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# Accessing Career Pathways to Education and Training for Early Care and Education (ECE) Professionals

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MOVING  
PATHWAYS **FORWARD**  
*Supporting Career Pathways Integration*

# Overview of the Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative

The *Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative*, supported by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (the Departments), examines the current state of career pathways in the early learning industry intended to meet the skill, employment, and advancement needs of low income, low-skilled adults who are in or entering this field. This work signifies the joint commitment of these Departments to support the development of career pathway systems in states to increase access to jobs in the early care and education (ECE) field. The Departments have contracted with Kratos Learning (Kratos) and Manhattan Strategy Group (MSG) to lead the initiative and extend the work currently being done through the Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education's (OCTAE) Technical Assistance for Developing Career Pathways (TACP) project (ED-VAE-13-R-003).

The main goal of this initiative is to support and advance the development of comprehensive career pathway systems in the ECE field by providing information states can use to inform and assess their efforts. The initiative explores selected issues related to the early learning workforce and produced two topical reports. The first report, [\*Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field\*](#), is complemented by this second report on issues of access to jobs and advancement in the ECE field for adult learners and incumbent workers.

This initiative includes an advisory group of experts in early care and education, elementary and secondary education, career and technical education, and postsecondary education. The advisory group provides guidance and feedback on the issues affecting states, programs, and educators related to the ECE workforce. The advisory group members that contributed to the content of this report are:

- **W. Clayton Burch**, M.A., Chief Academic Officer for Teaching and Learning, Office of Early Learning, West Virginia Department of Education
- **Belinda Bustos Flores**, Ph.D., Professor at College of Education and Human Development, University of Texas at San Antonio, and Founder and Principal Investigator of the Academy for Teacher Excellence, University of Texas at San Antonio
- **Susan Russell**, M.A., Executive Director, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center
- **Marcy Whitebook**, Ph.D., Founder and Director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California at Berkeley



# Executive Summary

Early care and education (ECE) professionals play a vital role in the health, well-being, and development of our nation's youngest learners. Research suggests that young children are not only learning at birth and learn at a rapid pace in their first years, but that they learn best when they have positive relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their development. With approximately 12 million children cared for and educated by paid professionals in home- and center-based settings in the U.S.,<sup>1</sup> developing an ECE workforce that has the necessary skills and training is critical.

While there is increasing consensus regarding the competencies needed for ECE professionals, there continues to be a large disparity between policies set for minimum professional qualifications, wages earned, and access to higher educational attainments across early learning settings. As documented in the initiative's first report, [Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#),<sup>2</sup> the majority of U.S. states have created minimum requirements for child care providers; however, the minimum requirements for entry-level positions in many states are only a high school credential and/or a Child Development Associate (CDA). Minimal professional qualifications for the ECE workforce promote a standard that falls short of the foundational knowledge required for educating young children. To upskill incumbent professionals and attract/retain professionals with higher credentials, actions will need to be taken to better support the ECE workforce as they further develop their knowledge and skills.

A number of factors impact the ability of ECE professionals to attain education and training. These challenges are particularly debilitating for disadvantaged individuals, such as low-skilled adults and English Language Learners (ELLs), that currently comprise a notable portion of the ECE workforce. Major obstacles facing the ECE workforce include: disparate educational attainment opportunities, availability of comprehensive social services and financial supports, and the need for additional language support for ECE professionals who are ELLs.

Career pathways can remove barriers experienced by ECE professionals, support the current and evolving landscape of the ECE sector, and provide opportunities for disadvantaged workers already in or entering the ECE field. Career pathways provide a clear sequence of education and training aligned with professional

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<sup>1</sup> Marcy Whitebook, Caitlin McLean, and Lea J. E. Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)," Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Chrys Limardo, Teresa Sweeney, and Laura Taylor, "[Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#)," Moving Pathways Forward, June 2016.



standards and competencies. An effective pathway with multiple on- and off-ramps and comprehensive social, educational, and financial supports broadens access to opportunities. Strategies that should be considered in supporting the ECE workforce include: financial supports and paid release time; comprehensive support services, such as career services and counseling; accredited online training and education options; stackable and portable credentials; and on-the-job training through apprenticeships. Several federal, state, and program level practices exemplify promising strategies in advancing the ECE workforce.

This report recommends expanding and systematizing career pathways implementation within the ECE sector. Other considerations for ECE stakeholders and policymakers include: expanding federal and state-level financial supports, creating policies to make ECE credentials stackable and portable, increasing wages and education incentives for ECE professionals, and expanding high-quality professional development opportunities. A comprehensive and wholistic approach must be considered when designing and implementing career pathways that takes into account compensation, training, and retention of a high-quality ECE workforce.

# Contents

**Executive Summary . . . . .iii**

**1. Introduction. . . . . 1**

**2. Major Obstacles for Advancing Educators in ECE . . . . . 3**

**3. The Potential of Career Pathways to Strengthen the ECE Workforce. . . . . 7**

**4. Career Pathways Success in Comparable Fields . . . . . 12**

**5. Career Pathways to Support ECE. . . . . 15**

**6. Conclusion . . . . . 23**

**7. Recommendations . . . . . 24**

**8. References . . . . . 27**

# 1. Introduction

Providing strong development and educational experiences for the nearly 20 million children under the age of five in the United States<sup>3</sup> has spurred a national dialogue on the pivotal role of the early care and education (ECE) sector and the professionals working with our country's youngest learners. A growing body of research supports the view that high-quality educators are imperative to the positive development of young children, particularly those between the ages of birth to three.<sup>4</sup> As the early years are a time of rapid growth in a child's social, emotional, and cognitive skill development, employing well-trained educators to harbor a trusting, appropriate learning environment is paramount to cultivating the next generation of skilled workers and investing in our country's future.

While there is increasing consensus regarding the competencies needed for ECE professionals, there continues to be a large disparity between policies set for minimum professional qualifications, wages earned, and access to higher educational attainments across early learning settings. Credential and wage disparities within the sector have contributed to a fractured workforce and as a result, have created a perception that educating children below the age of five outside of a school-based setting requires less expertise. With the mounting evidence presented by scientific research highlighting the importance of high quality educational experiences for children birth through five, these perceptions are rapidly changing, and with this change, the landscape of state and national credential requirements are evolving. The task will be to provide high quality training and educational opportunities, social and workforce supports, and compensation improvements to upskill and retain highly qualified incumbent ECE professionals and entice new skilled educators into the field.

This report explores how career pathways can offer an effective approach to address some of these challenges and support the current and evolving landscape of the ECE sector and its most disadvantaged professionals. Comprehensive and flexible education and training programs can make it easier for individuals to acquire industry-recognized credentials and higher education degrees to advance on a career trajectory. Effective career pathways approaches can also better serve workers that may experience significant barriers to education and employment advancement (i.e., low-skilled adults, and adults with limited English proficiency).

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<sup>3</sup> "Annual estimates of the resident population for selected age groups by sex for the United States," U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from [http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=PEP\\_2015\\_PEPAGESEX&prodType=table](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=PEP_2015_PEPAGESEX&prodType=table).

<sup>4</sup> Institute of Medicine, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*, Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2015



Expanding the implementation of career pathways in the ECE sector is examined as a strategy for elevating the workforce and assisting ECE professionals that have barriers to accessing credentials, higher education, and career advancement opportunities. The report will present major obstacles ECE professionals encounter as they move into, and through, career pathways; highlight career pathways approaches and strategies at the federal, state, and program level to provide examples of promising practices in serving the ECE workforce; and recommendations for next steps and considerations for career pathways implementation in the ECE sector.

- **Approximately 12 million children are cared for and educated by paid professionals in home- and center-based settings.<sup>5</sup>**
- **It is estimated that there are more than two million adults paid to care for children birth to five in homes and centers in the United States and nearly three million unpaid home-based ECE teachers and caregivers.<sup>6</sup>**
- **Between 2014 and 2024 it is expected that nearly 441,300 child care positions<sup>7</sup> and 158,700 preschool teacher positions<sup>8</sup> (600,000 combined) will be open due to growth and replacement.<sup>9</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Marcy Whitebook, Caitlin McLean, and Lea J. E. Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)," Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) defines "Childcare Workers" as those that provide care for children when parents and other family members are unavailable. Included in this category are childcare center workers, home-based family childcare providers, and nannies. The main distinction between BLS' definitions of childcare workers and preschool teachers are the duties that they perform, not the setting in which they work.

<sup>8</sup> BLS defines "Preschool Teachers" as those who educate and care for children under the age of five in public and private schools, childcare centers, and charitable organizations.

<sup>9</sup> "[Employment by detailed occupation, 2014 and projected 2024](#)," BLS.



## 2. Major Obstacles for Advancing Educators in ECE

A host of contributing factors, such as insufficient staffing; high levels of attrition; poor compensation and program financing; inadequate training; familial obligations; and inaccessible and/or unaffordable higher education degree programs impact ECE professionals' ability to provide and promote high-quality learning. The challenges examined are particularly debilitating for individuals with barriers to employment and family sustaining wages, especially in states with few funded social and financial supports. The following key obstacles are examined: disparate educational attainment and opportunities, access to social services and financial support, and support for ECE professionals who are English Language Learners (ELLs).

### Disparate Educational Attainment and Opportunities

Educational attainment and opportunities vary considerably among the ECE workforce (see [Table 1](#)). More than half of unlisted home-based providers<sup>10</sup> (52 percent) and one-third of listed home-based providers<sup>11</sup> (34 percent) have earned a high school degree or less. In contrast, eight in ten (80 percent) center-based teaching staff<sup>12</sup> have participated in, or earned a degree from, a postsecondary institution.<sup>13</sup> However, it is not clear whether the college coursework or degrees achieved by ECE professionals have been in early learning or a related field.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1: Educational Attainment by ECE Occupation**

ECE Occupation	Less than High School	High School or Equivalent	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Unlisted Home-Based Providers	25%	27%	24%	9%	15%
Listed Home-Based Providers	5%	29%	34%	16%	15%
Center-Based Teaching Staff	1%	18%	28%	17%	35%

Source: Early Childhood Workforce Index, 2016

<sup>10</sup> The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) defines unlisted home-based providers as those who “receive payment for the care of at least one child but do not appear on state or national lists.”

<sup>11</sup> NSECE defines listed home-based providers as “individuals appearing on state or national lists of early care and education services, such as licensed, regulated, license-exempt, or registered home-based providers.”

<sup>12</sup> NSECE defines center-based teaching staff as “Teaching staff employed in center-based programs, including programs sponsored by public school districts or funded with Head Start dollars.”

<sup>13</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, “[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#).”

<sup>14</sup> “[Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education \(ECE\) Teachers and Caregivers](#),” NSECE.

As documented in the initiative's first report, [Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#),<sup>15</sup> the majority of U.S. states have created minimum diploma or degree and certificate/licensure requirements for child care providers. Minimum educational requirements for entry-level positions in many states require only a high school credential and/or a Child Development Associate (CDA), engendering a standard that falls short of the foundational knowledge required for educating young children. However, nationally, 23 states have minimum credential/training requirements of a bachelor's degree for pre-k teachers. Five states have qualification indicators for both preschool teachers (bachelor's degree) and center/home-based providers (at least CDA/Vocational training).<sup>16</sup>

Federally funded programs are also raising the bar on educational requirements. The Head Start Act of 2007 increased the minimum credential threshold for lead teachers, requiring that 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide must have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or an equivalent degree with experience teaching preschool-age children by 2013. Similarly, the federally-funded Preschool Development Grant (PDG) program (2014) awarded to 18 states, requires preschool teachers to have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and teaching assistants to have appropriate credentials.

The further infusion of advanced degrees can raise the floor for future ECE professionals. While there is a notable percentage of ECE workers with a bachelor's degree or higher (federal targets, such as Head Start's 50 percent requirement for bachelor's obtainment for lead teachers has been met and exceeded),<sup>17</sup> it is critical to note that as these requirements evolve potential challenges will emerge for ECE professionals with barriers to accessing education, training, and sustainable wages. Comprehensive supports to access education opportunities will be critical for low-skilled adults, ELLs, and other disadvantaged populations that currently comprise a large portion of the ECE workforce.

## Need for Social Services and Financial Support

Poverty is a major obstacle for many ECE professionals (see [Figure 2](#)). The median hourly wage of childcare professionals in all settings is just above the poverty threshold for a family of three and just below the poverty threshold for a family of four.

Wages for childcare professionals are far below the median hourly wage for all occupations (\$17.40) and even further below other teaching positions, such as kindergarten teachers (\$24.83) and elementary teachers (\$26.39).<sup>18</sup> It comes as no surprise,

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<sup>15</sup> Chrys Limardo, Teresa Sweeney, and Laura Taylor, "[Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#)," Moving Pathways Forward, June 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)." ECE "Qualification indicators" are minimum credential/training requirements set by states. States can either require preschool teachers to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree, require center- or home-based ECE workers to have a CDA or vocational training, or both. Only a handful of states are taking action to set or raise minimum qualifications for ECE educators.

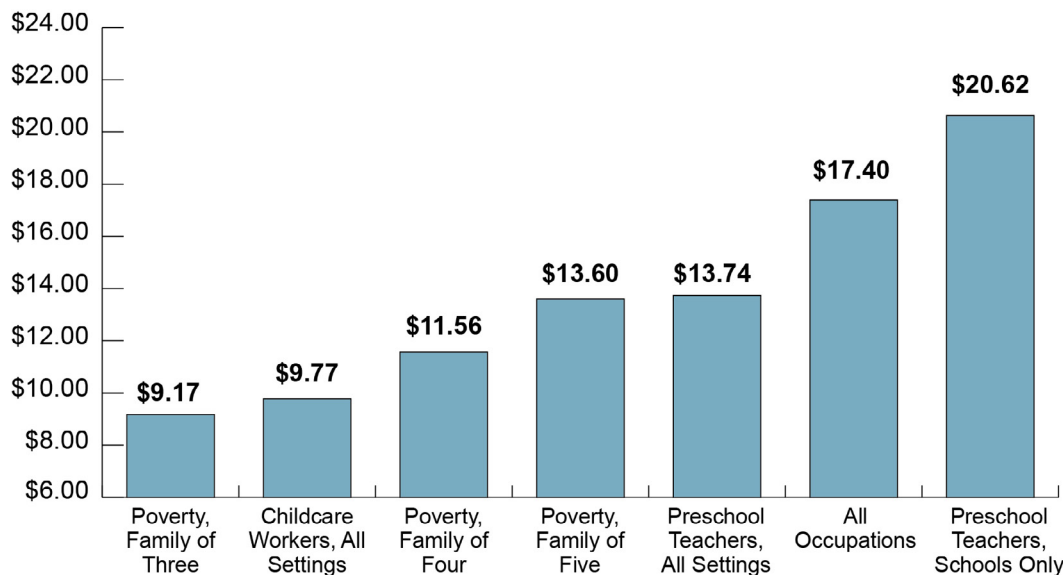
<sup>17</sup> "[Policy Statement on Early Childhood Career Pathways](#)," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>18</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)."

then, that approximately 46 percent of ECE professionals participate in a public support program.<sup>19</sup> A recent joint U.S. Health and Human Services and Department of Education study found that on average, child care educators are eligible or nearly eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) and other public assistance benefits.<sup>20</sup>

As such, low wages are a fundamental challenge to all ECE professionals, creating a significant barrier to professionalizing the field. Between 2010 and 2015, only thirteen states saw an increase in wages for childcare workers, compared to a majority of states for preschool teachers.<sup>21</sup> During this period, real median hourly wages decreased by three percent for childcare workers (from \$10.09 to \$9.77) and increased by two percent for preschool teachers (\$13.42 to \$13.74).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 2: Median Hourly Wages by ECE Occupation, 2015**



Source: US Census Bureau; BLS

Note: Poverty thresholds are reported as annual salaries. Hourly wages were calculated by dividing the poverty threshold annual salary by 52 weeks per year, 40 hours per week. Family configurations include two adults and children under 18. Childcare workers, all settings includes home-based settings.

<sup>19</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)."

<sup>20</sup> "[High-Quality Early Learning Settings Depend on a High-Quality Workforce](#)," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, June 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Without substantial financial supports to include equitable wages for skills acquired, ECE professionals will be unable to afford the opportunities that could lead to advancement and higher wages (or they incur debt to do so). Their college access and continued success towards completion relies on economic supports such as paid leave time, affordable child care, access to scholarships, earned income tax credits, and debt relief for incurred educational costs.

### Increased Supports for ECE Professionals who are ELLs

The ECE workforce is racially and linguistically diverse. In 2014, childcare workers, as classified by BLS, were 77 percent white, 15.9 percent black, 21.6 percent Latino, and 3.5 percent Asian.<sup>23</sup> The percentage of Hispanic/Latino childcare workers in proportion to all childcare workers rose nearly 5 percent, from 16.8 percent in 2007.<sup>24</sup> As a result, ECE professionals more closely align with the racial makeup of the children they serve (as opposed to K-12 educators) and more closely match their linguistic proficiency (about 20 percent of both populations speak a language other than English).<sup>25</sup> As the families and children utilizing ECE services become more ethnically and linguistically diverse, maintaining a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce across all professional roles to include lead teachers and program leaders, is essential.

To accomplish this, English Language Learners (ELLs) need targeted supports to advance in the ECE sector. These professionals, once they enter college, will need additional language support to navigate the administrative and educational requirements necessary to earn advanced credentials. In some cases, ELLs may have low levels of education in their primary language and need support in basic skills and preparation in college skills. Multi-lingual education programs and training opportunities, as well as access to bilingual tutors, are services that some ECE educational programs are offering. While Spanish is the most prevalent option available to ELLs comprising the ECE workforce, offering required courses and training in languages predominant in a region will support the local ECE workforce demands. Additionally, assistance in administrative requirements is imperative in helping ELLs navigate the complex institutional demands of attending college. For example, the FAFSA forms are only available in English and Spanish, further creating barriers for those that speak other languages.

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<sup>23</sup> "[Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2014](#)," BLS, November 2015.

<sup>24</sup> "[Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2007](#)," BLS, September 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Julie Kashen, Halley Potter, and Andrew Stettner, "[Quality Jobs, Quality Child Care](#)," The Century Foundation, June 2016.



## 3. The Potential of Career Pathways to Strengthen the ECE Workforce

Career pathways systems leverage education, workforce development, and social service supports to assist people in acquiring the skills they need to advance in their careers. They provide a broad strategy to meeting the educational needs of individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment, helping to improve their employment outcomes and meet workforce demands. “Career pathway programs offer a clear sequence or pathway of education coursework and/or training credentials in alignment with employer-validated work readiness standards and competencies.”<sup>26</sup>

Career pathways provide flexible opportunities for education and training to meet the needs of working learners and non-traditional students. They are designed to service a wide range of learners, including but not limited to, youth and adults; new immigrants and ELLs; and individuals with disabilities.

Comprehensive and effective career pathways systems and programs require coordination across several entities and resources and require an agreed upon vision, strong partnerships, and the adoption of new behavior and processes. Federal and state supported career pathways efforts can provide the leadership and resources necessary to implement career pathways at the programmatic level.

Federal investments in career pathways took a major leap forward with the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014. WIOA reauthorized the workforce system and emphasized new priorities for the coming era, including the strategic alignment and coordination of federal programs that support employment services, workforce development, and adult education. WIOA also emphasizes that training services align with workforce needs and utilizes career pathways as a promising model.

While career pathway models have been in place for decades, WIOA codified a common definition outlining the essential elements of career pathways. WIOA also formally expanded the purpose of states’ adult education systems to include assisting adults through career pathways programs and formalizing career pathways as a federal priority and key strategy for developing an effective workforce and education system.

**Career pathway programs offer a clear sequence or pathway of education coursework and/or training credentials in alignment with employer-validated work readiness standards and competencies.**

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<sup>26</sup> “[Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development](#),” U.S. Department of Labor, 2015.

## WIOA Career Pathways Definition

The term “career pathway” means a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that:

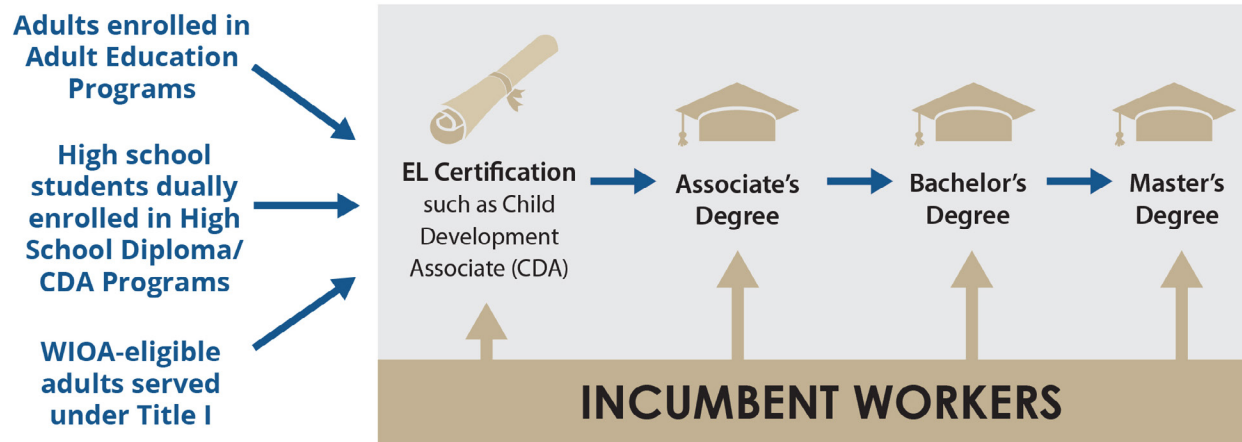
- (A) aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;
- (B) prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937;
- (C) includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual's education and career goals;
- (D) includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- (E) organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
- (F) enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
- (G) helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

## Federal Career Pathways Resources

The U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services have all released multiple resources to help states and programs build career pathways into their state systems. The [Career Pathways Catalog of Toolkits](#) provides a searchable directory of resources. The Department of Labor has also issued a revised [Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development](#), which is intended to help state staff develop and enhance their career pathways systems. Resources developed by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services examine career pathways in the ECE sector include the [Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#) and [High-Quality Early Learning Settings Depend on a High-Quality Workforce](#).

Career pathways have been successfully implemented across sectors to prepare and upskill incumbent workers in an industry. Below is a visual representation of the educational trajectory that a career pathways can support for upskilling the ECE sector.

### Upskilling the Early Learning (EL) Workforce Through Career Pathways



Note: A HSE equivalency is required for a CDA (except in dual enrollment program).

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued recommendations for improving the ECE workforce. Career pathways was noted as a strategy for helping professionals meet the goal of a Bachelor's degree, calling for the field to

*“Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor’s degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through 8.”<sup>27</sup>*

Federal investments in building state ECE career pathways have echoed this charge. The Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) provides an impetus for states to focus on quality early learning and development programs for young children and their families.<sup>28</sup> Jointly initiated through the Departments of Education and

<sup>27</sup> Institute of Medicine, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*.

<sup>28</sup> §1832(b)(1), title VIII, Division B of P.L. 112-10, the Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011.

Health and Human Services, the competitive three-year grants have provided funding to 20 states<sup>29</sup> to support their efforts in developing comprehensive and coordinated early learning systems. The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 (CCDBG) requires states to provide professional development services and training to improve the skills of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) educators.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, the CCDBG Act requires states and territories to develop a “progression of professional development, which may include postsecondary education.” Likewise, federal investments in Head Start and the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships have led to early educators meeting higher knowledge and skill levels.

## Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (Core Area D): A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

RTT-ELC required participating states to develop comprehensive, state-level early learning systems; five core areas for reform were identified. One of these core areas (Core Area D) called for participating states to create a “great early childhood education workforce” and a set of common competencies and content knowledge. In addition, participating states needed to establish a common progression of credentials and degrees in the form of career pathways to help ECE workers move up in their career and develop their knowledge and skills.

### SUPPORTING A GREAT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE



COMPETENCIES

Early childhood educator competencies that are aligned with State early learning and development standards and include knowledge of multiple content areas



CAREER PROGRESSION

Establishing a common progression of credentials and degrees so early childhood educators can move up a career ladder and continually develop their knowledge and skills



CREDENTIALS/DIPLOMAS

Postsecondary institutions and professional development providers aligning their professional development opportunities and credentials and diplomas



TRAINING/PD

Providing and expanding access to training and professional development opportunities, such as coaching and mentoring

All 14 State grantees addressed at least one component of D: *A great early childhood education workforce.*

<sup>29</sup> Race to the Top grant recipients include: (Phases 1 and 2) Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Tennessee; (Phase 3) Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

<sup>30</sup> “[Child Care and Development Block Grant Act \(CCDBG\) of 2014: Plain Language Summary of Statutory Changes](#),” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, November 2014.



West Virginia is an example of a state-supported career pathway effort to strengthen their early learning system and workforce.

### **West Virginia S.T.A.R.S.**

The WV STARS Career Pathways is a defined ECE career trajectory. There are eight levels that an individual can earn, starting at workers enrolled in high school through a Ph.D. The requirements and abilities are [clearly defined for each level](#). Each level is based on a participant's education (both formal and informal) as well as work experience. Once accepted as a Career Pathway participant, individuals can track their training through the online registry.

## 4. Career Pathways Success in Comparable Fields

The ECE field would be well-served to look to the healthcare field for examples of how to implement career pathways to recruit, train, retain, and advance individuals with barriers to employment into healthcare careers. The direct-care field experiences many of the same systemic challenges as ECE including: low wages and lack of benefits, discrepancies between training requirements in diverse environments, high turnover and low retention rates, and a large portion of the workforce being comprised of individuals with barriers to employment that provide a family-sustaining wage.

Entry-level healthcare positions are frequently direct-care positions, such as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), personal care aides, and home health aides. These positions are typically low-wage positions with a low barrier to entry. Demand for direct-care workers is projected to increase in the following decade to keep pace with the aging U.S. populace.<sup>31</sup> Personal care aides and home health aides are two of the fastest-growing occupations with very low wages and entry requirements.

These positions are filled by individuals who are demographically similar to individuals in the ECE field. Direct-care workers are predominantly female (89 percent), African-American (30 percent), Hispanic or Latino (16 percent), and include many foreign-born workers (23 percent).<sup>32</sup> The direct-care field is also similar to the ECE field in the minimum educational attainment of the workforce (55 percent have a high school credential or less) and low, non-family sustaining wages (46 percent use public benefits such as Medicaid or food stamps).<sup>33</sup>

The healthcare field has embraced career pathways to meet growing workforce demands. The examples provided demonstrate how innovative education and training programs with embedded supports can be used in challenging contexts to attract and train new workers and retain and upskill incumbent workers.

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<sup>31</sup> ["Profiles of the Direct-Care Workforce and PHI,"](#) Workforce Strategies Initiative at the Aspen Institute.

<sup>32</sup> ["Who Are Direct-Care Workers?,"](#) PHI, February 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



To improve the quality of care provided to the aging population and to meet the growing demand for these jobs, Washington State and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) established a large-scale training partnership to support home-care employees in the state. The SEIU Healthcare NW Training Partnership aims to improve access to training, training outcomes, and quality of care in the home-based environment.

## The SEIU Healthcare NW Training Partnership – Washington State

The [Training Partnership](#) provides training for long-term care workers and home-care aides with the goal of “raising the professionalism of the home-care workforce through comprehensive training” and “providing better training for long-term care workers and, in turn, better care for long-term care Consumers.” The Training Partnership trains approximately 45,000 new trainees and incumbent workers and is the second-largest educational institution in the state and the largest educational institution dedicated to home care workforce development in the U.S.

The Training Partnership's Homecare-to-Medical Assisting career pathway delivers professional learning in classroom and online environments in 13 languages for both entry-level training and continuing education. Peer mentorship, registered apprenticeship, and student support services are also critical components.

The Training Program's apprenticeship model was recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as a “Trailblazer and Innovator”. It is based on the competency model, in which apprentices demonstrate mastery of skills rather than engaging in 2,000 hours of on-the-job training. The Registered Apprenticeship program includes 75 hours of basic training required for new workers in nursing homes and 70 hours of advanced training to meet the 144 hours of instruction-based education recommended for apprenticeships. Because of this innovative approach to apprenticeship which allows apprentices to move more quickly through a program, most apprentices gain relevant competencies and complete the program in one year.<sup>34</sup> Apprentices also receive wage increases as they hit certain training milestones during the program. The Training Partnership is committed to growing and improving the Registered Apprenticeship program from 200-300 slots per year to 3,000 in the next five years.

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<sup>34</sup> Vickie Choitz, Matt Helmer, and Maureen Conway, “[Improving Jobs to Improve Care](#),” Workforce Strategies Initiative at the Aspen Institute, March 2015.

The healthcare field is also similar to the ECE field in that it has large numbers of incumbent workers unable to progress from low-wage, entry-level jobs. The Health Care Advancement Program is a national example of an innovative partnership between employers and unions to help incumbent workers advance in their nursing careers from low-wage positions to positions with family-sustaining wages.

## The Health Care Advancement Program (HCAP)

[HCAP](#) is a national initiative designed to move licensed practical nurses (LPN) and other direct-care providers along a career pathway to attain an associate degrees in nursing. HCAP programs aim to develop industry-based career pathways that meet the needs of working adults, support the diversity of the healthcare workforce including language diversity, prepare workforce for postsecondary education, and provide supports that lead to educational completion and job retention.

HCAP is a labor-management partnership between the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and hospitals. Individual partnerships typically offer two-year, part-time programs that include classes and clinical experiences onsite at the hospital or online. HCAP has active partnerships in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington State, and Washington, D.C.



## 5. Career Pathways to Support ECE

As discussed, there are multiple obstacles that ECE workers need to overcome to advance along a career trajectory. The IOM's 2015 report identified common barriers as articulated by ECE professionals themselves. They included:

- Lack of time to pursue professional learning;
- Lack of funds to pay for professional learning;
- Lack of a professional community, especially in settings outside of school systems;
- An isolated feeling in ECE settings outside of school systems, particularly small organizations;
- Staff turnover and the need to constantly retrain; and
- Lack of availability of professional learning activities, especially in rural and resource-constrained areas and for specialized training.<sup>35</sup>

Career pathway approaches have the potential to break down these barriers. This section of the report explores some of the strategies that should be considered to support the ECE workforce and provides examples of current career pathway efforts in ECE.

### Provide Financial Supports and Paid Release Time

Relieving the financial burdens on ECE professionals is an important strategy for increasing accessibility and retaining qualified educators. Increasing salaries to align with credential attainment and offering salary supplements as incentives for engaging in professional training are critical components to meeting the national demand for highly-qualified ECE professionals. Additional supports, such as paid time for engaging in professional development, appropriately qualified substitute teachers to take their place during absences, and the provision of financial supports to attend institutions of higher learning (e.g., grants, scholarships, and tuition and loan forgiveness programs) will further incentivize educators and professionalize the field. As such, efforts must be made to close the salary gap and support discrepancies that exist between professionals working with children ages 0-5 and public k-12 educators.

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<sup>35</sup> Institute of Medicine, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*.



Federally funded programs designed to alleviate the financial burdens of ECE professionals are available, but access to these benefits must be widened and deepened at the state and program level to ignite real change to the current realities experienced by the ECE workforce. Wage increases can help bring about such change as long as states establish *long-term and enduring* financial policies. Financial supports that are short-term – such as bonuses – are temporary strategies vulnerable to state budgets that ultimately fail to provide long-term financial security.<sup>36</sup>

## T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood® Scholarship Project

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Project provides scholarships for tuition, books, travel, and paid release time for ECEs to complete coursework leading to early childhood credentials, degrees, and teacher licensure. In this model, Individual scholarship recipients and their employers share the cost. Recipients receive a compensation enhancement when they complete a set amount of coursework. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia have T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® programs.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center provides technical assistance, resources, standards, and accountability to licensed state non-profit organizations that operate the scholarship initiative. State administrative agencies must adhere to the fidelity of the model, collect and report on output and outcome data, meet competency standards for the administration of the program, and work with their statewide advisory committee and other stakeholders to improve education, compensation, and retention of the workforce and the state's professional development system. Funding for scholarships comes from local, state, and federal resources, as well as from private foundations.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® states include: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, and Wisconsin. For state profiles about T.E.A.C.H. programs, see the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood State Profile Compendium.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)."

<sup>37</sup> "[Strategic Opportunities: Exploring Multiple Pathways to a Diverse, Well-Compensated and Professional Early Childhood Workforce](#)," T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center, 2015.

## **The Child Care WAGES® Salary Supplement Project**

The Child Care WAGES® Salary Supplement Project is another financial support available to low-paid childcare educators and directors that work with children ages 0-5. Florida, Kansas, and North Carolina currently offer this program. It provides education-based salary supplements to ECE staff to increase retention, education, and compensation for qualified staff. Individuals who meet the education levels receive a wage supplement every six months as long as they stay in their program. Funding is continuous and the amount increases as their level of education increases; thus, there is a continuous incentive to pursue additional coursework and credentials. This project often complements the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program.

## **Illinois Great START Wage Supplement Program**

Great START (Strategy to Attract and Retain Teachers) is a wage supplement program that rewards eligible practitioners by supplementing their income based on education attained above Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) licensing standards. Eligible ECE and school-age care practitioners are rewarded for receiving higher education and for remaining at their current place of employment. Great START wage supplements are paid directly to the eligible practitioner on a six-month schedule based on their ability to continually meet all eligibility requirements. The program helps retain employees, which increases quality and consistent care to the children without raising parent fees.

Great START was introduced into legislation in June 2000 and permanently signed into law in 2004. The Great START Program is administered by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Bureau of Child Care and Development. Great START builds on and complements the Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship Program. The Gateways Scholarship Program assists child care and school-age care practitioners in attaining more education. The Great START Wage Supplement Scale determines practitioner's potential level/option based on education attainment and eligible position. Those who have earned an associate's degree in ECE are eligible for \$825 in six-month increments; those who have received a bachelor's degree in ECE are eligible for \$1,575.

## Provide Comprehensive Support Services

The population of individuals with barriers to employment and family-sustaining wages are more vulnerable to obstacles that can impede their ability to succeed in an academic career pathway (i.e. lack of childcare, stable housing, transportation funds or reliable transportation, and an understanding of workforce options and requirements). These individuals benefit from a program design that includes financial, career, academic, and personal support services to help address the challenges that arise in balancing the demands of training, work, and family. Dedicated career services such as career counseling/navigation and job placement, academic supports such as academic advising and tutoring, and comprehensive personal support services to include mentoring and case management are crucial to helping individuals succeed on a career pathway. The WIOA legislation affirmed that federal funding could and should be used to support these services. WIOA specifically identifies supportive services such as transportation, child care, dependent care, housing, and needs-related payments that enable participation.

### Family Child Care Higher Education Academy – Project Vistas

In its fourth year of implementation, [Project Vistas](#) in Los Angeles, administered by the East Los Angeles College Foundation, provides comprehensive academic supports and services for family child care providers with ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The project aims to improve the quality of ECE instruction and practices and to increase educational attainment. It furthermore provides a bridge between the child care provider and the local community college and offers a well-designed cadre of support services to its participants including financial assistance, tutoring, mentoring, contextualized/contracted coursework, assistance in state permit application, and a textbook lending library, among others. These services are offered during various times, including evenings and weekends, ensuring accessibility for all participants, as well as offering tutors and bilingual professors to ensure support for those with limited English proficiency. In 2012-13, Project Vistas helped nearly 80 family child care providers earn certificates and nearly 40 members earn associate's degrees through East Los Angeles College.



## Leverage Technology to Increase Access

Technology has great potential to help ECE educators gain education and competencies by affording accessibility and flexibility. Accredited online training and education that meet national standards for ECE can expedite the time it takes to earn credentials and offer training during non-traditional hours. This addresses barriers specific to low-income, employed individuals. Technology can also mitigate additional obstacles encountered by adult learners, such as lack of transportation and childcare. Online education and training extends access to those populations in rural areas. Online offerings can also provide cost effective delivery options in multiple languages to alleviate language barriers.

### Northampton Community College

[Northampton Community College](#) in Pennsylvania offers an eCDA, an online program with courses designed to provide flexibility in a student's ability to access course content, submit assignments, and interact with the instructor and fellow students. Learning occurs through interactive, computer-based scenarios facilitated by faculty. Students who complete the certification can transfer nine credits for an associate's degree.

### West Virginia's web-based e-Learning for Educators

[West Virginia's web-based e-Learning for Educators](#) courses are free and available to anyone working in West Virginia's universal pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. The catalog of e-learning courses includes those specifically designed for ECE staff, including Child Development, Early Childhood Special Needs Inclusion, Creating a Language Rich Environment, Early Childhood Curriculum, Early Childhood Assessment, and Family and Community Engagement.

## Offering Accelerated and Blended Programs

Low-skilled adults pursuing careers in ECE while in college are more likely to complete a college degree or credential in a program that integrates, or blends, the delivery of skills (e.g. basic reading, writing, math, and English language) into occupational content leading to a credential or certification.<sup>38</sup> This contrasts with programs that require students to earn a high school credential before

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<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow and Emily Schneider, "[Unlocking the Gate: What We Know About Improving Developmental Education](#)," mdrc, 2010.

enrolling in a postsecondary program, or require them to attend a series of developmental or remedial courses before they can enter non-degree credential coursework or credit-bearing courses. In some accelerated models students are dually enrolled, which allows them to take basic skills courses at the same time as credit-bearing courses in their area of interest.

In the I-Best model,<sup>39</sup> a job-training instructor and an academic instructor are partnered to team-teach as well as design their curriculum to integrate work-based content with basic skills (such as reading comprehension strategies). In other models, such as the Vestibule program of Nassau Community College in New York and the Academic Bootcamp at Gateway Community College in Connecticut, skills are front-loaded before coursework begins. Learners participate in an intensive pre-entry program for several weeks where they are introduced to study and reading strategies combined with workplace and college-ready skills and competencies. There are additional supports that are often part of this model, such as tutoring; English language instruction; college preparation workshops; and academic and career counseling.

## Wisconsin's Blended and Accelerated Programs

**Blended curriculum.** Wisconsin's Technical College System offers several blended, or contextualized, ECE courses that are team-taught by ECE content instructors and Adult Basic Education (ABE) instructors. Students can be dual enrolled ABE/ECE students, and students are allowed to enroll in classes even when they don't make the school's test cut-off scores. Without this method, students would be held back in ABE until his/her skill levels have increased enough to enter into college. One community college offering this program, Nicolet Community College, has seen more than a 90 percent skill level increase in ABE reading and writing. Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) offers two post-secondary early childhood credentials supported with a career pathways bridge providing contextualized ABE instruction.

**Accelerated programs and other supports.** In both Nicolet and Waukesha County Technical College, students are able to complete four courses in one semester. The project targets learners already employed in ECE programs and courses are delivered on Saturdays to accommodate work schedules. There is an opportunity to transfer credits from the Infant and Toddler Credential to an associate's degree, which makes it a stackable and portable credential. In addition, funding allows some of the courses to be offered tuition-free. Finally, students with substantial work histories can request credit for prior learning through a portfolio process.

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<sup>39</sup> John Wachen, Davis Jenkins, and Michelle Van Noy, "[How I-BEST Works: Findings from a Field Study of Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program](#)," Teachers College, Columbia University, September 2010.

## Creating Stackable and Portable Credentials

Stackable credentials are a sequence of credentials that build on prior knowledge and competencies. They can be accumulated over time to build an individual's portfolio of qualification with a clear market value and help them move along a career pathway or up a career ladder.<sup>40</sup> In this approach, students are able to leverage shorter-term credentials to earn additional advanced certificates, degrees, jobs, and wages. For example, the CDA is an ECE certificate that may carry credit over to a degree-bearing program. In some states there is policy or legislation that requires four-year colleges to accept CDAs or associate's degrees from community colleges. There are also articulation agreements between two year and four year programs. These types of programs create milestones, or off-ramps, on a pathway that easily allows learners to progress further.

In addition, portable credentials are recognized across states and are milestones along career pathways.<sup>41</sup> For example, degrees and certain national credentials are recognized by child care, Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs. Because ECE professionals may move to other states during their careers, ensuring that are accredited and portable nationally will remove a significant obstacle for those that are forced to re-invest time and resources to meet requirements for employment.

### New Mexico Higher Education Taskforce

The New Mexico Higher Education Task Force is a state level community that works to ensure that all institutions of higher education in New Mexico offer high-quality courses that meet the needs of ECE educators. –The Task Force coordinates courses so that students can transfer from one institution to another, allowing ECE professionals to continue their coursework even if their geographic or other circumstances change.

The Task Force includes early childhood faculty from colleges and universities throughout the state. It has worked to ensure that all New Mexico institutions of higher education offer high-quality programming. A highlight of the Task Force has been the development of a 45-hour entry level course available statewide. Most portions of the course are accessible online. The coursework meeting New Mexico's requirements for licensure and certification are fully articulated across all two- and four-year colleges offering early childhood-related degrees. Course credits are transferable across institutions.

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<sup>40</sup> [“Employment and Training Administration \(ETA\),” U.S. Department of Labor.](#)

<sup>41</sup> [“Portable Credentials and Degrees for the Early Childhood and School-Age Workforce,”](#) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 2012.

## Providing On-the-Job Training through Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are an effective strategy for blending on-the-job training and related classroom instruction. ECE professionals engaging in a structured apprenticeship can “learn by doing” through site-based training, enabling individuals to receive training while working. Apprenticeships work best when there are strong partnerships among community colleges, educational institutions, and the business community. The passage of WIOA also encourages the use and growth of work-based learning models, such as Registered Apprenticeship, as an effective strategy for working with employers, adult workers, and youth. Registered Apprenticeship programs are now eligible to receive federal workforce funding to support instruction and other apprenticeship costs.

States including Vermont, Kansas, Montana, and West Virginia have state-wide ECE apprenticeships systems in place. The West Virginia Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist Program is showcased.

### The West Virginia Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist Program

The West Virginia Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist Program is a program based on a professional partnership between childcare providers and their employers. It is based on the Department of Labor's apprenticeship model and requires 300 hours of coursework and 3,200 to 4,000 hours of on-the-job training. The program offers a blended, or integrated, curriculum model of coursework, as well as on-the-job training. The program also offers a four-semester training program for child care providers, Head Start, in-home providers, preschool employees, public schools, youth apprentices, and home visitors. There is a mutual requirement for the employer to support the apprentice's work and increase wages upon training completion. Apprentices who complete the program receive a nationally-recognized certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Registered Apprenticeship training is distinguished from other types of workplace training by several factors:**

- (1)** participants who are newly hired (or already employed) earn wages from employers during training;
- (2)** programs must meet national standards for registration with the U.S. Department of Labor (or federally-recognized State Apprenticeship Agencies);
- (3)** programs provide on-the-job learning and job-related technical instruction;
- (4)** on-the-job learning is conducted in the work setting under the direction of one or more of the employer's personnel; and
- (5)** training results in an industry-recognized credential.

## 6. Conclusion

The importance of an educated, highly competent workforce is imperative to strengthen and ensure high-quality interactions with children ages birth to five, which are directly correlated to children's growth and development socially, cognitively, emotionally, and physically. While there is national recognition and efforts in place to increase educational requirements for the workforce, opportunities to meet higher requirements and the wages that reflect them have not kept pace. ECE professionals in non-school settings continue to be among the lowest paid employees in the United States, even if they have a bachelor's degree. Low wages affect the well-being of staff, who cannot support their own families, and many of whom have significant barriers to access the education and training necessary to succeed. These realities contribute to high turnover rates, affecting the well-being of children who need continuity of care to thrive.

ECE professionals face multiple obstacles – particularly accessing education and training opportunities that lead to advancement; family-sustaining wages; high-quality on-the-job professional development tied to career advancement; sufficient social, financial, and academic supports for success in college; attainable continued education progression; and support to meet familial obligations. Low-skilled and ELL adults comprise a significant portion of the ECE workforce, particularly those working with children ages 0-3. These individuals require comprehensive academic, personal, career, and/or financial support to enroll in, navigate, and complete credential and credit-bearing courses. Effective career pathway systems and programs can help support the upskilling necessary for the ECE sector.

There are many federal, state, and program level efforts in career pathways implementation occurring across sectors and a wide body of research and resources are available to assist in the development of effective career pathway systems and programs. The ECE field would benefit from examining the promising practices in career pathways implementation occurring across sectors as well as those within the ECE sector. Several strategies outlined in this report demonstrate career pathways efforts that are already underway in the ECE field. Strategies such as these need to be expanded and systematized to deepen and widen access to the comprehensive supports that well established career pathway can provide. When effective, pathways can create a pipeline for a more robust and high quality ECE workforce, and, ultimately a better experience for children.

However, a holistic approach must be taken to properly align the compensation, training, and retention of a high quality ECE workforce. It is pertinent to not overlook the many additional factors that contribute to the success of ECE professionals and find solutions to these obstacles. Policy changes to licensure and credentialing; salary scales and financial supports; workforce benefits and planning time; working conditions; and access to continuous learning and professional development all need to be re-examined to truly create an ECE workforce that can meet the challenge of educating our nation's youngest citizens.



## 7. Recommendations

### **Expand federal and state-level financial supports to promote and sustain educational attainment.**

Increasing financial supports to ECE professionals to widen their access to education and family-sustaining wages is critical in addressing the significant barriers faced by the ECE workforce. Programs such as T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project® aim to alleviate some of the major obstacles faced by ECE professionals by providing access to professional learning and incentives, such as wage increases. Expanding federally and state supported programs that require compensation and financial supports, and making sure that information about the program is well advertised, disseminated, and sustained across states, is an effective strategy to help ECE professionals access resources and training.

### **Create career pathways with comprehensive support services and multiple entry and exit points.**

Build and expand effective career pathway efforts that include a clear professional trajectory with corresponding requirements and credentials and offer comprehensive financial, personal, career, and academic support services. Multiple entry and exit points will enable individuals of varying education attainment and from different target populations to have additional points of entry into the pathways as well as clear milestones to allow for exit points and easy re-entry to continue on the path. In addition, online and eLearning courses are a strong strategy to widen accessibility and on-ramping opportunities.

### **Expand stackable, portable credentials and/or credit transfer.**

Colleges need to create systems for students to transfer credentials or credits acquired in a community college to a four-year university. This would entail creating Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) or articulation agreements between institutions. States can consider enacting legislations or policies to articulate this policy. In addition, colleges need to recognize credentials or credits earned from institutions across state lines and outside of the U.S., making ECE credentials more portable.

### **Design culturally appropriate training curriculum.**

Ensure that the preparation of the ECE workforce addresses issues of linguistic, cultural, and economic diversity, since the populations of both children served and adults in the workforce are diverse. This includes ensuring that



those responsible for teaching and training the ECE workforce, such as higher education instructors and professional development providers, are knowledgeable about issues of diversity and families in any setting, and address special education, dual language learners, and cultural relevance.

### **Create policies to support diversity in the ECE workforce.**

Policies need to be created to help first generation and ethnic and racial minorities attend college and achieve certificates and degrees in ECE, including native language instruction, cohort programs, financial support, and academic advising/counseling.<sup>42</sup> This would help ensure that professional roles and wages are not stratified by race and ethnicity and can mirror the increasing diversity of children served.

### **Increase wages and education incentives.**

Severe wage disparities within the sector exist, particularly among those working outside of the k-12 environment. This has contributed to a fractured workforce, and as a result created a perception that educating children below the age of five requires less expertise. The current administration's Preschool for All proposal specifically addressed this issue. The proposed 75 billion investment over ten years aims to accelerate the work of states to expand and raise the quality of preschool-aged children. Chief among the requirements is that preschool teachers would be paid comparable salaries to their k-12 counterparts. Additionally, financial incentives should be available to support ECE professionals, including scholarships; compensation and wage supplements; tiered reimbursement rates; and professional and career advancement opportunities. It is important to note that short-term salary supplements and bonuses, while important, are not long-term strategies for financial solvency.

### **Expand high-quality professional development opportunities.**

States should create a coherent system to provide access to high quality pre- and in-service preparation and credentials that will support career and educational advancement to create a capable and stable workforce. Programs should provide opportunities for all staff to engage in targeted professional development activities that both increase skills and knowledge and support individuals on a career pathways trajectory.

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<sup>42</sup> Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)."

### **Create ECE professional learning communities/online communities of practice.**

One of the major obstacles to retention of ECE staff is a feeling of isolation. Professional Learning Communities, or Communities of Practice, are often used in other professional fields to break down isolation as well as share resources. Professional exchange and collaborative learning help increase a feeling of professional connection through shared challenges, solutions, and professional wisdom.

### **Standardize data and definitions surrounding ECE workers.**

A clear picture of the ECE workforce does not exist due to the current landscape of data available. Given that there is no clear consensus in the distinction between child care workers and preschool teachers, a dearth of standardized and uniform data is available for use. As such, few comparable data points from disparate sources can be analyzed together due to each having a particular definition for what constitutes a child care worker and a preschool teacher. Data surrounding ECE workers should follow a uniform definition, either in accordance with the BLS or another source, and clearly define what constitutes a childcare worker and preschool teacher (and what doesn't). Only then can a clear national picture be drawn of the ECE workforce and data surrounding ECE workers be leveraged across multiple sources and studies.

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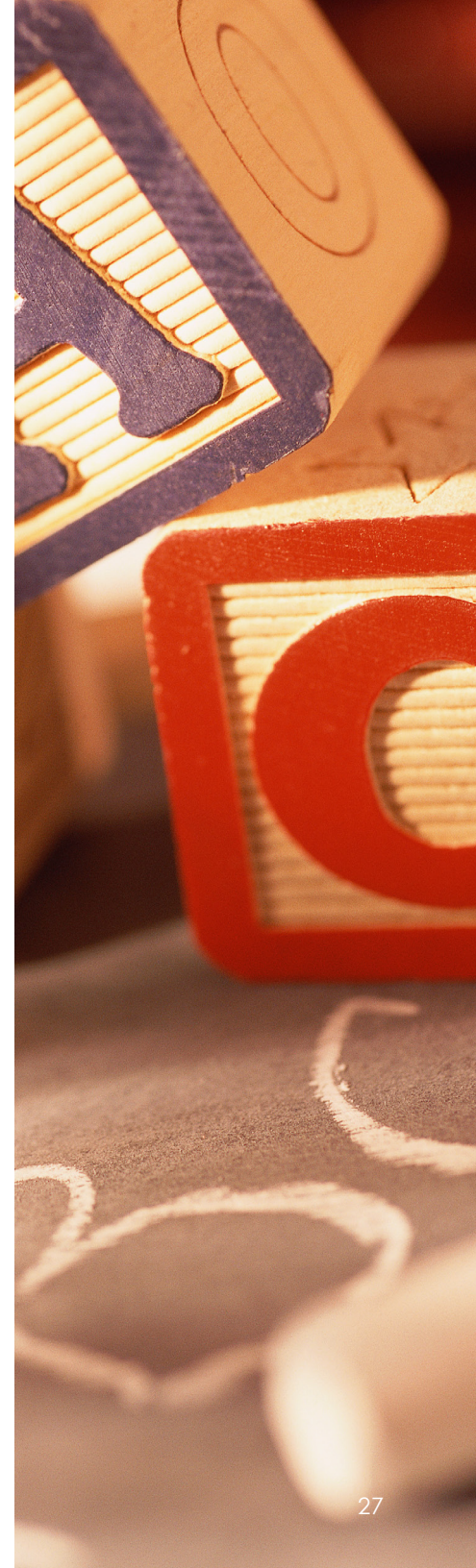
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