

# Spotlight on Minnesota's R.E.E.T.A.I.N.\* Grant Program

\*Retaining Early Educators Through Attaining Incentives Now

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## Overview

Minnesota's R.E.E.T.A.I.N. (Retaining Early Educators Through Attaining Incentives Now) was created by Child Care Aware (CCA) of Minnesota<sup>1</sup> in 2002 to support the retention of committed and highly qualified early childhood education (ECE) teachers and providers. Child care providers are among some of the lowest paid workers in the country; because of this, retaining highly qualified providers can be challenging (Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2019). Once providers obtain higher educational degrees (e.g., attain a bachelor's or master's degree), they may leave the field in search of higher wages. To address retention difficulties, R.E.E.T.A.I.N. offers two types of salary bonuses to qualified providers: one for center-based providers and one for home-based providers.

R.E.E.T.A.I.N. is intended to complement Minnesota's Teacher Education and Compensation Helps Early Childhood® (T.E.A.C.H.)<sup>2</sup> program by creating a professional development pathway for early childhood providers across the state. T.E.A.C.H. is a nationwide professional development program that provides continuing education supports and tuition assistance to early childhood and school-age care providers. CCA of Minnesota implemented R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonuses as a way to encourage T.E.A.C.H. alumni and other highly qualified providers to remain in the field. While the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus is awarded to many former T.E.A.C.H. recipients, it is not a requirement for R.E.E.T.A.I.N. recipients to have gone through the T.E.A.C.H. program.

Following a yearlong planning process, Child Care Aware began accepting their first R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus applications in fall 2003. The program initially targeted specific counties that already had functioning T.E.A.C.H. programs, and within the first five years R.E.E.T.A.I.N. had spread statewide. While data from 2003–2012 is limited, Child Trends reports that the number of applicants has doubled since 2013 (Shaw et al., 2018). To date, more than 2,000 child care providers with degrees and credentials have received the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus.<sup>3</sup> According to the most recent data available, among the 99 educators who received the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus in 2018, the average bonus was \$2,323 (Shaw et al., 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.childcareawaremn.org/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.childcareawaremn.org/providers/grants-and-scholarships/teach-scholarships/>

<sup>3</sup> Child Care Aware of Minnesota (2019). *R.E.E.T.A.I.N. Workforce Retention Program*. Retrieved from: <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/92513e79-3c74-422f-b96f-7148d42cd19c.pdf>

## Financial incentives

R.E.E.T.A.I.N. is a unique financial incentive program for ECE providers because it has no restrictions on how bonuses can be spent. CCA of Minnesota intentionally designed R.E.E.T.A.I.N. to give child care providers the flexibility to use the funds in ways that best meet their needs. R.E.E.T.A.I.N. administrators do not require recipients to report how bonuses are spent; however, R.E.E.T.A.I.N. sends out an informal survey at the end of each year for their own internal tracking purposes. They report that most recipients invest the bonus in their respective child care settings or use the bonus to pay off loans or bills. Bonuses range from \$500 to \$3,500 per year and are disbursed in two installments within the one-year timeframe (Shaw et al., 2018).

## R.E.E.T.A.I.N. requirements and eligibility

To apply for the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus, teachers must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Be licensed to provide child care or work for a licensed child care program
- Work with the same children for at least 30 hours per week
- Have worked in their current position for at least one year
- Remain in their current position for at least one year following receipt of the bonus
- Hold a Minnesota Child Care Credential or a Career Lattice Step of 6 or higher
- NOT currently receiving a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship

If teachers meet the initial eligibility requirements, their applications are scored based on the following criteria (preferences):

- Length of service in current position
- Wages
- Career Lattice Step
- Training hours in past year
- Leadership activities
- Ages of children they currently serve
- Prior receipt of R.E.E.T.A.I.N. grant

Minnesota's Develop Career Lattice<sup>4</sup> is a professional development tool used to assess child care providers' experience, level of education, and relevant certifications. The Career Lattice is used to help employers find highly qualified candidates, as well as help child care providers identify how to move forward in their career. Preference for R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonuses is given to applicants who have lower wages and higher Career Lattice steps. Preference is also given to teachers who work with infants and toddlers and ECE teachers who have not received a previous R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus.

The Career Lattice is an important consideration during the application process. Teachers are assigned to a step in the Career Lattice based on their level of education as well as the leadership and professional development opportunities in which they have engaged. The Career Lattice was added to the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. application criteria in 2014 to increase providers' participation in Develop, the statewide early childhood

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<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.developtoolmn.org/>

quality improvement and registry system through which the Career Lattice is accessed. By making the Career Lattice a requirement of the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. application, CCA of Minnesota hoped to increase the number of providers accessing Develop, further expanding the network of registered providers. The Career Lattice assists R.E.E.T.A.I.N. in identifying both highly qualified and committed early childhood providers.

In order to reach more providers, R.E.E.T.A.I.N. allows applicants to apply for the bonus every year, and an average of 35 percent of applicants are awarded bonuses each year. However, providers who receive the bonus must wait one additional year before applying again. Applicants are not allowed to receive both the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship and R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus within the same year.

## Funding

R.E.E.T.A.I.N.'s funding streams have changed throughout the lifespan of the program, and funding amounts vary from year to year. When R.E.E.T.A.I.N. began, funding came from a variety of sources, including private donations and federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) funds. The program is now funded through the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), administered by Minnesota's Department of Human Services (DHS). Unlike other incentive programs, R.E.E.T.A.I.N. does not have a single source of ongoing or continuous funding. CCA of Minnesota must submit a new request for funding to DHS every three years.

Funding for R.E.E.T.A.I.N. goes toward providing award bonuses for providers and supporting three part-time CCA of Minnesota staff who manage R.E.E.T.A.I.N. The award bonuses are allocated to two different award pools, one for center-based providers and the other for family-based providers. Each year, funds are equally allocated to both pools; however, the center-based award pool is eligible to receive additional funding, based upon availability, due to its larger number of applicants.

## Successes and Challenges

### Successes

CCA of Minnesota reports two major successes of the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonuses: the increased level of interest from child care providers and the positive feedback from recipients. Feedback indicates that applicants and award recipients view the program as necessary and value the flexibility of the bonus funds. Recipients report that award bonuses help to alleviate some of the strain experienced by ECE providers as a result of their low wages, making it easier for them to remain in their position. CCA has also observed benefits of R.E.E.T.A.I.N.'s alignment with Develop. Because Develop's Career Lattice is integral to the application process and can only be accessed through the registry, R.E.E.T.A.I.N. has helped to increase awareness of the registry and boost its popularity among child care providers, further supporting their professional development needs.

### Challenges

CCA of Minnesota identified the limit on appropriated funds to meet the demand for R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonuses as a major challenge. While program administrators are very appreciative of the funding they receive, limited funding forces R.E.E.T.A.I.N. to turn down a significant number of applicants each year. Another challenge for R.E.E.T.A.I.N. is ensuring that the application process identifies the providers who are most qualified *and* most in need of financial support; however, since the application does not set a specific cap on wages, it is possible for more highly paid providers to be awarded the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus. In the future, this

challenge may be addressed by implementing a maximum wage limit as an eligibility requirement to receive the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus, rather than an applicant's wage as a preference during the application process.

## Conclusions

CCA of Minnesota hopes that R.E.E.T.A.I.N. can serve as a model for other states looking to support and retain their ECE workforce, and continue supporting teachers in Minnesota. The flexibility of the R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonus allows teachers to use the money in ways best suited to their needs—something that program administrators say is greatly appreciated by a historically underpaid workforce. R.E.E.T.A.I.N.'s incorporation of other professional development supports and tools (T.E.A.C.H., Develop) has helped extend the resources available to ECE teachers and child care providers in Minnesota. While R.E.E.T.A.I.N. has funding needed to support the program for at least three more years, CCA of Minnesota is hopeful the program will continue for even longer.

## Additional Information

For additional information on R.E.E.T.A.I.N. bonuses, please visit this website:

<https://www.childcareawaremn.org/providers/grants-and-scholarships/REETAIN-bonuses/>

## References

Shaw, S., Hilty, R., Lloyd, C. M., Nagle, K., Paschall, K., Warner-Richter, M., Moron, L., & Tout, K. (2018). *Evaluation of R.E.E.T.A.I.N., Minnesota's Child Care Workforce Retention Program – Final Report*. Minneapolis, MN: Child Trends for the Minnesota Department of Human Services. DHS-7809A 1-19.

Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/>.

### Project Overview

This project aims to understand how state policies, funding, and practices support the strengthening of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce.

The purpose of this series of “Spotlights” is to highlight strategies and initiatives being implemented by state and local agencies designed to support the development of the ECE workforce.

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