

2023 Chicago Early Learning
Workforce Scholarship

Fall Field Inquiry Focus Group Summary

Presented by **vera.**



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Focus Group Overview

City Colleges of Chicago and Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship aims to establish an Education Workforce Center that specifically caters to the challenges and needs of early childhood professionals in the City of Chicago. This field inquiry seeks to gather valuable insights from participants to inform the development of the center.

Objectives

To engage in a discussion focusing on the challenges and needs faced by early childhood education professionals, and to collaboratively identify and prioritize resources that should be offered at the Education Workforce Center. The aim is to gather input that will guide the design and functionality of the center to best serve the education workforce.





Section 1

First Impressions

Section 1: First Impressions

About the Participants

- Primary background in early childhood education
- All College Educated
- Interested in pursuing a career in ECE due to passion for caregiving and children
- Experience ranges from student to 10–20+ years





Section 2

Understanding Barriers

Section 2: Understanding Barriers

Summary

- **Licenses and credits:** struggle with credit transfers, licensing, and cost of testing.
- **Financial barriers:** such as funding, cost of continued education and testing.
- **Access to Classes and Courses:** Issues with schedules, classes offered at inconvenient times, no bilingual options.
- **Pay:** access to health insurance and retirement. Unpaid student teaching.
- **Lack of resources:** very little support to understand the curriculum and prevent burnout.
- **Staff Shortage:** shortage of teachers, support staff, and good managers.



Section 2: Understanding Barriers

Top Challenges

- **Lack of Advocacy:** not enough support for the field of early childhood education and CEL students.
- **Language Barriers:** need better resources and training for students with English as a second language.
- **Under rewarded and recognized:** they are not babysitters, they are educators to bring quality education to early ages.
- **Burnout:** a lot of responsibility for one person who is expected to do so many things in one day on their own.
- **Inconsistency in regulations:** continued education standards and licensing requirements constantly changing.

II “Teachers are under-reward. We need more recognition for the work we do. We’re not babysitters, we are educators to bring quality education to early ages. Pay is an issue and more importantly is benefits - health insurance, retirement etc. As an admin, I tried best to provide resources needed and enough resources for the field to prevent burnout but there is a shortage of people in the field. It’s a lot of responsibility for one person who is expected to do so many things in one day on their own. Good management is also needed to check in on the well-being of the teachers, like a Wellness committee that meets monthly to do what they can to help the teachers.” - **Educator 1**



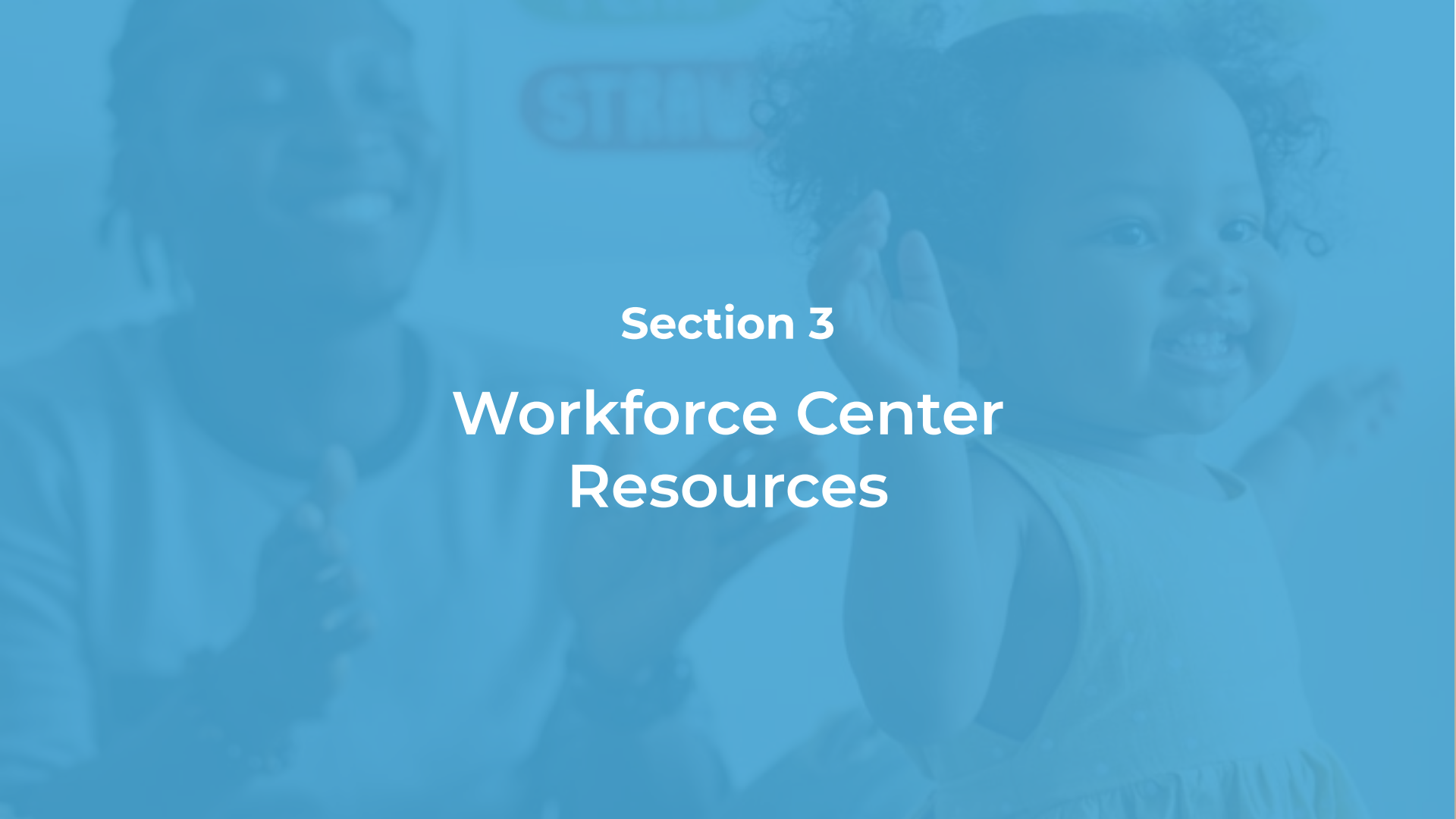
Section 2: Understanding Barriers

Job Satisfaction and Support

All participants felt they were adequately prepared for their position, but noted:

- They would like more support in **how to teach the curriculum** and model it.
- There is **inconsistency in knowledge and expectations from administrators** when it comes to early childhood education.
- There's sometimes a **disconnect between what the IEP is reporting about a child** and what they observe in the classroom.
- **Not all teachers are adequately prepared** for their roles, especially in regards to IEPs, resulting in some teachers carrying a majority of the workload.

“I have a colleague who was not properly prepared, but given credentials to be in the Special Education classroom. This leads to her being overwhelmed. The PD trainings don’t go as deep as needed to equip this colleague to be able to manage her responsibilities, especially in the “blended” program with General Education. This peer needs more resources and doesn’t have an advocate or someone to point her to resources and training.” - **Educator 2**



Section 3

Workforce Center Resources

Section 3: Workforce Center Resources

Summary

- **Educators feel more supported in CPS Pre-K settings than in Community-Based Organizations** because of more manageable hours, flexible vacation time, higher pay, and more access to resources.
- **Not enough support** in the beginning of the school year to prepare the classroom and participate in professional development.
- **They wish CPS and CBOs worked better together** to act in one accord and offer the same quality of education to the kids and prepare the educators with the same quality.



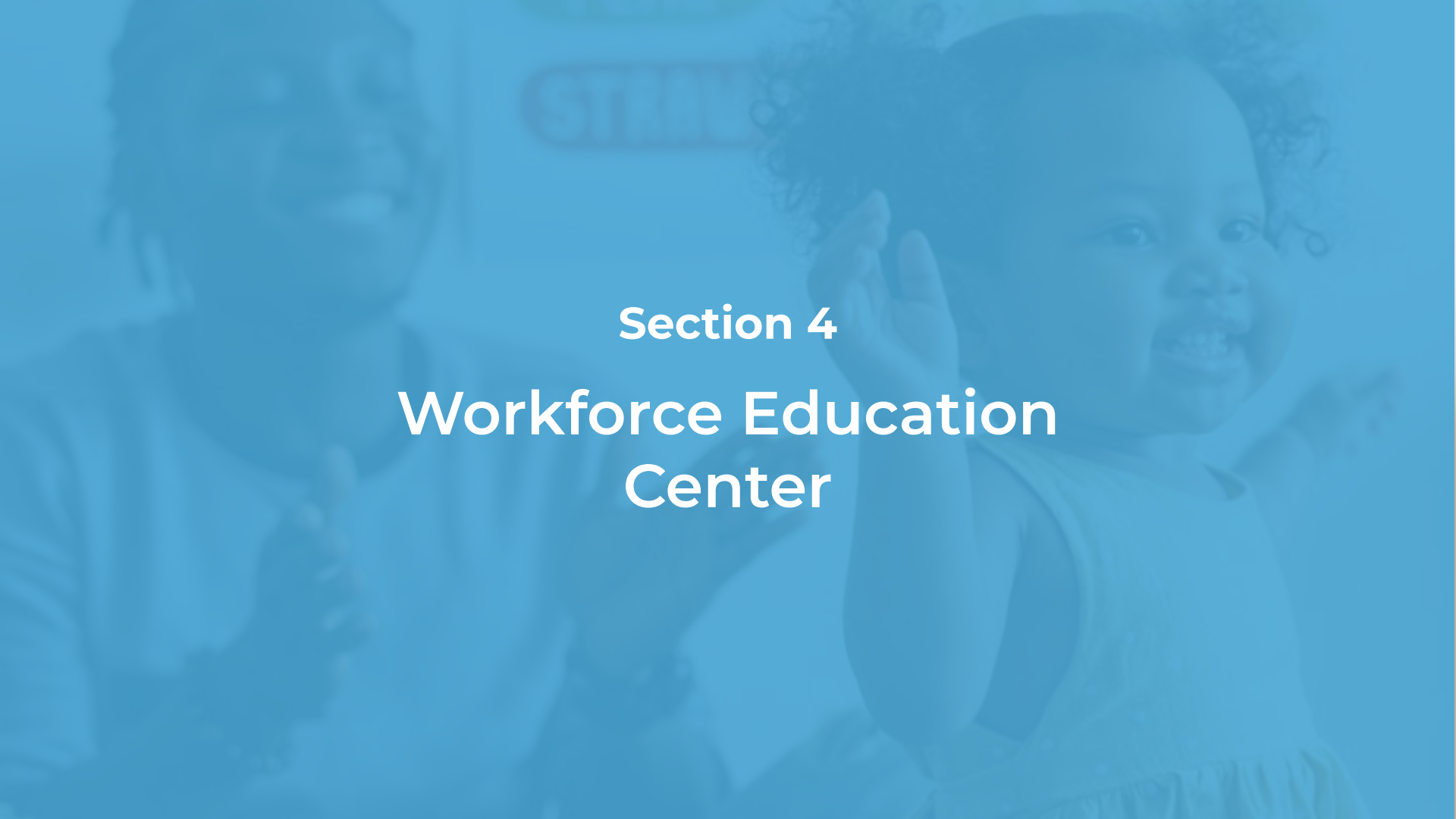
Section 3: Workforce Center Resources

Beyond Salary, Why Do Educators Leave?

- **Lack of Training and Resources:** Not enough training or resources to work with children with special needs and disabilities. No support from administration
- **Burnout:** Too many responsibilities and not enough support causes burnout.
- **Unprepared:** Teachers come in with a different expectation of the job than what is actually required of them, it leaves them feeling overwhelmed.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Parents are not being held accountable and teachers can't do anything about it (No sending home, no discipline, no consequences).
- **Lack of Appreciation:** Early childhood educators don't get the same recognition as K-8 teachers. They don't get access to educator discounts, memberships etc. because they aren't considered "teachers".
- **Lack of Respect:** especially for ECE teachers working outside of CPS. People treat early childhood educators like daycare workers.

|| "We need to stop treating early education as daycare and compete with CPS on benefits and offerings because it's better than they get in early education positions. The union needs to fight for the issues like long hours, lack of respect for teachers, lack of respect for anyone in education that isn't part of CPS. Teachers don't feel valued or appreciated." - **Educator 2**





Section 4

Workforce Education Center

Section 4: Workforce Education Center

Summary

- More people would be interested in a career in ECE if **the salary was higher, especially if CBO salary was competitive** with CPS and offered benefits.
- Educators are attracted due to **the lasting impact on the children.**
- **They need help navigating transfers** and transition between schools.
- **They need more dual-language support**, especially with books that are not just translated but created specifically for the Spanish language.
- **They need more Pre-K focused administration and resources.** K-8 seems to get the most attention.



Section 4: Workforce Education Center

What services, training, or workshops would benefit you?

- **Having a teacher resource center** that has storybook packaging, patterns and books of ideas to check out, laminating machines, etc.
- **Additional tracks for teachers** to work in other areas such as admin or mental health, and career guidance.
- **Sessions about furthering education**, such as looking to pursue your master's degree.
- **Networking opportunities** to discuss topics as a group to learn from others in the field (similar to this focus group).
- **Mentorship programs**



Section 4: Workforce Education Center

Mentorships

All participants agreed that mentorships or coaching would be useful in their professional development. They noted:

- Mentorship programs could **help give on-the-job training to assistants** to learn more about what's required in the classroom.
- **Reflective practice groups or support groups** could offer a space for teachers to share their experiences and work together on solutions.
- Mentorships could give **new teachers training on practical applications** in the classroom.

|| “I like the idea of reflective practice groups. Mentorship is great, but it may be overwhelming when there are too many people inside of the classroom in the teacher’s space and having too many voices giving critiques.”

|| “There needs to be a partnership among teachers and sit with them and walk through practical applications in the classroom. There’s a disconnect between the learning environment and the experience on the job, so having a mentor that can bridge that gap will be helpful.”



Section 4: Workforce Education Center

Visiting the Education Workforce Center

- **Would you visit an Education Center in Person or Virtually?
If so, what time of day would you most likely visit?**

All participants would visit the EWC in person and virtually, after work hours in the evening and on weekends.

- Mentioned options for Saturdays as well.
- “If this is designed for teachers then after hours is the time that is best for them.”

- **Would you attend Education Workforce Center resources if they were provided in your community?**

All participants said yes to all of the above, including:

- Professional development
- Networking
- Seminars / Sessions
- Trainings
- Actual resources center for things like laminating, printing etc.
- Multilingual resources– Spanish books are hard to find for example
- More networking/events





Section 5

Additional Thoughts

Section 5: Additional Thoughts

Summary

- ***“I want more engagement opportunities, like this focus group.”***
- Desires to see teachers wanting to teach and have the heart for the profession again. ***“I Want to see more support for teachers and less ‘politics’.”***
- The system is not working for ECE teachers. Afraid for the field. System is not helping teachers. ***“We can have all the scholarships in the world, but it won't matter if the system isn't changed.”***
- Teachers need support groups and a safe space to share their challenges.
- ***“Teachers who don't want to teach or go back to the classroom because they don't like what is happening to teachers now - it's rough.”***



Thank you

Presented by **vera.**

