

WORTHY WAGES

Why Every ECE Program Needs a Salary Scale

Dr. Tamar Andrews, EdD

American Jewish University | Early Childhood Education

Webinar

Welcome — About Today's Presenter

Dr. Tamar Andrews, EdD

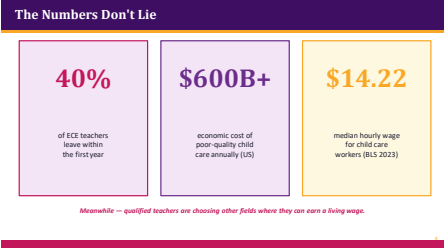
- ◆ 40+ years in ECE & child welfare
- ◆ Author
- ◆ preschool director
- ◆ PD trainer for early childhood educators
- ◆ expert witness, ECE child care/licensure cases
- ◆ University professor

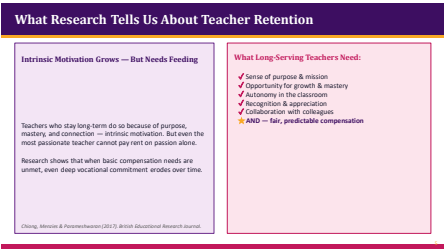
What We'll Cover Today

1. The ECE retention crisis & what research tells us
2. Why salary scales are the answer
3. The 5-level teacher framework
4. Building your salary scale step-by-step
5. Weighted scoring — education, years, performance
6. Finding the money to fund higher wages
7. How to talk to your board & make the case
8. Implementation tips & live Q&A

Part 1

The Retention Crisis in ECE





What Does Teacher Turnover Actually Cost You?

50-200%

of annual salary per teacher lost

Source: Center for American Progress

Recruitment

job postings, admin time, background checks

Onboarding

Training, orientation, paperwork, mentoring

Lost Quality

Irregularity harms children's learning & wellbeing

Reputation

Word spreads — families choose other programs

A salary scale is not a cost — it's your most powerful retention investment.

Part 2

What Is a Salary Scale — and Why Does It Work?

What Is a Salary Scale?

"A salary scale is a structural, transparent system that determines how teachers are compensated based on clearly defined, objective criteria — not on who asks loudest or who you like best."

**Equity & Fairness**

Every teacher is evaluated on the same objective criteria

**Transparency**

Staff always know where they stand and how to advance

**Retention Power**

Teachers stay when they see a clear, rewarding career path

**Director Confidence**

You have data to back every compensation decision

Part 3

The 5-Level Teacher Framework

Five Levels of Teaching Excellence

Level 1 Entry	Level 2 Developing	Level 3 Proficient	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
New to the Field	Assistant / Teacher-in-Training	Lead Teacher	Lead Teacher + Mentor	Lead Teacher + Admin
Learning the basics, needs close mentoring and support	Growing skills, stepping into new responsibilities	Independently runs a high-quality classroom	Supports colleagues' growth alongside their own classroom	Shares leadership responsibilities, partner in program quality

Why Levels Matter — Clarity Creates Motivation

Without Levels: ✗ Raises: feel arbitrary & political ✗ No clear path to advancement ✗ Experienced teachers request new hires ✗ You can't explain your decisions ✗ Trust erodes over time	With Levels: ✓ Every teacher knows exactly where they stand ✓ Clear criteria for moving forward ✓ Peer mentoring is built into the culture ✓ Decisions are data-driven and defensible ✓ Trust and morale improve
---	---

Part 4

Building Your Salary Scale: The 4 Factors

The 4 Factors That Drive Salary Increases

Each factor is scored 0-5 and carries a weight that reflects its importance in your program's values:

**Teaching Level**

20%

Which of the 5 levels does the teacher currently hold? Level 1-5 score.

**Education & Courses**

20%

ECE units, AA, BA, MA -- scored 0-5 on a defined rubric.

**Years at Your Center**

10%

Loyalty matters. Longer tenure earns a higher score.

**Performance Review**

50%

The most important factor. Formal evaluation on a 1-5 scale.

The Scoring Rubric — Turning Criteria Into Numbers

Score	Teaching Level	Education	Years at Center	Performance
1	Entry (New to field)	0-32 ECE units	0-1 years	Probationary
2	Developing (Asst.)	32-64 units	1-2 years	Below Expectations
3	Proficient (Lead)	64 units / AA	2-5 years	Meets Expectations
4	Advanced (Mentor)	BA degree	5-8 years	Exceeds Expectations
5	Expert (Lead/Admin)	MA degree	8+ years	Significantly Exceeds

Weighted Score = (Level x 0.20) + (Education x 0.20) + (Years x 0.10) + (Performance x 0.50) | Max Score = 75

Setting Salary Bands by Level

Salary bands define the range for each level — giving structure without being rigid:

Level 1 Entry	New to field	\$13 – \$16/hr
Level 2 Developing	Asst. / on-training	\$16 – \$24/hr
Level 3 Proficient	Lead teacher	\$24 – \$34/hr
Level 4 Advanced	Lead + Mentor	\$34 – \$37/hr
Level 5 Expert	Lead + Admin	\$37+ /hr

Tip: Review and adjust bands annually. Share them openly with all staff!

The Formula in Action — A Real Example

Teacher: Lead teacher, BA degree, 6 years

Teaching Level (Level 3)	3.0	× 0.20	=
Education (BA)	4.0	× 0.20	=
Years at Center (5-6 yrs)	4.0	× 0.10	=
Performance (Succeeds)	4.0	× 0.50	=
Weighted Score: 3.00 out of 5			
Raise: (3.00 ÷ 5) × 7% = \$ 3.24%			

What This Means:

- ✓ Transparent — teacher can verify the math
- ✓ Objective — based on documented criteria
- ✓ Motivating — score of 4 instead of 3 means a bigger raise
- ✓ Consistent — applied the same way to everyone
- ✓ Defensible — you can explain every decision

Your spreadsheet does all this math automatically!

Part 5

Finding the Money — Funding Higher Wages

Where Can the Money Come From?

**Go Year-Round**

Move from 10-month to 12-month calendar — charge 12-month tuition, pay 12-month salaries. Teachers earn more, families get consistent care.

**Reallocate Supplies Budget**

Go zero-waste. Reduce consumable purchasing. Redirect those dollars to salaries — teachers appreciate far pay more than new craft supplies.

**Leverage Technology**

Apps like Playground, Hixlens, and Instant Business save admin time and supply costs. Reusing Budget. Time saved = money saved.

**Revisit Benefits Structure**

Offer teachers a choice: full benefits OR opt-out (up to 40% don't want health insurance, redirect that premium cost).

**Apply for ECE Grants & Subsidies**

CCDBG, Child Care Stabilization Funds, state pre-K grants, and ECE Synapse Foundation grants can supplement wages directly.

**Make Your Case to the Board**

A congregation or board that values equity must practice it. Payparent turnover costs vs. salary scale investment — the math makes the case.

Beyond the Paycheck — Non-Salary Compensation

Remember: benefits cost the center ~12% more than the salary amount -- use them strategically!

**Pay for Degrees**

Tuition reimbursement for ECE courses creates loyalty and raises their earning index level.

**Pay for PD**

Conference attendance, webinars, and coaching — invest in their growth, invest in your program.

**Planning Time**

Protected weekly prep time lets teachers their professionalism matters.

**Extra PTO**

Bonus days off for high performance scores — low cost, high value.

**Resource Access**

Curated music playlists, shared lesson libraries, teaching toolkits — make their job easier.

**Voice & Autonomy**

Budget control over classroom supplies, input into curriculum decisions.

Part 6

Making It Real — Implementation & Advocacy

7

How to Implement Your Salary Scale — 6 Steps

1 Define Your 5 Levels Write clear, observable descriptions for each level — involve teachers in the process	2 Build Your Rubric Set the 3–5 scoring criteria for education, years, performance, and level	3 Set Your Weights Decide what matters most in your program — adjust the 4 factor weights accordingly
4 Create Salary Bands Establish minimum/maximum ranges for each level based on your budget reality	5 Share It Transparently Give every teacher a copy; walk through it at a staff meeting; celebrate it!	6 Commit to Annual Review Review bands and weights each year; adjust for cost of living and program growth

Making the Case to Your Board or Funders

"You cannot promote equity, equality, and justice if you do not practice it at home." — Dr. Temar Andrews

🔥 Lead with the math Turnover costs 50–200% of salary. A \$2,000 raise costs far less than one replacement cycle.	📊 Show the data Present your current turnover rate, average tenure, and what that has cost in real dollars.
🎯 Frame it as values Your mission is child development. That requires stable, qualified, motivated teachers.	🔗 Connect to reputation Low wages lead to poor reviews, weak enrollment, and loss of accreditation standing.
📝 Bring a draft scale Come with the framework ready. Make it easy to say yes by doing the homework first.	🗣️ Invite teacher voice A teacher sharing their experience is more powerful than any spreadsheet.

From the Field — Temple Isaiah Preschool

A Real Salary Scale in Action — 40+ Staff, 30+ Years, Sustained Quality

The Challenge Jewish preschool, temple-based, operating on a tight budget with a deeply dedicated but underpaid staff	The Approach Created a 5-level, 4-factor salary scale with transparent bands. Shared openly with every teacher on day one.	Key Moves Went 12-month, not consumable waste, reallocated supplies budget, renegotiated benefits structure
The Results Teachers with 15–20 year tenures. Low turnover. Strong classroom quality. Staff who feel respected and valued.	What We Learned "Transparency builds trust. A clear path forward changes the conversation from 'why aren't we getting a raise' to 'here's what we're working toward'."	The Board Conversation "We cannot promote tzedakah if we don't practice it with our own staff." That framing changed everything.

?

Questions & Discussion

What questions do you have? What will you try first?

5 Things to Take Home Today

1

Teacher retention starts with fair, transparent compensation — not just passion.

2

A salary scale removes guesswork, favoritism, and distrust from your center's culture.

3

Four factors — level, education, tenure, performance — drive every raise decision.

4

The money is there: go 12-month, reallocate, apply for grants, make your board case.

5

Share it openly. Transparency is your most powerful retention tool.

Thank You!

Your teachers are waiting for you to lead this change.

Dr. Tamar Andrews, EdD

tamar.andrews@aju.edu

American Jewish University | Senior Director of Degree Programs

Resources: NAAC.org | CCSA.net | IvyMagisound.com | TEPsharper.org

Additional Resources

- [*Salary Scale Sheet*](#)
- [*Teacher Evaluation*](#)
