JUNE 2026

THE SUNSHINE PORTAL

Florida's Early Childhood Integrated Data System

# Research Brief: What Keeps Childcare Businesses and Teachers in Business?

FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026

EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY RESEARCH GROUP (ECPRG)
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The Sunshine State Early Childhood Information Portal Project described was supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5) Grant Number 90TP0068-03-02 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Authority and Funding is Section 46 of Chapter 2023-239, Laws of Florida, from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Discretionary Child Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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FLORIDA Preschool Development Grant

# Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG)

This work is the result of the ECPRG; a collaborative team housed at the University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies that consists of the following partnership organizations and individuals.


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# What Keeps Childcare Businesses and Teachers in Business?

Florida's childcare sector depends on two things staying in place: the businesses that operate childcare programs, and the teachers who staff them. This study used the state's linked administrative data to ask a practical question: which businesses and which teachers tend to last, and which tend to disappear? The goal is to show policymakers where the sector is most fragile and where support is most likely to pay off.

## How the study was done

Researchers tracked licensed childcare providers and teachers over time using state licensing and personnel records (DCF CARES), combined with local community data from the U.S. Census. A business was counted as surviving if it stayed open; a teacher was counted as surviving if they kept working somewhere in the licensed childcare industry. Using machine learning, the team let the data reveal which characteristics best predict survival, rather than starting with assumptions.

> **Important caution**
> These results describe what longer-lasting teachers and providers tend to look like. They do not prove that changing any single factor will cause longer survival. The patterns are useful for targeting support, but they are correlations, not guarantees.

## What the data showed

**Teachers leave fast; businesses last.** Larger childcare centers are remarkably stable, with nearly 9 in 10 still operating after ten years. Teachers are the opposite. Fewer than half of teachers are still in the industry after one year, and fewer than 1 in 13 remain after five years. Smaller centers and home-based providers fall in between and are notably less durable than large centers.

**Share still active over time**

| Group Name | 1 Year | 3 Years | 5 Years | 10 Years |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers | 46% | 15% | 8% | 3% |
| Home-based providers | 90% | 72% | 61% | 47% |
| Smaller centers (under 10 staff) | 94% | 80% | 72% | 59% |
| Larger centers (10+ staff) | 100% | 98% | 95% | 89% |

Figures rounded. Even centers that stay open for a decade cycle through their teaching staff repeatedly.

**Training tracks with teacher staying power.** Teachers who hold a Birth-to-Five or national credential last considerably longer than those without one, and early literacy training adds further benefit.

**Older entrants stay longer.** Teachers who enter the field later in life remain longer. Three-year survival for those entering after age 40 is higher than one-year survival for those entering at or below age 20.

**Training shows up strongly for whole centers, too.** At larger centers, the share of teachers who completed the 40-hour training tracked closely with the center's own survival: where under a quarter had completed it, 10-year survival was about 33%; where at least three-quarters had, survival rose to roughly 96%.

**Quality and program participation mark durable providers.** Across provider types, any history of Gold Seal quality certification and participation in the School Readiness or VPK programs went hand in hand with higher survival.

## Why it matters for policy

> **The bottom line**
> Business closure is not the sharpest problem in Florida's childcare sector; teacher turnover is. Even stable, long-lived centers churn through their workforce. Because training and program participation both line up with longer survival, they are sensible places to focus retention and quality investments, even though the study cannot prove they directly cause businesses or teachers to last longer.

- Retention efforts aimed at teachers, especially in the first year, address the sector's most fragile point.
- Supporting credentialing and the 40-hour training is doubly attractive: it is associated with longer teacher tenure and with more stable centers.
- Smaller centers and home-based providers are the most vulnerable businesses and may warrant targeted stability support.