

Life Beyond Graduation: Three-Year Follow-Up Study of T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Recipients - Year One Report

Background:

The early childhood field is going through a major transition. With more researchers pointing to the importance of high-quality early childhood education as a major factor in a child's future success in school and life, and the need for a child's teacher to be well educated, the field is under scrutiny. "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8," a report from the Institute of Medicine and the National Academy of Science, recommended that lead teachers in all settings have earned at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education as a foundation for their practice, basing this on the science of early childhood development. The early childhood field is far from achieving this, yet there is a huge push to advance this goal. The final report developed by the Power to the Profession Task Force calls for major investments in early childhood educators, including comprehensive strategies to make college degrees affordable and accessible for the incumbent workforce. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® (T.E.A.C.H.) scholarship initiative is seen as a proven vehicle to make that happen, given the post-secondary education the workforce needs and the real career and wage mobility it deserves.

With the goal that every child in an early childhood setting has a teacher who is well educated and well compensated, the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship initiative strives to provide the opportunity for incumbent early childhood educators to access an affordable college education, have adequate workforce support while pursuing more education and earn fair compensation commensurate with their educational achievements. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship consists of several components. These include financial support for tuition, books and other expenses, paid release time, annual compensation enhancements upon completion of required credit hours and a counselor who provides personalized support for scholarship recipients and their employers. Currently, T.E.A.C.H. scholarship programs operate in 21 states and D.C.

The various state programs are supported by the T.E.A.C.H. National Center (National Center), which provides ongoing technical assistance to the various states' programs. The National Center also conducts oversight to ensure that these programs maintain fidelity to the basic design of the T.E.A.C.H. model. To support this mission, the National Center created an extensive database used by all programs that captures data on current and previous T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients in the states. While this database was developed to facilitate scholarship administration, uniform reporting and model fidelity of the state programs, it has proven useful for research and evaluation as well. A key feature of the database is that it includes information obtained at the time of application and additional information that is individually updated throughout the time each recipient is served by the program. Although this database is usually employed as a scholarship management system, data are regularly monitored and examined by National Center staff, making the system quite useful for developing high quality data that can be used for strategy development and research and evaluation studies.

However, individual scholarship recipients are not routinely tracked in the T.E.A.C.H. database after they complete their T.E.A.C.H. contracts. As a result, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct any systematic assessment of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients' longer-term careers and experiences. In order to address this situation, a longevity study was proposed and implemented to examine the long-term career trajectories of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients who graduated from an early childhood education program with a college degree. To fill this gap, a study was developed that would conduct systematic surveys of recent graduates of early childhood college degree programs (i.e., AA or BA) who had been supported by T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. These surveys would allow investigators to follow these graduates prospectively for up to three years, receiving reports from them every six months about their employment, wages, career trajectory, professional development and other work and life situations. Using these data, it will be possible to develop a more thorough portrait of T.E.A.C.H. graduates' accomplishments and experiences. This report is the first in a series of reports that will flesh out that portrait by drawing on these data.

Key Research Questions:

We sought to answer several specific questions in conducting this study. These include:

- After T.E.A.C.H. scholars complete their coursework and obtain their college degrees, do they continue working in the ECE field upon graduation? Do they continue working in the same early childhood educational settings where they were employed when they first obtained their T.E.A.C.H. scholarship support?
- Do these graduates experience career progress as indicated by increased earnings and/or promotions within their work settings or advancement to higher positions with other employers?
- Do these graduates advance in the ECE field along a career pathway by being promoted to higher positions in their work settings or by moving up into other full or part-time positions in the field?
- Do these graduates become more engaged in the larger ECE professional development system through attending continuing education, seeking an additional degree or participating in other types of professional development and professional leadership activities?
- Do these graduates experience increased self-confidence consistent with a stronger identity as an early childhood professional?

Methodology: Study Protocol

The National Center created an initial Longevity Study Advisory Committee, made up of key National Center staff, the evaluator and T.E.A.C.H. program leaders from three states. This team helped design the protocol for the study, the research questions and the study survey content. T.E.A.C.H. Center staff identified 18 specific states currently operating a T.E.A.C.H. program that had a long enough history to yield alumni who graduated from associate or bachelor's degree programs since fall 2017. The leadership of each qualifying state was invited to participate in the study, and all agreed to enroll graduates in the study. All T.E.A.C.H. associate and bachelors' degree graduates from three graduation cohorts (fall 2017, spring 2018 and summer 2018) in those 18 states were invited to participate. Participation involved making a commitment to answer on-line surveys every six months for the ensuing three years. State programs initially contacted graduates in their state that they identified and then they followed up with emails from initial request through Round 1. Surveys in Round 2 and beyond have been and will be sent out directly from the National Center.

Individual respondents are tracked using unique IDs assigned by each state program that link longitudinal surveys over time. Center staff designed a uniform survey that was administered via SurveyMonkey. Prospective respondents were sent an email reminder one week before the release of the survey. Then individuals were sent an email with a link to the survey. Potential survey respondents were sent three or four reminders in each round. Inducements for a prompt response included a chance in a raffle of gift cards for respondents. Eight gift cards were provided at the end of each round. A total of four more follow-ups are planned to encompass the three-year period following graduation.

Survey Response Overview

Study sample characteristics. Invitations to participate were sent to 483 people in the 18 states, and a relatively high number (N=272 or 56%) responded and agreed to be enrolled in the study. This constituted our study participants. Participants are quite diverse geographically; they graduated from 137 different schools in all 18 participating states distributed across all regions of the U.S.

Survey data in Rounds 1 and 2 have yielded 218 respondents. Most of the analyses presented in this report provide information from the most recent survey. For most participants, this is the one reported in spring 2019. Only 1 in 5 of the participant surveys were from six months earlier (fall 2018) because these individuals did not answer the spring 2019 survey. Subsequent reports will follow the same group of participants, allowing the Center to observe any changes that might occur over the three-year post-graduation period.

Survey response patterns. Survey responses by state varied from 50% to 100%, with a median state response rate of 83% (see Table 1). No measured demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity, family type or educational background, differed between survey respondents and non-respondents. About two-thirds of survey respondents had associate degree (AA) scholarships (N=137), while the remaining one-third had bachelors' degree (BA) scholarships (N=81). The response rate from BA grads (84%) is only slightly higher than the response rate of AA grads (78%). Although the number of BA program grads is smaller than that of AA

grads, there is an especially strong representation among BA degree holders. Only a few BA scholarship grads (N=15) enrolled in the study have not provided any survey data. Thus, the number of cases available are quite adequate for robust analyses of the entire sample, as well as for the two subgroups of AA and BA degree holders.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Comparisons between the sample participants and the most recent cohort of T.E.A.C.H. graduates in participating states suggest that degree completers in the present study sample are quite similar to T.E.A.C.H. graduates generally. For example, similar percentages of persons of color and/or of

Hispanic origin are found among all T.E.A.C.H. graduates (38.6%) and the survey respondents (37.2%). Further, the demographic background and life experiences that study sample participants reported at the time they applied for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships resemble the profile of the college student who is at a relatively high risk for experiencing delayed degree completion or non-completion. All participants are working and are part-time students; the overwhelming majority of respondents are women and most have family responsibilities. Two-thirds are mothers and more than one in five are single parents. The one-third of those without children appear to be at various stages in a family life cycle – fewer than one in 10 appear to be empty nesters.

The extent of participants' previous college experience and their familiarity with higher education was documented when they applied for their T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. At that time, one-third of the graduates had neither parents nor siblings who had attended college, and slightly less than half (46%) had neither parents nor siblings who graduated from college. Approximately 42 percent had only a high school diploma or less education. At the other end of the educational spectrum, only 7% of the T.E.A.C.H. graduates had a BA degree when they applied for the program and 22% had an AA degree at that time. Most of these degrees were not in ECE related fields, and most of these sample members who were AA degree holders at that time were applying for the BA scholarship program. None of the other educational background characteristics varied between the two types of scholarship programs (AA vs BA).

The average age of applicants to the program (33.7 yrs.) did not differ between AA and BA programs. However, there is a lot of variation in the ages at which people reach the various stages in their educational pathway. The average duration of the program was about 4.6 years and did not differ between AA and BA graduates. This is not surprising given that BA applicants typically would have completed the AA degree in an ECE-related field to be eligible for a BA scholarship. Given that most participants would have taken about two years of course work if they had been going full time, the pace of progress of these part-time students seems remarkable, especially given their ongoing work and family responsibilities.

Outcomes of Survey Respondents

Retention in the field and in current work setting: *After T.E.A.C.H. scholars complete their coursework and obtain their college degrees, do they continue working in the ECE field upon graduation? Do they continue working in the same early childhood educational settings where they were employed when they first obtained their T.E.A.C.H. scholarship support?*

Nearly all of the graduates (211/218 or 96.8%) were still working in early childhood at one year after the completion of their degree. Another 1.4% were not working due to different family circumstances. Most

Degree Type	Response Pattern	1st survey only	2nd survey only	Both surveys	Either survey	No survey
Both types (N=272)	Number	42	49	127	218	54
	Percent	15%	18%	47%	80%	20%
Associate (N=176)	Number	26	37	74	137	39
	Percent	15%	21%	42%	78%	22%
Bachelor's (N=96)	Number	16	12	53	81	15
	Percent	17%	13%	55%	84%	16%

graduates (195/211 or 92.4%) are still working in the settings in which they were employed when they applied for their scholarship.

Upward Mobility: *Do these graduates experience career progress as indicated by increased earnings and/or promotions within their work settings or advancement to higher positions with other employers? Do these graduates advance in the ECE field along a career pathway by being promoted to higher positions in their work settings or by moving up into other full or part-time positions in the field?*

Table 2: Real wage gains of T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® graduates								
Job role at start of T.E.A.C.H.	N	Mean Hourly Wage		Paired Differences				Sig level (2-tailed)
		At start of T.E.A.C.H.	12 months after grad.	Mean wage diff.	Std. dev.	90% CI		
						Lower	Upper	
Total useable sample*	177	\$12.01	\$14.12	\$2.11	\$4.58	\$1.55	\$2.68	.000
Director	25	\$15.34	\$18.84	\$3.50	\$6.11	\$1.41	\$5.59	.008
Teacher	86	\$11.64	\$13.74	\$2.10	\$4.78	\$1.24	\$2.95	.000
Asst. teacher	65	\$11.06	\$12.79	\$1.73	\$3.38	\$1.03	\$2.43	.000

* This useable sample includes wage data from survey respondents at both points in time and includes one non-teaching staff, but excludes all family child care home operators because their wage data were not reliably reported. All wage data were adjusted for inflation using consumer price index data. Directors include those identified as directors, assistant directors and administrators of various types excluding family care home operators. assistant teachers include assistant teachers and floaters.

Table 2 displays the hourly wages from all graduates in the sample with wage data available for two points in time. Most of these individuals (four out of five) would be reporting their situation in spring 2019, but a minority of these are describing fall 2018. All the dollar values have been adjusted for inflation and are expressed in “2019 dollars.” For the 177 associate and bachelor’s degree completers on whom we *have data for multiple points in time*, the average real wage (adjusted for inflation) went up from \$12.01 per hour to \$14.12. This is a sizeable and highly statistically significant wage gain averaging \$2.11 per hour or an increase of nearly 18% from the baseline wage. The meaning of this can be demonstrated by looking at the confidence interval which reveals that nearly all of these ECE professionals (90%) received a real hourly wage gain that was at least \$1.55 and could have been as much as almost \$2.68 per hour. The next three rows show wage gains broken down by job type. These positions include directors, teachers and assistant teachers. These positions were the ones survey respondents reported at the time of their initial application for a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship. The relative hourly wage gain for *directors* was on average nearly 23% (\$3.50 from a base of \$15.34 up to \$18.84). Similarly, teachers experienced on average an hourly wage gain of 18% (\$2.10 from a base of \$11.62 up to \$13.74). A significant wage increase was reported by *assistant teachers* of almost 16% (\$1.73 from a base of \$11.06 rising to \$12.79). All of these wage gains were highly statistically significant.

In order to assess career progress in terms of *promotions*, graduates were classified according to their initial job title. If we examine the career progress of the 211 respondents still in the ECE field, we see clear evidence of widespread upward mobility. At the time they applied for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, 57 were directors, assistant directors, administrators and family care home operators. Another 88 were ECE teachers (birth to 5 years) while 66 were assistant teachers or floaters. Promotions were evident one year after degree completion for teachers and assistant teachers. Of the 88 teachers, 12 (14%) had moved up to director positions and another three (3%) were operating their own family care homes. Of the 66 assistant teachers, 56 (85%) were promoted to teachers, while another four (6%) had attained director positions by one year after obtaining

their college degree. Those with associate and bachelor's degrees experienced somewhat different wage gains and promotion patterns; these differences will be examined in a subsequent report.

External Engagement: *Do these graduates become more engaged in the larger ECE professional development system through attending continuing education, taking college courses, seeking an additional degree or participating in other types professional development and professional leadership activities.*

T.E.A.C.H. alumni are highly engaged in continuing their higher education, participating in professional development activities and developing as professional leaders. In the year following degree completion, approximately one-third of T.E.A.C.H. graduates reported taking college courses, mostly aiming at a BA degree (44/211 = 21%) or MA degree (5/211 = 2%) with support from the T.E.A.C.H. initiative in their state. An additional number (12/211 = 6%) were taking courses leading toward an ECE college degree without T.E.A.C.H. support, while a few more (9/211 = 4%) were taking college courses in an unrelated field. Clearly, these graduates demonstrate a commitment to higher education, especially in their chosen field of early childhood, and continuing involvement with the T.E.A.C.H. program seems to be facilitating that process. Not surprisingly, degrees currently being sought varied by the degree they had attained (AA vs. BA) during their initial T.E.A.C.H. contract. These differences will be examined in a subsequent report.

Survey respondents reported their participation in each of six types of professional activities (as well as a residual "other" category of activity) during the previous six months. Slightly more than half of all respondents had attended a local, state or national ECE meeting or conference in the previous year, while about one-third had joined or renewed their membership in an ECE professional association. About one in every six T.E.A.C.H. graduates had attended a local or state advocacy event, and 15% had presented at a local, state or national conference in the past year. One in 10 reported that they had advocated for ECE funding or public policy, and the same proportion served on an early childhood advisory committee or board of directors of an ECE-focused community-based organization. On average, survey respondents reported 1.5 of these types of events over the previous six-month period, and 80 percent had engaged in at least one of these activities; 25 percent reported two or more of these activities over the year since their graduation. In addition to voluntary participation in professional development, graduates were asked about any part-time work they did that was related to early childhood education. Approximately 8 percent reported such work, mostly at a second ECE center (5%). A few others reported serving as an adjunct faculty member at a community college, a professional development specialist, early childhood consultant, trainer or director of pre-K ministry at a church. This pattern confirms that engagement with the profession is substantial and widespread.

Internal development: *Do these graduates experience increased self-confidence consistent with a stronger identity as an early childhood professional?*

In order to find out whether T.E.A.C.H. graduates had a stronger professional identity as an early childhood professional, they were asked to report if they "feel more confident in my knowledge and skills in early childhood education." A sizeable majority of graduates (151/211 = 72%) responded affirmatively in response to that question. This strongly suggests that for three-quarters of T.E.A.C.H. graduates, the college degree and subsequent professional development experiences contributed to a more positive professional self-image.

Study Limitations

Even though we have a high response rate and a motivated set of respondents, we need to be cautious in drawing conclusions. The study population contains only those who agreed to participate. Those individuals agreeing to participate (N=272) constitute more than half of the total number of people who would have been eligible to participate. But those individuals who declined to participate may have different characteristics than survey respondents. Thus, more non-respondents may have declined to participate because they moved out of the field or have not made much career progress. If such is the case, it could lead us to overestimate career retention and the extent of career progress. However, it is reassuring to note that the demographic characteristics of the 272 survey respondents are quite similar to the graduates in the entire population as reported in the summaries provided by participating states. Finally, some self-reported data may be inaccurate or inconsistent. However, most of these inconsistencies appear to be minor, including a few inconsistencies in

wage data, timing of events and job descriptions. These inconsistencies are more likely to occur among survey respondents who work in family care homes and administrative settings, and can be resolved or clarified in subsequent data collection rounds. Generally, however, respondents have been quite forthcoming in telling their own stories by providing many comments that are consistent with the findings based on the quantitative data.

Conclusions

An examination of survey data from AA and BA graduates of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship programs substantiates the finding that these graduates have made meaningful and substantial progress in the first year after the completion of their college degree in early childhood education. That progress has occurred along several dimensions—upward, outward and inward—measured by a number of indicators suggesting a consistent pattern of career progress. Virtually all of these graduates experienced some upward career mobility. This is evident from sizeable wage gains for nearly all of the graduates, regardless of their initial job category. Significant numbers of teachers and assistant teachers also received promotions, contributing to the upward mobility of these ECE educators. Career progress is also evident in the extent to which these T.E.A.C.H. graduates have reached outward as they expand the scope of their professional engagements, actively participated in professional development and exhibited professional leadership. Finally, T.E.A.C.H. graduates have experienced inward progress. They report a strengthened sense of professional identification and self-confidence as a result of their increased knowledge and skills in early childhood education.

As these early childhood educators enter their second year after obtaining a college degree with a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship, they are well on their way to accomplishing the larger mission of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® initiative. The investment in an affordable college education is paying off by upgrading the credentials and rewards of these educators.

Future Reports

A more detailed examination of T.E.A.C.H. graduates focusing on how career outcomes for AA and BA graduates differ will be presented in a subsequent report. That report will employ survey data from three rounds of data collection through 2019. It will focus on the following questions:

- How do the various outcomes in the ECE professional development process—upward mobility, external engagement and internal development—vary for different subgroups?
- How is the career trajectory of T.E.A.C.H. graduates affected by their demographic and early educational background, their current employment situation and the type of degree (AA vs BA) they obtain?

Special thanks go to; 1) our study advisory committee members: John Cregg, Nevada AEYC; Amy Duffy, Child Care Services Association; Phyllis Kalifeh, the Children’s Forum, Jill Arnold, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center at Child Care Services Association and Thomas R. Konrad, evaluator; 2) this paper’s authors: Thomas R. Konrad, Ph. D., Senior Fellow, Ships Center for Health Services Research, Chapel Hill, NC, and Susan Russell, Executive Director, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center at Child Care Services Association; and 3) the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, whose generous support made this project possible. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of this organization.



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