



# Caring, Credibility, and Credentials:

## *Advancing Family Child Care in Massachusetts*

### Introduction

Recent statistics<sup>1</sup> indicate that Family Child Care (FCC) has evolved from an informal community support system to a more formal multimillion dollar industry requiring an organizational structure, public financial resources, legislative action, a better educated and qualified workforce, collaboration with colleges and universities, and standardized benchmarks to assess its effectiveness. Summits at both Wheelock College and the CAYL Institute have highlighted the importance of increasing opportunities for postsecondary education for the Family Child Care workforce as a key element for change.<sup>2</sup> Given the centrality of the workforce, all efforts to enhance Family Child Care have not elevated the field to the level necessary to be considered a viable partner in the field. This policy paper presents the case for Massachusetts to increase its public investment in this field.

### Family Child Care Workforce: Who Are They?

Massachusetts Family Child Care educators are both small business owners and educators who provide care to approximately 50,000 children in small, often mixed-age groups.<sup>3</sup> These small business owners are required to navigate complex regulations, vouchers and contracts that support young children and, at the same time, advance their careers through an intricate credentialing system.<sup>4</sup> Most FCC providers have modest levels of education (see Table A) and few incentives to continue their education.<sup>5</sup>

**Table A: Level of Education of FCC Providers in Massachusetts, 2008**

Highest Percentage of Education Obtained	# of Providers
Less than H.S./GED - 6%	350
H.S./GED - 34%	2150
Some college courses - 26%*	1624
AA degree in early care and education-related field - 9%	542
AA degree in a field other than early care and education - 7%	645
Bachelor's degree - 15%	928
Advanced degree - 3%	183

\*Represents a 4% increase from 2007

Data gathering on the ethnicity and race of the educators is not compiled by the state; however, there are 7,552 licensed Family Child Care educators in Massachusetts of whom 39% speak a language other than English.<sup>6</sup>



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### Benefits to Investing in the Family Child Care Field

*FCC providers are educators.* Given Massachusetts' emphasis on the early years, the state's investment in early care and education must include a strong focus on the professional development of FCC providers for several reasons:

1. Families often prefer Family Child Care, rather than center-based care, for babies, toddlers, and sibling groups or to sustain home language and culture.<sup>7</sup>
2. To recognize family choice, the legislative benchmarks established in initiatives such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten,<sup>8</sup> National Association for Family Child Care Accreditation (NAFCC),<sup>9</sup> and the proposed Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System will partially depend upon the effectiveness of FCC providers.<sup>10</sup>
3. FCC services emphasize cultural and linguistic continuity for many children, a factor essential to a child's social and emotional development and learning.<sup>11</sup>

### What Are Other States Doing?

Massachusetts has increased its public investments in the early care and education field.<sup>12</sup> In FY 09, the state appropriated \$300 million for a better educated, fairly compensated early care and education work force.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the extent to which these investments support Family Child Care providers is unclear because the state does not collect data on the number of Family Child Care providers who participate in its initiatives. Nevertheless, relative to other states, it is clear that Massachusetts lacks the substantial and necessary investments required to improve in the Family Child Care workforce. For example:

1. The Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance is the nation's only statewide early childhood professional recognition system that is administrated by a consortium of higher education and early care and education providers, professional associations, business representatives and parents.<sup>14</sup> Modeled on national standards for quality, this program is open to all licensed Family Child Care providers, each of whom is required to have at least a high school equivalency education level.

2. Oklahoma's Reaching for the Stars quality system of reimbursement requires even its lowest tier One-Star program staff, including licensed Family Child Care providers, to have five years of experience, 120 hours of early childhood related training, and an acceptable passing score on a state-administered assessment. As of 2001, all licensed FCC providers are required to have a high school equivalency educational level.<sup>15</sup>
3. Florida's Universal Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program, passed by a state referendum in 2004, requires participation in state or national credentialing programs. The Florida Even Start Program, established in 1999, requires all FCC homes to participate in 30 hours of orientation, pass a state competency exam, and complete 10 hours of professional development every year. Florida's "Gold Seal" establishes a higher level of care that is rewarded by automatic eligibility for participation in VPK and higher rates of reimbursement.<sup>16</sup>
4. Professional development and wage initiatives, such as North Carolina's T.E.A.C.H (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood,<sup>®</sup> operate in 21 states. T.E.A.C.H provides comprehensive scholarships for coursework leading to degrees and credentials in early childhood education.<sup>17</sup>

### Findings: Glimpses into Best Practices

As a result of our extensive literature review, individual interviews, and convening of a statewide policy forum attended by 125 people including experts from Maryland, Tennessee, Georgia, and Massachusetts, we have reached six conclusions:

1. Attention to FCC in Massachusetts is inadequate and falls behind the innovations of other states.
2. The economic, social, and educational value of FCC is often overlooked in efforts to advance learning opportunities for young children in Massachusetts.
3. The substantial lack of data regarding the FCC educator workforce obscures the importance of this work and contributes to stereotypes (i.e., it is only "babysitting").
4. Massachusetts devotes inadequate attention to the impact on FCC within its early care and education professional development initiatives, state policies and regulations, and licensing standards.
5. The Massachusetts FCC workforce will require substantial financial investment if it is to meet the goal, proposed by several national organizations, of a bachelor's degree for all educators of young children.<sup>18</sup>
6. The Massachusetts FCC workforce lacks both professional organization and a strong voice in the public policy arena.



## Recommendations

Family Child Care must play a more prominent and effective role in public policy that seeks to advance early care and education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We offer four recommendations for change. Massachusetts must: Collect Data, Close the Gap, Create Pathways, and Listen and Include Family Child Care providers.

1. **Collect Data:** The Commonwealth must develop and strengthen its data collection system about the early care and education workforce (i.e., type of providers, ethnicity, culture, race, education, and income levels).
2. **Close the Gap:** As recommended by a Massachusetts task force,<sup>19</sup> the Commonwealth must close the gap in licensing standards by requiring FCC educators to have a high school diploma or GED certification as well as specialized training in order to enter the field.<sup>20</sup> Massachusetts law CMR 600.128GL should be amended to include language that strengthens the educational and accreditation requirements.
3. **Create Pathways:** The Department of Early Education and Care must provide a focused effort to facilitate higher education opportunity for FCC providers. A road map for quality similar to those already being implemented in other states must be established, including such guidelines as a two-year window for credentialing or demonstration of core competencies.
4. **Listen and Include:** The Department of Early Education and Care should organize and convene a diverse, cross-sector Family Child Care advisory group. Such a group will ensure that FCC receives greater and more widespread recognition and is included in the planning and development of significant workforce initiatives and policy planning efforts.

## CONCLUSION

These recommendations for policy change reinforce the need to have high-quality programs with qualified educators, benefiting individuals and communities; while yielding a significant return to taxpayers. Massachusetts should become a national leader in the development of the Family Child Care workforce. We can not only do better, we must do better!

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## Endnotes

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15. Oklahoma Department of Human Services <http://www.okdhs.org/programsandservices/cc/stars/starscriteria.htm>
16. State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation <http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/VPK%20Program.html> <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/childcare/goldseal.shtml#LinkGSAPCCP>
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