

# TRANSFORMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## Making the Case for a Focus on the Workforce

Early Educator Investment Collaborative  
2021 - 2024 Fund Report



The Early Educator Investment Collaborative works to accelerate progress in the early childhood education profession and ensure early educators have the supports they need to be well-prepared and appropriately compensated. This report’s aim is to orient you to our history and the work we have supported over the past three years—the grants that we have awarded and our research and convening efforts—and look ahead to the opportunities that lie in front of us. We envision a world in which all young children have equal access to high-quality learning experiences grounded in the science of child development.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>WHERE CHALLENGES LIE, OPPORTUNITIES ARISE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
A Historic Bet on Early Childhood Education	5
Essential Agents of Human Development	5
Laying the Groundwork	8
<b>RACIAL EQUITY AT THE FORE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>OUR GRANTS: COLLABORATION IN ACTION</b>	<b>10</b>
Transforming Early Childhood Education Lead Teacher Preparation Programs	10
Creating Capacity to Tackle Compensation	14
Raising Child Care Fund: Grassroots Organizing & Support	18
<b>ENGAGING THE FIELD</b>	<b>20</b>
Higher Education Learning Community	20
Lead Teacher Certification Feasibility Study	21
Narrative Change Campaign	22
<b>LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE</b>	<b>23</b>

# WHERE CHALLENGES LIE, OPPORTUNITIES ARISE

We are excited to share with the field a three-year report on our efforts at the Early Educator Investment Collaborative. We are a group of funders who came together seven years ago with a bold vision to support the essential agents of human development—early childhood educators—recognizing that we will only attain the great outcomes we aspire to for all children by also attending to the needs of the adults who care for and educate them daily.

Early childhood educators perform a variety of functions in early learning settings and provide critical support for families and communities. Still, we know that, according to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at UC Berkeley (<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/journalists/>), child care workers earn a national median wage of just \$13.22 an hour and Black early educators are paid on average \$.078 less per hour than their White peers, even though 40% of the workers are women of color. Additionally, nearly half of early educators earn poverty-level wages that often must be supplemented by public assistance.

These challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic during which about 48,500 child care jobs were lost, again according to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

**Given the magnitude of the workforce crisis, some big questions stand out:**

- How do we boost compensation and working conditions?
- How do we improve educational preparation for people entering the field or trying to advance in their careers?
- How do we support the attainment of competency-based credentials that are portable?
- How do we do all of this in ways that are equitable and do not perpetuate systems of racism and oppression?

There are no easy answers or quick fixes to these pressing questions, but we do believe that there are solutions. We believe that in crisis, comes opportunity. We are looking forward to building on the work of the previous three years and harnessing the current momentum in the field. There is much to be done and we do not do this work alone. Collaboration is at the heart of what we do. Our contributing funders are committed to this work, as are the many community leaders, policy makers, systems administrators, and teacher educators that have partnered with us over the years. Still, we need others to join us. Making the changes that our children, families, and the ECE workforce deserve will take more of us working collaboratively. We look forward to the many opportunities to contribute to the joint work ahead.

**Dr. Ola J. Friday**



**Lis Stevens**





**DR. OLA J. FRIDAY**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EARLY EDUCATOR**  
**INVESTMENT COLLABORATIVE**

Dr. Ola J. Friday is the inaugural Executive Director of the Early Educator Investment Collaborative. There she leads efforts to help early educators achieve their full potential as professionals and to ensure that all children are prepared for success in school and life. As a child of immigrant educators, Dr. Friday was raised with an appreciation for the power of education to change lives. Initially drawn to the classroom, the urge to impact systemic issues compelled her to pursue work in early childhood education policy implementation. Dr. Friday led the implementation of New York State's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and most recently she led workforce development efforts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Ola holds a doctorate in Education Leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a Master of Public Policy from the Goldman School at UC Berkeley, and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Tufts University. She loves traveling and spending time with her nephews ages 4, 15, and 21.



**LIS STEVENS**  
**SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER,**  
**BEZOS FAMILY FOUNDATION**

Lis Stevens is a Senior Program Officer at the Bezos Family Foundation based in Seattle, Washington. In this role, Lis works to drive more equitable outcomes for young children, caregivers and early childhood educators—bringing thought partnership and support to both grant and community partners. Specifically, she stewards the Foundation's investments to boost parent engagement, transform the early childhood educator field, increase literacy, support the prenatal period, and increase research and insights. With more than two decades of experience supporting children and families in a variety of settings, Lis thrives in helping to foster high-quality learning experiences based on developmental science and improving family systems. She holds a degree in Child Psychology from Lewis and Clark College and finds joy in raising her children, ages 14 and 10.



# BACKGROUND

## A Historic Bet on Early Childhood Education

The Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative) was born out of a gathering of funders at the invitation of the David & Lucile Packard Foundation and the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation in 2014 to identify ways that philanthropists could collaborate to achieve kindergarten readiness for all children. With the help of the Bridgespan Group, the group continued meeting to develop a common vision for a "big bet" that could overcome the opportunity gaps experienced by young learners who lack access to high-quality early childhood educational experiences.

These convenings led to a historic collaboration between multiple funders of early childhood education to combine resources and express a common vision to do what none of them could do alone. The Collaborative launched in 2017, focusing on supporting early childhood educators as the key to transforming early childhood education. Guided by the recommendations from the Institute of Medicine's [report](#) to transform the early childhood workforce, as well as the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's [report](#) on early childhood financing, The Collaborative has worked to create equitable and affordable access to teacher preparation and professional development, and align them with increased compensation that reflects the critical role they play in children's lives.

## Essential Agents of Human Development

The Early Educator Investment Collaborative envisions a country in which there is no opportunity gap among children, and where every child makes lasting gains in cognitive, social, and emotional development through their early care and education experience. To achieve this vision, we are driven to invest in the essential agents of human development: early childhood educators.



The Collaborative aims to ensure every young child in an early care and education program has an educator who is well-prepared, well-compensated, and supported in their professional growth, regardless of the settings in which they work across the birth-to-third grade continuum. Moreover, we strive to see that systems are in place to ensure equity and diversity within the workforce, including a clear path for upward mobility across early childhood professional roles.

We advance this theory of change through research, communications, organizing and advocacy, and on-the-ground implementation. These efforts are ultimately centered on transforming educator preparation through competency-based education, as well as supporting professional credentialing and compensation.

Well-prepared educators drive quality and positive child outcomes. It is time for early educators in all settings to possess the knowledge and skills needed to promote healthy learning and development of young children, and to be recognized and compensated as professionals. Our work seeks to create a system of clear roles and career pathways from entry to expert levels, recognizing the competencies educators already possess, while providing necessary supports to equitably access and achieve new competencies essential to childhood development at every stage of professional learning.

We are also committed to increasing compensation for early childhood educators. Nearly half of early educators earn poverty wages. To ensure all children have access to the educators they need, we must offer professional compensation that accomplishes three goals: adequately rewarding teachers for their expertise and preparation, encouraging their continued growth and development, and making quality education accessible to students from all economic backgrounds, not just those whose families can afford to pay premium tuition rates.

## TERMINOLOGY

The terms “early childhood educator” and “early educator” are used interchangeably in this report. Both terms denote the adults that support the care and education of young children birth through age 8 in all custodial-care settings.





# SHARING OUR STRENGTH

We are a national funder collaborative that has come together to achieve a big vision. Funders who have contributed to supporting this work include:



Supporting the work of The Collaborative as an aligned funder is:



Our fiscal sponsor is TSNE, an organization that provides grants and financial management, consulting, and training services to strengthen nonprofits.



# Laying the Groundwork

Between 2017 and 2020, The Collaborative laid the groundwork for its transformative efforts; at the same time, we responded to the unprecedented crisis in early childhood education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning going on in the country brought on by the murder of George Floyd.

- We engaged in foundational research through the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Bellwether Education Partners, and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to analyze existing opportunities and challenges facing state competency and compensation policies around the country.
- We awarded rapid response grants to address the many structural inequities and instabilities that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed in the early childhood workforce, including four grants totaling \$660,000 to organizations that conducted research, engaged in federal and state advocacy, and developed resources for Early Childhood Educator (ECE) systems.
- We supported [a convening](#) hosted by the Alliance for Early Success that uplifted early educator voices alongside state leaders and ECE organizations to discuss key improvements that need to be made and policy solutions that need to be enacted to lead to transformational change.

## RESPONDING TO CRISIS

The Collaborative moved quickly to respond to the sudden crisis to early education brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, including grants to:

- **First Five Years Fund** – focused on national policy advocacy, educating members of Congress on the need to support early learning and care professionals who were economically devastated by the crisis
- **Raising Child Care Fund** – conducted grassroots organizing to shift the messaging around the child care crisis through inclusion of voices of early educators, many of them Black and Brown women
- **The Urban Institute** – developed a rapid-response research-to-policy assessment and action plan for the ECE workforce grounded in existing evidence-based research, including research into contract-financing mechanisms to provide stability for child care workers during a dynamic and unstable time
- **The Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University** – collected data from nearly 100,000 early educators to better understand the health, mental health, and economic impact of COVID-19 on the ECE workforce





# RACIAL EQUITY AT THE FORE

The Collaborative is committed to eliminating the systemic racism that has held early childhood educators in poverty and limited the access of children of color to high-quality early childhood education in their communities. Additionally, we recognize the historical context through which structural racism continues to affect the early childhood workforce—and in eliminating the systemic oppression that keeps many early childhood educators living in poverty. In 2021, The Collaborative contracted Child Trends to conduct a landscape scan to map the history of systemic racism in the US and show how it has influenced ECE policy and practice—including educator pay and benefits, preparation, and workforce stability.



*Visual from the Mary Pauper Report presentation at the Grantmakers for Education 2022 Conference. Source: Getty Images*

The report, [Mary Pauper: A Historical Examination of Early Care and Education Compensation, Policy, and Solutions](#)—a play

on Mary Poppins—offers a dramatic look at

the legacy of colonization, slavery, racism, and sexism that has constantly devalued child care, transferring it to women—particularly women of color—to support the profit-making work of men. It shows starkly how for more than 400 years policies including Native American genocide, enslavement of African Americans, and Jim Crow segregation have formalized and concretized policies that have suppressed wages for early educators. It's only in the last 100 years that public reforms such as the Lanham Act, Comprehensive Child Care Act, Head Start Act, and Child Care Development Block Grants, have attempted to reverse the worst aspects of this harmful legacy.

“ What became very apparent in our review is that for about 75 to 80 percent of the time our culture has been in existence, we have been grappling with issues that have relegated Native Americans, Black Americans, and other people of color to the sidelines. It's important to understand the ramifications of all these commodified laws and policies and how they ultimately still have such a big impact today. It's really no surprise we are still dealing with their legacy!

– **CHRISHANA LLOYD**, Research Scholar, Child Trends

# OUR GRANTS: COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Between 2021 and 2023, The Collaborative has issued direct grants, and steered aligned funding, to more than a dozen organizations and agencies, for a total of \$25 million. The grants focused on our two core focus areas: improving teacher preparation programs and increasing pay for early childhood educators.

“ Early childhood education is at a pivotal moment. To move forward, we must tackle two interconnected challenges: ensuring professional wages that reflect educators’ skills and preparation and establishing strong professional standards and preparation programs. These two goals are mutually dependent, and we need to address both to succeed.

– LIS STEVENS, Senior Program Officer, Bezos Family Foundation;  
Chair, Early Educator Investment Collaborative

## Transforming Early Childhood Education Lead Teacher Preparation Programs

The Collaborative awarded eight grants in 2021 and 2022 in support of partnerships between institutions of higher education and states, territories, and tribal nations to transform their preparation programs for early educators. The three-year grants were intended to break down systemic barriers to education, particularly for those most traditionally disenfranchised from those systems including people of color, indigenous students, and those for whom English is not a first language. The grants have also sought to increase financial assistance and improve access for all students studying to be early educators. Now



*Salish Kootenai College Master's Of Education (Cohort 1) Graduation*

totaling \$15.7 million, the grants are working to strengthen programs that prepare ECE lead teachers through a competency-based bachelor's degree. All grantees are minority-serving institutions, including partnerships with community colleges.

## Collaboration in Action: Spotlights on Grant Partnerships

### CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO – THE UNIVERSITIES & PARTNERS, LEARNING, INNOVATING, FOSTERING EQUITY, TRANSFORMING CALIFORNIA ECE DEGREES (UPLIFT-CA)

- Analyzed demographics of the program to make the case for strengthening culturally-responsive counseling and other supports for students
- Made adjustments to coursework to align to new policy efforts in the state to adopt a preschool to third grade teacher licensure
- Added upper-level courses focused on supporting dual language learners (DLL) and literacy in multilingual contexts

### COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION

- Created more individualized advising to meet student needs, leading to greater retention and growth
- Implemented more culturally-relevant support for students, including hiring an indigenous wellness director, implementing talking circles to help facilitate difficult conversations, and implementing an elder mentor model to support student work-life balance

### GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY – PROJECT SUPPORTING EARLY EDUCATORS' DEVELOPMENT (PROJECT SEED)

- Provided comprehensive, wrap-around supports through mentorship and academic coaching
- Advocated for, and achieved, the amendment of admissions requirements around testing that presented barriers for marginalized students
- Assessed transfer agreements between institutions of higher education to ensure they best serve students and minimize discrepancies in transfer students' credits



College of Menominee Nation faculty members



## NORTH SEATTLE COLLEGE

- Worked collaboratively with departments across campus to redesign math and English requirements and provide higher level of support to decrease student dropout rates
- Reduced residency requirements to minimize the negative impact on Spanish-speaking and Somali students
- Launched a credit-bearing, community-based program to serve as another on-ramp for current and future teachers onto the higher-education ECE pathway
- Implemented several efforts to support students just learning English, including launching a new Spanish BA program for ECE



*North Seattle College 2022 Early Childhood Education graduates*

## SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE

- Infused the teacher preparation program with elements that honor and appreciate students' culture and community, including a tribal policy coordinator to bring Native voice to policymaking spaces, and providing food and honorary gifts during meetings to build community and express gratitude

## UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, DENVER – COLORADO HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

- Created the state's first online BA for ECE
- Launched a rural AA to BA program, bringing the second two years of the BA to rural community colleges, to improve access for rural students
- Formed a faculty community of practice among the four largest BA-granting institutions in the state and the overall community college system to share best practices around inclusion, trauma-informed practices, cultural responsiveness, and other elements
- Funded a director of ECE workforce policy, seated at the Department of Higher Education to serve as a liaison between decision-making bodies

## UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY PROJECT [ECE3]

- Funded a statewide workforce compensation study to build shared understanding about potential policy recommendations to inform advocacy and legislative efforts for increased compensation for the ECE workforce
- Reviewed workforce-related resources to better align coursework with performance standards in the field, so students enter the profession feeling more prepared.
- Improved connections and knowledge sharing through new communities of practice

## UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA – RESPONSIVE EQUITABLE SYSTEM FOR PREPARING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS (RESPECT)

- Developed a competency framework to align preparation curricula across the partner institutions and support statewide credentialing and licensure
- Partnering across entities including ECE organizations, community colleges, and regulatory bodies to create an effective apprenticeship program for students
- Engaging communities in deep ways to elevated

## THE COLORADO HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

Diana Schaack, assistant professor in Early Childhood Education at the University of Colorado, Denver, explains that early childhood teachers in Colorado have traditionally entered the field through two main routes. The first involves earning a degree and then teaching pre-K through third grade in public schools. The second path begins with minimal certification in a community-based program, often supplemented by community college courses or professional development. Despite these two different systems, educators are basically doing the same job, requiring the same set of skills. In applying for a grant from EEIC, members of a consortium of colleges in the state hoped to better integrate these pathways and allow teachers entering from anywhere to work towards the same end—a comprehensive knowledge of child development that can better serve children from all backgrounds. “Our goal has been to see how they converge in a common set of knowledge and skills regardless of what service sector they are working in,” Schaack says.



*University of Colorado, Denver graduating student*

In the past three years, the consortium has focused its efforts on one primary goal: access. It has worked with rural community colleges to expand their ECE offerings, allowing them to offer a bachelor's in conjunction with the University of Colorado, so teachers can take coursework and earn a degree without having to come to a major city. Another group in the consortium created the state's first online bachelor's to make coursework even more convenient.

The group has also worked to change entry requirements for degree programs, to take into account work experience and trainings teachers have completed outside of the traditional academic setting, so they can focus on filling in gaps and earn their degree faster. "We want to honor their prior experience and deep knowledge in the field, so they continue pursuing a degree instead of just spending time doing things they already know," Schaack says. The consortium has used part of the grant to fund a new position inside the state Department of Higher Education, to serve as a liaison between institutions of higher education and state officials to better implement policy. While not focused on compensation directly, the consolidation of credentialing into a unified system can also help advocates better argue for fair wages for everyone.

"What teachers need to know to teach four-year-olds at ABC Preschool or the public-school next door are the same thing," says Schaack. "It's the same job. So, we need to create multiple ways for people to jump in on that, so we're not shutting out people who don't have degrees in the field, but we're moving everyone in a credit-bearing direction."

## Creating Capacity to Tackle Compensation

The Collaborative released a grant opportunity in 2023 to state and local agency partnerships focused on innovating financing mechanisms to create sustainable increases in ECE compensation. The goal is to ensure that salary and benefits are increased for all ECE professionals, with a specific focus on lead teachers, addressing the structural barriers that have historically suppressed their wages. In total, The Collaborative awarded \$11.4 million in grants. While these agencies are just getting started on their work, they intend to do the following:

### Colorado: CO Department of Early Childhood (CDEC)

- Enhance the Colorado Early Childhood Teacher Salary Increase Pilot by gathering data on compensation parity for early childhood teachers
- Conduct a study to articulate the true cost of quality child care and design a financing mechanism to ensure that increased funding is passed through to ECE staff
- Submit a state budget request for a universal salary increase for all early childhood educators
- Establish new CDEC positions (such as a compensation analyst and budget analyst) and liaison positions across key state agencies

“ Colorado is honored to again be selected as a Collaborative grantee, so we can continue our pursuit of innovative opportunities to increase compensation and improve access to benefits for early childhood educators in our state. This funding allows us to create deeper cross-agency partnerships, conduct new research and cost modeling, and pursue new ways of thinking about how to best support early childhood educators in a time when our programs are not only still recovering from the pandemic, but also starting to implement our newly launched Universal Preschool Program.

– DR. LISA ROY, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Early Childhood



## Washington, DC: Office of the State Superintendent of Education

- Implement, evaluate, and document the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity
- Fund through outreach, data systems enhancement, and development of new supports and resources
- Expand health insurance for early educators through data enhancements, education, and outreach efforts
- Support continuing education for early childhood educators by reducing barriers to completion and analyzing funding and scholarship sources
- Explore new funding streams to ensure OSSE is making use of all possible sources

“ DC is a national leader in early childhood education and is committed to providing early childhood educators the supports they need to do their jobs to the fullest. OSSE’s innovative programs help early childhood educators to attain degrees and credentials, access health insurance coverage, and earn equitable pay. With the support of The Collaborative, we’re excited to build upon our success and collaborate with states to strengthen the early childhood force nationally.

– DR. CHRISTINA GRANT,  
State Superintendent, DC Office of the  
State Superintendent of Education

## Louisiana: LA Policy Institute for Children

- Implement compensation demonstration projects in key local communities that can be scaled across the state
- Collect data on early childhood educators to track their progress and identify what works best to improve their pay
- Advance statewide policies to improve compensation

“ We’ve known for some time that high-quality early care and education supports developing minds and enables caregivers to work, and that low-quality experiences can be damaging to children. But the issue the early care and education field is grappling with is how to continually provide high-quality experiences for children when it’s so difficult to retain and recruit high-quality staff. We are thrilled to be awarded these grant funds to start addressing this issue.

– DR. LIBBIE SONNIER, Executive Director, Louisiana Policy Institute for Children

## Minnesota: Department of Education

- Evaluate existing compensation reform efforts to identify opportunities to scale what is working
- Sustain several positions focused on early childhood workforce and compensation that are temporarily funded by grants to preserve the institutional knowledge and sustain Minnesota's capacity to focus on improving compensation for the ECE workforce
- Conduct a 2026 workforce study to allow the state to see how things are shifting within the workforce in terms of compensation and benefits access as an important foundation of data for future workforce supports and interventions

## Tarrant County, Texas: Child Care Associates (CCA)

- Refine and evaluate the Prime Early Learning Pilot that advances innovative financing of community-based early learning programs towards increasing early educator compensation across the birth-to-five spectrum
- Enhance the PreK Today pilot that advances a new community-based prekindergarten model
- Identify state, local and operational barriers to the use of contracts/grants as a transformative and functional method for layering multiple funding streams into a single, coordinated contract
- Develop a comprehensive workforce study to build robust understanding of the early educator workforce in the North Texas region



## CHILD CARE ASSOCIATES

They say everything is bigger in Texas—that's certainly the case for Child Care Associates (CCA), the major nonprofit daycare provider for Fort Worth and the surrounding area. It manages more than 600 early childhood classrooms throughout North Texas, primarily working with underserved children and families, overseeing a budget in excess of \$10 million. When the federal block grant program came to Texas in the 1990s, the organization was put in charge of administering those funds, making CCA the rare organization that has both direct experience in the day-to-day of daycare as well as a hand in public policy. "We've always straddled this living reality of operating childhood centers on the ground, but also operating public dollars," says director Kara Waddell. "We're hearing from providers, talking to parents, and are aware of what's happening on a grassroots level."

That awareness has been crucial as CCA has driven systemic change, creating a standardized assessment for teacher-child interactions as a way to measure competencies of educators and drive professional development and peer coaching. "Whether or not we've had bachelor's degrees, we've had the score to validate where they are doing well, and where there are other areas that need support or improvement," Waddell says. "We're exploring alternative ways to credential them so they might get public funding and earn a living wage long-term." At the same time, the organization has partnered with the University of Chicago to develop a tool to measure classroom conditions to identify what makes a high-performing culture.

When COVID-19 hit, the organization saw it as a way to "completely rethink everything," using federal funds through the American Rescue Plan to launch pilot projects along with the Texas Policy Lab and Rice University for qualifying private centers to apply for subsidies for operating costs and to pay educators a minimum wage of \$18 an hour. Now as those one-time funds have trickled away, the organization is working to make the program sustainable for the long run using block grant and state funds. With the help of a \$1.4 million grant from EEIC, it's been conducting research and convening policy experts to make that a reality, re-evaluating both financing and teacher credentialing. "The grant has come at exactly the right time," says Waddell. "We're excited because we see some really practical ways to move forward."





# Raising Child Care Fund: Grassroots Organizing & Support

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Collaborative awarded a grant to Raising Child Care Fund (RCCF), an initiative of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, that distributes funds to groups to life up voices of educators, families, and other advocates to help transform early childhood education and expand equity. From 2021 to 2023, The Collaborative contributed to fund the Raising Child Care Fund with three rounds of grants totaling \$1.5 million. These funds went directly to groups working on the ground with child care providers and early educators in 17 states to grow their organizing, power-building, and communications capacity.



*OLÉ Organizers in New Mexico*

The messages they've helped convey integrate the national movement for equitable and sustainable child care with specific local needs. It has also hired a mission-driven, Black-owned public relations firm, Spotlight PR, that has been able to increase the number of stories in the media on the child care crisis, working with organizations to place letters to the editor and opinion pieces, get the word out on social media, and build relationships with reporters, helping shift the public narrative about the worth of early care and education work, and highlighting the need to use public dollars to provide higher compensation. While the federal push for an extension of funds from the American Rescue Plan has not yet succeeded, several states have added revenues to the budget to subsidize early education efforts.

**Some specific examples of this work include:**

- **Shaped narratives about the workforce in crisis.** Grantees are keeping focus on how little child care workers – especially women of color and those caring for infants and toddlers – earn, despite being the workforce behind the workforce. Initial data from just seven of partners showed reach to close to one million people through social media and e-newsletters. A standout example is from Ohio, where Spotlight helped arrange for providers to meet with editorial boards from three major newspapers in Ohio, which was influential in placing 13 child care articles in three months.
- **Expanded the number of storytellers and organizers.** Community organizers have intentional strategies to work with individuals who have experienced inequity to identify the systemic and policy barriers to their success, and then take action to make change. They are developing a cadre of stakeholders who are telling their stories and building the base through their own social networks.

- **Gained access to policy leaders to help shape public policy solutions.** RCCF grantees worked to get providers and educators a seat at the table where decisions are being made and to testify in public hearings. An RCCF investment in a single organizer in West Virginia had a domino effect that led to Town Halls across the state which energized providers to call on the Governor through Facebook to be part of the conversation. West Virginia leaders are now developing child care legislation in consultation with the RCCF grantee and provider volunteers.
- **Advocated for equitable implementation of compensation policies.** After passage of a new policy, there is still a lot to do to make sure implementation is equitable for the workforce. DC Spaces in Action (SIA) is ensuring providers are part of the conversation about how to implement Wage Parity and health insurance policies passed by the City Council. Soon the Pay Equity fund will be administered through contracts/grants directly to providers, rather than the city cutting checks to the early educators themselves, and there will be work to ensure the funds are actually used to raise salaries.
- **Led key aspects of the movement.** Staff from RCCF grantee partners are helping to shape what the Child Care for Every Family Network (the Network) is building out as a national infrastructure of support to scale the wins they are having in localities and states to impact the country. Two former staff of grantee partners are leading the Network, and partnering with RCCF on expansion strategy.

Based on these successes, RCCF has been working to raise even more money to reach organizations in even more states.





# ENGAGING THE FIELD

## Higher Education Learning Community

As part of the Transforming Lead Teacher Preparation grants with institutions of higher education and state and Tribal systems partners, The Collaborative contracted with School Readiness Consulting, a women-led early childhood consulting firm, to design a learning community for grantees to communicate and share information with one another. Four times a year for three years, the institutions have met for virtual gatherings of up to two hours to share progress and discuss challenges and successes.

The conversations took in both practical strategies, and more overarching philosophical goals. For example, when one grantee expressed frustration with requirements set by the math department at their institution, several others chimed in with the same issue—realizing they were not alone, and strategizing together how to approach it. When another grantee named the white supremacy culture that affected early childhood education in their state, it spurred a rich discussion of the effects of systemic racism in multiple communities.

By sharing the process, challenges, and successes in a group, the grantees were able to increase their impact and allow good ideas to spread beyond any one institution or state. Furthermore, the grantees shared their work more broadly through webinars. These presentations highlighted the unique state contexts of participating teams and showcased innovations in lead teacher preparation. They also discussed implications for systemic change within the broader early educator community, enabling non-participating institutions to consider implementing successful ideas in their own settings. The Collaborative intends to continue and expand this learning community.



“ There is something very isolating in early childhood education that folks in higher education are not immune to. We were struck by how hungry folks were for connection with others who were experiencing similar things. The learning community allowed for authentic relationship building, both between the grantees and the respective work they were doing, and in scaling up their roots and building something sustainable for the communities they serve. That is where transformation comes from.

– ANNIE WATSON, Director, School Readiness Consulting





## Lead Teacher Certification Feasibility Study

In October 2023, The Collaborative [released the results](#) of a nationwide feasibility study that assessed the viability of a national, competency-based certification for lead teachers working with children from birth to 8 years old. The 4,400 people surveyed indicated strong demand for addressing compensation and equity issues in the field as “first steps” toward a national lead teacher certification (NLTC) that increased pay for educators.

- **COMPENSATION.** When stakeholders were asked to identify the most significant challenges to implementing an NLTC, they consistently highlighted three dimensions: cost, time commitment, and staff coverage. Some interviewees believed that addressing compensation concerns for all early childhood educators was necessary not only to facilitate the conditions for an eventual NLTC, but also to tackle existing inequities within the field. The low perceived value of a certification without accompanying assurances of increased compensation and other benefits was also raised. On average, over half (56%) of surveyed stakeholders reported that resultant increased pay would need to be a feature for the system to be feasible.
- **EQUITY.** During interviews, nearly all participants expressed concerns related to equity, particularly regarding equitable access, support and outcomes associated with an NLTC. Stakeholders raised questions about the potential effects of an NLTC in a field characterized by systemic racism and existing structural barriers. Concerns were voiced that the certification may primarily benefit white, advantaged teachers, exacerbating existing stratification within the ECE workforce and pushing out teachers of color.

While the report results are illuminating, they represent a snapshot in time; data collection was completed in June 2021, before COVID-19 had dramatically exacerbated challenges in the ECE field. With the study results and the current realities of the workforce since COVID-19, it is important to take a step back and emphasize the enabling conditions, rather than proceeding to increasing the certification requirements in an already stretched field. The feasibility of an NLTC for early childhood educators is promising, but only when compensation and equity are effectively addressed.

# Narrative Change Campaign

The Collaborative engaged [Purpose and Frameworks Institute](#) in a contract to research and develop a narrative change campaign that tells an integrated story of the need for increased compensation and improved educator preparation to support ECE professional competencies that lead to stronger outcomes for children. The campaign targets the root causes of inequity as they develop and test messages with two initial key audiences: providers and parents. To do that, the campaign has mapped the current narrative ecosystem around early childhood education, conducted stakeholder interviews and focus groups, explored the various interests of target groups, and tested creative concepts to inform the campaign's conceptual designs.

## The key messages the campaign is developing are:

- Early educators support important brain development and lay the foundation for the youngest minds
- Early educators perform a variety of critical roles for children, families, and communities
- Skilled professionals require professional wages
- Low compensation impacts children and families
- We should all advocate for increased public investment in compensation for the ECE workforce

The campaign has coalesced around the concept "In Our Hands," representing the idea that the children are our future, and the future is in our hands. It plans to digitally share overarching messaging around this, using a bold, optimistic, imaginative, and expansive tone and imagery. The goal is to bolster the call for increased ECE compensation, increased access to higher education, and improved early educator preparation leading to ECE professional competencies linked to positive child outcomes.

## Illustrative images of a future "In Our Hands" campaign.



# LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

As The Collaborative looks back, progress has been made. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified ECE challenges and placed them front and center in the public sphere. Issues of the ECE workforce, including compensation and access to meaningful professional development, inside and outside of higher education, are now at the forefront of conversations. We hope that this trend continues. And still, much more action in terms, policies, initiatives, and greater public and private investments are required.

We are excited for the work ahead, including a focus in the next three years on:

**Continuing support on issues of educator preparation, compensation and competency-based credentialing through our grant, research and field engagement activities.**

We're looking forward to seeing how the grants to transform financing systems to support long-term compensation increases will evolve. These innovative partnerships are poised to disrupt the current financing mechanisms that compensate early childhood educators. We'll also keep growing our learning community that began with our teacher preparation program grants. Even though those initial grants have ended, we'll continue working with faculty leaders across the country. Our goal is to provide grants to learning community participants to help recruit and assist more racially and ethnically diverse early childhood educators into and through bachelor's degrees pathways.

**Further exploring the historical root causes of the devaluing of the ECE workforce and the modern-day context to promulgate strategies that will create long-lasting changes for the workforce.**

Through our partnership with Child Trends, we plan to build on the initial set of the Mary Pauper Papers and extend that research to examine current ECE leadership challenges. Relatedly, we will partner with Community Change, Inc. to promote the stories of early childhood educators, parents, and community leaders to shift the early educator narrative away from a workforce that engages in menial labor to a profession that incorporates great skill and competency.

**Promoting greater investments in ECE workforce issues among our funder peers and partners, not only towards our collaborative efforts, but also to ECE workforce efforts in general.**

With more partners and investments, we can take this work even further, ensuring that early childhood educators get the preparation and compensation they deserve and all young children have equal access to high-quality learning experiences.







# **EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT COLLABORATIVE**

*Professional Educators. Professional Compensation. Prepared Children.*

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