

A Decade of Change: Progress and Possibility in  
Early Childhood Workforce and Finance



**The Power of Educator Voice in Building  
a Well-Prepared, Well-Supported, and  
Well-Compensated Early Childhood  
Education Profession**

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative) is a coalition of national funders committed to transforming the early childhood education (ECE) profession. Our goal is to help all early educators achieve their full potential as professionals so that every child is prepared for success in school and in life.

Grounded in the landmark 2015 report *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation* and the 2018 report *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*, The Collaborative works to address systemic issues in the field by advancing pay equity, strengthening and professionalizing the ECE workforce, aligning early childhood and K–12 systems, and supporting a well-funded system that serves all children—not just those whose families can afford to pay.

Marking the 10-year anniversary of *Transforming the Workforce*, this series of reflection papers invites the field to look back on the progress and lessons of the past decade and to consider what is needed for the decade ahead. Developed in partnership with national organizations, the series elevates diverse perspectives and sparks dialogue to inspire collective action toward a stronger, more sustainable early childhood system.



The perspectives shared in these papers are those of the individual authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of The Early Educator Investment Collaborative, which shares them to elevate diverse voices and spark dialogue across the field.

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# FROM LANDMARK REPORTS TO TODAY

Twenty-five years ago, the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine published *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, sparking national interest in the importance of early childhood education (ECE) and brain development. Ten years ago, they did it again, publishing *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8* and honing broad national attention into a focus specifically on the importance of the ECE workforce. This report and its sequel, *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*, were landmark reports that gave renewed strength and imperative to the importance of building a prepared, valued, and compensated workforce unified



by the science of child development and the shared knowledge and competencies needed to provide consistent, high-quality support for the development and early learning of all young children. The reports provided visibility for and elevated the significance of the ECE workforce and offered recommendations on the elements needed to improve the quality of professional practice; the practice environment; the status and well-being of the workforce; support, higher education, and financing structures; and ultimately, outcomes for children, families, and communities.

**So, what has changed since the release of the *Transforming the Workforce* report?** In the past 10 years, how have organizations, systems, policymakers, and educators themselves responded, reacted, and adapted to the recommendations outlined in the report—particularly in the context of a decade that has also brought massive social, political, and economic changes and disruptions to our society?

One key change—and one element missing from the development of the *Transforming the Workforce* report itself—is an emphasis on and an expectation of work that is not only for educators, but by educators. Policymaking processes are increasingly rooted in and responsive to grassroots efforts that reflect educator voice, expertise, and perspective. Educator voice is driving consensus for a unified vision for the profession, state funding and policies that strengthen the ECE profession and the systems surrounding it, and representation and thought leadership for the ECE field.

# OUR COMMITMENT IN ACTION

For nearly 100 years, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has served as the professional membership association for early childhood educators, celebrating, centering, and advancing educators' expertise;<sup>1</sup> supporting educators on their advocacy journeys;<sup>2</sup> and providing platforms for our affiliate leaders<sup>3</sup> to share their advice for helping to ensure that educators' voices are heard and respected in decisions that shape the profession.



**Educators are central to NAEYC's mission, values, and daily work; therefore, NAEYC is committed to centering educators' voices through policy and advocacy efforts, publications and events, program accreditation, and much more.**

**– NAEYC, From Our President: Centering Children's and Early Childhood Educator's Voices<sup>4</sup>**

Indeed, all our work in the research, policy, and practice arenas is informed by and implemented in collaboration with the lived experiences and expertise of our members: early childhood educators and administrators as well as ECE faculty, families, advocates, and allies. In addition, NAEYC's commitment extends to intentional efforts to “seek out and welcome new voices, questions, experiences, ideas, and perspectives, especially from early childhood educators on the frontlines.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the key mechanisms by which NAEYC has welcomed new voices and contributed to a field-wide effort to center educator voice is through our ongoing ECE workforce surveys.<sup>6</sup> These surveys, which began in the initial days of the pandemic and have led to more than 70,000 responses in the past 5 years, seek to understand the well-being of early childhood educators and child care programs and the impact of federal and state funding and policies on the ECE field. The research gathered through these surveys has helped to identify needed resources for the field and informed the federal and state policy agendas that drive toward having a unified, diverse, effective, well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated workforce.

Yet the surveys are only one of multiple mechanisms by which educator voices drive our organizational and collective efforts to support their professional development and advocacy capacity, advance the knowledge base, and elevate quality and quality standards across early learning programs in all states and settings, as well as in higher education programs that prepare early childhood educators. Other examples of educator-centered efforts include the following:

- Early childhood educators, faculty, directors, policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders from all states and settings convene each year at NAEYC’s signature Annual Conference,<sup>7</sup> which gathers approximately 8,000 participants, and Public Policy Forum,<sup>8</sup> which gathers approximately 400 participants, to share expertise, learn from one another, build relationships, and engage in collective and powerful advocacy—which extends to their ongoing and supported state-based advocacy and affiliate leadership and engagement.
- Early childhood educators from all states and settings serve as researchers, presenters, and authors across NAEYC’s wide array of professional development courses<sup>9</sup> and publications, from foundational books on developmentally appropriate practice and anti-bias education to our peer-reviewed journals *Young Children*<sup>10</sup> and *Voices of Practitioners*.<sup>11</sup>
- Early childhood educators from all states and settings guided recent changes to NAEYC’s early learning program quality assessment and accreditation,<sup>12</sup> which resulted in updated and streamlined standards and systems to better and more equitably support programs’ participation.
- Early childhood educators in all states and settings engaged in extensive and robust public comment periods to inform and guide the revision and creation of all five of NAEYC’s foundational position statements<sup>13</sup> in just this past decade. The *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*,<sup>14</sup> in particular, reflect *Transforming the Workforce*’s vision for “shared knowledge and competencies,” and in the revision process, “gave particular consideration to potential missing elements identified in the *Transforming the Workforce* report, including teaching subject-matter specific content, addressing stress and adversity, fostering socio-emotional development, working with dual language learners, and integrating technology in curricula.” Likewise, the *Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators*, a revised version of which is being released for the first time since 2011, reflects extensive educator engagement and a broader movement toward having a recognized ECE profession with individuals who are licensed to practice—and who could, in the future, be required to follow a unifying, profession-led code of ethics just as other licensed professionals (such as social workers, doctors, nurses, audiologists, engineers) do.



## Spotlight on Power to the Profession

The Power to the Profession (P2P) initiative (2017–2020) expanded upon our own work centering educator voice and expertise by bringing that sensibility and orientation to our work with partners. This initiative began within two years of the release of *Transforming the Workforce*, taking up the mantle of the report’s recommendations to explicitly move toward implementation by defining a first-edition *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*,<sup>15</sup> birth through age 8, that could be inclusive of and implemented across all settings, sectors, and states. While the initiative rooted itself in the research of the *Transforming the Workforce* report,<sup>16</sup> the P2P Task Force that came together in its wake centered not the researchers or traditional experts who naturally formed the committee for the National Academies of Science, but rather educators themselves, whose powerful voices were brought to the table by 15 membership organizations representing educators working in a wide range of settings, age bands, institutions, and funding streams.



**P2P was led and driven by the current members of the early childhood education field. From the decision drivers and decision makers who shaped the framework to the decision-making processes and the decisions included in the framework, the aim was to reflect the lived experiences and expertise of those who comprise the profession itself. Focus groups, surveys, conference calls and webinars, informal conversations, conference sessions, response letters, and focused meetings were continuously expanded to ensure that those impacted most by the P2P framework and those historically marginalized in policy development (such as educators of color working in home-based and center-based settings) were leveraged and elevated as experts.**

**– NAEYC, *Flipping the Script: Educators Driving Public Policy*<sup>17</sup>**

This intentional engagement<sup>18</sup> of a wide diversity of educators, and a set of implementation commitments made to the field<sup>19</sup> by the Task Force, represented a different approach. This engagement and these commitments were defining characteristics of the P2P initiative, as was the consensus-building process in which individuals and organizations expressed their endorsements, concerns, and disagreements with the framework's proposals and recommendations. This process—messy, inclusive, and imperfect—was necessary to the work of developing an explicit vision of ensuring that current and future educators working in family child care settings, child care centers, and schools have equitable access to (and are not excluded from) a resourced system in which they are fairly compensated, operate with professional autonomy, are valued and supported, and are the drivers of their own destinies. As the Task Force wrote:



**We believe that early childhood educators are experts in their own practice, and that they, not elected officials or policymakers, need to be the ones informing and directing the work to shape and define their profession. That includes setting their own standards and, in collaboration with federal, state, and local governing bodies, having both support and accountability for meeting them.**

**– NAEYC, *Transforming the Financing of Early Childhood Education: A Statement from the National Power to the Profession Task Force*<sup>20</sup>**

This commitment to centering educator voice has been embraced and furthered by the Commission on Professional Excellence,<sup>21</sup> which took up the mantle of implementing and helping states align to the *Unifying Framework* after it was released by the P2P Task Force in March 2020 and has continued to advance the work (see more below). The Commission, continuing to move deeper into centering educator expertise, learned from the P2P Task Force and structured itself so that individual educator members<sup>22</sup> sit on the Commission alongside organizational members,<sup>23</sup> each with an equal vote.

## Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education

The goal of the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education,<sup>24</sup> which formally launched in December 2021 as a collaborative, collective 16-member semi-autonomous body hosted by NAEYC, is to advance the framework for a unified, cohesive, and equitable ECE profession informed by and in partnership with early childhood educators across states and settings. Building on recommendations outlined in the *Transforming the Workforce* report and adapted, furthered, and expanded upon in the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*—and with educator voices and representatives driving priorities and actions—the Commission’s organizational and individual members provide technical assistance to states that are implementing compensation initiatives; exploring or establishing professional licensure for early childhood educators; investing in ECE higher education pathways; revising ECE career ladders to the ECE I, II, and III designations; and streamlining governance and regulations to better support a cohesive ECE profession. The Commission is also responsible for picking up the work that the P2P Task Force didn’t finish for reasons of scope, time, and sequence—for example, approving specializations and developing additional guidelines for the profession, including advanced competencies and competencies for pedagogical and instructional administrators. In addition, the Commission continues to develop resources, including those that specifically support the idea of developing and implementing professional licensure for early childhood educators. To that end, it has developed model state legislation<sup>25</sup> and regulations and is exploring the creation of licensure assessments<sup>26</sup> that are aligned to the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and the ECE designations. The Commission’s winter 2025 newsletter<sup>27</sup> and summer 2025 webinar<sup>28</sup> highlight its recent work in the context of its North Star vision that “each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce across all states and settings.”

Each of these efforts contributes to an expansive understanding of early childhood education as a field that requires, demands, and benefits from expertise that is gained and grown from a diverse range of educational and experiential options and opportunities. As the *Transforming the Workforce* report made abundantly clear, the science is unequivocal on the “importance and complexity of working with young children from infancy through the early elementary years” and the need to ensure that adults are “knowledgeable about how to support [young children’s] development and learning” so they can thrive in the context of positive, secure relationships.

In the span of these 10 years, and in the wake of a pandemic that both brought us together and pushed us further apart, a shared identity that unites a wide diversity of early childhood educators working with children birth through age 8 feels both as necessary and as threatened as it has ever been. While today NAEYC sees communities fracturing in ways both old and new, we also see and support early childhood educators, advocates, families, organizations, and allies working together in community, raising their voices, and making headway in situating early childhood education as the recognized, compensated, supported profession that the *Transforming the Workforce* report made clear it should be just a decade ago.

# BUILDING MOMENTUM TOWARD THE FUTURE

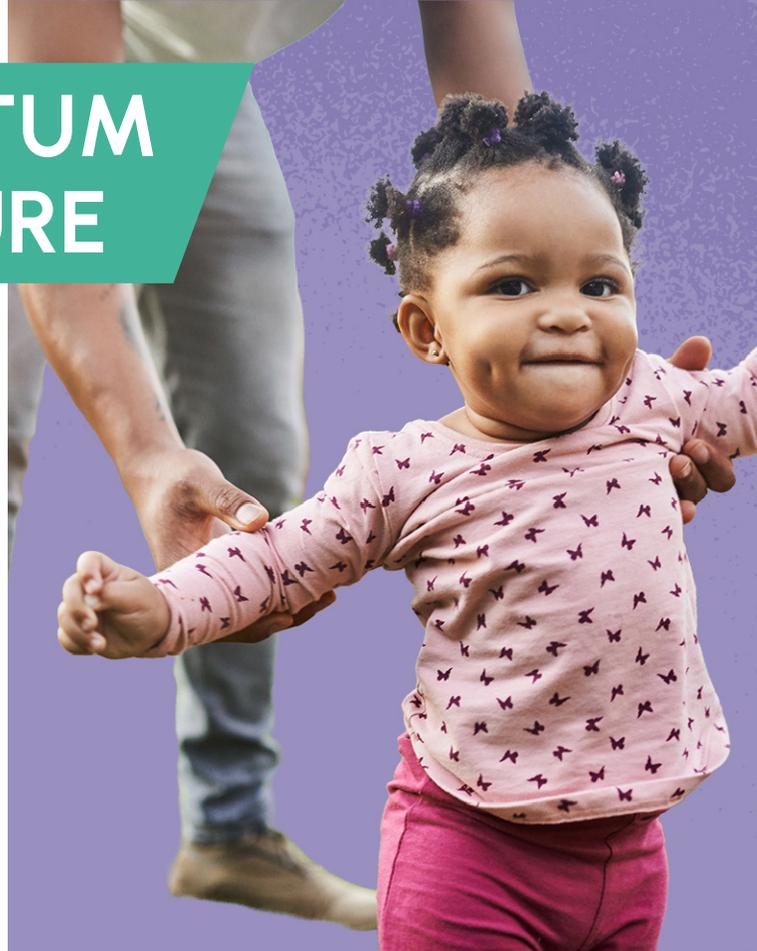
In light of this research-based reality and supported by historic and robust levels of federal and state public investment especially in child care and Pre-K in recent years, we have seen multiple states and communities make progress toward investing in and supporting the vision set forth in the *Unifying Framework* and *Transforming the Workforce* of equitably accessible, affordable, and high-quality early childhood education provided by a diverse group of well-prepared, well-supported, well-compensated ECE professionals.

For example, **Vermont** has made substantial progress in its ongoing, multiyear efforts to transform child care through sustainable, substantial investments and to make early childhood education a recognized, licensed, compensated profession in the state. After years of gaining consensus in the field<sup>29</sup> by engaging educators in homes, centers, and schools at every step, Vermont AEYC, Let's Grow Kids, and partners turned to engaging with the state and lawmakers on a process to specify a system of professional licensure for early childhood educators,<sup>30</sup> in alignment with the *Unifying Framework*. Vermont's Office of Professional Regulation made recommendations to the legislature that early childhood education become a recognized profession, sponsoring the Early Childhood Education Professional Recognition bill, which passed the Vermont Senate in May 2025 and put Vermont on a pathway to being the first state to officially recognize and license the profession of early childhood education.

Other states are at various stages on this path toward building a unified, diverse, effective, well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE profession as well—through efforts that center educator voices and expertise.

## Shared Knowledge and Competencies

States including **Michigan**, **Pennsylvania**,<sup>31</sup> and **Rhode Island**<sup>32</sup> have adopted and adapted the Professional Standards and Competencies<sup>33</sup> within their state early childhood systems. In addition to moving toward the *Transforming the Workforce* report's clear goal of shared knowledge and competencies, this action represents an essential step in the process of aligning ECE career ladders to the ECE designations and is critical for successfully implementing strategies such as credit for prior learning (CPL), which is a necessary pathway for our existing ECE workforce to be recognized for the knowledge and competencies they have gained through experience and to unlock compensation parity.



## Effective, Accessible Professional Preparation

States including **Alabama, Connecticut, Michigan, New Mexico,** and **South Carolina**, and higher education systems such as the **Ivy Tech Community College** system and **City Colleges of Chicago**, are providing support (for example, funding and/or technical assistance) for ECE higher education degree programs at the associate and baccalaureate levels to obtain and maintain accreditation.<sup>34</sup> The accreditation standards define features of quality professional preparation programs, support curriculum and courses of study aligned to the Professional Standards and Competencies, and help ensure that graduates possess and can demonstrate proficiency in these essential competencies.

## Professional Compensation

States including **Arkansas,**<sup>35</sup> **Alabama,**<sup>36</sup> **Illinois,**<sup>37</sup> **New Mexico,**<sup>38</sup> and **Washington, DC**, are making investments in improving compensation for early childhood educators. Some states are focused on increasing benefits<sup>39</sup> for educators—which may include anything from paid leave to health insurance to retirement benefits to substitute pools—while other states are increasing payment rates, bonuses, and parity. The Commission on Professional Excellence has compiled compensation resources with additional state examples and recommendations for implementation.

Some of these states and others are making progress on several fronts identified by the *Transforming the Workforce* report and the *Unifying Framework* at once. For example:



In **CONNECTICUT**, educators and policymakers have worked together to ensure educators are working in environments that support their quality work and well-being. They have partnered to combine three early childhood state funding streams into a single program to reduce administrative and funding barriers for programs and families alike. The legislature has approved the creation of a sustainable Early Childhood Endowment<sup>40</sup> to fund wage increases and health care subsidies for early childhood educators; create thousands of new subsidized infant, toddler, and Pre-K slots; and eliminate or cap co-pays for families.



In **DELAWARE**, educators receive standardized college credit for earning a CDA; scholarships to use at any state institution; mentoring, coaching, and wraparound supports; and financial bonuses for completing credentials and degrees. The state is preparing to review current child care and early childhood educator qualifications and comment on a framework for individual licensure that will leverage existing teacher credentialing infrastructure and inform the conversation about right-sizing regulations and future determinations about what belongs where (health and safety licensing, quality, and individual licensure).



In **MINNESOTA**, educators helped develop a career pathway and compensation ladder that aligned with ECE I, II, and III, using the professional licensure structure. Educators have provided extensive feedback on a comprehensive review and modernization of the child care licensing regulations and are working with advocates to begin assessing how proposed regulations can support professional licensure in the future and considering what should be in licensing, quality, and professional licensure systems.



In **MISSOURI**, educators participated in a statewide workgroup collaborating on a multipronged initiative to advance the ECE workforce, revising the ECE career ladder<sup>41</sup> in the state registry to align with the ECE designations. To support the incumbent ECE workforce in being recognized on the ladder, the state established equivalencies (via credentials, degrees, college credits that are portable across settings and states) that recognized competencies early childhood educators have developed.



In **NEW MEXICO**,<sup>42</sup> educators can access a range of professional preparation and support programs, make their voices heard through participation in ongoing state surveys, and receive investments through a range of compensation programs, including the Infant Toddler Pay Parity Program,<sup>43</sup> Head Start Pay Parity program,<sup>44</sup> Pre-K Pay Parity Program,<sup>45</sup> and wage supplements.<sup>46</sup> Educators can access a Child Care Revolving Loan Fund,<sup>47</sup> which helps programs open or expand child care operations. And the state's Early Childhood Trust Fund invests in child care assistance, Pre-K, quality initiatives, and tribal partnerships, among other programs for children and families.



In **WASHINGTON, DC**, educators can travel a seamless, supported professional development pathway through the Advancing Early Education Collaborative,<sup>48</sup> which provides scholarships and wraparound supports to students, including those in cohorts specifically designed for educators in family child care settings and those who speak Spanish. Educators can benefit from the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund, which provides significant wage increases and access to health insurance and has resulted in lower turnover and higher retention.

## WHAT STILL STANDS IN THE WAY

The progress that some states and communities are making toward recognizing and supporting the ECE profession is important and laudable. Yet it also exposes the fractured and inequitable nature of our early childhood workforce and the lack of a unifying identity that would transcend states, settings, and funding streams. The countervailing narrative that isolates and divides educators from one another and from families remains strong and means that many early childhood educators are exhausted: tired of fighting the charge that they are “babysitters”; tired of defending the reality that early childhood education is complex and requires both expertise and support; and tired of working in under-resourced systems that don’t consistently or sustainably recognize their expertise, help them further it, or compensate them for having it.





The financial struggles, coupled with burnout, anxiety, and depression, make it difficult to sustain my passion for teaching. The compensation often doesn't reflect the immense time, effort, and emotional labor that goes into nurturing children and supporting their development. This disparity can lead to feelings of undervaluation, which is hard to ignore when basic needs like housing and education are not being met.

- EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR, UTAH



It's exhausting with not much compensation or respect for what we are doing.

- CHILD CARE PROGRAM DIRECTOR, MARYLAND



Instead of support and compensation, numerous states are turning toward extensive, harmful deregulatory policies<sup>49</sup> that threaten the health and safety of children and educators, fail to address the challenges programs face, and, in disregarding the value and skill of early childhood educators, ultimately worsen the persistent workforce shortage that these policies falsely purport to address.

Making the workforce challenges worse, states and educators are also navigating the anticipated impacts of federal cuts<sup>50</sup> to supports from Medicaid to SNAP to student loans, which will further undermine the ECE workforce, the institutions that support the workforce, and the idea that child care is a collective public good. These cuts threaten some of the positive momentum we have seen in multiple states, worsen budgetary realities, and risk exacerbating negative trends around harmful deregulation.

In the face of these challenges and ongoing uncertainty, it is more important than ever that we continue to listen to and work with educators in all settings and draw attention to what is working in states that are aligning with the vision of the *Transforming the Workforce* report and the *Unifying Framework*. Advocates and policymakers must be clear-eyed about the need for public support for this profession and system, as well as the ways in which investing in a well-prepared, supported, and compensated workforce improves the options, stability, and quality of child care and early learning programs for educators, for families, and especially for young children.

Achieving these goals, however, requires unified, collective, powerful advocacy—and while the field is still (rightly) navigating challenges and tensions, **our progress will likely rest on an inclusive approach that promotes “both/and” rather than “either/or” thinking, strategies, and investments.**

## Educators Support BOTH Parents AND Children

For example, the science and research around the importance of the early years that was ignited by the *Neurons to Neighborhood* report and highlighted in the *Transforming the Workforce* report remains settled—and NAEYC’s commitment to anchoring our work in our mission of equitable access to “high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood education” for each and every child from birth through age 8 remains unchanged. Yet the focus on child care that positively increased during the pandemic also came at the cost of having the public and policymakers shift their view of child care from being a place for children to grow and thrive to being primarily a support that helped parents go to and remain at work. The reality, of course, is that child care—like K–12 education—has always been a place where “parents earn while children learn” and that educators are professionally obligated and prepared to support both families and children.



## Educators Support BOTH Credentials AND Credit for Prior Experience

Tension around degrees and credentials in early childhood education is not new;<sup>51</sup> while the *Transforming the Workforce* report recommended embracing baccalaureate degrees for all lead educators, the *Unifying Framework* recommended a structure that included baccalaureate degrees but did not set that as the floor for all educators, instead creating a professional, recognized pathway inclusive of multiple levels of educational attainment. Both sets of recommendations generated debate at the time—and those debates continue today, with different factions expressing disagreement about the value, role, expectations, and accessibility of credentials and degrees for educators working in all settings, in the context of the *Unifying Framework* specifically and early childhood education in general. Particularly in the face of documented workforce shortages, continued low compensation, broad-based attacks on higher education, and real challenges concerning child care accessibility and affordability, there have been additional attacks on the value of higher education in preparing and supporting the early childhood workforce. Some policymakers and advocates have sought to roll back existing workforce credential requirements and advance a narrative that early childhood educators don’t need, don’t want, or can’t get credentials and degrees. At the same time, others have doubled down on investing in access to ECE higher education, lifting up the reality<sup>52</sup> that many current and prospective educators do want to earn credentials and degrees and that they need supports and systems that are designed and held accountable for helping them do so.<sup>53</sup>

NAEYC remains committed to the vision articulated by the field in the *Unifying Framework*, working to reduce barriers and increase equitable access to ECE professional preparation programs while simultaneously investing in credit for prior learning,<sup>54</sup> articulation, transfer, apprenticeship, and other strategies that recognize existing competencies, increase the supply of high-quality early childhood

education opportunities, and support the professional recognition and compensation of the ECE workforce. Educators have made clear that they do not benefit from systemic training requirements that lead to nothing by way of credits or compensation and that are not aligned, stackable, available in different languages, or portable. Rather, current and future educators across states and settings, including educators working with infants and toddlers as well as those in preschool and the early grades, have made it clear that they do benefit from equitable access, bridges, pathways, and supports that get them to the kinds of professional preparation, development, resources, and compensation that honor, value, and respect their complex work as education professionals.

## Educators Support BOTH Formal AND Informal Child Care and Early Learning Options

Yet not everyone working in the field of child care and early learning is or wants to be an education professional. This has been clearly articulated by the *Unifying Framework*, as well as frameworks such as WeVision EarlyEd,<sup>55</sup> which both connect individuals working as ECE professionals to others working within the ECE field and differentiate among these individuals. Particularly in the wake of the pandemic, which both ignited a movement for an intersectional “care economy” and pitted parents and teachers against one another, we need to rely on these frameworks to help ground us in solidarity rather than succumbing to division. This applies to the challenges relating to the treatment, definition, and inclusion of educators working in K–3 spaces (as differentiated from those working in mixed-delivery 0–5 settings) and of individuals working in Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) contexts (as differentiated from educators working in family child care homes).



For example, under the guidance of educator and organizational members, the Commission on Professional Excellence shares a working framework that recognizes the ways in which both formal (ECE) and informal (FFN) child care systems are important to help children and families thrive in the environments and settings that work best for them. This framework embraces a future in which public forms of support are available for those who are or want to be part of a formal system of ECE professionals working in schools, centers, and family child care homes alongside public forms of support that are available for family members, friends, and/or neighbors providing informal care, especially to safeguard children’s health and safety. It is also clear that the scope and type of support does not need to be, and should not be, the same. In addition, the Commission, in keeping with the *Unifying Framework* and the *Transforming the Workforce* report, recognizes that informal FFN providers who want to become part of the ECE workforce and access the supports that benefit a more formal ECE profession should be able to access equitable and supportive pathways that help them become part of a licensed and regulated child care and early learning system.

# SHAPING THE NEXT DECADE

Overall, both substantial progress and substantial setbacks have occurred in the decade since the release of *Transforming the Workforce*—a decade in which educators have confronted major crises but have also seen and experienced the impacts and benefits of significant funding invested in early childhood education systems and specifically in the education and compensation of the workforce. What we want is possible. And that’s why educators—even those who are worn out and worn down—are nevertheless holding fast to the unifying vision that each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce.



To continue making progress toward this vision—and holding the line against policies that take us backward—educators are calling one another and their policymakers to action. As part of that call to action, and as states and communities consider aligning with any elements of the *Unifying Framework*, an overarching recommendation from NAEYC, in keeping with the orientation toward valuing educator voice and elevating educator expertise, is to create a broad-based engagement process (with seats at decision-making tables, focus groups, surveys, webinars, public comment periods, etc.) that is inclusive of educators working in different types of homes, centers, and schools.

In order to transform the workforce, we have to have a workforce to transform. So, with educators in the drivers’ seat, here are five ways states and communities can honor their early childhood educators and the 10th anniversary of the *Transforming the Workforce* report—and move forward into the next 10 years and beyond.

## STRATEGIES TO DRIVE CHANGE

» **Increase compensation and include robust benefits for early childhood educators working in homes, schools, and centers.**

**MORE:** *Compensation Means More Than Wages: Increasing Early Childhood Educators’ Access to Benefits*<sup>56</sup>

» **Talk about early childhood education and educators in ways that respect and value the complexity, competencies, and skills required for this important work.**

**MORE:** *Empowering the Profession Through Early Childhood Education Credentials*<sup>57</sup>

» Simplify and right-size the regulatory environment for early childhood educators through helpful, positive reform strategies and not harmful deregulatory ones.

**MORE:** *A Path Forward on Child Care Regulation: Differentiating Between Harmful Deregulation and Helpful Reform*<sup>58</sup>

» Design and implement credit for prior learning strategies that recognize and elevate educator expertise and experience in ways that unlock compensation parity.

**MORE:** *Credit Where Credit Is Due: Expanding Credit for Prior Learning in ECE Higher Education Programs*<sup>59</sup>

» Move toward the creation of fair and equitable ECE professional state licensure systems that provide recognition at all professional designations, allow for reciprocity across settings and states, promote educator autonomy, and protect public investments.

**MORE:** *Early Childhood Education Professional Recognition Act: Summary of ECE Professional Licensure Legislation and Regulations*<sup>60</sup>

Early childhood educators have led us from the *Transforming the Workforce* report’s “Unifying Foundation” to Power to the Profession’s *Unifying Framework* and beyond. As the *Unifying Framework* itself concludes: “The voice at the forefront of implementation must be the early childhood education profession ... early childhood educators who work with children every day [must] have a central role in shaping the present and future of their profession.”



# EXPLORE THE SERIES

This document is part of a series of opinion papers developed to mark the 10-year anniversary of Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation and the subsequent report on financing, Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education. The series was created to reflect on the impact of these landmark reports, analyze the current state of the early childhood workforce and financing, and amplify diverse perspectives on challenges, progress, and opportunities shaping the field.

## INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

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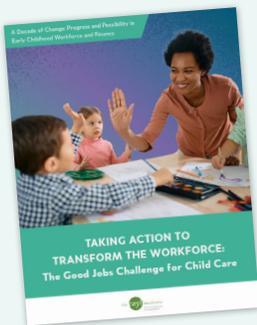


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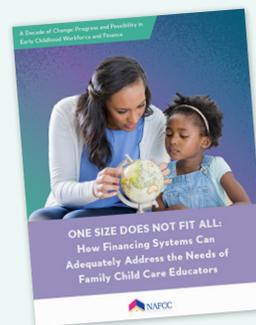
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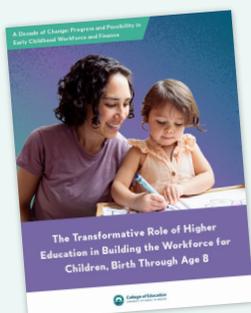
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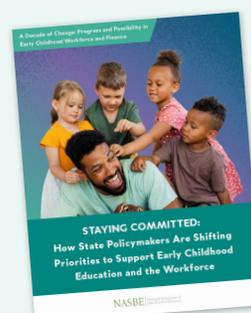
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