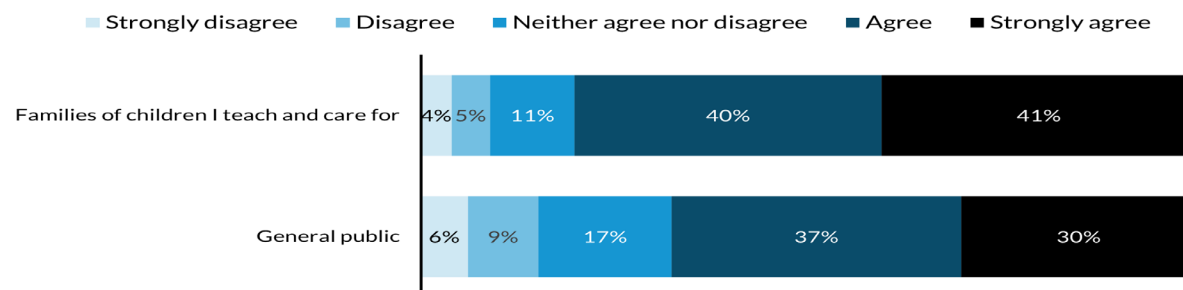
Most early educators surveyed reported feeling respected by the families of children they serve (81 percent) as well as— to a lesser extent—by the general public (67 percent; figure 12). In focus groups, many educators noted that the Pay Equity Fund has made early educators feel genuinely appreciated and acknowledged for their essential role in the workforce. Educators described how this elevated their feelings of value, respect, professionalism, and recognition for their contributions, both within their programs and the broader community. As one lead teacher voiced, the supplemental payments symbolized more than just financial compensation and represented a tangible acknowledgment of their expertise.

It makes you feel like, “Hey, I didn’t go to school for nothin’.” I’m feelin’ more appreciated. I’m gettin’ semi-what I deserve. It may not be to the full potential of what I deserve, but it’s a start just to be recognized.

FIGURE 12

Early Childhood Educators’ Reported Feelings of Respect

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: *I feel respected and seen as a professional by...*



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,478.

One recurring theme in focus groups was the desire to be recognized as teachers and not babysitters. Some educators spoke of how the Pay Equity Fund is shifting public perceptions of what it means to be an early childhood educator. An assistant teacher illustrated this shift in the narrative:

Sometimes, we get overlooked ... This Equity Fund pretty much made us all noticeable ... I feel that I'm in the big league now, because I get the respect that I've been working so hard and so long for.

Many educators also acknowledged the positive impact of the Pay Equity Fund on their job satisfaction. The boost in their financial security shifted their views toward their jobs. The payments, according to focus group participants, enabled them to remain committed to their work and have a more positive outlook despite any financial hardships. Educators spoke passionately about their commitment to nurturing and educating children, recognizing their impact on shaping future generations; however, they also acknowledged the emotional labor involved and the need for adequate support to sustain their efforts. They struggled to find moments of reward. One assistant teacher captured this sentiment, expressing how the Pay Equity Fund provided not only financial relief, but also a boost in their self-esteem, stating,

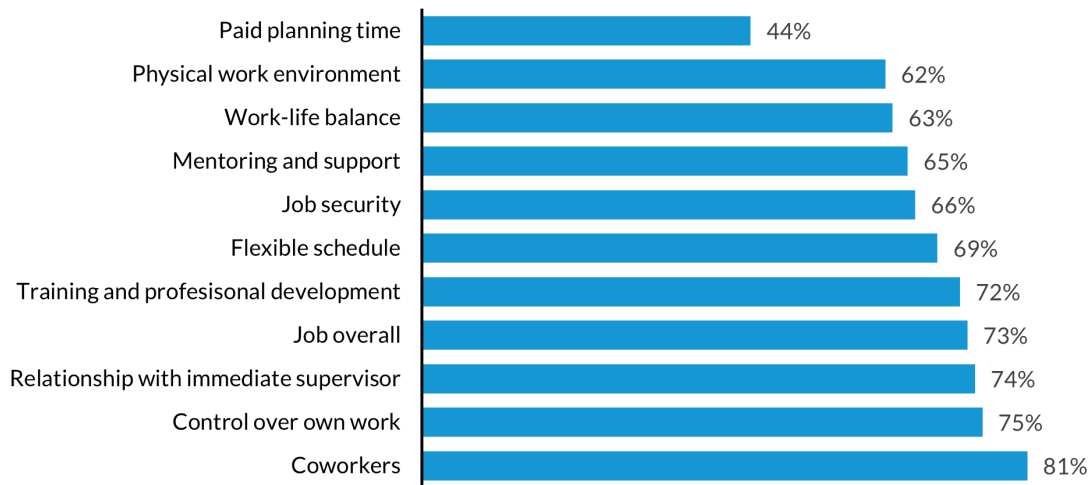
I think it gave me a little bit of more self-worth, if I could say that. I'm not embarrassed to say. It is what it is It's really hard when you work every day and you see nothin' that you can do to treat yourself. It's really hard. Again, I'm really grateful.

Most surveyed educators (73 percent) reported that they were satisfied with their jobs overall (figure 13). We observe few significant differences in aspects of job satisfaction between payment recipients and nonrecipients, with those receiving payments reporting greater satisfaction with job security and relationships with supervisors. Although at least three quarters of early childhood educators overall were satisfied with their coworkers and their control over their own work, a smaller share reported satisfaction with paid planning time, the physical work environment, work-life balance, and mentoring and support. This suggests additional areas for improvement for working conditions and job quality in the early education sector in addition to wage increases.

FIGURE 13

Early Childhood Educators' Report of Job Satisfaction

How satisfied are you with these aspects of your job? (Satisfied and very satisfied responses)



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,478.

Enhanced Professional Growth and Child Care Quality

Educators perceived the fund as a crucial initial step toward continuous self-improvement within the teaching profession. They recognized the significance of investing in their own development to enhance their instructional quality. As they discussed benefits to the broader workforce, and not just themselves, many early educators stated their belief that the Pay Equity Fund is motivating early educators in DC to pursue higher education and training, which will contribute to their being more professionally equipped and, in turn, improve overall care quality.

With the desire to get to a more just salary, there is a percentage of teachers of who have registered in universities and are studying. They are getting more trained, and that means there will be better quality.

For a few educators in focus groups, the Pay Equity Fund payments helped cover education-related expenses, enabling them to pursue higher education and work toward their career goals. The possibility of higher compensation also acted as a motivator. As one assistant teacher explained, the fund gave her both the financial resources and the motivation to continue her education, knowing she could reach an even higher pay as a lead teacher.

I only had a CDA ... I started looking for information about an associate or a bachelor's. Currently, I'm registered. I'm taking classes. It motivated me; I thought, "If they could earn \$14,000, why can't I?" I can do it. It motivated me a lot.

About two-thirds of focus group participants discussed feeling like the wage supplements improved their job satisfaction and work performance and how this is having a positive effect on the children in their care. Lead teachers in particular reported improved quality in their interactions with children as a result of their feeling more recognized and respected for their work in the field.

It makes you feel more appreciated. It makes you really wanna go beyond and above for your job. It's sad to say that, but almost bein' recognized for what we've been doin' for a very long time. We always been at the lowest pay. It just makes you wanna do better. Just incentives like that. It makes you feel more appreciated. Of course, you wanna do your job to the fullest.

In contrast, assistant teachers more commonly attributed any improvements in teachers' performance and care quality to reductions in financial stress. Their view was that, if financial worries are alleviated, educators can better channel their energy and focus on nurturing children's development.

If you come to work and you're not stressed and worried about other things, you can give that attention to your children and to your job. Comin' into a job every day with already somethin' on your mind, "How am I gonna pay the rent?" it takes a little bit off of what you're doin'. Not intentionally, but it cannot help but enter into your mind from time to time... You try to leave it all the door, but we're all human. We cannot just cut off our feelings all the time.

Just being able to not have to worry as much, it really changed how I was in the classroom, and I really appreciate that.

Survey findings reinforce this idea. Most respondents agreed that they can better focus on the children they work with because of the Pay Equity Fund (figure 14), with 41 percent agreeing "a lot" and 30 percent agreeing "somewhat." The rate of agreement varied depending on whether early educators felt they were being paid fairly for the credentials they have. Those who felt more strongly they are being paid what they should also felt more strongly that they are better able to focus on their job (figure 15).

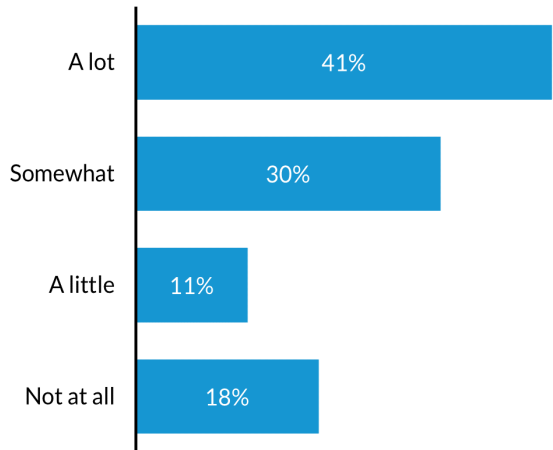
Moreover, several educators shared experiences of how the fund enabled them to provide more supplies for their students and classrooms, thereby enhancing students' learning experiences. Early educators often find themselves financially responsible for purchasing materials for classroom activities, potentially limiting the scope and quality of educational experiences they can offer students. These educators spoke passionately about using the funds to introduce various enriching activities, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to expand their teaching methods. As one assistant teacher shared,

It also did help me with providing more supplies for my students ... I got to do so many extra activities with that money, which I'm so grateful for ... I started suggesting ideas to my director. She was saying "yes" to everything. She was so excited.

FIGURE 14

To What Extent Early Childhood Educators Feel They Can Focus Better on the Children They Work with Because of the ECE Pay Equity Fund Payments

How much do you disagree or agree with the following statement? "Because of the PEF, I can better focus on the children I work with."



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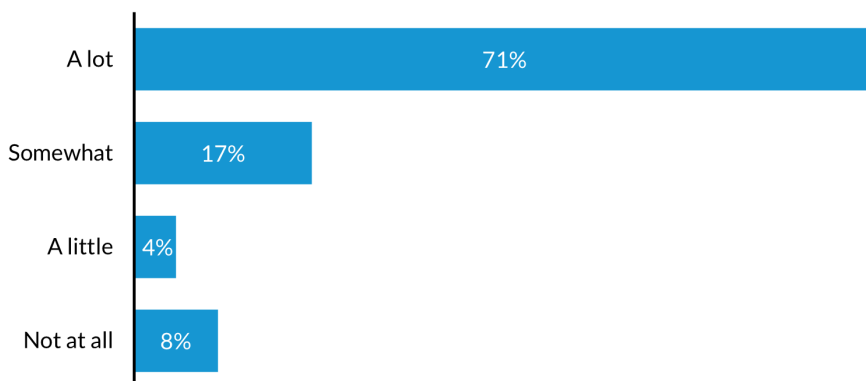
Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,255.

FIGURE 15

To What Extent Early Childhood Educators Feel They Can Focus Better on the Children They Work with Because of the ECE Pay Equity Fund Payments, Among Those Who Agreed They Are Paid What They Should Be for Their Credentials Because of the Pay Equity Fund

How much do you disagree or agree with the following statement? “Because of the PEF, I can better focus on the children I work with.”



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current early educators as well as home-based owners/operators who agreed “a lot” with the statement “I am paid what I should be for the credentials required for my job.” Unweighted N = 1,255.

Reflections on How the Pay Equity Fund Is Shaping the Field

Champions of the Pay Equity Fund held a vision that by better compensating early educators, DC could achieve a number of important workforce goals, including fair pay and a more stable workforce (Greenberg et al. 2023). As educators reflected on their own experiences with the Pay Equity Fund—many benefits, and some challenges—we asked them to reflect on these Pay Equity Fund goals as well.

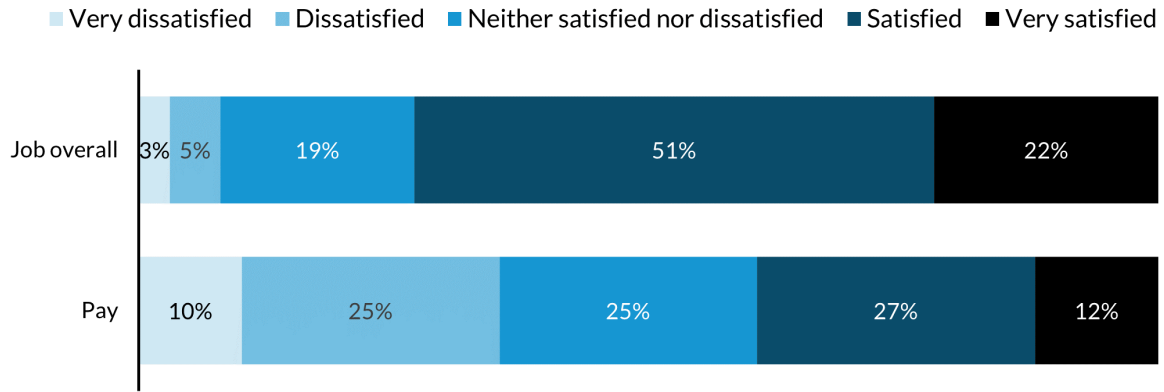
Fair and Equitable Pay

Fair and equitable pay has long been a concern for early educators, who are some of the lowest-paid workers in the United States. In the survey, about 36 percent of early educators reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their pay, even though only 8 percent indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their job overall, demonstrating the ongoing need for wage supplements (figure 16).

FIGURE 16

Early Childhood Educators' Report of Job Satisfaction

How satisfied are you with these aspects of your job? (Satisfied and very satisfied responses)



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

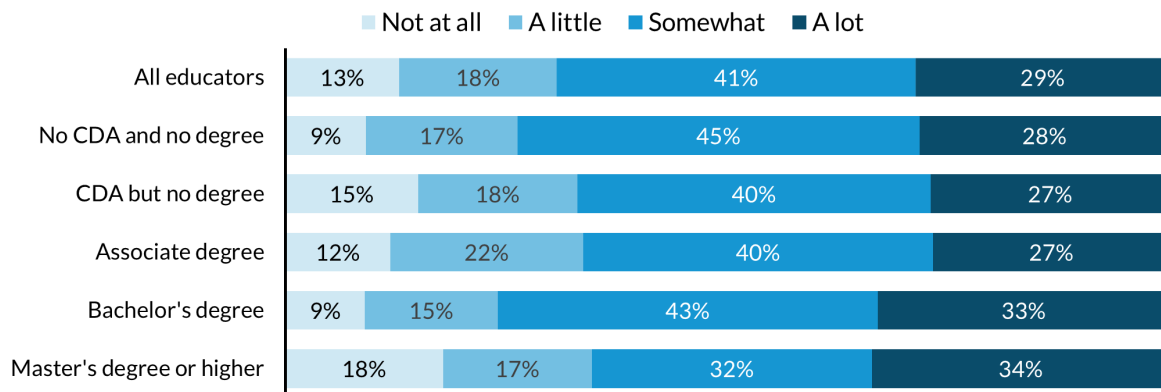
Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,264. Survey weights were implemented to be representative of full population of survey-eligible educators.

Indeed, the Pay Equity Fund—as delivered as a direct supplemental payment to early educators in its early implementation—appears to have contributed to beliefs among educators that they are now being compensated fairly. Overall, many survey respondents agreed that they were being paid what they should because of the Pay Equity Fund, given the credentials required of their job. Seventy percent of respondents agreed “somewhat” or “a lot,” and just 13 percent disagreed (figure 17). We found few differences by highest educational attainment. Early educators with a bachelor’s degree, compared with other groups, appear to have the highest agreement with their receipt of fair pay.

FIGURE 17

Differences in Early Childhood Educators' Report of Fair Pay by Educational Attainment

Because of the ECE Pay Equity Fund payments, I feel like I'm being paid what I should be for the credentials required of my job



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current and former early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,264. Survey weights were implemented to be representative of full population of survey-eligible educators.

Many educators in focus groups—both lead and assistant teachers—also agreed that the wage supplements advanced pay equity goals. They commended the Pay Equity Fund for getting their salaries in closer alignment with public school teachers. They described how, historically, early childhood educators have not received comparable financial compensation despite their expertise and qualifications. As one lead teacher shared, the discrepancy in recognition between early educators in licensed child care centers and public school teachers in early grades has long been evident, despite some of the former holding advanced degrees.

I felt that, I mean, we do the same work as regular teachers. Even though we were considered lead teachers in a daycare facility ... It's a big difference, but I felt like this is something that we deserve because you still have the same knowledge and the same educational background as teachers in public schools.

However, not everyone believed the payments were enough or equitable relative to the requirements and responsibilities of their roles. In focus groups, educators working in child development centers shared specific views about how the payments were falling short of achieving pay equity. Some educators expressed uncertainty about the fairness of the supplemental payments given DC's educational requirements and extensive professional development added to an already overwhelming workload in their classrooms. This frustration was mentioned significantly more often in focus groups by lead teachers (8 out of 19, or 42 percent) than assistant teachers (1 of 11, or 9 percent).

In addition, some older and more experienced early educators reflected on how the Pay Equity Fund failed to reach parity with DC public school salary schedules by not rewarding their years of professional experience. Furthermore, some early educators reflected that the salary increase could have been more in comparison to the salaries and bonuses offered to DC public school teachers.

We have these degrees, we have so much opportunity just to leave this field to make double than what we're makin'. You know what I'm sayin'? That's what I'm seein' for the last year, two years, how teachers and aides are leaving this field to make more money.

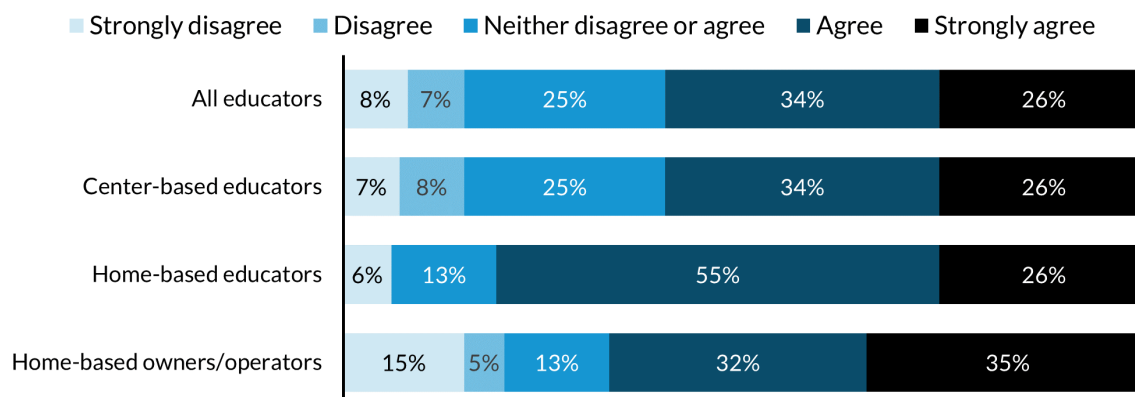
Workforce Retention

Despite past struggles with staff retention due to low pay, survey and focus group responses suggest the Pay Equity Fund is supporting early educators to stay in their current jobs and in the child care field. Sixty percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they plan to continue working in their current job longer because of the Pay Equity Fund (figure 18). A similar share agreed or strongly agreed they plan to continue working in child care in DC longer than they thought they would (figure 19). Early educators working in home-based settings agreed at a somewhat higher rate, even among educators who did not necessarily own or operate the program where they work.

FIGURE 18

To What Extent Early Childhood Educators Plan to Continue in Their Current Job Because of the Pay Equity Fund

Comparisons of rating by educator role



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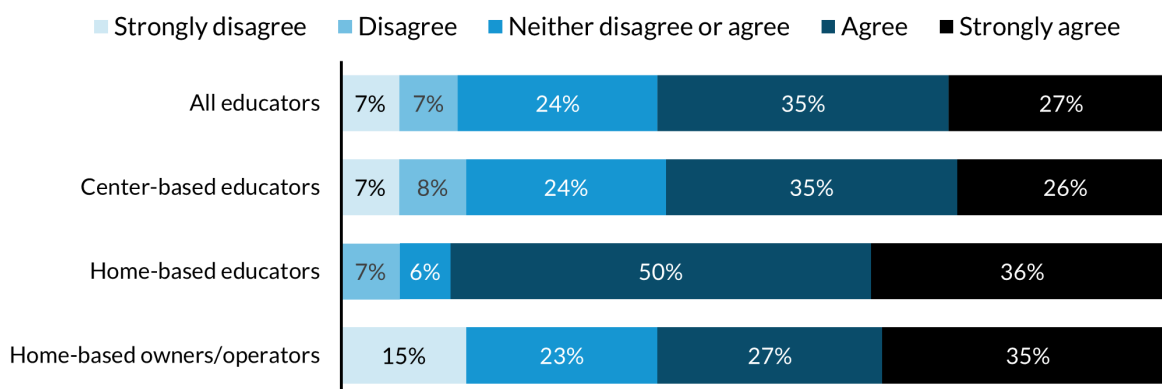
Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,276.

FIGURE 19

To What Extent Early Childhood Educators Plan to Continue in Child Care and Early Education Field in DC Because of the Pay Equity Fund Payments

Comparisons of rating by educator role



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Data obtained by Urban research team from the 2023 Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Survey.

Notes: Data presented represents current early educators as well as home-based owners/operators. Unweighted N = 1,076.

Focus group participants also reflected on how the Pay Equity Fund is supporting staff recruitment and retention. Some described their own motivations to continue working in child care longer in light of higher wage opportunities and others shared their thoughts on the workforce as a whole. Their reflections highlighted the importance of wages in early educators’ decisions to stay in or leave the profession. One assistant teacher expressed how the low pay makes it difficult to justify the challenges of the job, leading to a high turnover rate within the child development center they worked in over the past four years.

I had concern, because it’s like more people are walking out of the classroom because of the salary; the amount that they are receiving. Their work is difficult, and the amount is so low. I guess that is why more people are leaving, because even the center that I’m working—since I started working there, it’s like about 10 people have left the job. A lot of people walk away from their job based on the salary that they are getting.

Others echoed this sentiment, each mentioning coworkers who left their jobs because of low pay before the Pay Equity Fund. They viewed the Pay Equity Fund as an opportunity to retain talent—good teachers who leave for better-paying teaching jobs elsewhere. Participants shared how the fund is incentivizing them and others with both higher pay and an increased sense of value and appreciation. As one lead teacher shared,

Sometimes, we’re fond of our jobs, but there are opportunities to work in other places where they are offering more money. With this [Pay] Equity Fund, you can keep on doing your job in your center, where you are familiar and you know you can be better paid.

Several educators also believed the Pay Equity Fund encouraged early educators to leave child care jobs in nearby Maryland and Virginia to work in DC. According to payment records, 42 percent of early educators that received payments lived outside DC.

I had several people who left a daycare in Arlington, Virginia to come work at this center where I currently am ... They were saying that, "I want to come here because of several reasons. First, I want to study at a university, at UDC [University of the District of Columbia], and secondly, because I know that I will be getting a salary increase, which is not happening in Virginia." I think it was a very good strategy to implement that, and a disadvantage for other states close to us, but that's life. Whoever got it, good for them, and hopefully the other states can also implement that in the future.

A few educators confirmed that although the Pay Equity Fund might attract early educators from neighboring states, it remains one piece of a broader effort to improve workforce retention. These educators viewed higher pay as a step in the right direction but noted that high job demands coupled with lack of resources and support still lead to low job satisfaction and burnout. Although fair compensation is crucial, participants felt it could not sustain a career in early education alone, and early educators must be intrinsically motivated to work with children.

You have to want to do this. Any job you should want to do it. You shouldn't just go into it because it's a good salary, 'cause when you start coming to those bumps and curves then everything in the back of your head is gonna be like, "I didn't wanna be here anyway."

Ongoing analyses of OSSE administrative data for this study will examine early educator retention rates and patterns more closely, which we will report in a future publication.

Conclusion

The stories of early educators who received Pay Equity Fund payments show that the initiative is an important step toward helping educators afford basic needs and strengthen their financial well-being through fair compensation for important work. At its core, the Pay Equity Fund seeks to remedy the dynamics of structural racism, gender discrimination, and occupational segregation into the caregiving sector that place women, particularly Black and Hispanic/Latina women, in historically low-paying early education jobs.³ By supplementing the wages of those jobs, the Pay Equity Fund can be reparative. It offers early educators the promise of building savings and achieving financial stability and well-being by doing work of value to the economy, working families, young children, and themselves. In doing so, the Pay Equity Fund also offers a path to professionalism, removing barriers to education, training, and economic advancement that have long challenged efforts to achieve equity and excellence in the field.⁴

This study goes beyond the goals of the Pay Equity Fund to examine its early implementation. Applying an implementation science approach to evaluation is important in cases of policy innovation so that jurisdictions—including DC and several others working to improve wages for early educators⁵—have evidence on how their efforts are experienced and perceived by intended beneficiaries. Early educators participating in our surveys and focus groups described several implementation issues in the roll-out of the Pay Equity Fund. These include distrust and disbelief in the availability of wage supplements, public benefits cliffs, issues related to taxation, the challenges of role classification in some child care settings, and eligibility criteria that excluded child care workers without teaching responsibilities, such as child care center directors who may have experienced wage compression and management challenges as a result. At the same time, early educators largely reported positive experiences with Pay Equity Fund outreach and information efforts, smooth application experiences, ease of payment receipt, and the transformative impact of wage supplements.

The Pay Equity Fund demonstrates that nimble implementation matters for the success of policy innovation—even innovation needed as urgently as early educator compensation reform. For example, Pay Equity Fund administrators repeatedly adapted in the face of unintended consequences, such as early educators not applying for payment out of concerns that the fund was not real or even fraudulent. Administrators also responded to consequences that were difficult to predict, such as confusion about taxation, through two-way engagement with the child care community. Inclusive and iterative communication and a commitment to continuous improvement drove the successful implementation of the Pay Equity Fund. But it did not happen overnight. As administrators described, innovation takes time and stakeholder engagement to get right.⁶

The evolution of the Pay Equity Fund is far from complete. In FY 2024, distribution shifted from direct payments to a new revenue stream model, in which child care facilities that opt in receive formula funding and must, in turn, meet minimum salary scales for early educators set by OSSE. OSSE has reconvened the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund Task Force for ongoing guidance (Greenberg et al. 2023). And the Pay Equity Fund is facing possible cuts following calls from the District’s chief financial officer to “replenish a reserve fund depleted during the pandemic years.”⁷ Despite evidence of a successful roll-out, innovations like this one can be vulnerable without stable funding.

As the Pay Equity Fund continues, our work documenting the challenges and successes of fund implementation will continue, too. New evidence can inform continuous improvement, shore up strengths, and tackle the greatest vulnerabilities in real time. Research can be a partner to innovation—especially in the case of pay equity.

Notes

- ¹ “Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund,” District of Columbia Office of State Superintendent of Education, <https://osse.dc.gov/ecepayequity>.
- ² US Census Bureau, “Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars),” *American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables*, accessed on April 12, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S2001?q=washington-dc-median-annual-wages-all-workers-with-earnings>.
- ³ Eve Mefferd, and Dawn Dow, “The US Child Care System Relies on Women of Color, but Structural Barriers Systematically Disadvantage Them,” *Urban Wire, the blog of Urban Institute*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/us-child-care-system-relies-women-color-structural-barriers-systematically-disadvantage>.
- ⁴ National Association for the Education of Young Children, “Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators: A Position Statement Held on Behalf of the Early Childhood Education Profession,” 2020, accessed on May 24, 2024, https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/standards_and_competencies_ps.pdf.
- ⁵ Anna Lovejoy, “States Are Taking Action To Address the Child Care Crisis,” *Center for American Progress*, February 21, 2024, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/states-are-taking-action-to-address-the-child-care-crisis/>.
- ⁶ Erica Greenberg, Victoria Nelson, and Heather Sandstrom, “What Are the Keys to Improving Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity?” *Urban Wire, the blog of Urban Institute*, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/what-are-keys-improving-early-childhood-educator-pay-equity>.
- ⁷ Alex Koma, “D.C.’s 2025 Budget Process Is Already Off the Rails, Thanks to Behind-the-Scenes Bickering with CFO Glen Lee,” *Washington City Paper*, March 18, 2024, <https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/685021/d-c-s-2025-budget-process-is-already-off-the-rails-thanks-to-behind-the-scenes-bickering-with-cfo-glen-lee/>.

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