

My name is Nicole DePaoli and I have been in the field of Early Childhood Education for 21 years. I began as an aide when I was 19 years old, I made \$5.00 an hour teaching children the fundamentals of life and learning. I know preschool teachers who work in NAEYC accredited centers who make \$9.15 today! Minimum wage pay for a job that makes an adult responsible for a group of small children, their health, well-being, AND education. Being a preschool teacher is a physically and mentally demanding career, yet in order to make ends meet many teachers have to work a second job. I work in a program that employs 27 classroom teachers, of those teachers only six are married and have another household income. The first day my ECE 101 class my professor told us "if you want a career that pays you well you need to find another profession, if you want a career that is rewarding beyond words you are in the right place" this statement is UNACCEPTABLE. Why can't a preschool teacher have BOTH?

I am expected to have a Bachelor's degree to maintain my current status a Lead Teacher, but I am not financially compensated for this. I was able to receive my Bachelor's degree in two years but it was extremely time consuming, it took over my entire life. I struggled with doing all of the work expected by my professors while still completing curriculum planning and assessments for work as well. I rarely slept for those two years and I missed several important events in the lives of my family and friends to complete my degree. I believe that all Early Childhood teachers should have a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, if we want to be looked at as professionals we need to have the education that is expected of most professionals. Several of the other students in my college classes received their Bachelor's degree and then left the Early Childhood Education field to work in the public school system where the salaries and benefits are better. We need to improve the wages of the amazing teachers that we have before we lose them and we need to improve the wages for teachers if we want new generations of graduates to become Early Childhood teachers. Children need educated and dedicated teachers, teachers who are going to stay the course and teach the children about trust and caring, high turnover is a huge issue in childcare and with better wages and benefits I believe that more graduates would choose the field of Early Childhood Education.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak not only for myself but for all of the Early Childhood educators who could not be here today because they are busy teaching the amazing children in our programs.

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