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Early Educator Preparation and Compensation Policies: Voices from 10 States



**EARLY EDUCATOR
INVESTMENT COLLABORATIVE**

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Early Educator Investment Collaborative

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Introduction

This report presents the research findings exploring how stakeholders across a selection of 10 states view and experience the early care and education (ECE) systems in which they are embedded, with particular regard to workforce compensation, higher education and competencies. The purpose of this study is to provide context for the development and implementation of ECE policies by presenting the perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders interviewed, and to draw upon their own direct work and experiences to illustrate the opportunities and challenges for future ECE policy. The findings presented below reflect what we learned from the stakeholders we interviewed, and thus, it is critical to remember that while their comments provide insight and nuance, they cannot be generalized to the broader ECE community or all states. In other words, and as with all qualitative research, the findings are limited in their scope to the stakeholders that participated in the study. However, in each state we strived to include respondents from state education and early learning offices, higher education, and advocacy organizations to ensure that a variety of voices were captured. The 10 states included in this study — Alabama, Colorado, Hawaii, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island — were identified by the EEIC committee as places of interest to learn from to inform policy initiatives and reform.

The findings demonstrate that among the 10 states, comprehensive strategies that appropriately prepare and compensate the early education workforce have yet to be realized. Furthermore, the findings of the current study illustrate the ways in which the political climate in which ECE operates presents barriers that make it difficult for this to change in the near future. In the absence of comprehensive reform strategies, states have pursued partial strategies to improve their higher education and compensation systems, which, in some cases, exacerbates tensions between higher education and compensation efforts.

As it relates to higher education, states have been able to make some progress; this is especially true for states with organized bodies (e.g., working groups, coalitions) of higher education faculty members. Such bodies have facilitated state-wide changes to ECE higher education degree program requirements and course content and have facilitated improvements to articulation, which makes the higher education process for college students more seamless. States have also focused on professionalizing the workforce and improving access to higher education coursework. In spite of this work, barriers for comprehensive higher education reform persist, especially in states with no organized or central higher education body. Institutions of higher education in many states struggle financially to maintain a focus on ECE and have limited resources to meet student needs or to maintain a focus on preparing teachers.

Whereas states are making some inroads on higher education, progress in compensation remains minimal, which itself poses challenges to further progress in higher education. Recent and ongoing initiatives to address compensation vary in their potential to lead to system-level changes in the wages/salaries paid for working in early care and education. Some states have made great strides in increasing compensation for teachers in their pre-K programs. More typically, efforts to address compensation tend to be small-scale (e.g. pilots) and/or teacher-centered approaches, such as wage supplement (stipends, tax credits) or apprenticeship programs, that support increased income or wages for individual teachers, but do not change the wage structure of early educator jobs more broadly, which higher education institutions have identified as a necessity for attracting students into the field. In the absence of more robust strategies, low compensation continues to undermine the stability of the workforce across settings, and compensation levels remain inequitable across ECE settings and funding streams, often pitting different segments of the workforce against one another.

Incorporating competencies into reform efforts has, in some communities, further complicated higher education and compensation efforts as states try to draw a link between competencies, preparation, and compensation. Even in states that have defined competencies, their implementation and their role in how higher education and compensation are addressed varies.

Overall, stakeholders in states find themselves at a loss for how to make incremental improvements to higher education or compensation without negatively impacting some segments of the workforce. The findings of this study, as discussed below, illustrate the challenges of designing and instituting comprehensive reforms in the absence of the right combination of political and stakeholder support and leadership, and the appropriate levels and mechanisms for financing reforms that address the full ECE system.

The report is composed of the following sections. The report opens with a discussion of the political climate and barriers for advancing ECE efforts across the 10 states. It then highlights the tension that exists between higher education and compensation strategies within the states. The subsequent three sections identify key progress and barriers related to higher education, compensation, and competencies. The sixth section discusses the potential for political momentum and the key players important to effecting change. Finally, the report closes with future directions for comprehensive higher education and compensation reform.

Methods

Sample Selection and Recruitment

The findings of the Early Educator Investment Collaborative report are based on interviews with early care and education (ECE) stakeholders in 10 states named below. These states are not meant to be representative of the country as a whole, but rather to offer insight into challenges and opportunities that may be shared across communities, as well as those that are uniquely influenced by the specific state context. The states were identified by the EEIC committee, and the stakeholders were recruited following a purposive sampling technique. The sampling technique consisted of the research team identifying stakeholders believed to have a breadth and depth of knowledge regarding the status of ECE in the state in which they work. A total of 41 stakeholders were contacted to participate in the study. Nine stakeholders denied the request, did not reply, or suggested contacting another individual better positioned to participate in the study. The final study sample consists of 32 stakeholders (see **Table 1** and **Table 2**).

Table 1. List of Study Participants by State

State	Number of Participants	State	Number of Participants
Alabama	4	New Mexico	2
Colorado	4	North Dakota	4
Hawaii	4	Oregon	3
Michigan	4	Pennsylvania	3
Nebraska	3	Rhode Island	1

Table 2. List of Study Participants by Stakeholder Type

Stakeholder Type	Number of Participants
Advocacy	6
ECE Provider	2
Foundation	3
Higher Education	9
State Government	12

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured interview protocols. The interview protocols consisted of a core set of questions that was shared across the 10 states, as well as an additional set of state-specific questions for eight of the states. The interviews were conducted remotely between December 2019 and January 2020. The interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed.

Analysis

The data were analyzed utilizing Dedoose, a web-based qualitative data analysis application. Each of the 32 transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose and reviewed. As the data in each of the transcripts were reviewed, codes were applied to the data to begin the process of grouping data along themes. The final codebook resulting from this process consisted of 240 distinct codes. To further winnow down on the codes and to produce themes for the findings, the 240 codes were reviewed. Codes that were similar or spoke to the same points or thoughts were merged to produce a theme. Codes that were present in three states or fewer and that could not be grouped with other similar codes were excluded from the findings. This process of winnowing the data and allowing themes to emerge resulted in a total of 36 themes.

The findings section presents the 36 themes that emerged from the data analysis. In each section, we include a selection of quotes from stakeholders that illustrate or provide evidence for the points being made regarding each theme. Not all states that shared a theme are represented in the quotes. Instead, the quotes that best illustrate or provide evidence for each theme are presented.

The findings should be interpreted as evidence of how stakeholders experience, interpret, navigate, and describe the systems in which they work. The reader is cautioned not to equate the data presented in the findings as evidence of prevalence across the 32 interviews, as not all of the stakeholders had the opportunity to respond to the same question(s) that produced the data and the subsequent themes. For example, to say that a theme was prevalent in four out of the ten states leads to the assumption that the theme was not shared in the remaining six states. It is very possible that the interviews simply did not collect data from these six states, especially if the questions that would have yielded the data were not asked. The interview protocols were semi-structured, with different learning interests across states, and there were a significant number of researchers from three agencies involved in data collection. This made ensuring that all stakeholders were asked the same questions nearly impossible. In addition, respondents had differing roles and levels of insight into particular aspects of their states' systems, and as a result, some respondents were more likely to speak to certain issues than others. For these reasons, we do not report on the number of times a theme may have been mentioned.

Political Climate for ECE Full of Barriers

Constraints on Government Involvement

ECE policy has long been influenced by ideologies regarding the role and responsibility of government and that of individual families in the provision of services for young children. These ideologies about services for young children, coupled with values about the appropriate role of government with regard to broader policies, both impact and provide insight into reform efforts, including (de)regulation of ECE and the ECE workforce; prioritizing parent choice; and, whether the locus of control rests with state or local governments.

- **Michigan:** “You do have a set of people who don’t think that there should be any level of intervention by the state in [the ECE] space.”
- **Nebraska:** “[Our governor] is a huge fan of deregulation. So, I would say, if anything came out of our state legislature that had to do with regulation of early childhood, [the governor] would probably not support that.”
- **North Dakota:** “[Pre-K] is not systematized like our K-12 [system]...[W]e have great voices of, ‘Moms should be at home with their kids. Kids should not be going anywhere until it’s time for kindergarten’.”
- **Hawaii:** “One of the values that has endured...has been having parent choice at the forefront around care and education options. And so, that gets privileged in a lot of the policies that get made here.”

The Role of Government Influences System-Wide Efforts: A Colorado Example

Colorado has a “county administered” administrative structure for child care (which places decisions about many child care policies at the county, rather than state level), as well as a strong culture of local control in the state’s public education system. This results in multiple, disconnected ECE systems within the state and even within local communities, in which children have access to services that can be quite different from one another and in which teachers are treated unequally. For example, communities can set their own teacher education standards, including at the pre-K level, impacting not only the qualifications for early educators but also the pay they receive. Early educators employed by Denver’s public K-12 system are paid at parity with elementary teachers, whereas in the Denver Preschool Program (funded by a local sales tax), teachers are not required to hold a bachelor’s degree and thus are not paid

at parity with public school preschool or elementary teachers. In neighboring Aurora, early educators working in the public schools are not even referred to as “teachers,” but rather, as “facilitators” and there are no compensation parity policies in place.

State-level governance is also fragmented: while the Colorado Department of Education is responsible for licensing teachers for the state’s public education system, its licensure is not required to teach in child care or the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) — although some local districts or counties may choose to hire licensed teachers for CPP. Instead, lead teachers in child care settings must hold an Early Childhood Teacher Certification issued by the Colorado Department of Human Services,¹ which allows a variety of combinations of education and experience to meet the requirements.

Further illustrating the critical link between how the role of government is uniquely enacted in a given state and opportunities for ECE reform, the 1992 Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) amendment to Colorado’s constitution makes it among the most difficult states in which to raise new public dollars for ECE services statewide.² While fewer than a third of states require a supermajority in the state legislature to approve a tax increase, the TABOR amendment — which has only been adopted in Colorado to date — places stringent limits on government spending tied to population and inflation increases, and further requires that voters approve any state or local tax increases.

Any efforts to reform state systems must take into account and be prepared to overcome a conflation of governmental factors that extend beyond the specifics of what children and their teachers alone need. In addition, Colorado’s experience suggests that efforts to elevate the early childhood teaching in states with strong local-level decision-making may need to look different from those that administer child care subsidies and related programs and policies at the state level.³

Disagreement and Lack of Clarity Challenges Progress

Progress on ECE reform is not stymied by a lack of belief in the need for change — stakeholders agree that reforms are needed to improve their state systems and often there is even agreement on a vision or an outcome. There is, however, a lack of consensus about specific strategies or paths and often a dearth of sufficient information to inform discussion; combined, these can

¹ For more information on this credential, see the [Colorado Office of Early Childhood](#) website.

² For more information on TABOR and its impacts on Colorado’s public service sector, see the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities website: [Policy Basics: Taxpayer Bill of Rights \(TABOR\)](#).

³ Twelve states have county-administered structures: California, Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

hamper efforts to prioritize and enact reforms. Further, a lack of data on the status of the ECE workforce and how this varies across the state interferes with stakeholders' ability to prioritize and agree on strategies.⁴

- **Alabama:** “I think what we see is that we hear a lot of, ‘We want to make things better,’ and it’s not really knowing how to all march in the same direction and figure out, how do we get to better?”
- **Nebraska:** “I think in terms of the general vision and how we move forward, folks are definitely on the same page there...I think the disagreements come when we start getting into some of the details.”
- **Michigan:** “I would say the tension may just be, how early is early [for children to be in ECE]? I think it’s just that there hasn’t been clarity or at least a strategy...I think that there’s still some of that discourse here that has not been completely formed out.”
- **Colorado:** “One thing we’ve been trying to do is get a handle on what’s the early childhood workforce need and quantify it...so it can inform the need. How many more workers do we need in the field?”

Meaningful Change Requires Coordinated Efforts on Multiple Levels

As there is rarely a single actor or entity that brings about progress, enacting change in ECE requires a confluence of different actors driven to work in alignment with one another and to be prepared to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. In ECE, this involves advocates (often referred to by stakeholders as the grassroots, though notably, very few stakeholders noted the presence of early educators in local or state efforts) all the way up to members of the highest levels of state government. The need for such a diverse array of actors working together makes the process of enacting change in ECE both slow and complex.

- **Oregon:** “[It] was like a perfect storm...that led us [to recent policy developments]. I think it was just the strong alignment between advocacy, between [what the state agency asked for] in our budget, what the governor was willing to support, and alignment with the legislature direction.”
- **Nebraska:** “I think really [the ECE movement] has come out of a grassroots [movement]. And I think higher education and the university has been a big push of that. The Buffett

⁴ For more information on workforce data challenges, see p. 33 of the report: *Early Educator Investment Collaborative: 50-State Policy and Practice Research Memo*.

Institute...[is] one of the places [pushing] to say, 'Okay, we really need to pay attention to this'...[L]ocal communities are the other places that are really raising this."

- **Colorado:** "[B]ecause we have this culture of collaboration and all voices at the table, we have a weakness in then actually prioritizing...We have this collaborative piece where [because] we all move together, we might move a little more slowly."

Advocacy and Political Momentum Are Not Enough

As of yet, ECE is not considered a necessary component of a state's infrastructure or its education system. Furthermore, swings in political momentum can actually undermine the limited ECE progress states have made, sometimes to such an extent that it can take years to rebuild what was lost. And even when political support is maintained, legislative priorities and opportunities often shift from session to session, resulting in fragmented and piecemeal progress. As such, even in the best of times when there is gubernatorial and legislative leadership, ECE policy and investments are vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of political priorities.

- **Colorado:** "[T]here's little pockets of people trying to do some things [regarding compensation], but there's no kind of sustained effort."
- **Rhode Island:** "There was a [state] department plan which came out a long time ago... [T]hey came up with six priorities [for the whole state]. That was at the very end of [another] administration. [The next administration] just accepted it, and they never even mention it."
- **Oregon:** "Governor leadership matters...We also see governors leave, and there's retrenchment, and sometimes states can't hold on to what they've won."
- **Michigan:** "Back then our standards, our regulations, were among the highest in the country...Now we are struggling. We became one of the lowest in the country a few administrations ago. [The governor] just decimated licensing."

Tension Between Higher Education and Compensation Strategies

States Lack Tandem Higher Education and Compensation Strategies

Tensions exist across states regarding how to best address higher education and compensation. States recognize that addressing both is important, yet they are generally at a loss for strategies that allow them to simultaneously address these critical issues. In the absence of comprehensive strategies, state efforts are too often focused on piecemeal rather than system-wide solutions. As a consequence, investments that are made in higher education are lost as poverty-level wages persist, driving well-qualified educators out of the field.

- **Pennsylvania:** “When we have these conversations [about the intersection of higher education and compensation], we liken it to a nurse. To be a nurse, you need to have these very specific credentials. A nurse obviously makes much more money than any early childhood educator does. We need to find this balance of the importance of having that credential, but then at the same time, making the living wage for this as a profession.”
- **Colorado:** “We are finally acknowledging that almost in every single conversation there is tension between achieving higher education and the fact that we have data that says, ‘If you get your BA in ECE, you’re only going to get three bucks more an hour’, so it just economically really doesn’t make sense for most individuals. We’re having that conversation.”
- **Oregon:** “[Y]ou have to be thoughtful about the whole workforce, particularly when you still have a large number of people who are probably never going to earn a bachelor’s degree.”
- **Nebraska:** “[W]e have a couple of initiatives that are happening in the state that will address both [higher education and compensation]. [T]he T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Nebraska Scholarship Program addresses scholarships and bonuses for the workforce that completes more education...[T]he School Readiness Tax Credit is a tax credit that the workforce can apply for based on their level of education.”

Uncertainty Over Which to Address First: Compensation or Higher Education

Despite the acknowledgment of the need to simultaneously address higher education and compensation, this does not necessarily translate into action. Perhaps a reflection of the wide-ranging levels of early educator qualifications required in a given state,⁵ stakeholders struggle with where to start. Such strategies rest on the assumption that progress in one will eventually lead to progress in the other. Increasing higher education requirements first in the hopes that it will lead to greater compensation is a more popular approach. In part, this is because states are at a greater loss when it comes to addressing compensation, compared to addressing higher education.

- **Nebraska:** “I would say that compensation is talked about more [than higher education]... I definitely think there is a really big push on working on early childhood compensation... We cannot require that teachers have bachelor’s degrees and still pay them like they work at a quick shop.”
- **Michigan:** “[I]n many ways it feels like, ‘We’re not going to give you more money unless you can prove you’re worth it’.”
- **Hawaii:** “[O]ur current [child care staff] licensing requirements...are so minimal, that I think people don’t feel that the profession justifies [good] pay... If we can have people see that it is a profession, then we can get them the pay that they deserve.”
- **Alabama:** “In order to [increase compensation], we have to present ourselves in a professional manner. I think one of the only ways to do that is to move towards that larger set of professional competencies that are more far-reaching than, ‘I have my GED. I’ve done my 30 hours of training.’ That’s a great place to start, but that doesn’t mean that that’s where it can end.”

Intentionality Required to Build a Diverse and Equitable Workforce

Without intention to support successful participation in higher education, a consequence of increasing education requirements for early educators is likely to be a decrease in the racial and ethnic diversity of the workforce. It is incumbent upon leaders and stakeholders to understand how systemic and institutional racism creates barriers to the acquisition of education, and intentionally

⁵ For more information on the range of qualifications required for early educators, see p. 5 of the report: *Early Educator Investment Collaborative: Early Educator Preparation Landscape*.

seek to mitigate these as education requirements for the ECE workforce are raised. Educators from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds highly value education and training, and when provided with the appropriate resources, these educators succeed in attaining higher levels of education.⁶

The issue of compensation for early educators also presents a threat to equity regarding educators from diverse backgrounds. Nationally, African American early educators in particular earn less than their peers across racial groups and settings, and African American and Hispanic early educators are more likely to be relegated to positions associated with the lowest wages.⁷

Tying compensation to credentials, without careful attention to promoting access and supports for degree attainment, may even further exacerbate the wage gaps that educators of color experience. More comprehensive approaches are required to make progress on both higher education and compensation without diminishing the diversity of the workforce or further entrenching racial inequities.

- **Colorado:** “I think the idea or hypothesis was, ‘Let’s demonstrate that our workforce is professional and will get the degrees and the money will follow’. I don’t think that has happened...[P]ushing higher education degrees...has really decreased the diversity of the workforce. So, there’s a real concern that as we push for a bachelor’s degree, that we don’t have the systems in place to support a diverse workforce.”
- **Oregon:** “[O]ne of the challenges we’ve had is that, because the higher education system, especially the university system, is less accessible to communities of color and communities where there are languages other than English being spoken or people who make low wages, that there is definitely caution in making too much of a direct, hardcore tie [between higher education and compensation] because there is a concern that we will reinforce wage inequities that already exist.”

⁶ See CSCCE (2011) [Learning Together: A Study of Six B.A. Completion Cohort Programs in ECE \(Year 3 Report\)](#); CSCCE (2013) [From Aspiration to Attainment: Practices That Support Early Childhood Degree Attainment. Los Angeles Universal Preschool’s Child Development Workforce Initiative](#); and, CSCCE (2019) [Strengthening the Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Identity of Early Educators: The Impact of the California SEIU Early Educator Apprenticeship Program](#).

⁷ For more information about the wage gaps early educators of color face, see CSCCE (2019) [Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment](#).

Making Inroads on Higher Education as Challenges Intensify

Organized Faculty Driving Higher Education Progress

Communication and collaboration across faculty and representatives from institutes of higher education have been instrumental in making progress within higher education. Both structured and informal groups — some formed with a particular task or purpose in mind, others more organically developed through existing collaborative relationships among faculty — were noted as creating movement both within individual institutions and across institutions and even higher education systems in a state (e.g., across community colleges and bachelor’s degree-granting institutions). Through these channels, faculty have been able to work on curricular alignment, articulation agreements, and professional development for early educators. Such unified higher education efforts are needed to push state-wide changes that will have a meaningful impact on the preparation of early educators.

- **Hawaii:** “There’s an informal group... [T]hey meet regularly, and they are a group of faculty called Kaulanakilohana. They actually have been the ones who have brought to the table a lot of the things coming out of the ‘Power to the Profession’ and other national standards conversations.”⁸
- **Nebraska:** “[W]e have four deans from bachelor-level institutions and a community college dean on that commission, all of them committed to this interdependent strategy that you can’t do [higher education reform] without [addressing compensation].”
- **New Mexico:** “As a state, we get together on a monthly basis — the Early Childhood Higher Education Task Force. [I]t’s a pretty unique opportunity for the field of early childhood circled around higher ed to get together and discuss issues.”
- **North Dakota:** “[The higher education consortium] started as a way for colleges or universities that were doing early childhood education to come together and really just do articulations. [It] definitely [allows us a much stronger voice with state agencies].”
- **Pennsylvania:** “[A] consortium of higher education [institutes] are now responsible for the professional development of our field. So that just took effect January 1, [2020]. So, hoping that now that we have the majority of professional development coming from higher education, that we are going to see a real shift in the way our workforce is going.”

⁸ Stakeholders noted that this group has not been meeting as regularly as in the past, due to funding cuts.

Although it is common nomenclature when discussing higher education and degrees to use the terms such as “two-year degree” or “four-year institution,” in this report, we intentionally utilize terms based on the actual degree granted (e.g., “associate degree,” “bachelor’s degree-granting institution”). The purpose of this vocabulary choice is to acknowledge that the majority of early educators do not complete the degrees they are seeking on a strict two- or four-year timeline, because they are often working full-time and raising families of their own.

Higher Education Consortium Drives Change: A North Dakota Example

North Dakota’s consortium of associate degree-granting and bachelor’s degree-granting institutions of higher education with ECE programs was formed 15 years ago. The consortium meets three times a year to discuss articulation, coursework alignment, credentialing issues, implementing new standards, and pilot initiatives for students. The work of the consortium is focused on ensuring easy transfer of credits but also a similar experience for early educators across institutions, while maintaining the unique aspects of the degree programs that meet students’ needs. Additionally, this group worked with the North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board to adapt the program performance standards for their birth to 3rd grade teacher licensure so that educators interested in working with children birth to five could complete a portion of their student teaching in a classroom with infants and toddlers.

States with organized higher education faculty have been more successful in embedding articulation into the higher education system. Official higher education consortia and task forces are able to weave articulation into the work they do across institutions. In states with the strongest articulation, organized faculty have been able to embed articulation into the day-to-day functioning of the higher education system.

- **North Dakota:** “[The higher education consortium] goes through course by course as far as trying to get those articulations to really match up. We talk about, ‘What curriculum are you using? What are your students doing? What kind of assignments are you having them incorporate?’”
- **New Mexico:** “New Mexico has an aligned system. We have had an early childhood higher [education] task force since the 90s, and what this task force has been charged with doing is creating alignment between the degree plans, certificate plans, in the state from two-year and four-year institutions so that everything matriculates. In other words...if you complete an AA degree, you’ve completed the first two years of your BA degree.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “Any time that [the Office of Child Development and Early Learning] has offered federal funds for higher education to support our workforce, we’ve historically asked [the institutes of higher education] to have articulation agreements to support that

work. [W]e have found that if we put that system into place for them, they'll be more successful in that transition from the associate degree to the bachelor's degree."

- **Hawaii:** "[O]ne thing that's really interesting about Hawaii is that it's actually the same system. Our community colleges are part of University of Hawaii, so the ability to connect across all those environments [is there]."

New Mexico: Articulation Built Into Higher Education System

Formed in 1995, New Mexico's Early Childhood Higher Education Task Force has developed a common catalogue of coursework for early educators pursuing ECE degrees, with common course titles and content for all institutions of higher education across the state. Through their work to create this universal coursework, which focuses on demonstrable competencies in seven content areas, the Task Force has facilitated articulation of coursework both within a degree level (e.g., moving from one associate degree program to another within the state) and across degrees (e.g., transferring from an associate degree program into a bachelor's degree program). Common syllabi and course numbers exist from entry-level courses up to the 400-level courses.

As a foundational piece to the common catalogue of courses is a set of common core content and competencies that was developed to guide training and professional development for early educators from entry into the field through graduate degree-level early educators. Within New Mexico's ECE career lattice are an entry level credential, a child development certificate, and a 1-year certificate that are stackable and lead into the associate degree, bachelor's degree, and graduate degrees in ECE.

Community Colleges Particularly Responsive to Needs of the Workforce

Across states, stakeholders noted that community colleges are particularly responsive to the needs of the ECE workforce. These institutions are more flexible with the programs and coursework they offer. In focusing on the needs of the workforce, associate degree-granting institutions are driving many of the changes related to how higher education systems prepare early educators.

- **New Mexico:** "I think at least at the community college level in New Mexico, there's been more of a movement towards taking ownership for the workforce. When I think about our program, I specifically think, 'workforce'. And we design all of our classes around that."
- **Michigan:** "[W]e've had good responses from the community colleges...That's how we

went down the road of working with the community colleges to become accredited because then they can feel comfortable that they're aligning to and adhering to a higher standard with their programming at the community college level. I would say that probably one of the bigger challenges is just getting the buy-in from universities to be receptive to where most of our students start. Most of our students start at the community colleges."

Rhode Island: Having a Single Community College Has Its Drawbacks

Under the Rhode Island Promise program, recent high school graduates in Rhode Island have access to free tuition at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), the state's sole community college. However, CCRI has not always been responsive to the needs of the early childhood field. The lack of other community college options in the state and political pressure to direct state funds to CCRI make it difficult to foster innovations that benefit the ECE workforce at other institutions of higher education (IHEs) in the state. Because of CCRI's reluctance, the Rhode Island Department of Health has contracted with Rhode Island College, a public bachelor's degree-granting institution, to offer Spanish language coursework that broadens the availability of the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential to a more diverse group of early educators. Early childhood leaders have celebrated the move, but much work remains to be done to create seamless pathways to degrees for the state's diverse early educators.

Efforts in Place to Professionalize the Workforce

States are undertaking initiatives dedicated to professionalizing the ECE workforce. In particular, states are adopting new certifications within the state teacher licensure system or changing existing certificates to elevate the focus on children birth through age five. Other initiatives seek to improve the clinical preparation of early educators through new student teaching, apprenticeship, mentoring, and coaching programs or requirements, both within approved teacher preparation programs and at a wider range of institutions that include early childhood-related associate and bachelor's degree programs.

Certification changes

- **Michigan:** "[W]e came together to adopt the 'Power to the Profession' definition so that we have a single understanding of who the early childhood profession is and who we are to support, so that when we speak to birth through eight, we know who we're talking about. And as we talk about aligning our systems of support and particularly around certification and non-certified professionals, we have a common understanding. [N]ow we have one teacher certification system [with a] banded in endorsement of Pre-K to 3."

- **Alabama:** “I know there’s been additional code that’s being put into the statutes, which looks at early childhood, especially zero to five, as a new certificate that people can earn if they go through a zero to five program.”
- **North Dakota:** “We rewrote the program performance standards for higher ed, and we included now that they can student-teach in a pre-approved program, birth through kindergarten and primary. Unfortunately, they still have to do that primary grade teaching, whether or not they’re ever going to teach first, second, or third grade. [B]ut we did open the door so now they could at least have that infant to three-year-old experience.”

Efforts to strengthen clinical fieldwork within preparation programs

New Mexico’s Early Childhood Mentor Network was developed for dual purposes: first, to provide training, support, and a career network for early educators to learn and grow together as professionals; and second, to provide additional quality sites for students participating in fieldwork during their degree programs.

- **New Mexico:** “The Mentor Network started with funding from the Thornburg Foundation. We’re currently in our fourth year of mentor training. We developed two [mentorship] classes...and then we have monthly meetings where the mentors come together. [It] puts teachers in the center and shows them as leaders and professionals.”

Strengthening the Profession and Pathways: A Pennsylvania Example

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf is described as being “extremely interested” in creating career pathways and pipelines for educators, as well as increasing the diversity of the state’s ECE workforce. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), a collaborative effort between the state’s Department of Education and Department of Human Services, is leading the efforts, working to bridge gaps, address workforce needs, and promote collaboration among a variety of stakeholders focused on early education.

In fall of 2019, Governor Wolf announced an investment of \$10 million of federal funds to support a system of regional professional development organizations (PDOs) focused on the early education workforce. These PDOs provide increased access to professional degrees, ongoing professional development, and system support for the ECE workforce. PDOs partner with institutions of higher education and other community partners to facilitate access to credit-bearing coursework and credentials for early educators across the state.

The state’s workforce registry is integrated with the PDOs and professional development partners in order to track educators’ training and professional development experiences, with the eventual goal of setting educators on clearly defined paths to earning credentials that are stackable and portable — regardless of where an educator lives in the state. The registry

is also linked to Pennsylvania’s quality rating and improvement system, Keystone STARS, acknowledging the connection between appropriately prepared educators and higher quality early learning experiences for young children.

As part of their efforts to create seamless experiences for students pursuing ECE degrees, OCDEL has worked with the Department of Postsecondary Education to put into place program-to-program articulation agreements between institutions of higher education offering associate degrees and institutions offering bachelor’s degrees — including some private universities. There is now a “great amount” of stakeholder engagement and momentum for institutions of higher education to be more aligned in how they are preparing early educators.

Building on the early success of programs like the Philadelphia Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship Program, stakeholders representing education, labor and industry, and workforce development are also pursuing implementation of a state-wide apprenticeship program to allow current educators the opportunity to pursue credit-bearing coursework while gaining on-the-job skills and receiving regular wage increases.

Efforts to Enhance Access to Coursework

States are also working to facilitate greater and more equitable access to ECE degree program coursework, particularly for non-traditional students and students living in rural areas. Legislators are also experimenting with modifications to the degree programs that community colleges may offer.

- **Nebraska:** “There’s a recent story coming out of state government talking about increasing broadband access to all of rural Nebraska.”
- **North Dakota:** “[S]ome of the programs, especially on the eastern side [of the state], have gone online to alleviate the problem with the rural areas, as well as western North Dakota, in helping educate people through virtual classrooms. That has really grown with some of the higher [education] programs.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “Pennsylvania is cognizant of the need to serve non-traditional students and incumbent employees. [T]hey have focused on opportunities to access education... on non-traditional times. [T]hese opportunities are more cohort-based and targeting very specific needs in geographic areas.”
- **Hawaii:** “[O]ne of the things that’s been good that’s been developed through [the University of Hawaii] over the last few years is having a flexible course path where there’s an intensive summer period, which means folks from neighbor islands can come over and participate in that program for some points during the summer.”

- **Oregon:** “We just passed legislation in 2019 allowing community colleges to offer four-year degree[s], like applied baccalaureates. There is some interest by a few community colleges because of their geographic isolation and distance from a university.”⁹

Institutions of Higher Education Can Stifle Progress

As one of the primary purveyors of early educator preparation and training, institutions of higher education hold a great deal of power in driving change related to the preparation of early educators. In states lacking collaborative state-wide higher education efforts, decisions are more likely to maintain a disparate and disjointed higher education system. This is especially true in states that have a weak or altogether lack a central higher education authority.

- **Colorado:** “[The University of Colorado, Denver] is very much wanting to work around articulation. I feel like they’re much more open to that. And [Metropolitan State University of Denver] is carving out its own identity and just a little more challenging to work with.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “[I]f you’re looking at the status of birth-5 relative to higher education, I think the state is well-positioned relative to coming up with the initiatives that are on the table, but higher [education] is not universally onboard. Not every institution [is part of the] consortium of higher [education] partners that is very active right now.”
- **Oregon:** “We’ve underfunded our public universities and community colleges so much, that we have allowed each of those universities and community colleges to develop their own public boards. And then our higher [education] system plays a more coordinating function and less of a mandating function.”
- **Michigan:** “[W]e have a non-centralized system in Michigan. It’s what we’re working against. We have 15 independent universities, not to mention the private colleges and the community colleges. [W]e have independent boards for every single one of them. We have little control over how and what programs are designed and chosen to be implemented.”

Independent Institutional Decision-Making Creates Challenges for Articulation: A Michigan Example

Michigan’s individual institutions of higher education hold a lot of power in the shaping of educator preparation, while the Michigan State Board of Education plays a small role, primarily

⁹ As noted in the report, *Early Educator Investment Collaborative: 50-State Policy and Practice Research Memo*, at least 8 other states also allow at least some community colleges to offer bachelor’s degrees for early childhood (Georgia, Florida, Indiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington, West Virginia).

serving as an instrument for implementing changes that come from the governor's office. Recently, institutions of higher education are noted as having been widely receptive to the state's new licensing requirements despite not being part of the initial conversations regarding the changes.

As a result of Michigan's decentralized higher education system, articulation between associate degree-granting and bachelor's degree-granting institutions of higher education is "very limited." Baccalaureate institutions tend to be "guarded" in accepting students from community colleges seeking to complete their bachelor's degree. This results in a bifurcation of the qualifications of early educators based on the ECE setting in which they teach, with community colleges primarily preparing educators serving in Head Start and private ECE settings, and baccalaureate institutions mainly preparing educators who enter Michigan's public school system.

Bifurcated Higher Education Options Reflect Fragmentation of the Workforce

In many states, higher education offerings in early childhood are bifurcated between two very different types of programs: certificate and associate degree programs at institutions that are designed primarily to prepare and support the current ECE workforce for roles in child care and Head Start that do not currently require bachelor's degrees; and teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities designed to prepare bachelor's-level teachers for the state's public schools. Because of their differing purposes and target audiences, these two types of institutions are subject to divergent oversight and regulation and often offer very different coursework, clinical experiences, and overall learning environments for students.

- **Alabama:** "Currently, there's this bimodal approach. We get programs like ours through the two-year system where we are really producing... those who are working somewhere on the Head Start side or on the child care side. Then we get the four-year system that's largely building into our [public] school systems. Often times there is a disconnect in those two. We're not seeing a whole lot of things like articulation between programs that allow our students to move through the workforce continuum."
- **Michigan:** "Michigan has a bifurcated system. You have your Pre-K-based system that attracts people who have to have a four-year degree with credentials to meet the Michigan Department of Education standards. Then you have your others who are just sort of getting their degrees to meet basic standards. Your Head Start, et cetera... where you have a set of children who look qualitatively different. They seem to be of color, you have your immigrants there. You have your children with different languages there."

Barriers to Articulation Reinforce ECE Workforce Divides

Related to the bifurcation mentioned above, articulation between institutions offering associate degrees and those offering bachelor's degrees remains limited in some states. Limited articulation between these institutions contributes to the obstacles early educators encounter when pursuing additional degrees.

- **Oregon:** “[Articulation] is uneven across the state. There’s just a lot of difference among two-year and four-year institutions in the level of importance and priority.”
- **Nebraska:** “[T]he articulation from the two- to four-year colleges varies by campus... [The] University of Nebraska at Lincoln and the University of Nebraska at Omaha will accept some of the credits from Metro Community College [but] not from Central Community College, even though the early childhood coursework is... very similar because it has the same syllabi and course numbers. The University of Nebraska at Kearney tends to accept a lot more than any of the other universities and four-year colleges.”

Working With a Disparate Higher Education System: An Oregon Example

Oregon’s higher education system, described by stakeholders as “disparate,” “in flux,” and “disjointed,” has been underfunded by the state for some time. With universities operating more akin to private institutions than publicly-funded ones, there is little leverage available to the state to push priorities for educator preparation. Even the community colleges in the state are described as being disconnected from one another; coursework is often not transferable from one community college to another, or to a bachelor’s degree-granting institution. With each community college and many baccalaureate institutions operating under their own board of governors or board of trustees, there is a lack of coordination across institutions — including articulation agreements.

Difficulty Balancing Certification Requirements With Early Childhood Focus

Although two-thirds of states in the nation have an option for a teaching license or credential encompassing the birth to age five period,¹⁰ higher education institutions encounter challenges

¹⁰ For details on the licensure options that each state offers, see Appendix A on pg. 41 of the report: *Early Educator Investment Collaborative: Early Educator Preparation Landscape*.

in their efforts to both comply with state licensing requirements and also maintain a focus in their degree program coursework on preparing educators to work with very young children. Since most jobs working with children birth to age five do not require a bachelor's degree or a teaching license, the majority of students seeking these degrees are likely planning to teach in the K-12 school system. Thus, it follows that licensing guidelines for early childhood or early elementary education credentials tend to require programs to cover a broader range of content and pedagogy for elementary-aged children, reducing the ability for early childhood programs to focus their core curriculum on content and pedagogy for very young children. In addition, as states move toward alignment of credentials with early educator competencies, these changes are often piecemeal, putting pressure on programs to adapt or add new requirements for degree completion.

These challenges create concern amongst institutions of higher education regarding the future of their early childhood education degree programs. As a result of changes in state licensure in recent years, many programs have seen changes to the content related to children birth to age five that is included in the necessary coursework. Further, while some degree programs try to creatively craft coursework and experiences for students in order to adhere to licensing requirements and ensure adequate early childhood content coverage, others may opt to reduce the emphasis on the early childhood period, resulting in a lack of consistency and uniformity in the preparation of the workforce.

- **Michigan:** “[Higher education] programs have broken down to where basically now you’re getting a teaching degree... and it’s not being addressed as early childhood education. It’s broader than that. When you get early childhood education degrees in Michigan, you might get an endorsement for Pre-K, but that’s not where your focus is.”
- **Alabama:** “[U]p to through 2003... early childhood was separated from elementary education. [A]fterwards they started blending early childhood education with elementary education. Because a lot of elementary education goes through the State Department [of Education], almost all the coursework tended to be focused on more of the kindergarten, or first grade through fifth, sixth work... I get the impression that some people are trying to separate, again, early childhood from elementary.”
- **Colorado:** “[B]ecause [the Colorado Read Act] has not resulted in stronger reading outcomes at third grade, there’s been some tightening of the law and what teachers should be doing in the classroom. That has had some ramifications for our teaching education programs that is a little conflictual and concerning right now. We have some [higher education] programs worried that they won’t be certified by the state because of the way they’re approaching early literacy.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “Traditionally, there are mixed approaches to [higher education] across the state. Some of our [institutes of] higher [education] have really figured out how to meet all of the certification regulations and what they have to go through to maintain certification and all of the policies that are wrapped up in that, and still encompass the 0-5 focus. Where [others] have not quite been able to figure that out.”

Multiple Certification Roadblocks Limit Workforce Growth

Current and future early educators face multiple roadblocks in the process of attaining the credentials they need to work in ECE classrooms. They are expected to complete degree programs, yet many must work to be able to pay for expenses related to these programs. State requirements also demand that they take courses in areas that may not be relevant to working with very young children. Such roadblocks contribute to the problem of expanding an appropriately prepared workforce.

- **Nebraska:** “The other thing we’ve heard is that time is an issue. If you’re teaching full-time and in the classroom full-time, how do you attend classes? [M]ost higher [education] programs are still designed for the traditional student that is 18 to 21.”
- **North Dakota:** “When we have students coming in that really want to work with that five and under population, but they need a license to do early intervention or to do early childhood special [education], they have to go through all of the elementary coursework, all the primary grade coursework. And that’s a struggle for them. Sometimes it’s a skillset struggle. Sometimes they just feel like it’s a waste of their time and money.”
- **Michigan:** “[T]he state requirements are that the teachers need to have degrees at various levels... but we’re not seeing that being matched at the universities. [B]ecause college costs are so exorbitant, we’re seeing less people going into ECE because they’re not getting the return on investment. It’s not matching what the state’s asking for.”
- **Hawaii:** “[H]igher education is going to need to do a lot of work around creating clear career pathways and education pathways for students... [I]f we’re trying to develop these new programs, we don’t have the capacity, the local capacity, that really understands what’s happening here in our communities and our schools in higher [education].”

Maintaining Degree Programs Becoming a Greater Challenge

Higher education stakeholders report that, just like with K-12 teacher preparation programs, keeping early educator preparation programs in place is becoming a greater challenge. Higher education faculty turnover, limited qualified ECE faculty, the expanded focus on infant and toddler expertise, and the relatively low faculty salaries have left institutions of higher learning lacking in the expertise they need to train the next generation of early educators. Institutions of higher education struggling with funding are especially vulnerable to being unable to recruit faculty or maintain ECE degree programs.

- **Hawaii:** “[With] baby boomers retiring out and needing to respond to the change, there was a lot of [faculty] transition [in] the community colleges [and] the four-year institutions. Looking systematically at trying to address challenges was a little bit hard because [new faculty] were just trying to figure out, ‘What is my job?’... I think we’re a good two-thirds of the way through the transition period.”
- **Michigan:** “[A]s we push down into three-year-olds, as we push down into infant-toddlers, the comfortability level [in higher education] starts to tense up... [T]here are no resources, there is little investment, and it has an impact on the workforce... [A]s we’re trying to establish more robust support systems, we’re recognizing that we don’t have in the higher [education] system enough infrastructure in place to support the workforce.”
- **Alabama:** “[I]t’s getting more and more difficult to hire people in early childhood... in higher education... [A] lot of people have to take a \$10-15,000 cut to start in higher education, so a lot of people don’t [go into higher education].”
- **Oregon:** “[Higher education for early learning educators in Oregon] is waning. There are community colleges and universities that are reducing or eliminating their higher education program... [T]hose programs cost more to run than they bring in. So, low enrollment and a lack of student ability to pay [are driving the closures].”

Absence of Comprehensive Strategies Entrenches Poor Compensation

Most Existing Efforts to Address Compensation Do Little To Change Wage Structure of Early Educator Jobs

Recent and ongoing initiatives to address compensation vary in their potential to lead to system-level changes in the wages/salaries paid for working in early care and education.¹¹ Some states, such as Alabama and Oregon, have made great strides in increasing compensation for teachers in their pre-K programs statewide. More typically, efforts to address compensation tend to be small-scale (e.g. pilots), short-term, and/or teacher-centered approaches, such as wage supplement (stipends, tax credits) or apprenticeship programs, that support increased income or wages for individual teachers, but do not change the wage structure of early educator jobs more broadly. Additional existing efforts focus on conducting studies or evaluations to inform future compensation reform by demonstrating the benefits of raising compensation and exploring strategy options.

- **Alabama:** “We’ve had substantial [budget] increases each year [for our pre-K program] from our state legislature, particularly since 2012...We were working on our budget in our request to the governor to put in the budget for the increase to the legislature. And we just said, “Okay, it’s time for pay parity.’ And so, we just wrote it in.”
- **Oregon:** “In 2015 we created a state preschool program called Preschool Promise, and in that legislation we included a requirement that the state set salary minimums that were correlated to kindergarten teacher salaries in Oregon. In 2019, the Student Success Act... will elevate Head Start lead teacher salaries to be the same as Preschool Promise lead teacher salaries. Starting in September of 2020, we should see significant increases in the Head Start lead teacher salaries as well.”
- **Nebraska:** “[W]e are starting to look at wages. Nebraska AEYC just got some funds to start the WAGE\$ [stipend] program, and they’re looking for other matching funds. They have started that process to get that in place. [T]hey’re starting with a small pilot in the Omaha area.”

¹¹ For further context on existing state approaches to address compensation, see p. 15 of the report: *Early Educator Investment Collaborative: 50-State Policy and Practice Research Memo*.

- **Hawaii:** “Child Care Development Block Grant funds. In the past the focus was on compliance. There’s a start of dialogue around looking at professional learning systems as more than complying with the 18 or whatever hours. And that’s a good start. I think the Executive Office of Early Learning’s efforts in the area have facilitated compensation... needing to be an essential component of state strategic planning.”
- **Colorado:** “[W]e actually are doing an intervention study right now [in our community-based program]. And the first intervention was increasing the salaries of our teaching staff fairly significantly. We’re probably a little bit different. We still don’t match what the school system does.”
- **Michigan:** “We have a study... to look at alternative industries and their compensation models to see if we can glean anything from business, philanthropy, medical, or other industries to see how their systems are sustained, are funded, and what we can learn and apply to early childhood.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “We have started to adopt some tiered reimbursement strategies, which currently there is nothing, no policy in place that would help that to trickle down into the hands of the workforce, but the potential is there. [W]e have to really build our employers’ awareness about what that looks like, really identifying their true cost of care and then being able to commit to some salary.”

Apprenticeships are currently one popular approach to addressing early educators’ wages, but they have limited potential to lead to fundamental and system-level changes to compensation. More comprehensive approaches are still needed given that compensation issues permeate so many elements of states’ ECE systems.

- **Pennsylvania:** “As far as I can see across our state, I haven’t heard or seen or had any kind of conversation with advocates or any of my colleagues around a really good compensation strategy. Apprenticeships and really leveraging a lot of this in QRIS is what I’m hoping pans out if there’s not some miracle magic that happens somewhere else.”
- **Rhode Island:** “I doubt apprenticeships are going to solve the problem that we’re trying to solve. I don’t understand what is going on with apprenticeships all of a sudden coming out of the blue and being a thing that people think is the answer. I don’t think we can get the rates high enough until we have a universal child care program.”
- **Colorado:** “We have an apprenticeship proposal with an early childhood emphasis. The Governor’s hammering away at it, this being a top priority of these programs... And that’s what we’re looking at. But it’d be great to know some effective strategies to increase compensation.”

Poor Compensation Hinders Expansion of the Workforce

Without comprehensive reforms, the poor compensation experienced by early educators will continue to be an enormous hurdle to the expansion of the ECE workforce. Institutions of higher education report struggling to attract students into their early childhood education programs because of the low compensation and lack of benefits associated with most ECE roles. Stakeholders also report transition out of the ECE field into other fields (e.g., elementary education) once students earn their degrees and realize they can be better paid in other settings.

- **Michigan:** “But now with generational changes as well as a profession that has been neglected for so long and devalued, we need a comprehensive approach to compensation.”
- **Rhode Island:** “Rhode Island College developed a bachelor’s degree for infant and toddler. They’re having a hard time getting anyone to sign up for it because of compensation. They think that if there was a way to have a good job, that they would have more people enroll in their program.”
- **Oregon:** “[Compensation] is one of the reasons why we are unable to recruit and retain, and also why we’re not able to create the market for institutions of higher education... It’s hard to choose a profession that you can’t then pay for your loans and all that.”
- **North Dakota:** “[W]hat impacts our workforce the most is what they get paid... [Y]ou can make the same, if not more, working at a fast food or retail store than you can dealing with children. The amount of money it takes to [earn a child care degree] versus what you’re actually getting paid... is definitely a deterrent in North Dakota.”

Compensation is Bifurcated Across Various Levels

Across states, early educators are offered the best compensation opportunities when their ECE program is embedded into the public K-12 system. Typically these higher paying roles require equivalent qualifications to a K-12 educator (e.g., bachelor’s degree and a teaching license or certification); however, not all public pre-K programs require parity for educators with the required credentials. Without comprehensive reforms, teacher compensation will remain uneven across ECE setting types, and along lines that parallel the bifurcation in preparation programs referenced above.

- **Alabama:** “[T]he Alabama first-class Pre-K program requires the bachelor’s degree in early childhood or child development. It is also designed to pay those teachers on par with public school educators. We have lots of folks graduating from those programs, but only if they go into elementary schools or first-class Pre-K programs in any settings do they receive that compensation boost.”

- **New Mexico:** “Public schools are required to pay their staff, both teachers and educational assistants, on the district salary scale... child care providers have no requirement to do anything. [A] child care provider at an Early Learning Advisory Council meeting recently stated, ‘Well, that’s not fair because the public school teacher down the street is making \$56,000, and my teacher who also has a BA is making \$20,000’. There’s nothing that requires that child care provider to pay that teacher a specific salary.”
- **North Dakota:** “Our public Pre-K dollars are actually given to our Department of Commerce, and then [the Department of Public Instruction] works jointly with our Department of Commerce in approving those programs. In order to be eligible to receive the Pre-K dollars, DPI has to approve those programs first... [I]n order to be eligible to offer or to apply for the grant, [centers] have to have that licensed teacher.”
- **Colorado:** “For example... in Denver, Pre-K teachers are paid at parity [if] their educational levels are the same. They need a teaching license that includes Pre-K in that licensure. You go right next door to Aurora School District, they don’t even call their Pre-K teachers ‘teachers’ because they don’t want to be in the union and subject to all that. They’re ‘facilitators,’ and they are not paid the same... [it’s all] based on the district that you’re in.”
- **Nebraska:** “We can do all the training and pre-certification that we want, but if we can’t figure out how to pay someone more than \$12 an hour for doing a very difficult and skilled job, then we’re just going to be training people to go work in the public schools. Because when you’re talking about the compensation difference between an early childhood educator working in a private child care center versus a first-grade teacher, the compensation difference is double.”
- **New Mexico:** “I know that [wage parity with the public schools] is a conversation that we’re really looking at. As far as trying to get people with bachelor’s degrees to stay in the field of early childhood and not just move to public schools, they have to be paid like a public school teacher would be paid.”

Blending in Competencies Complicates Strategies

Role of Competencies Severely Limited

Even in states that have a competency system in place, competencies play a limited role in higher education and compensation. Many states entirely lack or do not enforce their competency system. It is impossible for them to track how early educators are being prepared and the quality of their teaching. The absence of such knowledge adds to the challenges of improving higher education and compensation. Furthermore, no competency system is being applied state-wide across all ECE settings.

- **Hawaii:** “Right now we don’t have a good system for tying competencies with compensation, or really tying competencies to how a candidate or a child care worker would go through a program and gain the competencies.”
- **Oregon:** “What used to be our QRIS system is now called Spark... [T]hose are based on some core knowledge that really is not fully functional as competencies. We’re recommending that the new competencies from NAEYC be used as a new starting point.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “I suspect [competencies] vary a lot from one institution of higher education to another... I think if their student body is largely students who will be going to public education, they may not be so aligned with NAEYC.”

The ECE settings in which states leverage their competency systems also vary:

- **Alabama:** “Everything has been very siloed, and various improvement programs don’t speak to each other.”
- **Colorado:** “Colorado’s competencies framework... [is] aligned with our Quality Rating and Improvement system, which is Colorado Shines. The idea is that you would be able to evaluate on competencies, but we don’t have that as a state yet.”
- **New Mexico:** “Public school teachers must pass an exam based on the competencies in the licensure, which are aligned with NAEYC competencies, as well as some locally-developed. That’s a licensure requirement. For child care, that’s not the case.”

Competency Efforts Range from Incentive-Based Initiatives to Systematic Integration

Within this context, efforts to elevate the role of competencies often are not system-based. Instead, some states are implementing incentive-based approaches that provide early educators and providers a financial benefit in return for participating in quality-enhancing programs. More system-based efforts are focused on beginning to build the infrastructure needed to elevate the role of competencies. Strong articulation amongst institutions of higher education facilitates the development of more system-based efforts.

- **Michigan:** “We just recently rolled out our [ECE teacher] registry program. Within that we have the core knowledge and competencies in terms of what training people access and what education. There’s the potential there to align compensation in that structure with competencies and credentials and degrees for the field.”
- **Oregon:** “[The Oregon Department of Education is] in the process of developing early educator competencies pretty much in alignment with state competencies. And then it would be implementing that within our professional learning system, which currently is not on competencies. It’s more core knowledge... It’s a pretty good overhaul that’s going to be necessary.”
- **Colorado:** “The community colleges have worked really well together and have done some significant work around ensuring course descriptions are aligned with each other, but also with [the] Colorado teacher competencies framework. Actually, it’s teacher and leader competencies. The idea was to start to create some alignment so that there would be standardization about how to evaluate teachers’ level of skills.”
- **New Mexico:** “New Mexico has a lot of great structures in place as far as the state articulation, where we have agreed to offer common coursework. It has common outcomes aligned to the state competencies, which were aligned to NAEYC... Each course in our early childhood has specific competencies that are in the syllabus, so everything is backwards designed from the outcomes.”

Teacher Shortages Complicate Competency Efforts

Shortages of teachers complicate efforts to increase the role of competencies in the preparation and compensation of early educators. ECE programs have to balance the need to have highly qualified teachers with the need to meet licensing teacher ratios. Meeting licensing teacher ratios is a more immediate need that takes priority over teacher competencies. K-12 teacher shortages can also complicate efforts to elevate early educator competencies, by increasing competition both for policymakers’ attention and for credentialed teachers.

- **Alabama:** “When we start looking at competencies, often times we have people who are saying, ‘Well, do I have a warm body in the [child care class] room so that I’m meeting ratios?’ I think, unfortunately, at this point, Alabama is much closer to warm bodies.”
- **Colorado:** “Because we’re in such a teacher workforce shortage, it’s like, ‘How do we get people as minimally qualified to get them in the classrooms right away?’ That seems to be everyone here’s focus, as opposed to developing teachers.”
- **North Dakota:** “There is such a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in the rural areas... [We are] just being strategic about how to fill those spaces in classrooms.”

The Potential for Political Momentum

Existing Political Momentum

Current political momentum for ECE across the ten states varies greatly. Some states are currently enjoying an upswing in political momentum as a result of a governor or state legislature knowledgeable about and supportive of early education. Nonetheless, this momentum is often focused on a specific element of ECE, rather than on the entire state ECE system, including issues facing workforce preparation, support, and compensation. This limits the existing potential for comprehensive reform.

- **Colorado:** “The governor is dead serious about [ECE]. His State of the State was [in January 2020]. If you look at the first three minutes of his transcript, it was about early childhood right out of the gate.”
- **Hawaii:** “I think there’s a lot of recognition in the legislature with respect to the need to support young children and families earlier. There’s been a lot of momentum around expanding the four-year-old program.”
- **North Dakota:** “[W]ithin the last two years, early childhood has come more to the forefront... The ’17 and the ’19 sessions by far held the most bills, statements, et cetera, that had to do with early childhood.”

- **Oregon:** “We’ve had a very supportive and vocal governor. We had a [legislative] committee with a subcommittee specifically focused on early childhood. And so, I think in that way we’re definitely on the rise or at a high point. Whether we can kind of build on that momentum moving forward, I think that’s the question.”
- **Pennsylvania:** [O]ur governor right now is extremely interested in equitable pathways for teachers, as well as our Department of Education is super focused on [ECE] teacher pipelines and increasing the diversity of our teachers across the state.”

Utility in Framing ECE as an Economic and Business Issue

Several stakeholders noted their success in framing ECE as an economic and business issue to leverage additional political support. In emphasizing the economic impacts of ECE as well as the social and educational benefits, advocates are able to connect with policymakers and other stakeholders who are concerned about economic and workforce development, both in terms of the ECE workforce and other fields.

- **Nebraska:** “And the other thing that we hear from our policy advocates in the state when they’re talking to the governor and the state senators is, they really talk about the economic development aspect of early childhood and what it does for communities. That is really resonating [in this] conservative state.”
- **Alabama:** “Our Chamber [of Commerce] in the state of Alabama is pretty active. We work pretty closely with them to try and figure out, how do we make this [an ECE] workforce issue? We know that it is one. It’s just trying to put it into their language because their language is so different from ours in education.”
- **Oregon:** “I think we just continued as stakeholders to just hammer the message of, ‘We will not be able to serve more children and families across our state if we do not begin to invest in this workforce’... You just cannot expand without really having a comprehensive workforce strategy. It won’t happen.”

Compelling Data Strengthens Bipartisan Support

The availability and quality of data is another crucial piece to pushing advancements with policymakers. Stakeholders reflected on the importance of useful data on the impacts of high quality ECE and information about the existing workforce in a state when communicating with officials. In providing evidence on the positive impact of investing in ECE programs and the status and needs of the ECE workforce, advocates have had success bridging the political divide and securing bipartisan support for ECE policies and funding.

- **Colorado:** “I really strongly believe that we wouldn’t be having the conversations we’re having right now and having the momentum that we have right now without having conducted both this workforce survey and then we did an economic sector analysis. It changed so much, and frankly we need to be doing it every couple of years.”
- **Rhode Island:** “[D]emonstrating something on a small scale is really important. [B]ringing research to the table and saying, ‘Look, all of these other states went before us and they found this’... Since we’re starting from scratch, let’s try to design something that is financed adequately and has the right supports in place to be successful.”
- **Alabama:** “[ECE] is one of the rare places that we see our politicians, particularly in the South, be able to come together. [T]he new [legislative] Democratic leader [and]... the Republican leader were both very receptive to the fact that they know that this [birth through Pre-K] program needs to grow in part because of the data and the research that we’ve been able to pull out of it and say, ‘We know that we’re effective. Here’s the numbers. Here’s the research’.”

Governors’ Political Interest Can Elevate ECE Efforts

State governors have strong potential to impact momentum for ECE. State governors, at the very least, are players that can be tapped into to make progress on ECE because of the political power they hold. Even when state governors are not personally invested in ECE, their offices hold the political clout to continue addressing ECE issues. States with governors prioritizing ECE have greater potential to enjoy a political landscape open to making inroads on ECE.

- **Pennsylvania:** “The focus on early childhood education is definitely part of the political arena because we have a governor right now who is very supportive of early childhood... I think that filters down through the variety of departments, particularly in the State Department of Education.”
- **Oregon:** “I think we’re calling this a historic moment in early learning in our state. I think it was actually started by our last governor, who really did recognize the importance of an investment in early learning, as he thought about ways to support a complete continuum of education from cradle to career. And then I would give real credit to our current governor who really continued that and then really pressed on this.”
- **Colorado:** “Our biggest window of opportunity is certainly the governor’s commitment to get universal Pre-K in the state by the end of his first term. [In early January 2020] we had 17 ballot initiative submissions to our secretary of state for universal Pre-K.”

Elevation of ECE in State Agencies Augments Political Influence

The elevation of ECE at the state agency level determines the influence government ECE stakeholders hold in state politics. ECE offices split across more than one state agency have to navigate more bureaucratic barriers and political players. Having a distinct ECE department helps streamline government ECE efforts and broadens government ECE stakeholders' access to high-level decision makers.

- **North Dakota:** “[O]ur [Department of Human Services] people sit with our [Department of Public Instruction] early childhood people. So, that’s a plus. But our state legislative body currently doesn’t see a need for DPI to take a lead at all when it comes to early childhood. They really like our Department of Human Services to do that, and we go along with that.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “[The] Pennsylvania Department of Education has a branch that focuses on early childhood development and early learning. Those stakeholders have been tremendously supportive, forward-thinking, action-oriented, and outcomes-oriented... [The office was established] 20 years ago. It sent a really, really strong message that child care is educational... and the state has done tremendous work in building the structure and building the clearly-articulated early learning standards all the way through second grade.”
- **Alabama:** “I think we have a magnificent team at the Department of Early Childhood Education. And you will not find another place in this country with more enthusiasm or energy for what they’re doing. And that’s what it takes. We are constantly working on [ECE]... We’re out talking to legislators. We don’t wait through session. We visit them all over the state, in their own hometowns, and talk to them. And this is early childhood! We’ve done governor’s summits. We’ve had three of those where we make it this exclusive event by invitation, and we invite legislators and superintendents, policymakers, and leaders.”

Department of Early Childhood Education Leveraging Its Clout: An Alabama Example

Alabama’s Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) is responsible for driving action on ECE issues. DECE Secretary Jeana Ross leverages relationships with other state agencies and ECE-related data to gain political support for ECE actions. DECE has inter-agency agreements with other parts of the Alabama State Government, including the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Mental Health. DECE effectively uses data as a messaging tool to gain bipartisan support for ECE. Furthermore, Governor Kay Ivey provides DECE with the space to pursue state-level ECE actions. ECE successes are usually approved “with little fanfare,” which “works really well” in Alabama.

State Legislatures Can Be Vehicles for ECE Action

State legislatures are the mechanism for delivering on states' political interest in ECE. The level of a state legislature's ECE interest is therefore important for making ECE progress. Through the introduction and passing of legislation, state legislatures determine the extent to which ECE is a political priority. Most crucially, state legislatures must approve the state's annual or biennial budget and therefore have tremendous influence about how ECE is funded relative to competing priorities. State legislatures also influence policy and funding levels for other state priorities, such as health and K-12 spending, that compete with early childhood for state revenues, as well as setting tax policies that influence the level of revenue available for early childhood and other funding priorities. In passing legislation supporting ECE, state legislatures can ignite new interest and action that help drive ECE movements forward.

- **Alabama:** "Last year, our legislature passed a law that if you had held an apprentice within your child care, you would receive a tax credit. And so, that has really sparked the interest of child care wanting to offer apprenticeship opportunities."
- **Oregon:** "In the 2019 legislative session, Oregon passed the Student Success Act. It's \$1 billion annual tax increase that funds education, early childhood through K-12. So, \$200 million per year will go to zero to five programming. And I believe \$6 million of that per year is focused on the early childhood educator workforce."
- **Colorado:** "[T]here's a pretty major bill in the legislature this session around the early childhood workforce, and it's pretty comprehensive and offers a lot of support and funding for things like apprenticeships, loan forgiveness, TEACH scholarships. A lot of pieces to support further education."

Advocates Sustain ECE Efforts, Federal Actions Inject Energy

Advocacy groups sustain efforts to address ECE issues whether or not ECE ranks high in states' political priorities. The importance of the role they play is bound to fluctuate with the ebb and flow of ECE political momentum. States rely on federal government efforts to fund new programs and strategies. Nonetheless, some states make greater strides than others in leveraging federal program dollars.

- **Hawaii:** "We have a fairly small advocacy community, and it's primarily led by a pretty broad tent early childhood advocacy organization called The Hawaii Children's Action Network... [It] isn't specific just to early childhood education. They have some broad areas where they push for legislation in things that cross the early childhood spectrum."

- **North Dakota:** “I believe some of that [the creation of the Office of Early Learning] just came out of the federal push for early childhood and maybe drawing a little bit more attention, making more demands of those early childhood programs, and in terms of collaborating and coordinating.”
- **Rhode Island:** “Child care is one [strategy] that we were able to push through with a [Preschool Development] Grant. If we get that... I’m really hoping that they’ll be able to set aside a small amount of money [for teacher compensation]. [W]e can do it over three years. And we can bring in an evaluator to look at the impact of the program.”

Nebraska: Philanthropic Investment Helps Advocates Maintain Momentum

Philanthropic investment in Nebraska helps state ECE advocates maintain political momentum. The Buffett Institute’s Workforce Commission is driving much of the philanthropic visibility in ECE. The commission recently released a report that recommends not pushing for any increases in certification requirements without also addressing teacher compensation. Nonetheless, some state senators are resistant to Buffett initiatives and advocates whose work is funded with Buffett money.

Sustained interest in and support for ECE from the Buffett Institute is critical for Nebraska in light of its legislative structure. Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, and state senators can serve for a maximum of eight years. The persistent legislator turnover makes educating legislators on ECE issues “never ending”.

Early Educators Relegated to a Small Role in Policy

Currently, early educators have been relegated to playing a small role in moving ECE policy, despite being the very individuals responsible each day for providing high-quality care and education for children and families. Although leaders in the K-12 system have the potential to be a strong voice for ECE and its educators, their focus on K-12 education often limits their support for greater investments in ECE. ECE providers and teachers can be at odds with state-level changes that do not meet their needs or consider their realities.

- **Hawaii:** “[ECE] practitioners, just in general, they don’t tend to be very influential on setting some of the systems changes on compensation or the pieces around higher [education].”
- **Nebraska:** “The school boards... [t]he Pre-K funding that will come through the state to those school districts is helping them realize that [the ECE workforce issue] is important. And thinking about, ‘Oh, wait. Infant-toddlers are part of my school district’.”

- **Oregon:** “The most vocal proponents of creating an alternative to the [state] bachelor’s degree requirement [for lead teachers] were... a public charter school... and [a] Head Start provider. [T]hey were really the leaders of calling the question [of], ‘We don’t have an accessible bachelor’s degree program [in our communities to meet the requirement]’.”

Implications for Comprehensive Reform

Advancing Multiple Strategies, Simultaneously

The majority of stakeholders provided responses to the question of what comprehensive reform in their state would look like. Combined, their responses reflect a call to move from the disparate nature of current strategies to an integrated approach to reform. Stakeholders describe that an appropriately reformed system would be centered on the needs of teachers, it would be fully funded — to support compensation as well as quality higher education — and it would establish a coordinated career pathway that lifts ECE as a profession.

- **Pennsylvania:** “We need to put practitioners as a very large focal point for an initiative... to build what could become a comprehensive system. [W]e have to have a system that moves forward not based on political will... which is hard to predict.”
- **Nebraska:** “[F]ull funding for the zero-to-five system. Stop doing these little fixes... You really have to step back and say, ‘It’s the full system. Full funding is your goal. What are the steps to get you to that goal?’”
- **New Mexico:** “Ultimately, compensation is key. There has to be a structural system in place that makes [being an ECE teacher] a viable option for people. If we don’t put something at the end that makes coming to school and doing the work worth it, we’re never going to [build a strong workforce].”
- **Oregon:** “[G]etting child care compensation in the mix is a key priority. That will require truly articulating what the real cost of quality child care is. Getting approval to set our subsidy rates at the true cost of quality, not at the market rate... [P]ush to shift the narrative around child care... to have it be a more universal investment.”

- **Hawaii:** “[W]orking on those articulation agreements and streamlining that and doing needs assessments. We’re working on doing needs assessments this year so we can get a clear sense of what it is the community wants and needs from us. What is lacking, what are the gaps, and how do we make it more accessible for our community and students?”
 - **Alabama:** “[E]stablish a coordinated pathway for early childhood educators, from that entry-level minimum wage job through roofs on various levels.”
 - **Colorado:** “This is a real profession. It has some content knowledge that you need that’s sequential, that’s organized, that’s comprehensive with breadth and depth... It’s not willy-nilly pathways... There’s building. There’s a knowledge base that teachers need.”
-

State Policies Can Drive Divides: A Hawaii Example

Hawaii’s constitutional restrictions on the use of public funds has created a divide between public and private ECE programs, which hinders the creation of a single, comprehensive ECE system in the state. The constitution is clear that public funds can only be used to fund preschool education in programs receiving public funding, including public K-12 systems and charter schools. Because of this dynamic, the support of teacher unions for ECE funding and reform, is focused on efforts that occur in public settings. While it is the case that some private ECE settings are able to offer more competitive teacher salaries using private philanthropic funding, it remains the case that most ECE programs lack the resources to match those of the publicly funded programs.

As Hawaii’s state-funded preschool program serves a small percentage of the state’s children, the majority of Hawaii’s early educators do not teach in this program. This means that state compensation efforts using public funds have the potential to reach only a small fraction of the workforce. Additionally, because so few teachers have access to these public preschool jobs in which a state license is required, and licensure is not required to teach in private settings, there is little incentive for early educators to seek licensure or the college courses that it requires. Further, the state lacks a system for tying competencies to compensation.

One Comprehensive Certification Process

Reflecting the inequities and frustrations that derive from the myriad of requirements for educators in states, a review of stakeholders’ responses regarding certification points to the importance of establishing a singular, competencies-based certification system, that includes multiple levels to capture entry through advanced roles. Certification would also align with the appropriate levels of compensation, and the process of obtaining certification would be streamlined from practitioners.

- **Pennsylvania:** “I really, really believe in the value of a zero to eight degree, the whole spectrum, regardless of where you’re teaching and based in the new competencies that will hopefully come out soon.”
- **Nebraska:** “If I had all the money and time and funding, I’d implement competency-based education. It’s looking at setting minimum qualifications across settings and putting together a career ladder that say, ‘Here’s what folks need at each stage based on competencies, and ways to think about how you demonstrate those competencies both within and outside of higher education’.”
- **Oregon:** “It’s not a stretch for people to start taking coursework in high school that bears credit for community college, and then having that very next stepping stone so that you continue and you don’t lose credits, and you don’t lose time, and you don’t lose money.”

Widespread Support and Collaboration is Needed

Creating comprehensive reform requires the support and collaboration of various players. This includes the perspective and input of early educators themselves, who have traditionally been absent in policy discussions and decisions. A champion is needed to rally public support as is support from key policy actors who can influence each of the multiple levers (e.g., legislative, regulatory, administrative, budgetary) required to advance meaningful, systems-level change. The support and collaboration of institutions of higher education and teacher unions is also understood by stakeholders as critical, though key political levers for driving significant policy or funding change vary across states.

- **Nebraska:** “[C]oalition building, because we can’t do this alone. Not one organization or even government agency can do it alone. [We need] a collective impact model saying, ‘Who are the players that need to come together?’ Putting together an advisory board that says, ‘Here’s our strategic direction and our goal’. And then pulling together work groups to tackle the specific issues.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “I see our actual workforce lifting up and guiding a lot of this work. I feel like that’s the biggest piece of this all being successful in the long run.”
- **North Dakota:** “We need a champion that understands and can speak to the general population of, ‘Okay just isn’t good enough anymore. Look what’s happening in our schools. Look what’s happening with the education system in general’... [W]hat it would take is a real champion that can connect to people’s hearts.”
- **New Mexico:** “[W]e would need legislation. That’s one of the fastest ways to get something done, is for the legislature to do a memorial and say, ‘This agency must do this by this time and present a report to the legislature’. I think that would be it.”

- **Colorado:** “We need to continue to have the higher education community involved. They, like everyone we talk to, identify the compensation issue as the big barrier... And that’s number one.”
- **Rhode Island:** “[W]e need to have the unions on our side. They are politically powerful in our state... [I]f the union wanted to support [ECE] and the public school teachers said, ‘You know what? It would help us if we had better prepared kids’.”
- **Hawaii:** “[W]e need some infusion that helps with some capacity to do these things... I see a lot of willingness here to work together... But the lack is more around the resource capacity piece to pull it off... like some outside technical assistance.”

Data are Needed

The absence of data makes it incredibly difficult to understand how to best approach comprehensive reform. A lack of understanding about the ECE workforce, variations that exist within a state, and the connection to quality improvement, all limit efforts to best address workforce issues and target resources.

- **North Dakota:** “[T]he biggest issue in our state to be able to answer any questions is, we don’t have the data. We don’t have an integrated data system at all.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “Once we have a true understanding of who the workforce is, that will help us inform these other decisions that we’re making.”
- **New Mexico:** “If we had a New Mexico workforce data report, we’d know how much people were making and why they make the decisions they do.”
- **Hawaii:** “[W]e don’t have the data we really need on our workforce to understand, what would be the implications of raising pay? What kind of workforce are we talking about?”

Increased, Streamlined Funding is Needed

Increased levels of public funding and, crucially, reform of existing funding mechanisms is essential for large-scale and long-term improvements to early educator jobs. The systems currently in place are fragmented, siloed, and inequitable, resulting in large wage gaps across comparable early educator roles. Addressing the deficiencies of the current system and streamlining funding requires a new financing structure for ECE, such as that proposed in the NASEM report, *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*. Efforts to grow the amount and sustainability of public funds must also go hand-in-hand with reducing the fragmentation of the ECE system. Investments from philanthropy also have a place in the financing of ECE; however, it is clear that the lion’s

share of funding must come from public sources and must be of significant scale to make an impact on each piece of the system (e.g., facilities and infrastructure of ECE programs, higher education and professional development systems, compensation of the workforce).

- **Michigan:** “[W]e did a study back in 2012, and there are 83 different funding streams across Michigan state government that fund early childhood, and we don’t tap into them in organized, aligned ways very well.”
- **New Mexico:** “Another thing we’re looking at is how we can enhance facilities for both child care and even Head Start programs in the state. There’s a severe need for facilities because a lot of what’s holding back compensation appears to be the money that’s being spent because the facilities are inadequate and need to be improved in order to meet licensure.”
- **Hawaii:** “[H]elp to build infrastructure within higher education. Help to build infrastructure really at all levels, just to make sure that once we build it, it can be sustained. We’re going to need people that can make sure that if we’re going to have a trainer and training registry, then somebody needs to be housing it. Somebody needs to be running it.”
- **Michigan:** “The state can’t pay for [innovation]. Innovation can happen by leveraging dollars from the philanthropic community. But that also means the philanthropic community should not use its money in a way that just gives them power. But [to] use it to help support innovation in a strategic way.”
- **Pennsylvania:** “There has to be public funding. It’s not going to work any other way and it has to be equitable public funding. And it really means that there are higher levels of funding where the need is greater, which is not the case in public education and it should be.”
- **Oregon:** “We did a cost model to outline what funding [would be needed] if we actually had access for all our currently eligible families across child care, preschool, special ed and home visiting at a level of quality, so ... teachers or educators, professional staff are adequately compensated, caseloads are reasonable ... how much money would we need each year? And we need a billion [dollars] each year in addition to the \$200 million that we just got. [O]ur struggle is that the reality of where we need to go is a lot more money and the reality of raising a lot more money in our state is a big challenge.”

Addendum: ECE Reform in the Age of COVID-19

This research was undertaken prior to the current COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic crisis across the United States. Families, workers, and businesses across sectors have been hit hard with little warning and this is especially the case in the early care and education field, which was already severely underfunded and loosely configured.

Findings reflect a common theme: comprehensive reform of ECE requires that early care and education services, and the attendant resources to ensure a skilled and stable workforce, be embedded into the public infrastructure. While some communities and parts of the ECE system have made gains and innovative ideas have been undertaken, it remains the case that these efforts remain vulnerable to changing priorities and interests. It is also the case that publicly funded pre-K is where there have been the most gains in terms of educator compensation and implementation of higher qualifications and thus, the ability to place some demands upon higher education. In the face of this pandemic, it is those public pre-K programs and their teachers that are most protected in terms of their own physical and fiscal well-being, whereas the majority of the field is facing the potential of permanent closures and making choices about whether to work in high-risk situations in order to earn an income.

The pandemic has made clearer than ever before the urgent need for a public ECE infrastructure on par with the public K-12 system. Though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that both schools and child care programs be closed as a strategy to mitigate the effects of COVID-19,¹² state and local governments have been far slower to take decisive action related to early care and education in their communities. The existing fragmented, largely private provision of ECE leaves state and local governments without a coherent mechanism to effectively govern or fund the entirety of the ECE sector, resulting in piecemeal or inconsistent policies pertaining to particular ECE settings. Federally funded Head Start and state-funded public pre-K programs have typically been closed in line with K-12 schools, with government funding to help weather the crisis. But policies pertaining to private programs, which form the bulk of the ECE system, have been much more varied. Many ECE programs were struggling financially before the crisis and there is real fear that many will be forced to close, never to re-open.¹³

Most of the attention to ECE during this crisis has focused on ensuring access to child care for workers in essential services, such as the health care industry, and in many states, access for parents of young children who transitioned to working at home. Child care has always been an

¹² See CDC (2020) [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs: Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

¹³ See NAEYC (2020) [Child Care in Crisis Understanding the Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic](#).

essential service that allows workers in other occupations to do their jobs, but the crisis has made clearer than ever the need to invest in a public early care and education infrastructure, and most especially in early educators themselves, who have persistently been sidelined despite the front-line, essential nature of their work with young children.



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