

White Paper
Care as Culture, Culture as Resistance:
The Black Family Child Care Educator
Well-Being Project

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Dear colleagues, families, and community partners,

We write this letter with deep respect and unwavering commitment to the Black women who sustain our youngest learners through family child care. These community mothers—often undervalued, often under-resourced—are the backbone of early learning in communities across the country. They braid care, culture, and curriculum into every corner of their homes, creating spaces where children are not only safe, but loved.

And yet, they are fighting to stay.

This white paper, *Care as Culture, Culture as Resistance: The Black Family Child Care Educator Well-Being Project*, is both a call to action and a reflection of truth. It emerges from a study rooted in the lived experiences of Black family child care educators (FCC educators), who shared their stories through surveys, community talks, and peer exchanges. Their voices reveal a profession under strain—shrinking in scale, fractured by policy, and burdened by race- and gender-based inequities. But they also reveal something more powerful: a wellspring of leadership, cultural strength, resistance, and aspiration.

We offer this brief not just as a summary of findings, but as a blueprint for change. It centers a culturally situated framework for well-being—one that honors the social, familial, and spiritual capital Black FCC educators carry. It outlines practical supports, policy shifts, and community-driven infrastructures that can help sustain this vital workforce.

To every educator who has whispered, “*I’m tired, but I’m still here,*” this work is for you. To every policymaker, funder, and ally: may this brief help you listen more deeply, act more boldly, and resource more justly.

We are in this together. And together, we can protect the joy, dignity, and power of Black family child care.

With gratitude and solidarity,

Ashley Watts, EdD & Crystasany R. Turner, PhD

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Executive Summary

Black Family Child Care Educators (FCC educators) are foundational to early childhood systems, serving as cultural bearers, pedagogical leaders, and trusted community anchors for children and families. Their homes function as culturally sustaining learning environments where identity, belonging, and holistic development are nurtured daily. Yet despite their indispensable contributions, Black FCC educators continue to navigate systemic inequities—rooted in racialized and gendered histories of carework—that undermine their well-being and threaten the long-term sustainability of home-based care. These inequities are not incidental; they reflect structural conditions that marginalize home-based educators, devalue culturally grounded pedagogies, and limit access to the resources, compensation, and recognition required to thrive.

Key Findings:

- Survey data reveal significant gaps in professional supports for Black FCC educators. While workshops (25%) and collaboratives (23%) were the most frequently accessed supports, educators reported limited access to culturally responsive resources and peer networks. Barriers included financial constraints (24%), limited information (23%), and a scarcity of culturally relevant supports (22%).
- Community Talks underscore the centrality of relational and community-rooted supports. Nearly 40% of all reported supports were relational or cultural in nature—relationships with families, peers, mentors, and cultural or spiritual anchors—highlighting the need for community-rooted networks that reflect Black FCC educators’ lived experiences.
- Black FCC educators provide culturally affirming, relational, and intergenerational learning environments that serve as protective factors for children and families. They consistently draw on cultural, familial, and spiritual capital to sustain children and families’ well-being and belonging.
- Although structural undervaluation and inadequate compensation persist, despite Black FCC educators’ essential contributions, educators rated their overall well-being at a moderate 8.06 out of 10. Their narratives reveal cultural, familial, and spiritual capital as well as grassroots networks that undergird their stability and sense of well-being.
- Educator well-being is shaped by systemic conditions—not individual effort alone. FCC educators described how economic precarity, fragmented systems, and punitive oversight directly affect their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, reinforcing that well-being is a structural issue requiring policy and investment shifts.
- Early childhood systems often fail to recognize or resource the cultural wealth Black FCC educators bring, privileging center-based models and credentialed narratives while

overlooking the relational, community-rooted, and culturally sustaining practices that define high-quality home-based care.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Redefine educator well-being as a structural and socio-political issue:** Frame Black FCCE well-being as shaped by compensation, race, policy, and systemic conditions—not individual resilience—and commit to reforms that guarantee living wages, culturally responsive supports, and recognition of educators as essential community anchors.
2. **Center Black FCC educators in policy and practice as system architects, not peripheral actors:** Ensure Black FCC educators are embedded in governance, licensing redesign, QRIS reform, and funding decisions so their lived expertise, cultural wealth, and community-rooted practices guide how early childhood systems are structured and evaluated.
3. **Reform licensing, regulations, and credentialing to be equity-centered and competency-based:** Replace exclusionary, degree-driven pathways with flexible models that honor prior experience, validate demonstrated competencies, reduce financial barriers, and align preparation with the realities of home-based care.
4. **Strengthen professional supports through sustained, culturally responsive infrastructures:** Build stable systems of support—including relevant PD, technology access, coaching, peer cohorts, and affinity groups—that reduce isolation, honor lived expertise, center the unique racial-linguistic needs of Black communities, and are funded as core infrastructure rather than short-term projects.
5. **Guarantee equitable compensation and comprehensive benefits as a matter of justice:** Establish living-wage floors, leverage philanthropic efforts, pay parity, direct cash opportunities, and publicly funded benefits (health insurance, retirement, paid leave) tied to explicit equity goals, directly addressing the historic and ongoing devaluation of Black FCC educators' cultural, pedagogical, and community labor.

Implementing these recommendations requires confronting the racialized and gendered histories that have long devalued Black women's carework. It demands intentional investment in community-rooted supports and a narrative shift that positions Black FCC educators as essential leaders in early childhood education.

By embracing these changes, policymakers and system leaders can build more equitable, culturally grounded early childhood systems that sustain Black FCC educators and the communities they serve, ensuring a thriving future for children and educators alike.

Background

The study, *“Healing Myself to Get Back in the Fight”: Toward a Culturally-Situated Framework for Black Family Child Care Educator Well-Being* (Turner et al., forthcoming), examines the

occupational well-being of Black Family Child Care educators (FCC educators) and the role of professional supports in sustaining their practice. Family child care represents a critical sector of the early childhood workforce, serving a significant share of young children in the United States (Harmeyer et al., 2023; Schneider, 2025). Black FCC educators, in particular, provide culturally affirming care and act as protective factors for children and families, yet they continue to face systemic inequities and stratification within the ECE ecosystem that contribute to high rates of attrition (Turner, 2022; Watts & Turner, forthcoming). In recent years, the number of licensed FCC homes has declined by between 24 and 50 percent, a loss that disproportionately impacts communities of color who rely on FCC educators for access, affordability, and cultural congruence (Harmeyer et al., 2023; Kelton & Tennis, 2024; Weisenfeld & Harmeyer, 2024).

These inequities are not new; they are rooted in historical legacies of racism, classism, and gendered exploitation that have long shaped the undervaluation and undercompensation of FCC educators (Orland et al., 2022; Early Childhood History, Organizing, Ethos and Strategy, 2022; Llyod et al., 2021). For generations, Black women have carried the weight of sustaining families and communities through their carework, even as their labor has been diminished, disregarded, and excluded from systems of recognition and support.

Today, Black FCC educators continue this legacy by providing culturally affirming care, fostering resilience, and serving as protective factors for children and families who rely on them for access, affordability, and cultural congruence. Black FCC educators embody a lineage of community mothering that has sustained Black children and families across generations, yet their labor remains systematically marginalized within early childhood systems (Turner, 2022; Watts & Turner, forthcoming). Their caregiving is not simply transactional—it is cultural, pedagogical, and political, grounded in oral traditions, diasporic practices, and communal responsibility. As living archives, FCC educators preserve collective memory through storytelling, embodied rituals, and home-based environments that affirm identity and belonging.

Despite this, policy frameworks and archival practices often privilege center-based models and credentialed narratives, erasing the expertise and resilience of Black women educators. Reframing FCC educators as builders of capital and anchors of community positions their work as essential to educational equity. Doing so calls for systems to honor their contributions and integrate their knowledge into the design of equitable, culturally sustaining infrastructures that truly reflect the diversity and strength of the early childhood workforce.

To illuminate these dynamics, this study employed a **convergent mixed-methods design**, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative narratives gathered through Community Talks. **Forty-seven FCC educators completed surveys, 23 joined a GroupMe community, and 12 participated in Community Talk sessions.** Participants were predominantly African American/Black women, and most were mid-career professionals aged 50–59, with more than half reporting over two decades of experience in the field.

FCCE Demographical Highlights

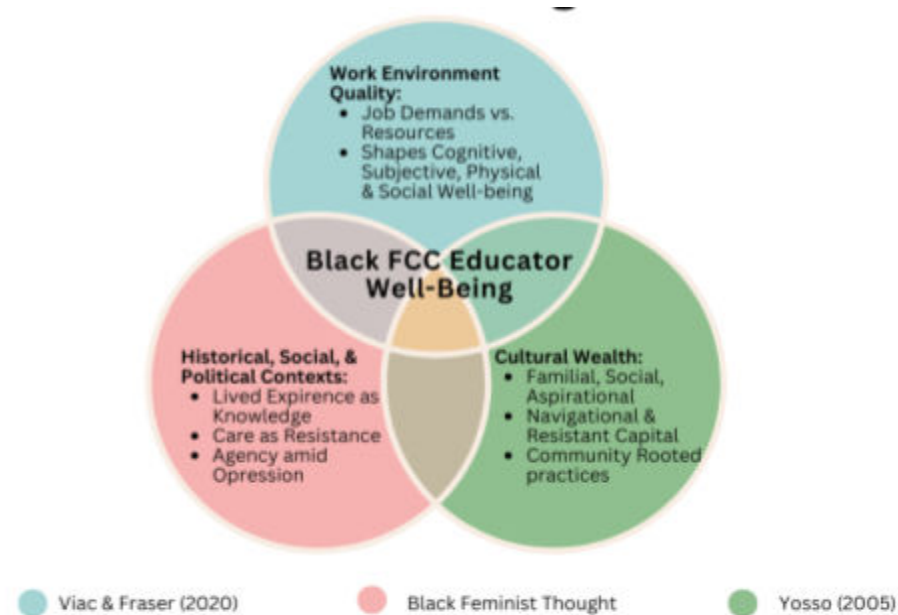
- **Gender:** All participants were female (100%).
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Eighty-seven percent (87%) identified as African American/Black , with smaller representation across mixed race, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino, and other identities.
- **Primary Language:** Ninety-six percent (96%) of the participants spoke English, with a small percentage speaking Spanish and Arabic.
- **Education:** Roughly eighty percent (80%) of participants held an associate's degree or higher, with smaller groups holding a CDA, GED, or some college.
- **Age Range:** Most participants were between 50–59 years of age (45%) and 60–69 (29%), showing a seasoned workforce.
- **Years in the Field:** Over half had more than 20 years of experience, underscoring deep expertise.
- **Program Characteristics:** Most FCC programs served between 4–12 children, with a few serving larger groups.

Toward a Culturally-Situated Framework for Understanding Well-Being

Honoring the rich history and diasporic traditions that Black FCC educators uphold, this study analyzes the dynamics of FCC educators' well-being. The study integrates Viac and Fraser's Teachers' Well-Being Framework, Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model, and Black Feminist Thought. The three integrated perspectives:

- **Viac & Fraser's Teachers' Well-Being Framework (2020)** highlights how job demands and resources shape cognitive, emotional, physical, and social well-being. FCC educators face intensified demands as caregivers and small business owners, underscoring the need for equity-centered supports.
- **Bromer & Turner's (2023) adaptation of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model** illuminates the aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, linguistic and spiritual capital that FCC educators mobilize. These assets—storytelling, oral traditions, communal responsibility—function as protective factors and affirm identity.
- **Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000, 2002)** centers lived experience, standpoint epistemology, and agency. It reframes FCC educators as cultural workers and knowledge producers, resisting deficit narratives and redefining well-being as a socio-political construct.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework for Black FCC Educator Well-Being



Together, these perspectives situate FCC educators' well-being as both structurally constrained and actively cultivated through cultural wealth and resistance practices. Our culturally situated framework argues for a redefinition of educator well-being that moves beyond traditional, school-based models to account for the historical, cultural, and political realities of Black FCC educators. It calls for equity-centered supports that validate lived experience, integrate cultural wealth into professional infrastructures, and dismantle systemic barriers. In doing so, the framework positions Black FCC educators not as peripheral actors but as central to reimagining early childhood systems—anchoring equity, resilience, and cultural continuity for generations to come.

Findings

As a mixed-methods study, several key findings emerged. The overarching takeaway is that while educators rated themselves with moderate well-being—**26 percent reported an average of 8.06 out of 10—their narratives reveal the persistent inequities and systemic stratification they endure**¹. Yet within these stories lies a profound wealth of capital—cultural, social, navigational, aspirational, resistance, and familial—that sustains their work, their programs, and their communities.

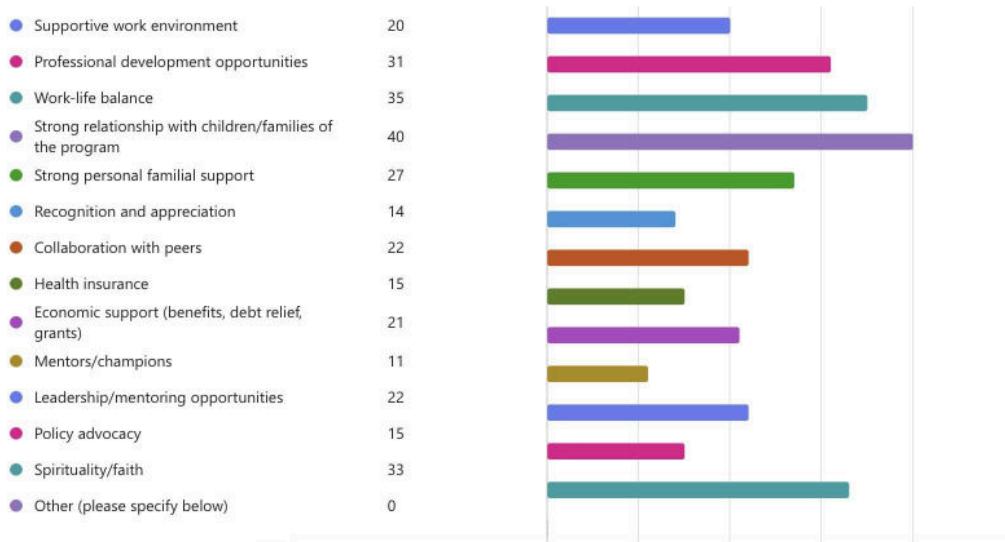
¹ The average well-being score of 8.06 should be interpreted cautiously. Although 26 percent of educators selected this rating, qualitative responses revealed that numeric scores often reflected personal resilience rather than actual working conditions. This discrepancy underscores the limits of self-reported metrics and highlights the need to pair quantitative indicators with contextual data to avoid masking systemic inequities.

Across both survey and narrative data, relational supports surfaced as the most significant contributors to well-being. **Relationships with families (familial capital), peers and fellow educators (social capital), and mentors or trusted advisors were consistently named as essential.** Additionally, anchors—such as faith and spirituality (spiritual capital), cultural traditions, and intergenerational caregiving practices—played a central role in how educators sustained themselves. Together, these relational and cultural dimensions accounted for nearly 40 percent of all self-reported supports, underscoring the importance of community-rooted practices in sustaining FCC educators' well-being.

Professional supports such as **workshops (25%) and collaboratives (23%) were the most frequently accessed**, yet these were often insufficient in addressing the deeper structural challenges educators faced. Systemic supports—health insurance, economic relief, paid time off, and professional recognition—lagged significantly behind. The survey further revealed stark barriers to accessing culturally affirming supports: financial constraints (24%), limited information (23%), and scarcity of culturally relevant resources (22%) emerged as the most significant obstacles. These barriers illuminate how FCC educators are routinely left navigating fragmented systems, punitive oversight, and inequitable pay without the structural supports necessary for stability or growth.

Importantly, examining the survey findings alongside the narrative data provided a more holistic picture of FCCE well-being than either source could offer alone. While the survey responses initially suggested fewer concerns about professional supports than anticipated, the narratives shared through the Community Talks made clear that this did not reflect a lack of need. Instead, **it revealed Black women's long-standing tradition of creating their own infrastructures of care** by building their own networks, sharing knowledge, and cultivating community-based strategies for both individual and collective survival and thriving.

Figure 2. Contributing Factors of Well-Being



Professional & Personal Well-Being

True to the purpose of the study, **well-being emerged as a nuanced and layered concept among Black FCC educators.** Some educators described being able to distinguish their personal well-being from their professional roles, while others emphasized that the two were inseparable. Many educators articulated how their emotional, physical, and spiritual health was deeply shaped by the needs, struggles, and experiences of the children and families they served.

Educators explained the **tension between caring for themselves and caring for others:** Multiple providers described the guilt felt when tending to their own needs, noting that even attending medical appointments felt burdensome because their absence directly impacted families' ability to work. Another educator described unrealized intentions to make time for herself, *"I have to take a few minutes for myself—and I have to pray. I literally have to pray ... sometimes I say I'm going to spend the day for me, but that's not always true."*

Several FCC educators spoke about the **financial and emotional self-sacrifice** embedded in their daily routines. As one provider shared, *"Any little dollar I get, I'm instantly thinking about what the daycare needs ... I'm always thinking about them."* Another echoed this sentiment: *"Honestly, I don't really think about myself. Other than taking a moment on Saturdays to breathe, everything is about the daycare. If I have an extra five dollars, I want to make sure the kids have a doll or what they need."*

Educators also described the **emotional weight of supporting children experiencing trauma.** One FCCE reflected, *"Children are coming in with more traumatizing experiences—things going*

on at home. When they come in in the morning, it's almost like they're bringing what happened at home with them to school." Another recounted caring for a child affected by domestic violence, noting how "familial trauma entered the childcare space and manifested in children's behavior."

Yet amid these pressures, educators also described **moments of grounding and joy**. As one FCC educator shared, "I love being with the kids. I feel like no matter what's going on ... for me, just being in their presence, it's like a peace." Collectively, these narratives reveal a persistent imbalance: FCC educators sustain themselves through relationships, cultural anchors, spirituality, and community-rooted practices, even as formal systems fail to adequately resource or validate their contributions.

Inequities and Systems Stratification

System stratification operates through layered hierarchies—across funding, policy, professional recognition, and access to resources—that privilege center-based models while marginalizing home-based educators, particularly Black women educators. These inequities are experienced daily through fragmented systems, punitive oversight, and the persistent devaluation of home-based care.

Across Community Talks, FCC educators described navigating **overlapping and conflicting requirements that undermine their stability and well-being**. Many spoke about being treated as less professional than their center-based peers, despite carrying equal or greater responsibility. As one provider stated, "We do the same work, sometimes more, but the system treats us like babysitters instead of educators." This sentiment was echoed throughout the various Community Talks, reflecting a widespread experience of **diminished professional recognition**.

Educators also described how **modality-based bias** shaped their interactions with licensing and subsidy representatives. One educator reflected on the complexity of these encounters:

Sometimes it's not a bias based on the same culture... you know, Black woman and another Black woman comes in, consultant or licensor or whatever, and because they have biases against family child care, they have biases against... big business versus small business and what that means to them based on what their past was."

Her words illuminate how systemic inequities are reproduced not only through policy but through interpersonal interactions shaped by internalized hierarchies and assumptions about the legitimacy of home-based care.

Ultimately, these inequities are rooted in the field's legacy of racism, classism, and gendered exploitation that continue to shape the undervaluation of Black women's labor. The persistence of stratification underscores the need for equity-centered reforms that dismantle hierarchies privileging center-based models and instead recognize FCC educators as essential and competent anchors of community care.



Uplifting an Abundance of Capital

Black FCC educators draw on deep reservoirs of cultural wealth to sustain their programs, support children and families, and navigate inequitable early childhood systems. Their narratives reflect the forms of capital identified in the Community Cultural Wealth framework (Bromer et al. 2023; Turner, 2025)—*social, aspirational, cultural, resistant, navigational, familial and spiritual capital*—each operating as a source of strength, expertise, and community resilience.

Social Capital

In this study, social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and trusted connections the educators rely on to access information, resources, opportunities, and mutual support. It includes both individual ties (i.e., colleagues, mentors, family leaders) and organizational links (local community organizations, training providers, child-care networks, funders, and licensing agencies) that **enable educators to solve problems, learn new practices, refer families, and amplify their voice**. Although FCC educators described feeling excluded from various professional supports, they described creating their own networks that addressed the unique, intersectional needs of Black family childcare education. One educator described a grassroots network she connected with:

Through this network, we've created clusters where African American providers can learn together, mentor one another, and build community. We help with business practices, marketing, classroom design, and professional growth. This year, we graduated our first cohort from [a local college's] assistant teacher certificate program. It's something I'm incredibly proud of, especially as a founding member.

When reflecting on various incidences of racial- and modality-based discrimination, specifically in the resource and referral agencies, educators throughout the Community Talks **emphasized the importance of having professional supports specifically for Black FCC programs**. As such, they often discussed having to create their own affinity spaces and networks of support. When describing the reasoning behind co-founding a group in North Carolina, one educator stated,

Our purpose is to come together and set our own agenda—because if we don't advocate for ourselves, no one else will. Every other culture seems to have spaces that are specific to them. Resource and Referral agencies provide information broadly, but it's not targeted.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital referenced the FCC educators' optimism, purpose, and commitment in their caregiving and educational roles, even in the face of systemic bias, marginalization, and structural barriers. We also saw this manifest as the educators continued to imagine solutions to current issues and dream toward a more equitable future for their children, families, and communities. When asked about challenges related to cultural representation within professional development, one educator reflected on the progress that has been made due to decades of advocacy in the field.

I don't think they're fully there yet, but we're getting there. At one time, we didn't even have a seat at the table. Now family child care providers have a voice. We're able to share our experiences—the obstacles, challenges, and successes.

She then shared:

Now that we have a seat, people are starting to understand that we do much of what a Class A center does. It's about recognition. [...] Even having our names mentioned—being included in classes or hearing people say “family child care.” That's exciting. When I first started, everything was about centers. Now we finally have a seat at the table.

Although the educators recognized there is still much work to be done in creating more visibility and equitable policy for FCC within early childhood education, this reflection tended toward pride for the work that is already being done and hope for further change in the future. In another Community Talk, educators gained hope and motivation in the realization that there were others in the Black family child care space who were navigating similar issues:

You all are amazing and we all are on the same wavelength of things happening in different parts of the world, but it's the same issues. How is it that one Black community continues to have the same issue? We need to change the narrative, we have to change the narrative.

From this, the educators began brainstorming various solutions to connect the parents in their communities to local resources. The space of connection and solidarity cultivated within the Community Talks reanimated the educators and regenerated momentum toward continuing their work to build a better future.

Resistance Capital

Resistance capital emerged in educators' refusal to internalize deficit narratives about home-based care and in their persistence despite systemic disrespect and bias. Our team conceptualized this capital to be the **demonstrations of resilience, tenacity, and agency within systems not built for their success. These opportunities reflect their ability to assert voice, develop their own systems and pathways, and showcase how collective agency can prevail despite structural inequities.** This capital manifested in one Community Talk as the educators discussed the effects of universal preschool on their children, communities, and businesses. Educators spoke passionately about the harms of culturally

unresponsive teachers who do not know or value the diverse social-cultural needs of the children in their classroom. One educator stated:

What worries me even more is how this impacts Black children. When children are misunderstood in schools, they're labeled—ADD, ADHD, autism—when often it's a lack of cultural understanding. Schools receive more funding for diagnoses, but that doesn't always translate into real support for the child.

In addition to concerns about children being pushed into culturally-unresponsive formal schooling, the educator—rooted in community care and socio-political consciousness—went on to reify the unique values of the family child care space:

We used to talk about the school-to-prison pipeline. Now it's preschool-to-prison. They're starting earlier, and it's dangerous. We have to stay alert and push back, because what's being framed as "free" comes with a cost. [...] This is our work because we care about our children and we care about the future. We pour into them day and night, constantly giving of ourselves. So to have something come in and take away or destroy what we've built—it hurts. It really bothers me. And the people who can afford alternatives? They're not impacted in the same way.

The urgent need for culturally responsive care and education was echoed in another Community Talk as the educators shared:

But for us, when we come together in our close-knit communities, we're able to say, "Hey, look—our children, they learn differently. They speak differently. How do we support them? How do we teach them? How do we teach them to code-switch when necessary?" These are things you learn on a broad spectrum, but you have to take that and build it for your group of children so they know what it means when I'm in this classroom with this Caucasian teacher. This Caucasian teacher is in a Black neighborhood, teaching your children and calling you bad.

Taken together, these narratives illustrate FCC educators' resistance capital as a deeply relational, culturally grounded, and politically conscious practice. Their critiques of culturally unresponsive schooling not only named harms inflicted on children but also asserted the family child care space as a site of protection, affirmation, and cultural continuity.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital was another key emerging theme, as many FCC educators remained determined to access the resources and systems that have historically excluded them. Our team recognized **how educators moved through systems of fragmented supports and discriminatory structures while still sustaining children, families, and their own professional growth**. In doing so, they transformed systemic gaps through collective agency, building culturally grounded networks, creating their own professional learning spaces, and developing tools that bypass biased gatekeeping to serve Black children, families, and communities.

One educator, responding to racial and FCC-based discrimination in her state's resource and referral system, developed a mobile application where FCC educators could register to be referred directly to families seeking child care. She shared:

I created an app for family child care providers, and it's coming out soon [...] forget going to the government and asking help. Once this app comes out, [it will benefit] providers and parents around the world...not just Washington, D.C, North Carolina, Virginia, and California. I said around the world.

Her reflection illustrates the educators' ability to navigate bureaucratic and relational landscapes and demonstrates their profound ability to make a way out of no way.

Familial Capital

Familial capital surfaced through educators' **deep sense of responsibility, care, and connection to the children and families they serve**. Many described their programs as extensions of their own families. These kinship dynamics were reflected particularly among veteran educators who described caring for multiple generations within the same families. This intergenerational continuity reinforced educators' sense of responsibility, purpose, and belonging.

An educator expressed:

I don't know how to not be the daycare lady. It's part of who we are. We don't just take care of children—we take care of whole families. We support them however we can.

This reflects the intergenerational caregiving traditions and community mothering that ground Black FCC educators' work. At the same time, this **sense of kinship and responsibility intensified the emotional and material labor of care**, as several educators described routinely prioritizing children's needs over their own financial security. As one educator stated:

Finances are a big challenge. I get paid, but everything is so expensive. You're constantly deciding what to prioritize. I've had parents who needed gas, food, or a place to stay. Family child care providers are like mothers and grandparents. We're mothers to the parents and grandmothers to the children we care for.

While these practices of care and generosity underscore the depth of relational commitment embedded in FCC work, they also illuminate how familial capital can function as both a protective and extractive force within an under-resourced system.

Across all forms of capital, Black FCC educators demonstrated profound cultural wealth toward sustaining children, families, and communities. Their narratives reveal a workforce whose expertise is rooted in cultural knowledge, relational strength, and community-rooted practices—forms of capital that formal systems rarely recognize or resource. Centering cultural wealth is essential for designing supports, policies, and workforce strategies that honor the lived expertise of Black FCC educators and strengthen the early childhood ecosystem.

Need for Mental Health Support

Despite the various forms of cultural capital engaged by the educators, they described their need for explicit mental health PD and support addressing the challenge of supporting children and families navigating multiple forms of trauma, while educators simultaneously carried their own histories of stress, loss, and systemic harm. One educator from D.C. articulated how the cyclical relationship between structural violence, family instability, and mental health challenges within her community intensified under the currently political regime:

"We have the National Guards here; and parents have been arrested... When you become a victim of any type of police engagement, it's hard for you to get a job somewhere because it comes up on your record. So, them not having a job, the fathers being detained, then we have, of course, people on drugs. And it's just bad things, because people don't know how to handle their mental health".

This narrative situates FCC educators' mental health needs within a broader ecology of structural trauma, underscoring how educators are often positioned as frontline responders to systemic failures.

At the same time, educators highlighted the potential of integrated mental health supports. One Louisiana provider described her experience accessing mental health services through a university partnership, emphasizing the reciprocal benefits of this arrangement:

"I was finally able to get mental health support to come in. They work with the child, but they're also helping me by showing me techniques to use with the kids and ways to manage my own stress—like stepping outside for a moment to reset and then coming back in."

Reflecting on this experience, she added, "The more help we [educators] get, the better we're able to help the kids." This account illustrates how mental health supports that are relational, embedded, and educator-centered can simultaneously strengthen educator well-being and improve the quality of care for children and families.

Recommendations

The implications of this study are clear. The field of early care and education is in dire need of equity-centered reforms, credentialing, and compensation systems, as well as culturally responsive supports—including financial aid, recognition of lived experience, peer networks, and coaching. To sustain the well-being of our educators, children, and communities, policy reforms must guarantee living wages, benefits, and mobility pathways that affirm the cultural wealth and lived realities of Black FCC educators. In addition to professional development systems prioritizing flexible, community-based models, there is a need for peer-based infrastructures to be formalized and funded to counteract isolation and sustain a racially diverse

workforce. The recommendations presented here are deeply informed by Home Grown's (2024) principles and licensure considerations, as well as the equity-driven insights of the Early Childhood History, Organizing, Ethos and Strategy (ECHOES) Project (2022).

Taken together, the following recommendations position Black FCC educators' well-being not simply as an individual psychological state, but as a socio-political construct forged at the intersection of unjust systems and community-rooted resistance. By centering the voices and experiences of Black FCC educators, this study underscores the need for culturally responsive professional supports that dismantle institutional barriers and advance equity in the early childhood sector.

Recommendation #1: Redefine Educator Well-Being

Educator well-being must be redefined beyond narrow, school-based models to reflect lived experience and the socio-political realities shaping care. The experience and perception of well-being is deeply nuanced. For Black FCC educators in particular, **well-being is multidimensional and intersectional**—shaped simultaneously by racialized labor histories, gendered expectations of care, economic precarity, cultural responsibility, and the emotional demands of sustaining families and communities, among others.

Decades of advocacy underscores that compensation is not simply a financial issue but a matter of dignity, justice, and sustainability for the child care workforce (Early Childhood History, Organizing, Ethos and Strategy, 2022). Similarly, the *Thriving Providers Project* by Homegrown and Stanford Center on Early Childhood (2025) demonstrates that when home-based educators receive direct financial support alongside peer networks, their stability increases, isolation decreases, and the quality of care for children and families improves.

We urge the field of ECE to think critically about the multiple layers that impact well-being—structural inequities, cultural wealth, and systemic supports—and to recognize that **educator well-being is inseparable from the economic and social conditions** in which care is provided. To advance equity, we must move beyond temporary relief measures and commit to systemic reforms that guarantee living wages, culturally responsive professional supports, and recognition of educators as essential anchors in our communities and social economy. Only by addressing these intersecting dimensions can we cultivate a workforce that thrives and, in turn, ensures children and families flourish.

Recommendation #2: Center Black FCC educators in Policy and Practice

Black Family Child Care Educators must be recognized as central knowledge producers and cultural anchors whose expertise drives equity in early childhood systems. Black FCC educators embody a lineage of caregiving rooted in community mothering, oral traditions, and diasporic practices (Turner, 2025). Yet, their labor has been systematically marginalized within policy frameworks that privilege center-based models. To advance to more holistic practices that serve the needs of all children, policy- and decision-makers must explicitly center Black FCC educators as leaders, innovators, and cultural workers, not peripheral actors.

Family child care educators play a crucial role in the early childhood ecosystem, providing care that is accessible, culturally grounded, and responsive to the needs of infants, toddlers, and school-age children. Their programs often serve as the most stable and culturally congruent option for families who rely on flexible, community-rooted care. Research affirms this reality, noting that FCC professionals are a critical workforce supporting low-income families and communities of color (Kelton & Tenis, 2024). Likewise, national analyses from the Erikson Institute Herr Research Center highlight that home-based child care remains the most common form of care in the United States, serving millions of children from birth through age 12 (Bromer & Porter, 2019). As such, FCC educators should be understood as foundational anchors of the child care system whose expertise and contributions must be recognized in policy and practice.

Key Actions:

- **Policy Inclusion:** Black FCC educators must be meaningfully integrated into decision-making bodies, workgroups, advisory councils, and governance structures. Their lived expertise is essential for redesigning licensing, subsidy, and quality rating systems that have historically been built around center-based norms and therefore fail to capture the relational and cultural strengths of HBCC. Given the documented gaps in existing QRIS tools—particularly their limited attention to culture (Garrity et al., 2021), family-provider relationships (Del Grosso et al., 2021), cultural and linguistic congruence, mixed-age care, nontraditional hours, and provider well-being—Black FCC educators’ experience and insight must guide the development of new measures that reflect the realities of home-based practice (Doran et al., 2022).

We uplift Home Grown’s six principles for equitable licensing (2024), which call for standards that clearly reflect children’s health, safety, and development; requirements that remain feasible and achievable; licensure pathways that are explicit, transparent, and clearly communicate timelines, expectations, supports, and consequences; robust and sustained state supports for FCCs through communities of practice, technical assistance, coaching, and mentoring; full recognition of FCCs as experts throughout the licensure life cycle; and a commitment from both states and providers to operate as true partners in strengthening the early childhood ecosystem. As a foundation, this calls for parallel reforms in quality rating and assessment systems to ensure they honor the cultural wealth, community-rooted practices, and operational conditions that define high-quality FCC.

- **Recognition of Cultural Wealth:** Policies (e.g., federal, state, and local) must acknowledge the unique strengths FCC educators bring— including culturally affirming practices and deep community ties. Our project, along with similar initiatives, underscores the social, cultural, and navigational capital that FCC educators contribute—highlighting the asset-based practices they bring to children, families, and communities. Recognition of Black FCC educators in policy and practice means embedding their expertise into systemic design. By integrating FCC educators into

governance, resourcing their programs equitably, and recognizing their contributions as foundational to child development, we can dismantle historic inequities and build early childhood systems that are truly inclusive, culturally sustaining, and just

- **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Funding streams must work diligently to ensure that FCC educators have equitable access to material resources, referrals, professional development, technology, and business supports. This includes designing funding mechanisms that reflect the true cost of home-based care and ensuring that FCC educators can participate in publicly funded programs without facing administrative or financial barriers.

As families' needs and preferences vary widely, resource and referral agencies should recognize that many families—especially those with infants, multilingual learners, or small family units—prefer the close-knit, relationship-based environments offered by HBCC and FFN (family, friend, and neighbor) care. FCC educators are essential partners in a mixed-delivery system, providing culturally grounded, flexible care that complements center-based options and expands families' real choices. Families should receive comprehensive, unbiased information about all available options and be supported in making decisions that align with their values, routines, and cultural expectations.

States implementing public pre-K and/or universal pre-K (UPK) must intentionally integrate FCC educators into planning, funding, and seat-allocation decisions. This includes guaranteeing FCC educators a meaningful share of available slots, adapting standards to reflect home-based realities, and ensuring that curriculum, assessment, and quality expectations are developmentally appropriate for mixed-age, relational environments. FCC inclusion should not be incidental—it must be designed into the system from the outset.

States and municipalities should also ensure that FCC educators are fully included in small-business grant programs, capital improvement funds, and local technical-assistance initiatives. Organizations like LISC demonstrate what this can look like in practice by providing targeted fiscal investments that strengthen quality, expand capacity, and support the unique needs of home-based programs. For example, LISC Houston partnered with Collaborative for Children to award small targeted grants to FCC small businesses, enabling educators to upgrade learning environments, enhance emergency preparedness, and purchase essential items such as air purifiers and refrigerators—investments that directly improve children's daily experiences (Tcholakova, 2025).

Recommendation #3: Reform Licensing, Regulations, and Credentialing

Credentialing systems should be transformed into competency-based, accessible pathways that honor prior experience and advance racial and economic justice.

Current licensing and credentialing structures often privilege center-based models and rigid degree requirements, creating barriers for seasoned FCC educators—especially Black women and Educators of Color—whose expertise is rooted in lived experience and community practice. These systems perpetuate inequities by undervaluing nontraditional pathways, imposing financial burdens, and excluding educators from recognition and advancement.

Key Aspects:

- **Competency-Based Pathways:** Shift from degree-only requirements to models that validate demonstrated skills, cultural knowledge, and years of practice. This ensures that FCC educators' expertise is recognized as equal to formal credentials. Recognition of prior experience and current competencies is essential for making higher education and credentials accessible to FCC educators, honoring the deep hands-on expertise many already hold. Establishing mechanisms for educators to receive academic or professional credit for their lived and work experience can reduce redundancy and affirm the value of their long-standing practice. Clear and flexible pathways—such as remote options, field-based practicum experiences in educators' own programs, and advising systems that accommodate the realities of home-based care—are necessary given FCC educators' long hours and multiple roles.

Early childhood teacher-preparation programs can be redesigned to reflect the realities and strengths of FCC/HBCC, moving beyond center-based assumptions that overlook home-based educators' daily practice and conditions. Degree and credential programs must include relevant content that reflects FCC realities: caring for mixed-age groups, supporting multilingual learners, managing a small business, and providing education and care in a home environment. Removing or minimizing classroom-centric or irrelevant coursework can reduce burden and increase applicability, aligning preparation with the strengths and needs of the FCC workforce (Hooper et al., 2025).

- **Accessible Apprenticeships:** Expand apprenticeship programs that combine coursework with stipends, coaching, and peer support, allowing educators to pursue credentials without sacrificing income or program stability. Such opportunities should explicitly pertain to the work of FCC educators, offering on-the-job training in topics such as mixed-age groups, navigating small class sizes, and business aspects.

Organizations such as RISE Center for Liberation recognize the barriers to professional pathways that exist for Educators of Color and offer location-based programs that center equity and justice. Additionally, Rhode Island’s registered apprenticeship program—developed through a partnership among SEIU (Service Employees International Union), the Department of Human Services, Building Futures, and the Department of Labor & Training—provides family child care educators with a structured pathway to certification, higher wages, and improved BrightStars ratings (Hooper et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2023).

- **Equity-Centered Licensing:** Harmonize licensing and regulatory standards to address the systemic stratification that favors center-based models over home-based care. Policies must reflect the lived realities of Family Child Care Educators, reducing punitive oversight and ensuring evaluation practices that are culturally responsive, affirming, and equitable. We reiterate and reinforce the six principles advanced by Home Grown (2024)—including prioritizing children’s well-being, keeping requirements realistic, and ensuring transparent, supportive licensing pathways—as essential anchors for centering FCCE professional authority. These principles offer a clear, equity-driven foundation for redesigning systems so they reflect the realities, expertise, and cultural wealth of home-based educators. State-level legislative efforts, such as Maryland’s House Bill 1441 (HB1441), demonstrate how licensing and regulatory standards can be intentionally shaped to be more responsive to and inclusive of FCC educators (Reinoso & Jones, 2024).
- **Financial Justice:** Enhance FCC educators’ financial well-being by covering costs for professional development and program quality improvements. Provide subsidies, scholarships, and stipends tied to credential pathways to remove economic barriers.

Reforming licensing, regulations, and credentialing requires moving away from exclusionary, degree-driven systems toward flexible, equity-centered pathways that validate the expertise of FCC educators. By embedding competency-based models, recognizing prior experience, and expanding accessible apprenticeships, we can dismantle systemic barriers and ensure that credentialing advances racial and economic justice rather than perpetuating inequity.

Recommendation #4: Strengthen Professional Supports

Professional supports for FCC educators must move beyond ad hoc or temporary measures to become systemic, equity-centered infrastructures. Too often, FCC educators—particularly Black women and Educators of Color—are left isolated, navigating fragmented systems without sustained guidance. Expanding and formalizing supports means investing in culturally responsive networks, peer cohorts, and communities of practice that validate lived expertise and reduce professional isolation. Coaching and mentoring must be emotionally attuned, bilingual/

bi-dialectic where needed, and grounded in cultural wealth, ensuring educators feel seen and supported in their practice. Access to practical resources such as laptops, flexible training formats, and technical assistance is equally critical, allowing FCC educators to participate fully in professional development while balancing the demands of caregiving and small business ownership. By embedding these supports into policy and funding streams, states can sustain the well-being of FCC educators and strengthen the quality of care for children and families.

Key Aspects:

- **Professional Development Access & Relevancy:** Design PD to fit FCC educators' schedules with evening options, short micro-bursts, and multi-session series that are mobile-friendly. Ensure content is directly relevant to home-based practice by centering culturally responsive approaches, practical business and capacity-building skills (budgeting, recordkeeping, marketing, licensing), and contemporary topics like ethical AI tools for assessment and family communication. Keep sessions varied and engaging so educators gain immediately usable strategies rather than repeating the same topics, and integrate home-visiting professionals.
- **Cross-Sector Collaborations to Support Mental Health:** Invest in cross-sector mental health partnerships—linking early childhood programs with universities, community mental health agencies, and trauma-informed practitioners—to provide embedded, educator-centered supports. Integrated models that offer coaching, stress-management strategies, and child-focused consultation strengthen educator well-being and improve the quality of care for children and families.
- **Technology Access & Digital Connectivity:** Equip FCC educators with laptops, hotspots, and digital training, and develop virtual platforms where educators can access PD, coaching, and administrative tools, which can be done by leveraging relationships with institutions of higher education (Schumacher, 2020). Technology should also serve as a bridge to community—reducing isolation through online networks, group chats, and social-media learning spaces; optimizing accessible apps like GroupMe, WhatsApp, and Facebook Groups to create low-barrier, localized hubs for peer support, resource sharing, and real-time problem solving. Consider that virtual professional development can be more accessible for FCC educators because asynchronous modules, short micro-sessions, and mobile-friendly formats let educators engage on their own schedules without leaving their homes or disrupting caregiving and small-business responsibilities.
- **Relationship-Based Professional Connection & Learning:** Incorporate relationship-based professional development approaches that prioritize trust-building,

reflective functioning, cultural sensitivity, and emotional support to strengthen educator–child relationships and overall program quality (Barron et al., 2020). Prioritize peer-to-peer opportunities by establishing ongoing, culturally responsive peer cohorts and communities of practice that offer reflection, resource sharing, problem-solving, and solidarity. These spaces should be bilingual/ bi-dialectic where needed, grounded in cultural wealth, and designed to validate the lived expertise FCC educators bring to their work. Additionally, provide emotionally attuned, strengths-based coaching that reflects the realities of home-based care. Coaching should be bilingual, culturally responsive, and embedded in stable funding streams—not dependent on short-term grants—so FCC educators receive consistent, long-term support.

- **Advocacy Capacity, Leadership Pathways & Incentives:** Strengthen FCC educators' ability to advocate for children and families by offering accessible policy-training opportunities that demystify legislative processes and licensing reforms (Reinoso & Jones, 2024). Building on the E4 Toolkit's emphasis on educator power, integrate training in organizing, storytelling, and collective action so FCC educators can effectively mobilize their experiences to influence policy (Hess & Austin, 2022). Create pathways for FCC educators to participate in policy development—submitting public comments, joining advisory councils, attending town halls, and co-writing recommendations. Provide stipends, fellowships, and compensated leadership roles so FCC educators are recognized and resourced as essential contributors to systems-level change.
- **Career Mobility:** To expand opportunity, states and organizations should also increase career pathways that allow FCC educators to move into coaching, faculty, administrative, and policy roles without abandoning the strengths and identities shaped through home-based care. Too often, leadership roles in ECE systems default to candidates with public pre-K or kindergarten backgrounds solely, overlooking the deep expertise rooted in HBCC and FCC practice. Employing bodies should intentionally create roles and advancement pathways that originate from home-based experience, recognizing FCC educators as system leaders whose knowledge of families, culture, and community care is essential to the field's future.
- **Deploy Affinity Groups within Networks:** Develop affinity groups within professional networks to create structured, identity-affirming spaces where Black FCC educators can learn, lead, and heal in community. These groups should be intentionally facilitated, resourced, and embedded into broader network infrastructure—not treated as optional add-ons. Affinity groups provide Black FCC educators with a safe space to share experiences, refine cultural and pedagogical practices, and develop collective strategies for addressing systemic inequities. When supported with stipends, leadership

opportunities, and connections to policy and professional development pathways, affinity groups. Additionally, such spaces should affirm grassroots efforts by the educators themselves to build and facilitate community.

Recommendation #5: Address Economic Well-Being

While we have briefly referenced the ECHOES project, we want to fully articulate the intersection of compensation, financial well-being, and social justice.

Equitable compensation is not a temporary stipend or short-term relief measure—it is a structural necessity for justice in early childhood education. FCC educators, especially Black educators, remain undervalued and underpaid despite their central role in sustaining families and communities. Systemic wage reforms must guarantee living wages, benefits, and pathways for career mobility that recognize FCC educators as professionals, not peripheral caregivers. Compensation must be tied to equity goals, which aim to dismantle racial and economic disparities that have long stratified the workforce. Benefits such as health insurance, retirement contributions, and paid leave are essential to ensuring stability and dignity in the profession. By committing to durable compensation reforms, policymakers can affirm the worth of FCC educators' labor, reduce attrition, and build a workforce that is resilient, respected, and able to thrive.

Key Aspects:

- **Guarantee Equitable Compensation and Comprehensive Benefits:** States should ensure FCC educators receive living wages that reflect the true cost of high-quality care by establishing wage floors tied to local economic conditions and ensuring pay parity with similarly credentialed public-school educators. Compensation must be stabilized through public funding—not parent fees—using base grants, wage supplements, voter-approved investments, and cost-model-informed reimbursement rates.
- **Advance Equity by Addressing Racial and Economic Disparities:** Design compensation reforms that directly confront the racialized and gendered inequities that have long devalued the labor of Black FCC educators. Black early educators experience some of the lowest wages in the field and disproportionately face economic insecurity, despite providing culturally grounded, community-anchored care (McLean et al., 2021).

States can look to emerging models—such as New Mexico's Early Educator Wage and Career Ladder Initiative—as evidence that sustained, structural investment is both possible and impactful. New Mexico's approach provides education-based wage supplements, issued twice annually, with increases tied to additional college credits and aligned to a statewide career ladder, creating a predictable pathway toward higher compensation and professional stability (Odonnell, 2023; New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department, 2021). These wage supplements demonstrate how states

can begin to correct historic underpayment, stabilize the workforce, and honor the expertise of educators who anchor their communities.

States should use disaggregated data to identify racial wage gaps, target compensation investments to Black FCC educators most impacted by underpayment, and embed equity metrics into all funding formulas. Compensation strategies must also recognize Black educators' lived expertise, cultural wealth, and community leadership as core components of professional value—not peripheral add-ons.

- **Leverage Philanthropic Models as Scalable Pathways to Economic Stability:** Philanthropic initiatives such as the Thriving Providers Project, the Raising Child Care Fund, and Vanguard's financial well-being investments demonstrate that direct cash supports, peer networks, and community-driven funding measurably improve FCCE stability and reduce income volatility. These models offer a proven blueprint for states to scale through public investment—showing that when Black FCC educators receive sustained financial support and culturally responsive networks, their economic well-being, program stability, and overall well-being increase.

Conclusion

Black Family Child Care Educators stand at the heart of community well-being, cultural continuity, and early learning in the United States. Their homes are sites of safety, identity formation, and intergenerational knowledge—spaces where children are not only cared for but affirmed, nurtured, and seen. Yet the findings of this study make clear that Black FCC educators continue to shoulder the weight of systemic inequities that undermine their stability, their well-being, and their ability to remain in the profession.

Despite these conditions, Black FCC educators persist through cultural wealth, resistance, and community-rooted practices that have sustained Black families for generations. Their stories reveal a workforce that is profoundly skilled, deeply committed, and structurally undervalued. They also reveal a truth that policymakers and systems leaders can no longer ignore: well-being is not an individual responsibility—it is a collective obligation shaped by policy, investment, and justice.

This white paper calls for a fundamental reorientation of how early childhood systems understand, support, and resource Black FCC educators. It urges the field to redefine educator well-being through a culturally situated lens; to center Black FCC educators as knowledge producers and system architects; and to enact structural reforms that guarantee living wages, comprehensive benefits, equitable mobility pathways, and culturally responsive professional supports.

The path forward requires more than incremental change. It demands that states, funders, and institutions confront the racialized and gendered histories that have long devalued Black women's carework and commit to building infrastructures that honor their expertise. It requires investing in peer networks, affinity groups, and community-based supports that reflect how

Black FCC educators actually sustain themselves. And it requires shifting narratives—recognizing Black FCC educators not as peripheral educators, but as essential leaders whose cultural labor is foundational to children’s thriving.

Black FCC educators have always been in the fight—holding families together, preserving cultural memory, and resisting erasure through everyday acts of care. The question now is whether systems will finally meet them with the respect, resources, and recognition they deserve.

By listening to Black FCC educators, investing in their well-being, and centering their leadership, we can build early childhood systems that are not only more equitable but also more humanizing, more culturally grounded, and more capable of sustaining the communities they serve.

This is the work of justice. This is the work of repair. And it is the work that will determine whether the next generation of children—and the educators who care for them—can truly thrive.

End Note

1. The average well-being score of 8.06 should be interpreted cautiously. Although 26 percent of educators selected this rating, qualitative responses revealed that numeric scores often reflected personal resilience rather than actual working conditions. This discrepancy underscores the limits of self-reported metrics and highlights the need to pair quantitative indicators with contextual data to avoid masking systemic inequities.

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