

Early Childhood Research Brief

OPRE Report #2022-17

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Exploring Staff Time Use in 30 Early Care and Education Centers

Early care and education (ECE) centers play an important role in helping children develop the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. How staff spend their time interacting with children, as well as planning and carrying out center activities, can affect the overall quality of ECE services centers provide. However, policymakers and researchers do not know enough about the specific ways center staff spend their time and how variations in staff time use contribute to the quality of centers' ECE services.

Preliminary results from the **Assessing the Implementation and Cost of High Quality Early Care and Education**, or **ICHQ** (pronounced I-check), project led by Mathematica and funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, help address this knowledge gap by shedding light on

Time use data key facts

- We collected time use data from all teaching staff (n = 359) and select administrators (n = 62) in 30 early care and education centers that serve children from birth to age 5 years.
- Staff reported the amount of time they spent on 18 activities that we summarized across five key functions of center operations.
- We did not collect time use data from center staff who spend all their time on child and family support. ▲

different ways that teaching and administrative staff in ECE centers use their time. This brief is part of a [series of research briefs](#) summarizing findings from the ICHQ multi-case study that collected data from 30 ECE centers between October 2017 and June 2018.

Key takeaways: How ECE center staff spent their time



Teaching staff spent the most time providing instruction and care to children and planning for these activities.



Administrators spent a notable amount of time on center administration and planning on average, although, depending on their specific type of administrator role, they spent different amounts of time providing instruction and care to children and planning for these activities, as well as workforce development.








Both teaching and administrative staff spent time on center administration and planning. This included at least 10 percent of teaching staff time and at least 25 percent of administrator time spent on **regulatory compliance and reporting**—activities to ensure compliance with federal, state, and city agencies or programs as well as standards related to accreditation, Head Start, or state prekindergarten programs. ▲

ECE center time use across five key functions

ECE center staff reported how they spent their time across various activities, which we organized and analyzed around [five key functions](#), or areas, of ECE center operations that all centers do to varying degrees to

provide services to young children and their families. Each of the five key functions is defined by a specific set of activities and practices that can support quality and each key function has specific costs. Staff time use information helped the project team allocate labor costs across the five key functions to create cost measures that assess how ECE centers allocate resources.

Five key functions

| Key functions of center operations | Types of activities |
|---|---|
|  Structural Supports for Instruction and Caregiving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing instruction and care to children |
|  Instructional Planning, Coordination, and Child Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning curriculum, activities, and lessons • Preparing, conducting, and sharing child assessments |
|  Center Administration and Planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining compliance with federal, state, and city agencies or programs (regulatory compliance and reporting) • Managing center finances • Managing and maintaining center operations |
|  Workforce Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing all aspects of staff development, recruitment, hiring, and evaluation • Attending staff meetings |
|  Child and Family Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with families or providing support services |

How teaching staff spent their time

Teaching staff spent most of their time planning for and providing instruction and caregiving. There is little difference in the amount of time spent on these activities overall by specific teacher role (head or lead teacher, teacher, or assistant teacher). All teacher roles spent more time on Structural Supports for Instruction and Caregiving than on Instructional Planning, Coordination, and Child Assessment. However, head or lead teachers and teachers spent more time on Instructional Planning, Coordination, and Child Assessment compared to assistant teachers.

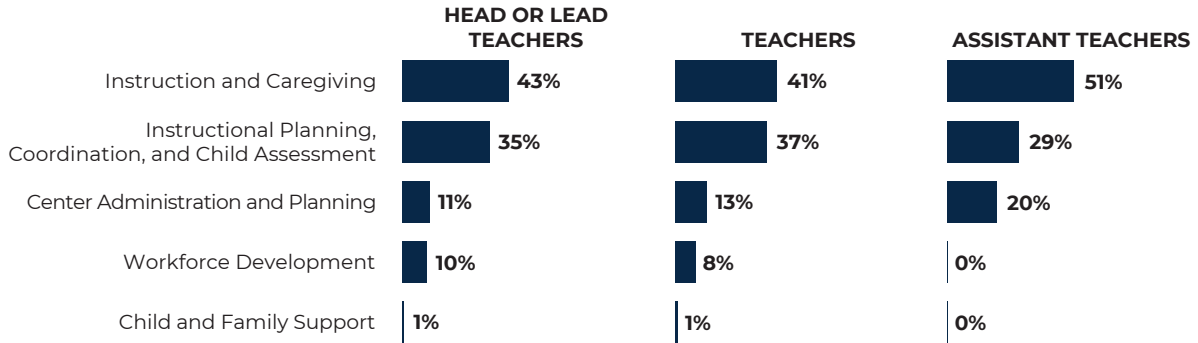
Although it represents a relatively small portion of their time, teaching staff also contributed to Center Administration and Planning, such as regulatory compliance. We found much more within-center variation in how teaching staff spent their time

Teaching staff self-identified as having one of the following three roles:

- **Head or lead teacher**—in charge of a group or classroom of children, often with staff supervisory responsibilities.
- **Teacher**—might take responsibility for the classroom at times of the day; collaborates with other teachers.
- **Assistant teacher**—works under the supervision of a teacher; might lead certain activities but does not have sole responsibility for the classroom or staff supervisory responsibilities. ◀

than between-center variation. In other words, two teachers from the same center often spent their time in different ways, although the average amount of time teachers spent on any particular activity across centers is similar.

Teacher time use varies minimally by role



How administrators spend their time

We found that there are three types of center administrators with varying roles—center directors, educational directors or coordinators, and teacher-directors. Not surprisingly, all types of center administrators, most notably center directors, spent a large proportion of their time on Center Administration and Planning. However, administrators also spent a fair amount of time on Instructional Planning, Coordination, and Child Assessment, Workforce Development, and Structural Supports for Instruction and Caregiving. The relative amount of time devoted to these activities varied by type of administrator role:

/ Center directors spent at least one-fifth of their time on Workforce Development and Instructional Planning, Coordination, and Child Assessment.

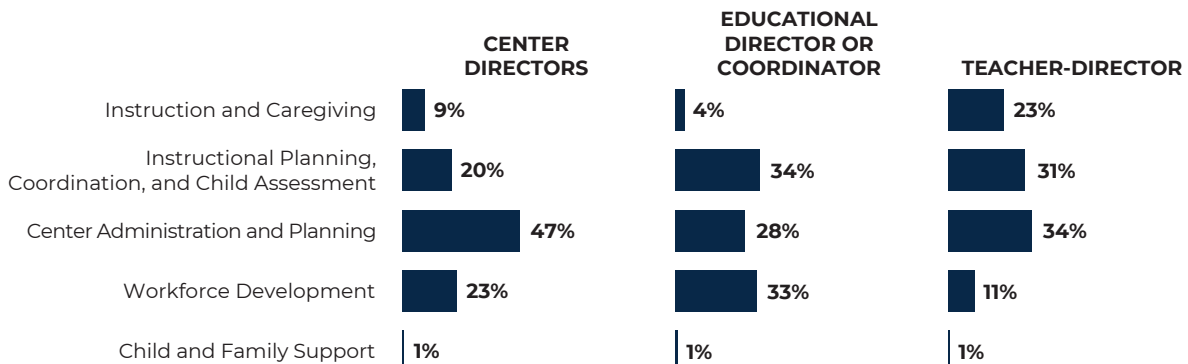
Administrators self-identified as having one of the following three roles:

- Center director—serves as the director of the early care and education center, with staff supervisory responsibilities; does not have regular teaching duties.
- Educational director or coordinator—responsible for the educational program; might supervise teachers.
- Teacher-director—regularly performs both teaching and administrative duties (not just filling in for absent teachers). ▲

/ Educational directors or coordinators spent most of their time on Instructional Planning, Coordination, and Child Assessment and Workforce Development.

/ Teacher-directors spent most of their time planning for and providing instruction and caregiving, and one-third of their time on administration.

Administrator time use across functions varies by role



Conclusion

Time use data collected from the 30 ECE centers in our multi-case study sample provide a preliminary snapshot of the choices centers make about staffing and the specific roles and responsibilities of center administrators and teaching staff. Although staff generally spent time in expected ways, we found a fair amount of variation in time use by role

within centers. This finding suggests that centers choose to use staff in different ways to fulfill essential functions—decisions which could be related to center size, funding source, or other factors. We will further explore how staff time use patterns relate to center characteristics in a 2021 field test with a larger sample of centers.

About the Project

OPRE sponsored the ICHQ project to create measures of implementation and costs of providing ECE services at centers for children from birth to age 5. The project produced measures to examine how differences in what a center does and how resources are used influence quality. Products include [a literature review](#) and a [methods paper](#) that describes how we developed draft measures through a multi-case study.

This brief is part of a [series of research briefs](#) summarizing findings from the ICHQ multi-case study that collected data from 30 ECE centers between October 2017 and June 2018 to develop draft measures. Subsequent products from the ICHQ project will describe findings from a 2021 field test in which we are testing and validating the measures in a purposive sample of 80 centers in four states and will further specify uses of the measures for research and practice.

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