



Bringing It All Together:

Enhancing the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Introduction

T*o complete our race to the top requires the third pillar of reform — recruiting, preparing, and rewarding outstanding teachers. From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it's the person standing at the front of the classroom.”¹*

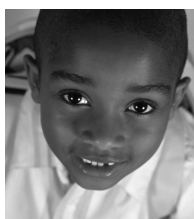
—President Barack Obama

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is at an exciting crossroads, as our country - led by national and state leaders - focuses attention on the value of quality early care and education and the concurrent need to enhance the early childhood workforce.

“The essence of quality in early childhood services is embodied in the expertise and skills of the staff... The striking shortage of well-trained personnel in the field today indicates that substantial investments in training, recruiting, compensating, and retaining a high quality workforce must be a top priority.”⁵

The positive impact of quality early care and education on the healthy development of children has been well documented in state and national reports over the past decade.² Additional studies have focused on the correlation between teacher qualifications and program quality.³ Despite some disagreement in the field, these reports consistently recommend a bachelor's degree as a requirement for early childhood educators, ensuring a foundation that supports children's learning, development, and school readiness. The findings in these studies further reinforce the need to tie higher education and qualifications to wages and benefits. Although there is a growing mandate for a more educated workforce, there has been a decrease in the supply of highly qualified teachers. This is due to a variety of issues, especially barriers to accessibility of higher education and the lack of financial assistance or incentives to attain that education.⁴

Comprehensive data about the numbers and characteristics of the early education workforce - how many and who they are - is not readily and regularly available from any one source.



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The Massachusetts Challenge

Massachusetts has a long history of creating both public and private initiatives to support early educators in gaining further education. However, there has been inconsistent enforcement and follow through, and these initiatives have failed to provide a cohesive pathway to degree attainment for the workforce.

Massachusetts Initiatives to Support Higher Qualifications for Early Educators

- Salary parity initiative in the 1980s: Efforts to address wage disparities (www2.urban.org/advocacy/research/MAreport.pdf)
- Worthy Wage Campaign - Fair Rates, Fair Wages effort – 1997: Efforts to increase state reimbursement rates used for wage increases (www.irle.berkeley.edu/csce.pdf/worthywages.pdf)
- Early Education for All – 2000/2001: Efforts to link better compensation to training (www.strategiesforchildren.org/eea/eea_home.htm)
- Subsidy Rate Increase Tier – 2001: Increased staff salary incentives for continued professional development (www.eec.state.ma.us/index.aspx)
- Higher education financial assistance and grant programs: Efforts currently active - *Advancing the Field/Building Careers, the Early Childhood Scholarship* (www.eec.state.ma.us/index.aspx)

The early education workforce seeking degrees is comprised primarily of nontraditional adult students. The goal of moving the field towards higher credentials proves challenging due to lack of access to higher education programs that are geared to the adult learner. Members of the workforce who seek higher qualifications typically face a variety of obstacles including low wages, full-time employment, family obligations, and the need for precollege academic or English language preparation. Professional development is provided within a fragmented “nonsystem,” and students often find themselves completing both noncredit and college credit courses that do not connect to degree programs.^{6,7}

Additionally, and importantly, students who do achieve degrees often find little or no financial reward, resulting in educators who leave the field in order to make a livable wage commensurate with their qualifications.

Findings

Seeking solutions to these challenges, we reviewed current literature, conducted personal interviews, investigated models in other states, and hosted a statewide policy forum with over 100 Massachusetts professionals. This work resulted in two primary findings:

First: Many other states use successful strategies to support integrated, comprehensive professional development systems.

Critical Elements of a Professional Development System^{8,9}

- Compensation and benefits initiatives linked to education and training
- Core body of knowledge and competencies
- Career lattice defining levels of training and education for various roles
- Registry to track and monitor educators’ professional development
- Articulation and transfer agreements
- Advising/mentoring programs
- Specialized credentials and certificates
- Centralized information systems
- Adequate funding

Second: Massachusetts professionals identified eight common themes and recommended next steps to move Massachusetts toward the goal of instituting an integrated, comprehensive professional development system sufficient to meet the needs of the early care and education workforce. Massachusetts must:

1. Prioritize and resolve issues of compensation
2. Learn from successful strategies implemented in other states
3. Include diverse populations in policy making and program development
4. Take immediate action on recommendations to move the agenda forward
5. Ensure that efforts and successful programs are sustainable
6. Make a greater commitment to data
7. Build student advising and support into the system
8. Utilize partnerships and collaborations (the private sector in particular) to leverage funding and influence

Recommendations

1. **Massachusetts should conduct an audit to assess all current programs**, resources, capacity, and assets related to early care and education professional development including:
 - A glossary and data analysis of successful programs – past and present
 - An inventory of all existing resources with recommendations on how to streamline, leverage, and use them most effectively
 - A summary of what challenges remain and the consequences of not resolving them
2. We call on early care and education stakeholders in Massachusetts to immediately initiate and support the process to **bring T.E.A.C.H. to Massachusetts** as the foundation for a comprehensive professional development system. T.E.A.C.H. is a proven model that has demonstrated effectiveness in over 20 states to raise qualifications, compensation and commitment to the field.
3. We call on the Massachusetts secretary of education to **convene institutions of higher education** to remedy institutional challenges to attaining increased qualifications.
4. **We call on the governor to propose and champion legislation** that establishes mandates for any new revenue streams to address the need to increase compensation commensurate with educational attainment.

“Investments in increased educational opportunities tied to compensations and benefits provide early educators with a viable, sustainable career path in a field in which they will remain committed.”¹²

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® connects education, compensation, and retention for the early childhood workforce by providing comprehensive scholarships for coursework leading to degrees and credentials in early childhood education. T.E.A.C.H. provides the opportunity for a diverse population of adult learners already working in the early childhood field to access college coursework to increase their knowledge and skills and work toward a college degree.¹¹

CONCLUSION

1. Massachusetts continues to develop many effective programs to enhance the early care and education workforce. Unfortunately, these programs are dependent on unstable funding and are often abandoned when that funding expires. Reports produced by various task forces¹⁰ recommend tangible steps; yet, there has been little concrete action taken on these recommendations.

2. Many isolated projects exist to help early care and education professionals enhance their qualifications, but there is no system linking these projects together to create a seamless pathway. In the absence of an integrated system, students must navigate a confusing maze of policies and resources.

3. Compensation is a major barrier and ongoing issue for our field. Without a sustainable plan for adequate compensation, the field finds itself challenged to promote, recruit, and maintain highly qualified educators. We must address this issue head on.

4. Institutions of higher education must work together to resolve the challenges that students face in attaining higher qualifications (articulation, transfer of credit, credit for prior learning, alignment of courses, accessibility).

5. Comprehensive data about the early care and education workforce – including economic impact – is essential to creating and maintaining an effective professional development system.

6. The Department of Labor needs to become a more active participant in early care and education workforce enhancement, providing resources in the area of apprenticeship and advising.

7. T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) is a promising model on which to build a comprehensive professional development system in Massachusetts.

With a shared understanding of what needs to be done to create a more qualified early care and education workforce, we have a unique opportunity NOW to move forward in Massachusetts. Our president's and governor's focus on education, a new secretary of education, and new commissioners of the Departments of Early Education and Care and Higher Education can guide Massachusetts to regain leadership in early care and education workforce enhancement.

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A program of The CAYL Institute

Endnotes

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