Guide to Support Pre-K Expansion:

Creating and Supporting a Highly Qualified Workforce during Pre-K Expansion

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One of the goals of pre-K programs funded by states is to support the learning and development of young children. Research finds that only high-quality programs can achieve positive, long-term outcomes in areas such as student achievement, educational attainment, personal and social behavior (e.g., reductions in crime), and adult health and economic productivity.[1] Teachers are not only a strong, but also a direct determinant of the quality of a preschool program.[2] As states plan for expansion of public preschool programs, the working conditions, qualifications, and compensation of the current workforce need to be addressed as well as strengthened to recruit future pre-K teachers who are highly-qualified and prepared to meet each child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in partnership with parents.

Creating, building, and maintaining a high-quality preschool workforce

The following are some of the policies and actions states, as well as school systems that operate preschool programs, can implement that will create, support and retain a high-quality early learning teaching staff.

Key Takeaways

- To create a high-quality preschool workforce, states can begin by developing a unified statewide vision informed by workforce data.

- Each state has the ability to create career pathways that acknowledge various points of entry, incorporate job-embedded or competency-based models, use stackable certificates, provide for smooth transitions from AA to BA degrees, and offer financial and additional supports.

- Continuous strong professional development is critical for maintaining a high-quality preschool workforce.

- Strategies that support salary parity and equity include not just entry level pay, but adequate salary schedules and comparable benefits.

- States efforts to improve the pre-K workforce can be designed to facilitate diversity and cultural and linguistic competencies.

Create a Unified and Informed Statewide Vision for developing an ECE workforce

Establish a statewide workforce advisory board. Through legislation, Washington created the *Early Childhood Education Workforce Council*[6] that includes not only state early childhood leaders but also representatives from higher ed, the state workforce board, and the economic development office. This advisory board makes recommendations to policy makers on enhancing the early care and education workforce, including competencies and career pathways. In 2010, Colorado developed its first *Early Learning Professional Development System Plan*.[7] The updated plan (2017) is organized by activities and its 3-year timeline identifies the implementation of a comprehensive professional development system that recruits, retains, compensates, develops, and supports a high-quality early childhood workforce.[8] It is critical to note that if a plan is to be implemented, then dedicated staffing and an organizational "backbone" needs to be identified to keep the work going.

What is a highly qualified preschool workforce?

- The preschool workforce includes several different positions, however, for the purpose of this brief, we are including those that have regular, direct contact with the preschool children: lead teachers and assistant teachers.3 Based on research, NIEER has identified several different policy areas that relate to the preschool workforce that are correlated to highly effective preschool programs:[4]
- Lead Teacher Degree: Multiple studies including those by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Science recommend that lead preschool teachers have a BA with specialized training.
- Lead Teacher Specialized Training: IOM and NRC reports have also emphasized that lead teachers who have specialized training (child development, knowledge of learning, preschool pedagogy) are more effective.
- Assistant Teacher Degree: There is not much research on the qualifications of assistant teachers; however, the Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing program has been recommended to help put assistant teachers on the pathway to become teachers rather than permanent assistants.
- Staff Professional Development: Research indicates regular and on-going professional learning for teachers, including coaching or job-embedded support, enhances high-quality experiences for children.
- Salary Equity: Compensation must be adequate to attract and retain strong teachers. In addition, economic and food insecurity is common among the early childhood workforce, who are primarily comprised of women of color.[5]

Collect and use workforce data. Often a missing piece for states is adequate preschool workforce data systems. States often collect early childhood workforce data, typically qualifications and participation in professional development activities, through either a workforce registry or workforce surveys. However, participation is typically voluntary and only required of some individuals.[9] In addition, the data are often collected separately by program funding streams, therefore making it difficult to understand the overall needs of the state thus limiting their ability to develop critical workforce policies.[10]

North Carolina utilizes surveys to collect data on the early childhood workforce's education level, compensation, access to professional support, and turnover.[11] Between 2013-2018, 27 states had published workforce survey data, collecting information on staff characteristics and perceptions and their working conditions,[12] including Illinois whose registry produces an annual report that identifies trends related to teacher demographics, education level, professional development participation, and wages.[13]

Establish Career Pathways that are Comprehensive, Aligned and Accessible

Each state sets its own qualifications for pre-K teachers and what is required to obtain a license or certificate. Comprehensive career pathways provide a clear sequence of coursework and training credentials aligned with both the state's licensing requirements and pre-K program needs, incorporating some of the following elements.

Various points of entry. Some states provide opportunities for high school students to dually enroll in a community college. The Council for Professional Recognition has created a High School Child Development Associate® (CDA) credential, an entry into the ECE workforce pipeline.[14] Throughout the country, smaller teacher prep programs have created programs for assistant teachers who want to work toward fulltime teacher licensure.[15]

Job-embedded/competency-based models. West Virginia's *Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist* program combines college work with on-the-job training.[16] Through four semesters, students complete a total of 300 hours of course work and 4,000 hours on the job. The preschool setting agrees to provide supervision and increase wages upon successful completion of the program. Wisconsin's *credit for prior learning* acknowledges the relevant experience, non-credit-bearing training, and non-traditional schooling many of the ECE workforce obtain. Individuals who are able to demonstrate the relevant skills and knowledge previously acquired through these non-traditional methods may obtain college credits.[17] North Carolina's *NC Birth-through-Kindergarten License* requires an in-service component that consists of three years of mentoring, including formal evaluations and professional development plans.[18]

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Stackable certificates. Stackable credentials are defined as individual certificates that are part of a sequence and can be accumulated over time, typically following a career pathway.[19] Washington has aligned its early childhood institutions of higher education's course titles, numbers, descriptions, and student outcomes to the state's Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals. They have also created a system of stackable certificates that build on one another in a sequential manner.[20] The *New Mexico Child Development Certificate* is a state-issued credential equivalent to the CDA and can be applied to an AA degree.[21]

Credits earned for an AA degree articulate to a BA degree.[22] California passed the *Associate Degrees for Transfer* (2013) requiring community colleges offer associate degrees that transfer to four-year colleges for select majors, including early childhood education. According to NCSL, Connecticut, Indiana, New Mexico and Pennsylvania, have also implemented statewide articulation agreements.[23]

Financial support. New Mexico's HB 275 (2019) provides for financial aid for students who want to become teachers and enacts the Teacher Preparation Affordability Act with $10 million of scholarship funds. New Mexico also addressed assistant teachers with the *Grow Your Own Teachers Act* (2019) which supports assistants with up to $3,000 per semester to complete degree and licensure requirements. Maine's *Act To Attract, Build And Retain An Early Childhood Education Workforce Through Increased Training, Education And Career Pathways (2019)* with over $3.4 million in funding to support the early childhood workforce.

T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) was established in 1990 to support early childhood teachers in completing degrees. In 2019, T.E.A.C.H. programs garnered $40.1 million to support 17,495 scholarships in 21 states and D.C.[24] In addition to T.E.A.C.H, states have been establishing their own ECE workforce scholarship programs, including Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Vermont who established programs in 2019.

Additional support. According to CSCCE, other supports that have helped early educators succeed in completing their degree programs include having cohort models; flexible class schedules (e.g. weekend courses, night courses); classes offered in satellite campuses located in communities; and additional academic counseling or advising that focuses on early childhood education.[25] The EarlyEdU Alliance has developed 16 ECE courses available in two formats: in-person and online.[26] Courses are piloted at the University of Washington's Early Childhood and Family Studies Program and then made available to other universities.

Offer Continuous, On-going Professional Development

Limited opportunity for professional development and support is a most serious work-life issue that contributes to lack of professional progress, low morale, and high rates of teacher turnover. High teacher turnover has been found to negatively affect children's social, emotional, and language development.[27] Professional learning must be grounded in children's development and early learning and include addressing the diverse backgrounds of children in programs. High-quality professional learning includes the support of supervisors, mentors, coaches, and peers, such as New Mexico's *Early Childhood Mentor Netwo*rk.[28]

Access to opportunities for professional learning for preschool teachers has been addressed in Massachusetts through the creation of the *StrongStart Professional Development Centers*

> **Principles for Professional Learning Systems**
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> A high-quality professional learning system provides practitioners with coherent, interrelated, and continuous professional learning activities and mechanisms that are aligned with each other and with the science of child development... professional learning activities and mechanisms have the following characteristics:
>
> - Intentional
> - Ongoing
> - Coherent
> - Collaborative and Interdisciplinary
> - Tied to Practice
> - Responsive
>
> From: Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation (2015), p. 502-503

are regionally based centers that provide TA, coaching, and have professional learning communities.[29] In Florida, the state partially funds *Early Learning Florida*, an online professional development system (including courses, coaching, and communities of practice) created with the University of Florida Lastinger Center, Early Learning Florida.[30]

Finally, ongoing professional learning should include instructional leaders. For example, Alabama's *PreK–3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning* is a state-grant that supports both teachers and school leaders. Principals who receive a grant are required to participate in the National Association for Elementary School Principals *Pre-K–3 Leadership Academy.*[31]

Establish Salary Parity and Equity

Most state-funded pre-K programs allow preschool teachers to be paid less than early elementary school teachers (K–3), even when preschool teachers must have the same qualifications.[32] Although 25 states in 2017-2018 required all preschool teachers, regardless of setting, to hold a bachelor's degree and certification, only Hawaii, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Rhode Island also required equal starting salaries and schedules between all preschool and K–3 teachers.[33] In 2017, median wages for early educators ranged from $10.72 per hour (or $22,290 full-time per year) to $13.94 per hour (or $28,990 full-time per year).[34] Poor pay and higher levels of teacher stress are associated with lower observed classroom quality in early childhood programs.[35]

Many states have policies that incrementally improve compensation for early childhood educators, such as wage supplements and tax credit. The following are some strategies to move toward salary parity and equity for pre-K teachers in a more sustainable and meaningful ways:

Establish the same starting salary for pre-K and K teachers. In 2017-2018, only Alabama, Georgia, Minnesota's VPK program, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon's Preschool Promise, and Rhode Island had pre-K teachers in both public schools and private programs, and those teachers had the same starting salary equal to K-3 teachers.[36] Georgia began moving to developing a pay parity in 2015 when the governor created an Education Reform Commission that recommended the development of a pay scale for pre-K teachers that would take into account education and experience beginning in 2016-2017.[37]

> In 2019, Oregon passed legislation to increase education funding by over $2 billion. Some of this funding has been targeted to address the ECE workforce pipeline by creating early learning professional networks and funding teacher scholarships.

Develop a salary schedule that provides for adequate pay. Since its inception, Alabama's First Class pre-K program has implemented pay scales for teachers in both public schools and community based organizations and with a recent shift (and accompanying budget increase) to focus on parity with K-3 teachers. In 2016-2017, a new salary scale for lead teachers was implemented in order to support salary parity between pre-K and K-12 teachers for Georgia's Pre-K Program. New Jersey moved teachers on to the public school salary schedule and offered them parity when they completed their degrees, essentially doubling their compensation through two grant programs administered by the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education.

Include salary requirements in pre-K funding. Illinois requires that teaching salaries are comparable to the K-12 salary scale for the Preschool for All Expansion RFP.

Provide comparable benefits as well as salary. In 2017-2018, only Minnesota and Tennessee provided retirement benefits, health care, and paid time off equal to that of K-3 teachers in both public schools and private pre-K programs for their state funded preschool teachers.

Develop a Diverse Pre-K Workforce

Several states and school districts have implemented *Grow Your Own* programs to help address educator shortages as well as the lack of diversity among the education workforce, including Colorado's Teacher Cadet program which in 2018 had 29 active programs within 14 school districts in the state.[38] EDvance, an ECE teacher prep program at San Francisco State University focuses its recruitment on groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education, including Black and Latino/a students.[39]

Conclusion

States are in the position to create and fund systems that recruit and retrain highly qualified early childhood teachers. One of the first steps states must do is create a statewide vision for their ECE workforce. This can be

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done through establishing a workforce advisory board comprised of representatives from higher education, ECE providers, advocates and the business community. Having workforce data across the ECE system can inform this work by better understanding state-specific needs, conditions, and barriers faced by ECE teachers. This information will assist in the recruitment of new teachers and support those already in the field.

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About NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts and disseminates independent research and analysis to inform early childhood education policy.

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Resources

The *CPQ&R Communications Toolkit* provides guides that specify key elements of a preschool program, including the preschool workforce. These guides along with other resources to help create effective testimony, presentations and handouts, including explanations of key elements and relevant resources from CEELO and NIEER can be found at: http://nieer.org/research/research-instruments/cpqr

Materials from the Alliance for Early Success conference: ***Elevating State Policies for and with the Early Education Profession: Taking Stock, Moving Forward*** (September 24-25, 2019). http://earlysuccess.org/meetings/elevating-state-policies-and-early-education-profession-taking-stock-moving-forward#overlay-context=our-work/convening

Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field *(June 2016)* technical assistance report identifies a career pathways framework and includes examples from California, Connecticut, New Mexico, North Carolina, and West Virginia. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/pathways/elpathways.pdf

Earning While Learning with Early Educator Apprenticeship Programs *(February 21, 2019)* identifies some key components to creating ECE apprenticeships, including Virginia's experience. https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/earning-while-learning-with-early-educator-apprenticeship-programs/

The National Council of State Legislators ***Building a Qualified and Supported Early Care and Education Workforce*** *(December 19, 2018)* provides information about preparing and supporting the ECE workforce with state examples, includes options for state legislators to consider. https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/building-a-qualified-and-supported-early-care-and-education-workforce.aspx

Latina Teachers and the "BA Challenge:" Impacts and Conditions of Increasing Degree Requirements in Early Childhood Education. This report presents findings from UnidosUS 2018 study on Latina teachers working in ECE settings. http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/1986

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National Workforce Registry Alliance has produced a series of papers focused on registries: https://www.registryalliance.org/our-work/publications-and-resources.   For a comparison of ECE workforce policies across states, CSCCE has developed the *Early Childhood Workforce Index*. CSCCE has also developed a list of action steps state leaders can take to strengthen their workforce data collection methods, including: Identifying and securing funding (federal, state, and local); Integrating workforce systems with other ECE data such as licensing databases, ECE health data, and K-12 data; and Requiring participation of the ECE workforce that is in licensed centers and receive public subsidies; see Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). *Early childhood workforce index – 2018.* Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. http://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/

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