



Research Paper

Supporting newly hired child care teachers: The role of onboarding

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in identifying ways to support and retain early educators, there is next to no evidence about onboarding, or the on-the-job training, teachers may receive at the start of employment. This study provides new evidence on the extent to which child care teachers receive initial training and investigates the relationship between onboarding practices and both teachers' professional wellbeing and turnover risk. Using 2021 survey data from publicly funded child care centers in Louisiana, we document the prevalence of onboarding among a sample of newly hired child care teachers ($n = 314$) and explore the links between these practices and teacher outcomes. We find considerable variation in both the amount and the types of onboarding child care teachers experience, as well as positive associations between the number of onboarding practices and both professional wellbeing and turnover risk. Receiving coaching in the classroom, although not the most common practice, is positively associated with most teacher outcomes considered. Our findings suggest that onboarding may help new child care teachers feel more prepared for, and satisfied with, their jobs. Finally, our results indicate that strengthening child care teachers' onboarding experiences may be a promising avenue for supporting child care teachers and reducing turnover.

Child care teachers have complex jobs. They are responsible for ensuring young children's safety and wellbeing while also promoting their social, cognitive, and early academic skills (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council [IOM & NRC], 2015). Unlike K-12 teachers, for whom both pre-service and in-service training are standard requirements, most child care teachers in the United States enter their jobs with limited or no pre-service training (Whitebook et al., 2016) and receive minimal on-the-job supports (Whitebook et al., 2014). Little is known about the types of site-level supports that child care teachers receive when beginning their jobs, or the relationship between these early work supports and teacher outcomes (Langdon et al., 2016; Totenhagen et al., 2016).

Against the backdrop of limited support, turnover rates among child care teachers are much higher than those of K-12, pre-Kindergarten, and Head Start teachers (Bassok, Markowitz, et al., 2021; Doromal et al., 2022; Doromal & Markowitz, 2023; Phillips et al., 2019). For the

purposes of this study, child care teachers are defined as those working in community-based centers serving children birth to age five. These rates are especially high for new early care and education (ECE) teachers; for example, a recent Louisiana study showed that among teachers new to their site, 56 % of teachers left from one year to the next compared to only 29 % of returning teachers (Bellows et al., 2022). While low compensation among child care teachers is widely recognized as a key driver of these patterns (e.g., Bassok, Markowitz, et al., 2021; Whitebook et al., 2018), there is growing interest in identifying site-level supports, such as onboarding, professional development, and supportive working conditions, that might help stabilize the field (Herman et al., 2023; Totenhagen et al., 2016; Vicente et al., 2025).

In the K-12 context, we know that teacher induction programs can have positive impacts on a host of outcomes including teacher efficacy, teacher retention, and student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Keese et al., 2023; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). The benefits of

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induction processes may be even more pronounced for child care teachers, given that they often enter the field with minimal training (Whitebook et al., 2016). For the purposes of this study, we define onboarding as the set of initial professional, site-level supports provided to new hires in child care centers.¹ We use this term to bridge the regulatory concept of *orientation*, which is specific safety and policy training mandated for child care licensing in our study context (Louisiana Department of Education, 2021), with the broader K-12 concept of *teacher induction*, which emphasizes professional integration and mentorship (e.g., Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Thus, our measure of *onboarding* likely captures both compliance-driven activities and deeper professional supports and development.

We view onboarding through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, a theory that posits providing employees with adequate job resources can mitigate the strain of high job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Onboarding, functioning as an organizational job resource in the JD-R, may play an initial role in equipping teachers with the competence, confidence, and social connections necessary to navigate the challenges of an early childhood classroom. To date, however, there is little evidence about the amount or type of onboarding early educators receive, their satisfaction with this early support, or the links between onboarding and teachers' *professional wellbeing* and *risk of turnover*. Prior studies define professional wellbeing as a multidimensional construct encompassing teachers' professional identity and their sense of community belonging (McCormick et al., 2022). Risk of turnover is often operationalized with measures of job satisfaction and job commitment, which serve as markers of both the quality of care teachers provide to children and their likelihood of remaining in the field (McCormick et al., 2022; McMullen et al., 2020). However, to date there has been little evidence about whether and how onboarding is linked to either child care teachers' professional wellbeing or their risk of turnover.

To address this research gap, we examine the association between onboarding and teacher outcomes using 2021 survey data from teachers in publicly funded child care centers in two large Louisiana parishes. We first document the types of onboarding practices child care teachers received and their satisfaction with these practices. Second, we evaluate the relationship between teachers' onboarding participation and their professional wellbeing. We operationalize professional wellbeing as including both *professional identity*, which we measure with teachers' self-reported preparedness for their jobs and self-efficacy, and their *community belonging* which we measure using their satisfaction with workplace interactions. Finally, we explore how onboarding practices relate to risk of turnover, measured using job satisfaction and commitment. We consider the overall count of onboarding practices as well as the types of onboarding teachers received. As far as we know, this study provides the first exploration of child care teachers' experience with onboarding and its relationship with their professional wellbeing and risk of turnover.

1. Professional development and onboarding practices

Access to high-quality professional development (PD), which provides on-the-job learning opportunities to support classroom skills, is recognized as an essential job resource (Schaack et al., 2022). Effective PD not only supports teacher development by improving job satisfaction and reinforcing professional value, but also plays a role in reducing turnover (McDonald et al., 2018; Schaack et al., 2022). For many early

childhood educators, PD provides practical assistance, such as strategies for managing classroom challenges, and serves as a source of emotional support and collaboration with colleagues (Schaack et al., 2022). However, the benefits of PD can be diminished when it is poorly timed or overly demanding, pointing to the importance of tailoring PD to the specific needs of teachers (Schaack et al., 2022). When well-implemented, PD fosters a sense of professional commitment and enhances work engagement, thereby contributing to a more stable and effective instructional environment (e.g., Hamre et al., 2017; Landry et al., 2009; Totenhagen et al., 2016).

Despite substantial research discussing the benefits and limitations of PD for early childhood educators (e.g., Schachter et al., 2019), there has been little research to date examining *onboarding* as a specific, initial form of professional support and development. This gap may be particularly relevant in child care settings, where formal training requirements are often minimal (Administration for Children and Families, 2021).² The significance of this initial support likely depends on the broader landscape of ECE workforce requirements, which vary substantially by state (McLean et al., 2024). Some state-funded ECE programs, particularly those in public schools, require Bachelor's degrees for lead teachers prior to employment. However, in child care settings nationwide, lower barriers to entry are the norm. In Louisiana's publicly funded child care centers (Type III), lead teachers are not required to hold any degree. Instead teachers must obtain an Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (a credential requiring training and on-the-job practice) within 24 months of their start date (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2023).

Louisiana does have some, limited entry requirements for child care teachers. All newly hired staff receive site-specific "orientation" within seven calendar days of their first day present at the center and prior to assuming sole responsibility for children. This orientation includes training on health, safety, and licensing standards. In addition, they may also be required to complete self-paced, state-created modules on child development, early learning standards, and instructional design (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2024). The onboarding that happens over and above these requirements is typically at the discretion of the site owner or director. This study, therefore, captures a workforce context in which onboarding may serve as a bridge between relatively flexible entry pathways and professional practice. Onboarding may play a valuable role in equipping newly hired teachers for success, particularly in contexts where structured pre-service training is absent or minimal.

1.1. Teacher induction in early childhood

Research within the K-12 sector demonstrates that new teacher induction programs yield substantial benefits, including improved instructional quality, teacher retention, and student outcomes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). A recent meta-analysis of 17 PK-12 studies corroborates these links across a range of experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational designs (Keese et al., 2023). While referred to as 'onboarding' in the context of ECE, we view these practices as functionally similar to K-12 induction, as both serve the purpose of integrating new hires into their professional roles and work communities. Given the flexible entry pathways and variable pre-service requirements characteristic of the child care sector (McLean et al., 2024), these initial supports may be even more important for this workforce than for their K-12 counterparts. Effective induction could act as a stabilizing force for educators who may feel overwhelmed by the immediate demands of the classroom. Yet findings from the K-12 literature cannot be immediately generalized to child care settings because of the

¹ Onboarding was operationalized using a survey checklist of six specific practices: (1) completing one-on-one training/meeting with a site leader; (2) completing group training; (3) completing individual, self-paced activities (e.g., reading a manual, watching a video); (4) observing or shadowing a current teacher; (5) receiving coaching in the classroom (being observed and provided feedback); and (6) meeting regularly with a mentor teacher.

² Analysis of data compiled from child licensing regulations posted in the National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations and accessed using <https://licensingregulations.acf.hhs.gov/>.

large differences with respect to workforce qualifications, as well as broader differences in working conditions and program structure.

The extant child care literature, while promising, is sparse. One qualitative study finds a lack of structured onboarding across various publicly funded ECE settings and suggests this creates challenges for positive workforce dynamics (Schaack et al., 2022). Other studies have explored associations between onboarding, teacher preparedness, and turnover in New Zealand (Langdon et al., 2016) and in the Head Start context (Vicente et al., 2025). However, both studies relied on samples of fewer than 30 educators, limiting their generalizability. The present study adds to this growing literature and begins to address some of these initial limitations by exploring onboarding in a larger sample within publicly funded child care centers.

1.2. The job demands-resources model in child care settings

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) provides a theoretical framework for examining links between working conditions, job satisfaction, and attrition among employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This model categorizes working conditions into job demands and job resources, hypothesizing that burnout and turnover are related to the extent to which teachers experience both.³ In ECE, job demands include lifting children (Kwon et al., 2021), managing classroom behaviors (Lipscomb et al., 2022; Schaack et al., 2022), taking on additional labor due to inadequate staffing (Farewell et al., 2022), and managing work-related stress (Farewell et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2021; Lipscomb et al., 2022; Schaack et al., 2022). These demands can erode teachers' wellbeing, and could be associated with dissatisfaction, burnout, or job exits, all of which could negatively affect children's experiences.

Conversely, job resources in ECE, including professional development opportunities (Schaack et al., 2022), supportive leadership (Farewell et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2020, 2021; Lipscomb et al., 2022; Schaack et al., 2022), compensation and benefits (Kwon et al., 2021; Schaack et al., 2022), and a positive work climate (Farewell et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2021; Schaack et al., 2022), act as buffers against job demands. In the current study, we conceptualize onboarding as an organizational job resource. We hypothesize that as an initial support, onboarding buffers against challenges related to starting a new job. We examine how this specific resource relates to two types of outcomes: (1) teachers' professional wellbeing and (2) their risk of turnover.

1.3. Professional wellbeing in child care settings

We hypothesize onboarding may support professional wellbeing in early childhood settings through two key domains identified by McCormick et al. (2022): professional identity (operationalized here as preparedness and self-efficacy) and community belonging (operationalized as supportive workplace interactions). McCormick and colleagues characterize professional identity as inclusive of a teacher's "efficacy, contribution, accomplishment, engagement, and intellectual challenge," and Day et al. (2006) similarly define professional identity as inclusive of self-efficacy and effectiveness. By measuring preparedness, which captures teachers' readiness and potential for effectiveness, and self-efficacy, which reflects beliefs about their ability to perform their roles, we assess two important aspects of professional identity. Developing a robust professional identity is essential for educators entering a field characterized by high emotional demands (IOM & NRC, 2015).

1.3.1. Professional identity: preparedness and self-efficacy

Preparedness refers to the extent to which a teacher feels ready to perform their job duties (Arviv & Rozenberg, 2024). When teachers feel

unprepared, everyday classroom demands (e.g., behavior management, safety protocols) may become overwhelming stressors, contributing to reduced wellbeing. Onboarding could contribute to preparedness by clarifying roles, expectations, and pathways for seeking support. This might, in turn, reduce role ambiguity and increase teachers' confidence in their ability to perform their roles (Ellis et al., 2015). Thus, we view preparedness as a vital outcome of the onboarding process that helps ground teachers in their new professional environment.

The second indicator we link to professional identity is teacher self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2020; Day et al., 2006). Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's belief in their ability to effectively manage their responsibilities and contribute to children's learning (Arviv & Rozenberg, 2024; Bandura, 1993). When teachers believe they can handle classroom challenges (high self-efficacy), they have been shown to possess a stronger sense of professional competence in their roles (Lipscomb et al., 2022). Onboarding practices may strengthen self-efficacy by providing role-specific training and feedback that increase teachers' confidence in managing classroom demands. By reinforcing a teacher's belief in their own agency, onboarding may protect against the feelings of helplessness that often characterize early-career burnout (Lipscomb et al., 2022).

1.3.2. Community belonging: workplace interactions

In addition to professional identity, we examine community belonging, defined as the teacher's perception of their workplace as a cohesive and supportive community to which they belong (McCormick et al., 2022). We operationalize community belonging through indicators of positive interactions with colleagues and leaders. Onboarding may play a key role in fostering these interactions by helping new teachers integrate into their sites and establish supportive relationships from the start. These relationships have been associated with higher levels of wellbeing among early childhood teachers, in part by fostering a sense of collegiality, providing emotional support, and reducing stress (Farewell et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2021). Qualitative research further suggests that supportive workplace relationships are critical for sustaining job commitment among teachers in child care centers (Kwon et al., 2020).

1.4. Instability and risk of turnover in child care settings

We also examine onboarding's relationship with risk of turnover. Turnover in ECE settings, particularly within child care, is a long-standing concern (IOM & NRC, 2015; Whitebook et al., 2014). Stable child-caregiver relationships are critical for providing consistent, high-quality care and supporting early learning (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2019; Markowitz, 2024; Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). High turnover rates, ranging from 15 % to 46 % annually, are particularly problematic. Sites with high levels of turnover are more likely to have to shut down classes or turn families away due to staffing problems (Bassok, Doromal, et al., 2021; Bassok, Hall, et al., 2021; Bassok, Markowitz, et al., 2021; Bellows et al., 2022; Bryant et al., 2023; Doromal et al., 2022; Totenhagen et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2014). Newly hired center-based child care teachers have even higher turnover rates relative to other center-based teachers, with some estimates as high as 56 % (Bellows et al., 2022). Given the high rate of teachers new to their sites, it is worth exploring whether effective supports at job entry may facilitate educators' adaptation to new roles and decrease risk of turnover (Bellows et al., 2022; Wells, 2015).

There are well-known systemic issues facing the child care sector. Specifically, the high turnover rates, in part, reflect a longstanding lack of public funding (Executive Office of the President & Council of Economic Advisers, 2023; Phillips et al., 2019; Wells, 2015; Whitebook et al., 2014). However, there is considerable variability in turnover rates across different child care sites. In fact, recent data from Louisiana show that year-to-year center-level turnover rates can vary considerably. Specifically, some sites experience almost no churn while others have turnover rates exceeding 50 % in consecutive years (Doromal et al.,

³ See Kwon et al. (2021) for a detailed description of how the JD-R model applies to ECE teacher outcomes.

2022). This finding suggests that site-level factors may also play an important role in teachers' risk of turnover.

Prior research has shown that factors such as positive peer relationships (Grant et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2018; McMullen et al., 2020; Wells, 2015) and effective leadership (Doromal & Markowitz, 2023; Grant et al., 2019; Jeon & Wells, 2018; Kwon et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2018; McMullen et al., 2020; Wells, 2015) are linked to child care teachers' decisions to remain or leave. However, it remains unclear how site-level supports, like onboarding, can reduce teachers' risk of turnover. In this study, we examine if these experiences are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, intention to stay at their site, and intention to stay in the field—three key components of turnover risk. We lack direct measures of teacher turnover in our data, but prior research indicates that job satisfaction and commitment predict actual turnover (Blöchliger & Bauer, 2024).

2. Current study

This study investigated the onboarding experiences of early educators working in publicly funded child care centers in two large parishes in Louisiana. To descriptively understand teachers' onboarding experiences, we asked: (1) How much and what types of onboarding practices do child care teachers working in publicly funded centers experience?, and (2) Are the (a) *number* and (b) *types* of onboarding practices teachers experience related to their satisfaction with onboarding, professional wellbeing (i.e., perceived preparedness, teacher self-efficacy, and workplace interactions) and to their risk of turnover (i.e., job satisfaction, commitment to their site, and commitment to the field)?.

We hypothesize that both the number and type of onboarding could shape the overall effectiveness of onboarding as a resource. Specifically, we anticipate that teachers who report more types of onboarding support may have received a more intensive or comprehensive experience and will therefore demonstrate greater outcomes. Similarly, we posit that the type of onboarding matters and hypothesize that more personalized, one-on-one onboarding experiences may be particularly salient. As far as we know, this study is the first to investigate the relationship between onboarding experiences and key outcomes for teachers in publicly funded child care settings. As turnover continues to affect the stability of the child care sector, our study provides suggestive evidence as to whether onboarding may be a way to stabilize the child care workforce and, consequently, improve instructional quality.

3. Method

3.1. Data

We used data from the Fall 2021 Study of Early Education in Louisiana (SEE-LA) Workforce Survey (Study of Early Education through Partnerships, 2021). In November and December 2021, surveys were distributed to all teaching staff, including lead teachers, assistant teachers, and other adults working directly with children, at publicly funded child care centers in Jefferson and Orleans parishes. These two parishes are adjacent, urban settings in Louisiana. They are diverse and serve families with economic needs. In 2021, approximately one-third of children in Orleans and one-quarter of children in Jefferson lived in households at or below the federal poverty line (Agenda for Children, 2025). These parishes were selected due to their commitment to quality improvement and the success of previous research collaborations in the region. Of those invited, 867 teachers completed the survey, yielding a high response rate of 70 %.

The SEE-LA survey was developed by the research team and based on prior waves of the study. The instrument was not formally piloted prior to fielding but was developed through a close, multi-year partnership between researchers and early childhood leaders in these communities. The surveys were reviewed by local early educators to ensure item clarity and relevance. Data collection aimed to capture the full universe

of teachers (including lead teachers, co-teachers, assistant teachers, aides, and floaters) in publicly funded child care centers (Type III) in the two parishes. Site leaders provided teacher rosters and all rostered teachers in these centers were invited to participate in the Fall 2021 SEE-LA survey. Recruitment was conducted using contact information provided by center program leaders. Survey invitations were distributed electronically via email and, when needed, via mailed paper copies. Multiple reminders were sent to teaching staff throughout the survey administration period. Surveys were provided both online via Qualtrics and on paper to ensure accessibility for those without available email addresses or who preferred a physical copy. The final instrument included about 160 items and took approximately 30–35 min to complete. Participants received a \$30 gift card as an incentive for completing the survey.

3.2. Sample

Our study examined the onboarding experiences of teachers new to their site, defined as having one year or less of experience at their current location. In our data, 342 (39 % of all respondents) met this criterion. We focused specifically on teachers in their first year at a new site, to capture recent experiences and minimize the recall bias often associated with retrospective reporting. The survey did not specify a precise timeframe for when onboarding activities took place (e.g., “within the first month”), however, the sample consisted exclusively of teachers in their first year of employment ($M = 6.4$ months at site, $SD = 3.9$). From this initial group of teachers new to their site, we also narrow our sample to teachers who provided data on the primary onboarding survey item and at least one outcome of interest.⁴ This yielded a final analytic sample consisting of 314 teachers across 101 unique sites.

3.2.1. Sample characteristics

As shown in Table 1, our sample included 69 % Black, non-Hispanic teachers ($n = 213$), 5 % Hispanic teachers ($n = 15$), and 22 % White, non-Hispanic teachers ($n = 67$). 4 % of our sample identified as Other or multiracial ($n = 12$). Teachers were predominantly female (97 %, $n = 300$), with an average age of 34.12 years ($SD = 12.46$). Educational backgrounds varied: one-third held a high school diploma or less ($n = 103$), slightly more than one-third had some college education without a degree (36 %, $n = 112$), 11 % held an Associate's degree ($n = 35$), and 19 % held a Bachelor's degree or higher ($n = 58$). Approximately half of the teachers (52 %, $n = 162$) were in lead teacher roles. All teachers were new to their sites, and nearly half (47 %, $n = 135$) were also new to the field of ECE, with the sample averaging 7.21 years of experience in ECE ($SD = 5.72$). On average, teachers had been at their site for about 6 months, with an average hourly wage of \$12.33 (range \$7.50 to \$26.00). Finally, for the subset of centers in our analytic sample with available capacity data ($n = 94$), sites were licensed to serve an average of 87 children (range = 19 to 281), representing an estimated total capacity of 8156 children.

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. Onboarding practices

The 2021 SEE-LA survey asked teachers whether they participated in six specific onboarding practices when they started at their current sites. To distinguish between distinct forms of support (e.g., coaching versus supervision), the survey provided explicit definitions for respondents. Specifically, the survey asked: *Sites handle training and onboarding for newly hired teachers in many ways. Think back to when you were first hired at this site. Did you do any of the following? Mark all that apply. (1) Completing one-on-one training/meeting with a site leader; (2) Receiving*

⁴ We also omitted one teacher whose only reported onboarding practice was ‘other,’ which lacked sufficient detail for inclusion in the analysis.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Teacher and Site Characteristics.

	Count	Mean	SD	N
<i>Teacher Characteristics</i>				
Female	300	0.97	0.17	310
Age (years)	–	34.12	12.46	304
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Black	213	0.69	0.46	307
Hispanic	15	0.05	0.22	307
Other and multiracial	12	0.04	0.19	307
White	67	0.22	0.41	307
<i>Education</i>				
HS or less	103	0.33	0.47	308
Some college	112	0.36	0.48	308
AA degree	35	0.11	0.32	308
BA or higher	58	0.19	0.39	308
<i>Professional Role</i>				
Lead Teacher	162	0.52	0.50	313
<i>Experience and Tenure</i>				
New to ECE: One year or less in field	135	0.47	0.50	289
Time in ECE Field (years)	–	7.21	5.72	289
Time at Site (months)	–	6.36	3.88	314
Hourly wage (dollars)	–	12.33	3.27	308
<i>Site-Level Characteristics</i>				
Site Capacity (children served)	8156	86.77	59.28	94

Note. Data are drawn from the 2021 SEE-LA survey, conducted in two Louisiana parishes, and the Louisiana Department of Education's administrative data provided to the study team. HS = High school diploma; AA = Associate's degree; BA = Bachelor's degree. ECE = Early Childhood Education. Differences in Ns reflect missing data across demographic information. "–" in the Count column indicates that the variable is continuous, so we do not report a count as a statistic.

coaching in the classroom (e.g., being observed and then provided feedback)⁵; (3) Completing group training; (4) Meeting regularly with a mentor teacher; (5) Observing or shadowing a current teacher; (6) Completing individual, self-paced activities such as reading a manual, watching a video, etc.⁶ To quantify participation in these practices, we created indicators for each practice, coded as 1 if a teacher received that type of onboarding and 0 otherwise. These indicators were summed to generate a total onboarding count for each teacher, ranging from 0 (no participation) to 6 (participation in all activities). Descriptive statistics for these onboarding practices are presented in Table 2.

3.3.2. Onboarding satisfaction

Above, we posited that a higher number of onboarding experiences, as well as specific types of onboarding, make for a more effective experience. If this is the case, we would expect to see this reflected in teachers' satisfaction. We would expect, for example, that teachers who received more types of onboarding would report higher satisfaction. To capture teachers' perceptions of the quality of the support received, satisfaction with onboarding was measured using two survey items that asked participants to rate their agreement with statements about their onboarding experiences: *Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the onboarding you received when you were first hired at your site. (1) I received enough onboarding, and (2) Overall, the content of the training/onboarding was useful.* Responses were measured

Table 2
Descriptive Results for Onboarding Variables.

Onboarding Variables	Count	Mean	SD	N
<i>Average Count</i>				
Number of Onboarding Practices Completed	–	2.63	1.71	314
<i>Count/Proportion of respondents who...</i>				
Completed 1-on-1 training/meeting with a site leader	183	0.58	0.49	314
Received coaching in the classroom	139	0.44	0.50	314
Completed group training	128	0.41	0.49	314
Met regularly with a mentor teacher	66	0.21	0.41	314
Observed/shadowed a current teacher	165	0.53	0.50	314
Completed self-paced activities	144	0.46	0.50	314
No training or onboarding activities	25	0.08	0.27	314

Note. Data are drawn from the 2021 SEE-LA survey, conducted in two Louisiana parishes. The number of onboarding practices completed has a minimum value of 0 and a maximum value of 6. "–" in the Count column indicates that the variable is continuous, so we do not report a count as a statistic.

on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Although treated as distinct items in descriptive reporting, these items demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.76$), supporting their use as indicators of general onboarding satisfaction. For our analysis, we dichotomized these items, coding the highest agreement level (i.e., "Strongly Agree") as 1 and all other responses as 0.⁷

3.3.3. Professional wellbeing outcomes: preparedness, teacher self-efficacy, and workplace interactions

We evaluated the relationship between onboarding practices and three sets of survey items related to teachers' professional wellbeing. The first two measures of professional wellbeing mapped onto professional identity: preparedness and teacher self-efficacy. Preparedness was measured through two items using a 5-point Likert-type scale: *Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the onboarding you received when you were first hired at your site. (1) I knew who to go to with questions after onboarding, and (2) I felt prepared to work at the site after onboarding.* Although not designed as a formal scale, these items were highly correlated and demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.80$), suggesting they capture a shared underlying construct of preparedness. The highest level of agreement (i.e., "Strongly Agree") was coded as 1, while all other responses were coded as 0.

Teacher self-efficacy was measured using an 8-item validated scale (Fantuzzo et al., 2012), which included items related to perceptions of child behavior and workplace stress.⁸ Participants responded using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1="Strongly Agree", 2="Agree", 3="Disagree", and 4="Strongly Disagree"), and items were reverse coded as necessary to indicate higher levels of self-efficacy. A minimum response threshold of 4 was applied, and responses were averaged to create a composite score. Scale reliability for this established instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88. For the analysis, scores were standardized.

The final aspect of professional wellness mapped onto community belonging, which we assessed using workplace interactions. We used a study-specific composite of two 4-point Likert-type items: *How satisfied are you with each of the following? (1) Interactions with other teachers and*

⁵ The inclusion of specific descriptors, including defining coaching as observation and feedback, serves to distinguish this practice from general administrative meetings or supervision.

⁶ Teachers were also given the option to select 'Other onboarding activity' and provide a description. Approximately 1% of our sample reported completing 'other' onboarding activities. Their other experiences did not align with existing categories. Therefore, we included three respondents who completed onboarding practices from the list of six types, in addition to 'other' onboarding, within the respective existing categories. One response from a respondent who only participated in 'other' onboarding was excluded due to insufficient descriptive content.

⁷ Across dichotomized measures, results are substantively similar when grouping "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses or when using an ordered logit model. The results of these analyses are available upon request.

⁸ Items include: (1) The children I work with have behavioral problems that are hard to deal with; (2) I am unable to get the children to do what I want; (3) Doing my job well requires a lot of preparation outside of the paid work day; (4) My classroom becomes so noisy that I feel very irritated; (5) I often have to juggle teaching the children and doing other tasks at the same time; (6) Attending to the many needs of children in my classroom is overwhelming; (7) There are major sources of stress in the children's lives that I can't do anything about; (8) The number of children I am caring for feels too high.

staff, and (2) Interactions with site leaders. These items demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.78$), indicating a cohesive measure of supportive workplace interactions. Responses were dichotomized, with the highest level of satisfaction (i.e., “Very Satisfied”) coded as 1, and all other responses coded as 0.

3.3.4. Risk of turnover outcomes

We assessed risk of turnover using three indicators: overall job satisfaction, intention to remain at their site until the following spring, and intention to remain in the field. Overall job satisfaction was measured using the item: *Think about your position at your site. How satisfied are you with each of the following? (1) Satisfied with the job, overall.* Following this, intention to remain at their site and in the ECE field was assessed by asking teachers to answer the following items: *How likely is it that you will continue working in early childhood education? (1) I will be working at this site in May 2022,⁹ and (2) I view being an early childhood educator (e.g., teacher, leader) as my long-term career.* For each of these Likert-type survey items, responses were collected on a 5-point scale (1=“Strongly Disagree”, through 5=“Strongly Agree”). The internal consistency for this set of indicators was $\alpha = 0.66$. Reliability analysis indicated that this value was driven by the strong correlation between the two site-specific indicators (overall satisfaction and intent to stay; $\alpha = 0.71$), whereas the item measuring long-term career commitment was less strongly associated. We retained all three items to ensure the measure captured both immediate site-level stability and long-term professional commitment, consistent with guidance that conceptual coverage may justify inclusion of items even when internal consistency is modest (Schmitt, 1996). We dichotomized each item, coding the highest level of agreement (“Strongly Agree”) as 1 and all other responses as 0.

3.3.5. Covariates

In our analyses, we controlled for teacher and site characteristics to account for factors that may relate to both onboarding practices and teacher-level outcomes. At the teacher level, we included educational attainment and lead teacher status, as lead teachers often have different educational requirements and may receive more intensive onboarding due to their roles within the classroom.¹⁰ We also included the teacher's hourly wage, since sites with higher wages may have more resources for onboarding. In addition, teachers with higher wages may report greater job satisfaction and commitment.

To capture teacher experience, we included two measures. First, our analyses focused on teachers new to their sites, which is distinct from those who are new to ECE more broadly. We constructed an additional variable to differentiate between ‘novice’ teachers (1 year or less in ECE, coded as 1) and ‘veteran’ teachers (more than 1 year in ECE, coded as 0) to control for potential variation in onboarding based on the timing of entry into the field. Second, we accounted for the number of months teachers had been at their current site, as this duration could influence the types of onboarding they received. At the site level, we controlled for sites' licensed capacity as a proxy for the size of the child care center using administrative data provided by the Louisiana Department of Education. We hypothesized that larger sites might implement more structured onboarding processes or have different organizational practices linked to our outcomes. Detailed descriptions of all survey items related to these measures are available in Appendix A.

3.4. Analytic strategy

To understand teachers' access to and satisfaction with onboarding, we conducted several descriptive analyses. First, we calculated the proportion of child care teachers who completed each of the six onboarding practices (RQ1a, Table 2). We then calculated the proportion of teachers in each Likert response category for the two onboarding satisfaction outcomes and the two preparedness outcomes (RQ1b). These shares are presented in Fig. 1, while Table 3 reports the proportion of teachers responding in the highest agreement category for each outcome.

We conducted three primary analyses to examine the links between onboarding and both professional wellbeing (i.e., preparedness, teacher self-efficacy, and workplace interactions) and risk of turnover (i.e., job satisfaction, commitment to their site, and commitment to the field). We first explored unadjusted relationships by grouping teachers based on the number of onboarding practices completed, ranging from 0 to 6. We grouped teachers who completed 4–6 practices together due to the smaller sample sizes in these categories (12.4 %, 5.7 %, and 9.6 % of the sample, respectively). Descriptive statistics for each outcome by onboarding group are reported in Table 4.

Next, we estimated the covariate-adjusted relationships using two regression models. Model 1 estimated associations between the total number of onboarding practices and each outcome (RQ2a). Model 2 explored associations between specific onboarding practices and outcomes by replacing the count variable with separate indicators for each of the six practices (RQ2b). To include the full set of practice indicators simultaneously, Model 2 was estimated without an intercept. For both models, we ran separate regressions for each outcome of interest.

To account for within-site correlations among teachers, standard errors were clustered at the site level. For regression analyses, we used complete case analysis; therefore, sample sizes in final models vary slightly due to item nonresponse on specific outcomes or covariates (e.g., center characteristics). Teachers who were missing responses on the onboarding practice checklist survey item or all outcome measures were excluded from the analytic sample. To verify that these slight variations in sample size did not introduce bias, we conducted a sensitivity analysis restricting the sample to teachers with complete data on all outcomes and covariates ($n = 226$). Results for this fixed sample were substantively identical to the full sample findings.

For all binary outcomes (e.g., onboarding satisfaction, preparedness, workplace interactions, job satisfaction, and job commitment), we used logistic regression and presented the results as odds ratios (OR). In Model 1, an OR greater than one indicated higher odds of a positive outcome associated with completing more onboarding practices. To isolate the relationship of each individual practice, Model 2 controlled for participation in all other onboarding practices. In Model 2, ORs represented the odds of a positive outcome for teachers who received a specific onboarding practice compared to those who did not, controlling for participation in other practices.

In both Models 1 and 2, the continuous teacher self-efficacy composite score was analyzed using multiple linear regression. For this outcome, we reported standardized coefficients (β). These coefficients represent the difference in teacher self-efficacy, in standard deviation units, associated with each additional onboarding practice in Model 1 and with the reported receipt of a specific practice in Model 2. Results for both models are presented in Table 5, with table notes specifying whether coefficients are odds ratios or standardized regression coefficients.

4. Results

4.1. Research question 1: prevalence and types of onboarding

Table 2 shows the prevalence of onboarding practices reported by child care teachers. First, we examined the quantity of onboarding. In

⁹ May 2022 was about six months after the survey administration.

¹⁰ We conducted sensitivity analyses estimating models separately for lead teachers versus the pooled sample. Results were consistent across groups, though the subsample estimates (lead teachers only) yielded wider confidence intervals due to reduced sample sizes. Consequently, we pool the sample to maximize statistical efficiency.

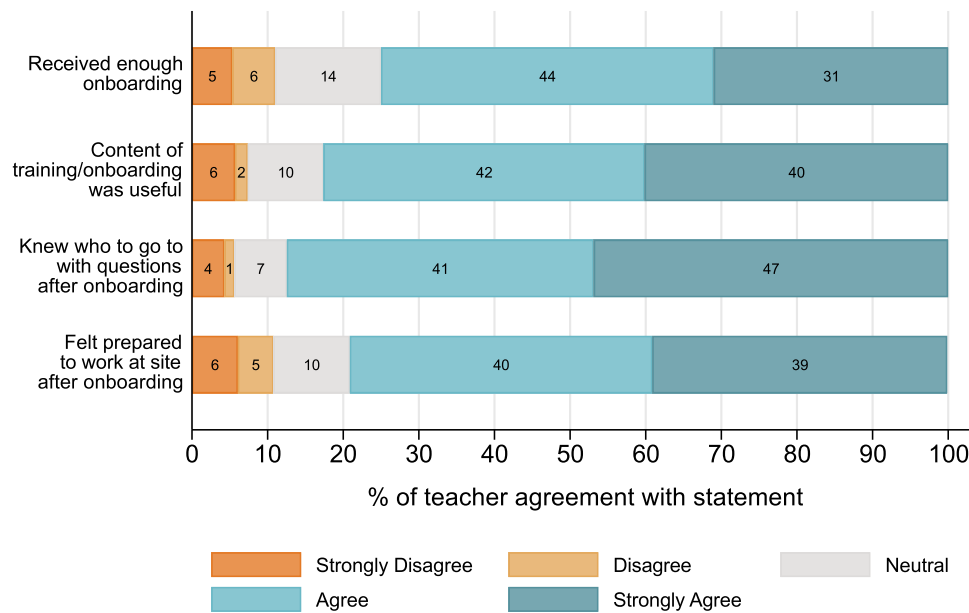


Fig. 1. Proportion of Categorical Responses for Onboarding Satisfaction and Job Preparedness.

Note. Data are drawn from the 2021 SEE-LA survey, conducted in two Louisiana parishes. Each value was calculated as the number of respondents who chose a given response option divided by the total number of respondents who answered a given outcome item. “Onboarding Satisfaction” is operationalized by “Received enough onboarding” and “Content of training/onboarding was useful.” “Job Preparedness” is operationalized by “Knew who to go to with questions after onboarding” and “Felt prepared to work at site after onboarding”.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Outcomes.

Outcome Variable	Count	Mean	SD	N
Onboarding Satisfaction Outcomes				
Proportion of respondents who strongly agree that they				
Received enough onboarding	94	0.31	0.46	301
Onboarding was useful	121	0.40	0.49	300
Professional Wellbeing Outcomes				
Proportion of respondents who strongly agree that they...				
Knew who to go to with questions after onboarding	143	0.47	0.50	304
Felt prepared to work at site after onboarding	115	0.39	0.49	298
Categorical average				
Teacher self-efficacy composite	–	3.19	0.71	301
Proportion of respondents who are very...				
Satisfied with interactions with other staff	182	0.59	0.49	311
Satisfied with interactions with the site leader	187	0.60	0.49	311
Risk of Turnover Outcomes				
Proportion of respondents who are very...				
Satisfied with the job, overall	163	0.52	0.50	312
Likely to still be at the site in May	180	0.58	0.49	312
Confident that ECE will be their long-term career	113	0.36	0.48	311

Note. Data are drawn from the 2021 SEE-LA survey, conducted in two Louisiana parishes. Only the proportion of responses for “Very” or “Strongly Agree” are shown in the average for outcomes in this table. “ECE” = Early Childhood Education. The teacher self-efficacy composite is calculated from a teacher self-efficacy scale (Fantuzzo et al., 2012) and is a composite that is the average of 8 items. Each teacher self-efficacy item has a minimum of 1 (the least perceived efficacy) and a maximum of 4 (the most perceived efficacy). “–” in the Count column indicates that the variable is continuous, so we do not report a count as a statistic.

our sample, 8 % of teachers ($n = 25$) indicated they did not participate in any onboarding practices. Teachers reported completing an average of 2.6 onboarding practices ($SD = 1.71$). Regarding the types of practices, one-on-one training/meeting with a site leader (58 %, $n = 183$) and observation or shadowing of a current teacher (53 %, $n = 165$) were the most common practices. Additionally, a sizable proportion of teachers

completed self-paced activities, received coaching in the classroom, and completed group training, each exceeding 40 % (46 %, $n = 144$; 44 %, $n = 139$; and 41 %, $n = 128$, respectively). Regular meetings with a mentor teacher were less frequently reported (21 %, $n = 66$).

4.1.1. Satisfaction with onboarding

In addition to examining prevalence, we also assessed teachers’ satisfaction with their onboarding experiences. Fig. 1 illustrates teachers’ levels of agreement with statements about their satisfaction with onboarding and preparation, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Most teachers (between 75 % and 88 %) either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the four items related to satisfaction with onboarding and job preparedness; however, approximately 25 % of teachers ($n = 75$) either disagreed or were neutral when asked if they had received enough onboarding. Additionally, about 20 % of teachers ($n = 62$) did not agree that they felt prepared to work at the site after onboarding. Finally, Table 3 provides further insight by showing the proportions of teachers who responded in the highest agreement category for onboarding satisfaction and preparedness outcomes. Only 31 % of teachers ($n = 94$) strongly agreed that they received enough onboarding, and slightly less than 40 % ($n = 115$) strongly agreed that they felt prepared to work at their site after onboarding.

4.2. Research question 2: associations between onboarding and teacher outcomes

We first explored the unadjusted relationships between onboarding and teacher outcomes. Full results are presented in Table 4 and summarized here. Overall, teachers who completed more onboarding practices generally reported stronger agreement with statements across most outcomes. As an example, the likelihood of still being at their site until May was 69 % among those engaging in four or more practices ($n = 87$) compared to 48 % among those with no onboarding ($n = 25$).

Table 5 presents covariate-adjusted regression results used to answer research question 2. Model 1 estimates associations between the total number of onboarding practices (RQ 2a) and each outcome. Model 2 examines the relationships between each type of onboarding practice

Table 4

Unadjusted Relationships between Number of Completed Onboarding Practices and Teacher Outcomes.

Outcome Variable	Number of Completed Onboarding Practices														
	0			1			2			3			4+		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Onboarding Satisfaction Outcomes															
<i>Proportion of respondents who strongly agree that they...</i>															
Received enough onboarding	0.18	0.39	17	0.18	0.39	73	0.22	0.42	54	0.40	0.49	70	0.44	0.50	87
Onboarding was useful	0.07	0.26	15	0.25	0.43	73	0.27	0.45	55	0.49	0.50	70	0.61	0.49	87
Professional Wellbeing Outcomes															
<i>Proportion of respondents who strongly agree that they...</i>															
Knew who to go to with questions after onboarding	0.25	0.45	16	0.28	0.45	74	0.40	0.49	57	0.57	0.50	70	0.63	0.49	87
Felt prepared to work at site after onboarding	0.21	0.43	14	0.22	0.41	74	0.28	0.45	54	0.52	0.50	69	0.52	0.50	87
<i>Categorical average</i>															
Teacher self-efficacy composite	3.10	0.89	25	3.11	0.75	71	3.10	0.72	54	3.26	0.61	65	3.28	0.67	86
<i>Proportion of respondents who are very...</i>															
Satisfied with interactions with other staff	0.44	0.51	25	0.46	0.50	74	0.59	0.50	56	0.62	0.49	69	0.70	0.46	87
Satisfied with interactions with the site leader	0.44	0.51	25	0.53	0.50	74	0.60	0.49	57	0.62	0.49	69	0.70	0.46	86
Risk of Turnover Outcomes															
<i>Proportion of respondents who are very...</i>															
Satisfied with the job, overall.	0.24	0.44	25	0.47	0.50	73	0.47	0.50	57	0.63	0.49	70	0.60	0.49	87
Likely to still be at the site in May	0.48	0.51	25	0.44	0.50	75	0.54	0.50	56	0.65	0.48	69	0.69	0.47	87
Confident that ECE will be their long-term career	0.32	0.48	25	0.30	0.46	74	0.23	0.43	56	0.37	0.49	70	0.51	0.50	86

Note. Data are drawn from the 2021 SEE-LA survey, conducted in two Louisiana parishes. Only the proportion of responses for "Very" or "Strongly Agree" are shown in the average for outcomes in this table. 25 teachers reported zero onboarding practices, 75 completed one practice, 57 completed two practices, 70 completed three, and 87 completed four to six practices. Differences in Ns reflect missingness in outcome variables. "4+" represents respondents who completed 4, 5, or 6 onboarding practices (out of 6 total practices). "ECE" = Early Childhood Education. "PD" = Professional Development. The Teacher Efficacy Composite is calculated from a teacher efficacy scale (Fantuzzo et al., 2012) and is a composite that is the average of 8 items. Each teacher efficacy item has a minimum of 1 (the least efficacy) and a maximum of 4 (the most efficacy).

Table 5

Regression Coefficients for Associations between Onboarding Practices and Onboarding Satisfaction, Professional Wellbeing, and Risk of Turnover Outcomes.

Outcome Variable	N	Model 1	Model 2							
		# of Onb. Practices	1-on-1 w/Leader	Coaching	Group	Mentoring	Observations	Self-Paced	None	
<u>Onboarding Satisfaction</u>										
Received enough onboarding	246	1.390** (0.154)	2.647* (1.038)	2.570* (1.043)	1.268 (0.376)	1.672 (0.711)	1.237 (0.380)	0.569+ (0.194)	2.542 (2.018)	
Onboarding was useful	243	1.587*** (0.163)	1.670 (0.535)	2.478** (0.824)	1.039 (0.301)	1.555 (0.609)	1.342 (0.410)	1.260 (0.410)	0.379 (0.404)	
<u>Professional Wellbeing</u>										
Knew who to go to w/ questions	247	1.459*** (0.146)	1.722+ (0.526)	2.002* (0.580)	0.706 (0.220)	0.966 (0.414)	1.759+ (0.513)	1.962* (0.623)	1.589 (1.142)	
Felt prepared to work at site	242	1.480*** (0.147)	1.838+ (0.583)	3.142*** (1.029)	1.199 (0.352)	0.943 (0.379)	2.090** (0.595)	0.708 (0.242)	1.111 (0.789)	
Std. Teacher Self-Efficacy Score (Lin. Reg.)	247	0.076* (0.036)	0.294* (0.146)	0.379** (0.127)	0.092 (0.114)	-0.111 (0.155)	-0.078 (0.133)	-0.107 (0.142)	0.188 (0.282)	
Satisfied with interactions w/ other staff	254	1.366*** (0.106)	1.390 (0.455)	2.217* (0.732)	1.572+ (0.407)	1.193 (0.473)	1.274 (0.405)	0.901 (0.285)	0.976 (0.459)	
Satisfied with interactions w/ site leader	254	1.330*** (0.110)	1.374 (0.406)	2.248* (0.751)	1.276 (0.396)	1.236 (0.421)	1.140 (0.345)	0.992 (0.310)	1.087 (0.554)	
<u>Risk of Turnover</u>										
Satisfied with the job, overall	254	1.303*** (0.098)	1.878** (0.449)	1.852+ (0.603)	1.165 (0.371)	1.164 (0.416)	1.047 (0.294)	0.788 (0.232)	0.725 (0.349)	
Likely to still be at site in May	255	1.356** (0.126)	1.315 (0.427)	2.179* (0.744)	1.571 (0.562)	1.476 (0.566)	1.068 (0.311)	0.721 (0.261)	0.973 (0.450)	
Confident ECE will be long-term career	253	1.387*** (0.134)	1.615 (0.577)	1.901* (0.602)	3.149*** (0.840)	0.809 (0.324)	1.349 (0.436)	0.813 (0.244)	2.680* (1.319)	

Note. Each cell in the table corresponds to an estimated coefficient given by the column title for the outcome variable in each row. This results in 20 separate models represented in the table. "ECE" = Early childhood education. "Std." = Standardized. "Lin. Reg." = Linear Regression. "# of Onb. Practices" = Number of Onboarding Practices and is treated as a continuous variable from 0 to 6. This variable is used as the predictor of interest in Model 1. Indicator variables for whether a teacher completed each onboarding practice type are included as a predictor set in Model 2. All models include the following covariates: Teacher Covariates: Has Some College, Has Associate's Degree, Has Bachelor's Degree, Lead Teacher, New to ECE, Months at Site, and Hourly Wage (High School or Less Education is used as a reference category); Site Covariates: Site Capacity Size. Standard errors are clustered at the site level and are shown in parentheses. Teacher self-efficacy is reported as the standardized estimated coefficient from a linear regression. All other outcomes are reported as odds ratios. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

(RQ 2b) and those same outcomes, with all practice types entered into the regression simultaneously. Each row in Table 5 represents a separate regression for a specific outcome variable. Additionally for Model 2, the columns display the coefficients for each specific onboarding practice,

controlling for completion of other practices.

4.2.1. Onboarding satisfaction

Model 1, which focused on the total number of onboarding practices,

showed that with each additional practice, teachers had 39 % higher odds of strongly agreeing that they received enough onboarding ($OR = 1.390, p < 0.01$) and 59 % higher odds of strongly agreeing that the content of training/onboarding was useful ($OR = 1.587, p < 0.001$). Model 2, which explored relationships by type of onboarding practice, found statistically significant relationships with two practices: having one-on-one trainings/meetings with a site leader and receiving coaching in the classroom. Specifically, teachers who participated in one-on-one trainings/meetings had more than twice the odds of strongly agreeing that they received enough onboarding ($OR = 2.647, p < 0.05$). Similarly, teachers who received coaching in the classroom had more than twice the odds of reporting strong agreement with receiving enough onboarding ($OR = 2.570, p < 0.05$), compared to teachers who did not receive these respective practices. Additionally, teachers who received coaching in the classroom during onboarding had higher odds of strongly agreeing that the content of the training/onboarding was useful ($OR = 2.478, p < 0.01$). The coefficient on completing self-paced activities was also significant at the 0.10 level.

4.2.2. Professional wellbeing: preparedness, teacher self-efficacy, and workplace interactions

Next, we explored the relationship between onboarding practices and our measures of professional wellbeing. We found positive associations between onboarding and preparedness. In Model 1, each additional onboarding practice was significantly associated with higher odds of teachers knowing who to go to with questions after onboarding ($OR = 1.459, p < 0.001$) and feeling prepared to work at the site after onboarding ($OR = 1.480, p < 0.001$). Model 2 revealed that receiving coaching in the classroom and completing self-paced activities showed significant associations with teachers knowing who to go to with questions after onboarding ($OR = 2.002, p < 0.05$; $OR = 1.962, p < 0.05$, respectively), while receiving coaching in the classroom and observing or shadowing a current teacher was significantly related to feeling prepared to work at the site after onboarding ($OR = 3.142, p < 0.001$; $OR = 2.090, p < 0.01$, respectively). Having one-on-one trainings/meetings with a site leader was marginally associated with both preparedness outcomes ($p < 0.10$).

Model 1 revealed that each additional onboarding practice was associated with a 0.08 standard deviation (SD) higher score in teacher self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.076, p < 0.05$). Overall, teacher self-efficacy scores averaged 3.19 out of 4.00 ($SD = 0.71$). In Model 2, specific practices were also linked to higher self-efficacy levels. Teachers who had one-on-one trainings/meetings with site leaders or received coaching in the classroom reported scores that were 0.29 and 0.38 standard deviations higher, respectively, compared to teachers who did not receive these supports.

We also examined the relationship between onboarding practices and satisfaction with workplace interactions. Model 1 showed that completing each additional onboarding practice was associated with slightly higher odds of teachers being satisfied with interactions with other teachers and staff ($OR = 1.366, p < 0.001$) and with their site leaders ($OR = 1.330, p < 0.001$). In Model 2, receiving coaching in the classroom was associated with higher odds of satisfaction with interactions with other teachers and staff ($OR = 2.217, p < 0.05$) and with site leader interactions ($OR = 2.248, p < 0.05$). Additionally, group training was marginally associated with satisfaction with interactions with other teachers and staff ($OR = 1.572, p < 0.10$).

4.2.3. Risk of turnover: job satisfaction

Model 1 examined the relationship between the cumulative number of onboarding practices and teacher job satisfaction. The results indicated that each additional practice was associated with 30 % higher odds of a teacher reporting they were very satisfied with their job ($OR = 1.303, p < 0.001$). When looking at specific types of support in Model 2, two practices are related to job satisfaction. One-on-one trainings/meetings with site leaders were significantly associated with 88 %

higher odds of high job satisfaction ($OR = 1.878, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, receiving coaching in the classroom was marginally associated with 85 % higher odds of being very satisfied with their job ($OR = 1.852, p < 0.10$).

4.2.4. Risk of turnover: job commitment and career intentions

Beyond immediate satisfaction, we explored how onboarding relates to teachers' longer-term professional commitment and intentions. Model 1 showed a positive relationship between the total number of onboarding practices and both a teacher's likelihood of remaining at their site the following May ($OR = 1.356, p < 0.01$) and their confidence in being an early childhood educator as a long-term career ($OR = 1.387, p < 0.001$). Model 2 revealed that receiving coaching in the classroom and group training were the specific practices most strongly associated with these commitment outcomes. For example, teachers who received coaching in the classroom had more than twice the odds of reporting that it was very likely they would still be working at their site in May ($OR = 2.179, p < 0.05$). Receiving coaching in the classroom was also linked to 90 % higher odds of expressing strong confidence that being an early childhood educator would be their long-term career ($OR = 1.901, p < 0.05$). Additionally, group training showed a statistically significant positive relationship with long-term career confidence ($OR = 3.149, p < 0.001$). Interestingly, not participating in any onboarding practices (None) was also positively associated with career confidence ($OR = 2.680, p < 0.05$), a surprising finding that was not observed for any other study outcome.

5. Discussion

Child care settings in the United States experience very high turnover rates, particularly among novice teachers (Bassok et al., 2021; Bellows et al., 2022). Cross-site variability in both instructional quality and turnover suggests that site-level factors may influence teacher quality and retention (Doromal et al., 2022). Research from K-12 contexts highlights that formalized job entry experiences, such as teacher induction and mentoring programs, can improve teacher retention, self-efficacy, and instructional quality (Keese et al., 2023). Though less is known about onboarding in child care settings, these early professional supports may be similarly helpful.

This study provides some of the first quantitative evidence on the prevalence and types of onboarding experiences in child care settings, as well as their links to key teacher outcomes, including job preparedness, self-efficacy, workplace interactions, job satisfaction, and job commitment. Specifically, we find that while onboarding experiences vary, participating in a greater number of onboarding practices is consistently associated with stronger endorsements of professional wellbeing, including professional identity (preparedness and self-efficacy) and community belonging (workplace interactions), as well as a reduced risk of turnover, measured by higher job satisfaction and intentions to remain at their jobs and in the field. Furthermore, more personalized onboarding practices, including one-on-one trainings/meetings with site leaders and receiving coaching in the classroom, were specifically linked to these positive teacher outcomes. This evidence points to the potential value of onboarding in supporting the work of early educators.

5.1. Prevalence and variability of onboarding

Our first key finding is the significant variability in teachers' onboarding experiences. While most child care teachers reported participating in some form of onboarding, with an average of about three practices, nearly 1 in 10 teachers (8 %) reported receiving no onboarding at all. This is notable, given that licensing regulations mandate specific training upon hiring (Louisiana Department of Education, 2021). To dig into this deeper, we conducted an analysis of variance. We found that nearly all variation in the number of onboarding practices (94 %) occurred within sites, with non-significant

variation between sites. This indicates that onboarding is rarely a standardized “program” where all new hires at a center receive the same support. Instead, it appears to be idiosyncratic, with some teachers within the same site reporting that they completed more or less onboarding.

The limited participation in onboarding may be due to several factors, including variation in regulatory compliance and enforcement, differences in how sites interpret onboarding requirements, and resource constraints at smaller or under-resourced centers. Moreover, some educators may not recognize certain activities as onboarding, while others may arrive at sites when onboarding is not immediately available. Alternatively, voluntary non-participation may occur if newly hired teachers or site leaders feel that the new hire’s prior experience or skills make formal onboarding unnecessary. We also found that 1 in 4 teachers felt that they did not receive enough onboarding, and more than 1 in 5 teachers indicated that they did not feel prepared to work at their site after onboarding. These findings suggest that current onboarding practices, which vary within sites and do not appear to be standard protocols, may not be sufficient in supporting newly hired teachers’ transition to their jobs.

For those who did receive onboarding, practices that could be considered as personalized attention or modeling were most common: 58 % reported completing one-on-one trainings/meetings with a site leader, 53 % observed or shadowed a current teacher, and 44 % received coaching in the classroom. Meeting regularly with a mentor teacher, another personalized strategy, was less commonly reported (21 %). Group training (41 %) and self-paced activities (46 %) were also common, likely because they are efficient and cost-effective strategies. While these methods can address basic training needs, they may lack the individualized support offered by strategies like coaching or mentoring, unless mixed with additional onboarding practices (e.g., group coaching).

5.2. Onboarding and teacher outcomes

5.2.1. Number of onboarding practices

Second, our findings suggest that both the quantity and type of onboarding matter. Teachers who engaged in more onboarding practices reported greater onboarding satisfaction, specifically that they received enough onboarding and found its content useful. Number of practices was also positively correlated with our measures of professional identity. Teachers who experienced more onboarding were more likely to know who to go to with questions and to feel prepared to work at their site (preparedness), in addition to demonstrating higher levels of self-efficacy. Additionally, more onboarding was associated with higher job satisfaction, a greater likelihood of teachers reporting that they intended to stay working at their site in the following May, and greater confidence that being an early childhood educator would be their long-term career. From a JD-R perspective, these findings illustrate the value of resource accumulation (Demerouti, 2025): rather than any single practice being sufficient on its own, a higher volume of onboarding supports appears to bolster the motivational process associated with professional wellbeing and sustained job commitment.

Contrary to our hypothesis, teachers receiving no onboarding reported higher career confidence than those receiving minimal supports. We strongly caution against over-interpreting this finding given the small sample size and potential for unobserved site-level confounders (e.g., leadership quality) that we cannot directly test. However, the pattern could reflect a *honeymoon phase* of optimism, where a lack of exposure to role expectations preserves an idealized view of the profession. Alternatively, descriptive data suggest this small subgroup ($n = 25$) may differ from those who completed at least one onboarding practice. Although not statistically significant, they earned slightly higher wages and were more likely to hold a Bachelor’s degree than their peers.

Our findings, consistent with the notion that onboarding helps mitigate job demands and foster professional wellbeing, align with the

JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and prior research that qualitatively finds that insufficient job resources directly undermine teachers’ perceived ability to be effective in the classroom (Schaack et al., 2022). Specifically, these results support the theory that onboarding may function as an organizational job resource that buffers against lack of confidence and role ambiguity, as evidenced by our finding that onboarding is significantly associated with both teacher self-efficacy and preparedness (measured here as feeling ready to work and knowing who to go to with questions). By fostering confidence in teachers’ ability to succeed (self-efficacy) and equipping them with clear expectations (preparedness), onboarding likely reduces the burden of navigating new responsibilities without guidance, thereby supporting professional identity (McCormick et al., 2022). Our findings also suggest onboarding facilitates social integration into a new site. By promoting positive interactions with colleagues and supervisors, onboarding fosters *community belonging*, a central component of professional wellbeing. In our sample, these interactions were also associated with a reduction in the risk of turnover, echoing prior suggestions that social integration is a key component of professional stability (McCormick et al., 2022; Schaack et al., 2022).

5.2.2. Types of onboarding practices

Third, our findings indicate that specific onboarding practices may be particularly useful. One-on-one trainings/meetings with site leaders and receiving coaching in the classroom were strongly associated with multiple beneficial outcomes, such as preparedness, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. Notably, the finding that coaching was consistently associated with positive outcomes aligns with a robust body of research identifying coaching as a high-leverage professional development strategy in early childhood (e.g., Artman-Meeker et al., 2015). We find that coaching seems to facilitate relationship-building between newly hired teachers and existing staff or site leaders. As a JD-R resource, personalized onboarding practices, like one-on-one meetings with leaders and receiving coaching in the classroom, may function as organizational resources that help buffer against high job demands. By facilitating early interactions with leaders, these practices may ground the supportive relationships necessary for professional wellbeing (McCormick et al., 2022). Consequently, one-on-one trainings/meetings with site leaders and receiving coaching in the classroom may also help newly hired teachers feel more valued and engaged with their work, potentially enhancing their sense of connection to the workplace.

We also found suggestive evidence that completing self-paced activities was negatively associated with most teacher outcomes. This could imply that self-paced activities might be less beneficial compared to other forms of onboarding. One potential explanation is that self-paced activities may lack interactive and relational elements, present in more personalized practices, which leave teachers feeling less supported and less connected to their colleagues. From a JD-R lens, while coaching functions as a resource that helps teachers meet instructional demands, self-paced activities may be experienced as an additional job demand, that is, a task to complete without supportive interaction to make it meaningful. Alternatively, it is also possible that the observed negative associations reflect the quality or content of the self-paced materials themselves, rather than the format of onboarding.

5.3. Implications for research, policy, and practice

The pervasive issue of high turnover in ECE settings has consequences that extend beyond the immediate loss of educators. When teachers leave, providers not only lose personnel but also the investments made in training and developing those educators. As a result, additional time and resources are diverted to recruiting and training new staff. High turnover often results in a heightened focus on recruitment efforts, which may reduce the attention given to professional learning and quality investments for existing staff (Doromal et al., 2022; Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). This cycle places additional strain on

remaining educators, who must manage the workload of colleagues who have left, exacerbating challenging working conditions and perpetuating instability in the workforce.

In addition to turnover concerns, instructional quality is another critical factor impacted by workforce instability. High-quality care requires ongoing professional learning, and onboarding can serve as an important initial opportunity to equip teachers with essential skills. Our findings suggest that robust onboarding practices, particularly those that emphasize personalized support such as one-on-one meetings with site leaders or receiving coaching in the classroom, may enhance both classroom quality and teacher retention. Onboarding may enhance instructional quality by equipping teachers with necessary resources, while also promoting workforce stability. By fostering a sense of preparedness and commitment from the start, site leaders may reduce the likelihood of early-career exits.

However, onboarding alone cannot address all the challenges related to quality and retention. While our data identify onboarding as a potential job resource, the JD-R model theorizes that resources must be sufficient to balance demands. We acknowledge that structural demands, especially low wages and limited career advancement opportunities, play a crucial role in workforce instability (Totenhagen et al., 2016). These issues must be addressed in tandem with enhanced onboarding efforts to fully support and retain quality educators. Although effective onboarding may improve immediate job performance and satisfaction, without competitive compensation and clear professional growth pathways, even well-onboarded educators may ultimately leave the profession.

To address this, policy initiatives could move beyond general compliance mandates to specific standards for high-quality onboarding. For instance, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) or state licensing guidelines could explicitly incentivize evidence-based practices, such as regular one-on-one meetings with site leaders or coaching cycles for new hires. However, standards alone are insufficient without resources. Allocating public funds to cover the costs of these supports, including the non-contact time required for instructional coaching and supervision meetings, could be an investment feasible through existing federal quality improvement funding streams currently available to states. Furthermore, ensuring leaders are well-equipped and satisfied in their roles is crucial, as their capacity and efficacy can shape the quality of onboarding provided to new teachers, directly impacting both instructional quality and workforce development.

Finally, our results suggest the utility of onboarding specifically for teachers new to their sites. Exploratory analyses (results available upon request) confirm consistent results for both true novice teachers, that is, those in their first year in ECE, and experienced teachers transitioning to a new site.¹¹ Given recent evidence that teachers grow in their ability over time (e.g., Bellows et al., 2024) and that turnover rates decrease with experience (Bellows et al., 2022), our data suggests that onboarding may also function as a stabilizer for experienced teachers. Thus, our findings provide suggestive evidence that initially supporting all teachers during their first year at a site through onboarding could be an efficient investment.

¹¹ We conducted sensitivity analyses to test whether the relationship between onboarding and teacher outcomes differed for teachers with one year or less in the ECE field (“novices”) versus those with more experience. These stratified models revealed consistent patterns of association for the majority of outcomes, including job satisfaction, retention intentions, and workplace interactions. The only notable difference was for self-efficacy, where the total count of onboarding practices was a significant predictor for novice teachers but not for experienced teachers, suggesting that initial supports are particularly critical for resource-building needs of novice teachers as they navigate early classroom demands. Given the overall stability of the estimates, we only present the pooled results with ‘New to ECE’ included as a covariate in the main text.

5.4. Limitations and future directions

Our study provides a useful exploration of the relationship between onboarding practices and key teacher outcomes. Nonetheless, it has several limitations. First, as noted above, we did not directly evaluate the content, quality, or precise dosage of onboarding programs. For example, while we know *coaching* likely involves observation and feedback given the survey item’s wording, we do not know the specific coaching model or focus area (e.g., instructional support vs. behavioral) teachers were referencing when answering this item. Similarly, the survey items “...one-on-one trainings/meetings with a site leader” and “...the content of training/onboarding was useful” rely on compound terms that combine potentially distinct activities. As a result, we are unable to distinguish whether teachers were reporting on administrative check-ins, formal instructional training, or broader onboarding experiences. Onboarding content and quality are likely to influence outcomes such as teacher preparedness, satisfaction, and retention. While we use satisfaction as a teacher-reported signal of quality, we lack observational data to objectively assess these factors in this study.

Relatedly, while we used the total count of practices as a proxy for intensity, our measure of onboarding relied on binary indicators of whether a practice was completed. This allowed us to capture the breadth of support but not the actual duration or quality. For instance, our data counts “meeting regularly with a mentor teacher” as a single practice regardless of whether it happened a few times for 30 min or weekly for six months. Consequently, we cannot distinguish between high-quality, intensive implementation and checking a box for compliance. Future research should prioritize collecting detailed data on the frequency, duration, and intensity of these activities to determine the optimal dosage to improve teacher outcomes.

Third, our study is observational and cannot establish causality. We do not know why some sites offer more or less onboarding or different types of onboarding, and it is likely that unobserved factors, such as site resources or leadership quality, are influencing the observed associations. For instance, sites providing more onboarding, and more tailored onboarding, may also offer other professional supports or maintain a healthier site climate, which we cannot assess in our data. In the future, research should explore barriers to implementation and include more information about site characteristics and leadership to help account for their potential influence on onboarding practices and teacher outcomes. Additionally, since most teachers in our sample had been at their sites for about six months at the time of data collection, it is possible that teachers who struggled the most or who received the least onboarding may have already left their positions by that point, reducing key variability in our outcomes and potentially weakening observed associations.

Fourth, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential response biases that may influence the interpretation of our findings. Since we cannot independently verify the accuracy of participants’ responses, these biases could lead to skewed associations. For instance, teachers may have provided socially desirable answers regarding their job satisfaction or self-efficacy to appear more professional or committed. Such subjective reporting can mask the true variation in teacher experiences across different sites. Future research should consider additional measures of teacher outcomes that are not self-reported, including classroom quality and observed turnover from administrative records or classroom observations.

Finally, the generalizability of our findings is limited by our sampling strategy and study context. Rather than using a random or nationally representative sample, we invited the universe of the teacher workforce within publicly funded (Type III) child care centers in two Louisiana parishes to participate. While this approach allows for a comprehensive examination of these specific communities, our findings may not generalize to other geographic regions or to teachers in centers that do not receive public funding. Additionally, data were collected during the late stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic may have uniquely

influenced onboarding delivery, specifically by limiting the number and type of in-person onboarding practices available to teachers and increasing reliance on virtual or socially distanced alternatives. Future research in diverse settings and using more recent data and rigorous sampling designs is essential to understanding how these trends apply more broadly. Specifically, longitudinal studies conducted in a more stable labor market could clarify if these associations remain consistent when centers are not facing pandemic-related staffing crises.

6. Conclusion

Early educators play an essential role in fostering young children's development, yet they often receive low wages and face numerous job demands, factors often associated with high turnover rates (Phillips et al., 2019; Wells, 2015; Whitebook et al., 2014). Research has shown that a supportive work environment and effective leadership are site-level factors associated with lower turnover (Doromal & Markowitz, 2023; Grant et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2018; McMullen et al., 2020). This study adds to that literature by demonstrating that onboarding, a set of initial, site-specific, professional supports, may help improve outcomes for newly hired child care workers. Specifically, we found that completing a greater number of onboarding practices was associated with higher levels of job preparedness, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and job commitment. More personalized, intensive practices, such as receiving coaching in the classroom, were the most strongly and consistently related to our outcomes of interest. These findings provide promising evidence that onboarding may serve as a valuable tool for enhancing professional wellbeing and reducing risk of turnover in early childhood education.

While these results are promising, further research is necessary to explore the content and quality of onboarding programs and how they relate to other critical outcomes, such as classroom quality and actual teacher turnover. Onboarding, as part of a broader suite of professional supports, including ongoing professional development and competitive compensation, may be instrumental in strengthening the early education workforce (IOM & NRC, 2015). To ensure extant investments in early care and education create high-quality experiences for young children, and more equitable educational outcomes, a continued focus on supporting the workforce is necessary. While many steps need to be taken, providing robust onboarding experiences may be one concrete action site leaders and policymakers can take to support educators in the essential work they do.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Google Gemini in order to refine grammar and improve clarity of writing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the published article.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Hannah Denker: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Anna J Markowitz:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Daphna Bassok:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2026.03.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2026.03.003).

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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