



THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY: EARLY EDUCATOR STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The Pulse Survey included a series of open-ended questions where respondents could describe what they enjoy most and what they wish they could change about their role as an early educator. A consistent theme was that Cambridge's early educators wish others knew more about the vast, multifaceted, and challenging nature of their role. This final brief showcases early educators' own descriptions of the greatest strengths, joys, and challenges of their role.

What do you *ENJOY*
most about your role as
an early educator?

LOVE + APPRECIATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

"Being with the children. They are a gift."

"The kids and their raw sense of wonder."

"I love learning from children! Young children are wise, brilliant, and help me to remember why the world is a good place."

"Children's engagement, their curiosity, [and] their honest, unbiased nature."

"The children that I work with, their curiosity and brilliant minds. I love their creative spirits, humor, kindness, and general approach to life. I adore four and five year olds."

"I love being a part of children's growth and learning, while I learn and grow alongside them."

"I like hearing children explain the world around them."

WORKING WITH FAMILIES

"Developing meaningful relationships with children and families."

"Giving parents new strategies to learn through play."

"Working in partnership with the families."

"Working with and connecting with families to build community brings me great joy."

"Helping families new to the US make connections and feel at home."

VALUE OF COLLEAGUES

"I am in awe of the teachers I work alongside -- they are amazing, talented, creative individuals who constantly remind me why I am in this field."

"Working with my coworkers who are all kind and supportive people. Every day I wake up able to face the day because of them."

"Learning from highly qualified teachers."

CREATIVE NATURE OF THE JOB

"I find creating a classroom environment and building unique curriculum based on the children's interests to be incredibly intellectually stimulating and rewarding."

"Thinking creatively about how to support children with disabilities or other unique learning needs, designing classrooms environments and curriculum."

"I love that I'm able to express myself as an educator and that having [an] emergent curriculum really allows us to be creative and provide experiences for the children that they're truly interested in and love."

"I enjoy planning and doing fun activities, especially messy ones and new ones. Giving children experiences that they will remember."

"Getting to plan creative and stimulating activities, freedom to create alongside the children the curriculum and activities that we focus on."

"Being creative"

"Designing curriculum"



What do you most wish you could **CHANGE** about your role as an early educator?

PUBLIC PERCEPTION + RESPECT

"I would like to change the world's view of ECE to be a public good, with as much respect for those who guide children from birth to 5 as is offered to those who support K-8."

"I wish that we received more respect. That we were seen on par as public school teachers."

"To be seen and valued by the general public as a teacher."

"I wish that people took this line of work seriously."

"The stigma that we are just glorified babysitters."

"More respect from the general public and understanding about the importance of our work."

"That people respect what we do and that it is not just 'babysitting.'"

"Greater societal appreciation and investment in early childhood education."

PAY + BENEFITS

"I wish I was making more than my younger brother,... who works as a waiter."

"I wish early childhood education was subsidized by the state/government so we could pay teachers higher wages without passing the costs to parents via tuition."

"I wish people could understand what we go through and could be compensated fairly for all the work we put into our job (including emotional labor.)"

"More pay, more time off, more sick leave due to always getting sick from kids, better hours."

"We should be more valued and paid wages that we can live in the communities that we work."

"Just more money. Inflation is making life as an early educator very difficult."

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

"I wish that we had more trauma-informed resources, personnel, and support to ensure that the environment works for all students."

"I wish I had more time for documenting and planning"

"I wish that we had true planning time and time for collaboration with our teams."

"I need prep time to create culturally responsive lessons."

"More time for paid planning, and more support when teachers are out. The teaching shortage is felt throughout my center."

"More time. More help. Real breaks from children. Time to meet with teachers as the same level."

"More paid time for planing curriculum, events, meetings with other teachers and interacting in different ways with families. Paid tuition for teachers' children. More professional development about learning differences and how to support children who have them."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

"I wish there were more opportunities for growth that did not involve becoming a director of some sorts, as many of us do not want that to be the next step in our journey... there are not many opportunities like this in our field."

"More professional development/training on special needs and behavioral issues."

"I would like to have more conversations with colleagues about pedagogy."



What do you wish
OTHERS KNEW about
your role as an early
educator?

"The joy that children bring to the class and that I derive from working with them is primarily what motivates me each day to put my best foot forward"

"I feel the profession isn't given the credit it is due and that others don't always recognize the essential and paramount role we play in not only the development of young children but helping our society function."

"I was told when I graduated in 1990 that the field of ECE was on the cusp of finally being a respected profession and that compensation was also going to reflect that change. Thirty years later- sadly, nothing has changed. In fact, I would argue it is actually worse."

"I wish that we were viewed as true professionals more of the time. I have 6 years of higher educational experience in this field, but I think a lot of people think our jobs could be done by anyone."

"I work with children who have severe disabilities. I work very hard every day. I love working with these children. But we need the school system to acknowledge how important our jobs are."

"Being an educator for young children is one of the best accomplishments I have done in my life. I left the field for a short period and then return. I honestly could not see myself doing anything else."

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? ANNOUNCING THE CAMBRIDGE EARLY CHILDHOOD PULSE SURVEY 2.0

As described in Brief #1, the aim of the Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey was to support the city's efforts to describe the composition of Cambridge's early care and education programs, as well as the makeup and perspectives of its workforce. The findings outlined throughout this series of briefs highlight the experiences—both uplifting and challenging—that early educators face in their roles, and their perspectives on these experiences.

As Cambridge's Office of Early Childhood (OEC) moves toward implementing a citywide Universal Pre-K system—the Cambridge Preschool Program (CPP)—in September 2024, learning as much as possible about the individuals who make up the system can help ensure that CPP is responsive to the needs of the workforce.

To continue the effort to support the City's early childhood system-building, early education professionals who work with children from birth to age 5 will have another opportunity to share their insights and experiences. The Harvard Graduate School of Education in partnership with the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood is excited to announce the Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey 2.0! This year's version will build on what was learned from the first Pulse Survey, with the aim of providing ongoing opportunities for early education professionals to share their perspectives and experiences about working within the Cambridge community. Keep an eye out for more information about the launch of Cambridge Pulse 2.0 this fall through the [OEC newsletter and website!](#)

If you have questions or would like to learn more about the Cambridge Early Childhood Pulse Survey, please reach out to us at: zaentz@gse.harvard.edu.