

Highlighting what we have accomplished together and why it matters. This Progress Report offers a look at the achievements we're making and the momentum we're building in collaboration with our network of dedicated partners.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Reader,

As 2025 draws to a close, I hope you are finding steadiness amid the many challenges shaping our field. The early childhood workforce faces growing pressures, including budget cuts and attacks on the very value of their work. Our institutions of higher education are under strain, immigrants and people of color are being targeted and disenfranchised, and public sector employees—federal and state alike—are contending with a dismantled system of support.

At the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative), we remain committed to being responsive, strategic, and grounded in what matters most: the early childhood educators who nurture and teach young children.

Our steadfast focus on the workforce is rooted in our vision of a country where 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 experiences.

This year, The Collaborative has continued to advance investments and research that strengthen a highly qualified, well-compensated early educator workforce and a more equitable field. In addition to building on our ongoing work with grantee and contractor partners, we have launched new efforts to respond to the immediate and emerging needs of our systems change partners.

The work ahead will require sustained attention, creativity, and courage. Yet with your partnership, we move forward with confidence, grounded in purpose and possibility.

Onwards,



OLA J. FRIDAY, Executive Director

We believe...

...early childhood educators deserve professional recognition and fair compensation.



...strong preparation programs drive better outcomes for children.



...racial and gender equity must guide the field.





EDUCATOR COMPENSATION

“IN OUR HANDS” NARRATIVE CHANGE CAMPAIGN

The Collaborative is advancing compensation strategies to drive systemic change in public understanding and financing, ensuring lasting increases in pay and benefits for the early education workforce. Shifting the narrative is key—educators are persistently undervalued, which drives low compensation. That’s why we pair efforts in preparation, competency, and compensation with strategies that affirm early childhood educators’ value and build public support.

In February 2025, we launched the *In Our Hands* narrative change campaign with Community Change to amplify the voices of parents and providers. Through storytelling, organizing, and digital engagement, the campaign has already surfaced compelling stories highlighting the challenges and resilience of early childhood educators, showing why bold change is essential. The campaign engaged 12 grassroots organizations and 11 Childcare Changemakers, boosting their capacity to organize.

COMPENSATION CAPACITY-BUILDING GRANTS IN ACTION

Our shared belief that ECE financing and fair compensation are public priorities requiring systemic solutions is reflected in the innovative strategies grantees are advancing to strengthen early childhood educator pay.

- In **Colorado**, the Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) is designing recruitment and retention solutions and developing a data-informed compensation model to guide future budgeting and influence policy.
- In **Tarrant County, Texas**, Child Care Associates is engaging local and national leaders, linking foundational grants with CCDF vouchers, conducting a regional workforce study, piloting new state-funded PreK delivery models, and innovating to promote professional growth and wage equity.
- In **DC**, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education is enhancing data collection, and expanding technical assistance to strengthen providers’ systems and help improve their operations.
- In **Louisiana**, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children is partnering with teachers to inform data and lessons for scalable projects and statewide compensation policy.
- In **Minnesota**, the Department of Children, Youth and Families is advancing compensation reform with monthly stipends to early childhood educators and a follow-up to the Pay Equity Pilot, that addresses participation barriers and elevates lessons learned.

APRIL CONVENING



TOP PERFORMING DIGITAL AD

JANNA RODRIGUEZ
Innovative Daycare Corp.,
Freeport, NY



FEBRUARY–MAY 2025:

**Digital ads reached more than 551,000 people
and were shared over 2,000 times.**

PARTICIPATING PROVIDER FROM COLORADO:

“Child care is very important to our community. People need access to high quality early childcare in their communities. The actual cost of care and what people can afford to pay are vastly different. Child care workers work long hours at low pay. Everyone wants higher pay but the rates do not enable that ... Benefits can sometimes make up for what is missing in the pay scale arena. The Benefits Pilot has been a blessing to our program.”

COMPENSATION CAPACITY-BUILDING GRANT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

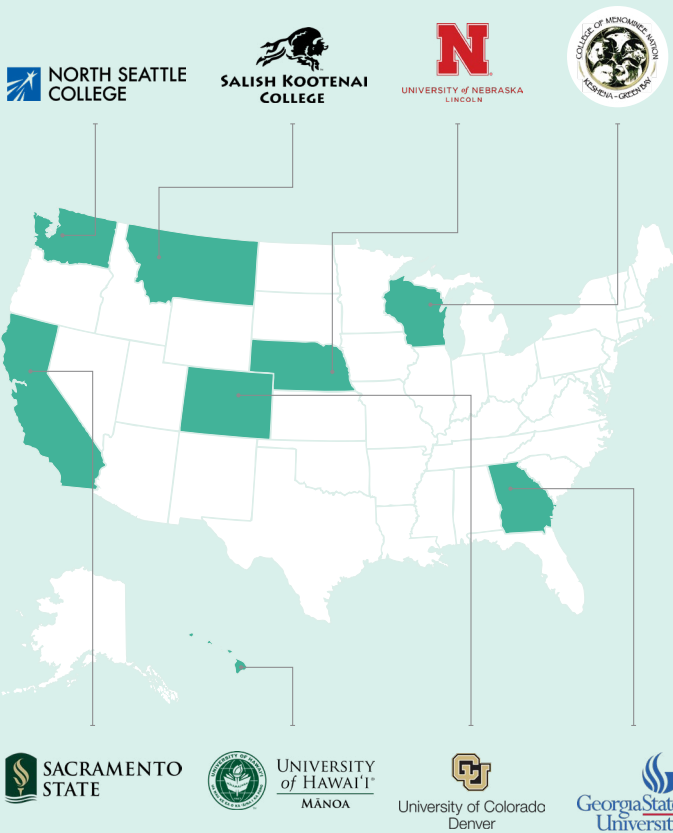
In addition to dollars, our grantee partners need targeted support to advance bold, innovative financing strategies. This year, we launched a Compensation Capacity-Building Community of Practice (CoP) in partnership with the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at UC Berkeley. Since February, the CoP has brought together six state and local teams to address persistent early educator compensation challenges. During quarterly convenings, grantees benefit from technical assistance and opportunities for peer learning. They develop solutions, share insights, and build on each other’s efforts. A core aim of the initiative is to share lessons and resources to inform, inspire and equip the broader field.



EDUCATOR PREPARATION

INNOVATION GRANTEES: LEAD TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Accessible, competency-based pathways to the BA are critical to strengthening the workforce, advancing equity, and building long-term capacity for high-quality early childhood education. Across the country, our grantee partners continue to drive change in educator preparation and equity. Although four of the eight university partnerships are beyond their grant terms, three continue to leverage grant funds this year and beyond to extend their impact. **CSU Sacramento**, **CSU Bakersfield**, and **CSU Pomona** and their partners are strengthening recruitment, retention, and PK–3 clinical practice through UPLIFT Dialogues. **The University of Nebraska** is advancing equity with culturally sustaining practices and a shared competency framework. In Hawai'i, the **University of Hawai'i at Mānoa** is positioning higher education as a hub for workforce development and policy innovation, including a new leadership and policy center. **CU Denver** is leading a Colorado IHE consortium to expand equitable access to ECE BAs by launching multi-language Prior Learning Assessments and credit-for-prior-learning pathways that recognize professional development for college credit across all participating institutions.



RACIAL & GENDER EQUITY

RAISING CHILD CARE FUND

The work of grassroots organizers and advocates is more important than ever, yet it is often hard and thankless. This year, we intentionally focused on supporting these leaders, many of whom are Black and brown women, by partnering with the Raising Child Care Fund, to support a respite and rapid response fund.

Through the 2025 respite and rapid response fund, 20 grassroots organizers are receiving \$10,000 in flexible funding to address urgent needs or take restorative breaks.

Organizers plan to use these resources for child care campaigns, capacity building, and member well-being. This flexible support helps them advance equity and quality in early childhood education with resilience.



THE RAISING CHILD CARE FUND

Early Childhood Funders Collaborative



PAPER & WEBINAR SERIES: TRANSFORMING THE WORKFORCE

In partnership with leading organizations, The Collaborative is celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the seminal report, Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation as well as its companion, Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education.

Through a series of opinion papers and companion webinars, we will be **spotlighting the importance of these foundational works and inspiring new conversations that address today's challenges in early childhood education.**

The webinar series runs **October 28–December 9**, featuring our Transforming the Workforce partners.



UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII
MĀNOA



MARY PAUPER PAPERS 2.0

The Collaborative works to address the historic and ongoing structural racism that keeps early childhood educators in poverty, recognizing that strong, diverse leadership is key to shaping policies and systems that support educators and children. The Mary Pauper Papers shed light on the consistent undervaluing of the ECE workforce by unpacking its root causes and offered policy solutions designed to dismantle the legacies of racism and sexism that persist in our field.

We are continuing our investment with Dr. Chrishana Lloyd and Child Trends to **expand the Mary Pauper Papers research, exploring how leadership in early childhood education is cultivated, constrained, and sustained.**



LEARNING EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT

Now in its eighth year, The Collaborative has engaged Engage R+D to conduct a comprehensive learning evaluation that will inform ongoing strategies and support other funders and ECE stakeholders. Using an equity-focused, participatory approach, the evaluation will **assess impact at multiple levels and generate lessons to guide future strategies and investments in the field.**

“The early childhood education workforce is at the heart of lasting change. Though our mission is ambitious, we are inspired to continue dismantling gaps and creating a stronger system that supports educators and, ultimately, children.”

—LIS STEVENS
Senior Program Manager,
Bezos Family Foundation



OLA J. FRIDAY
Executive Director



TANYA CASTIN
Program Manager



LIS STEVENS
Steering Committee Chair

FUNDERS FUELING THE COLLABORATIVE



Bezos Family
Foundation

Buffett Early
Childhood Fund
investing in the early years



HEISING-SIMONS
FOUNDATION

STRANAHAN
FOUNDATION