



# 4 Early Childhood Workforce Policies

High-quality early care and education depends on teachers who are skilled at nurturing children's curiosity and learning. Accordingly, national discourse about how to ensure that the ECE system can provide a sturdy foundation for all children's well-being and lifelong success should prominently feature the preparation, ongoing development, and work environment of early educators.

Across the states, conversations are underway: how to recruit educators and strengthen initial teacher preparation; how to retain new and veteran educators and provide ongoing learning experiences; and how to organize work environments to ensure that all teachers can best address the needs of an increasingly diverse child population, culturally and linguistically, whose early learning experiences may take place in a school, child care center, or home.<sup>52</sup> Answers to these questions are urgently needed given the persistent learning gap between children living in poverty and their more advantaged peers, the poor academic performance of U.S. students on international achievement tests, and in light of projected increased demand for well-prepared early educators.<sup>53</sup>

A mix of market forces and government policies shape early childhood services, but federal and state governments together determine the level of public resources available for services (see Financial Resources, p. 51). In addition to raising their own revenue and passing legislation for ECE, states also have discretion about how they interpret policies and deploy resources provided by the federal government, in part due to a lack of sufficient guidance and leadership at the federal level. In particular, states play an active role in shaping the conditions of early childhood employment and determining who is qualified to work with young children in various settings. Exceptions are Early Head Start, Head Start, and Department of Defense child care programs whose rules are established by the federal government.

To a large extent, state policy decisions drive the current uneven levels of qualifications for educators across settings and program types and for children of different ages. State reimbursement policies contribute to the status quo of inadequate compensation for early educators as well as the absence of policies related to professional workplace benefits and paid time for planning and professional development, supports common to teachers of older children.

However, government policies can also play a powerful role in *reshaping* early childhood jobs, including qualifications, earnings, and work environments for the current and future ECE workforce. States can enact policies that will lead to more effective and efficient

## **EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN K-12 & ECE: HOW THEY DIFFER**

Conversations about how to prepare, support, and reward teachers reveal both shared and divergent challenges in K-12 and ECE, largely due to very different assumptions about the purpose of these services, their clientele, and who is responsible for providing, funding, and governing them.<sup>50</sup> Every school-age child in the United States is guaranteed space in a classroom, and 90 percent of school-age children receive their education in public institutions.<sup>51</sup> Although there are significant inequities in access to particular schools and classrooms among school-age children from different racial and economic groups, no school-age children will be told they are ineligible or will have to wait for space in a classroom, as routinely happens for younger children.

With the exception of child care provided by the Department of Defense for families in the armed services and a handful of states or local entities that have written schooling for four-year-olds into law — children have no guarantee of publicly funded ECE services before they enter kindergarten or first grade. Even when children meet eligibility criteria for such public services as Early Head Start, Head Start, or subsidized child care, they may be placed on waiting lists due to inadequate funding; families using subsidized services may also lose their access to subsidies due to changes in income ceilings, work requirements, copayments, or reimbursement rates. In contrast to K-12, the majority of ECE services, including centers that receive public dollars, operate in private-market settings as commercial or nonprofit enterprises, and the majority of families are directly responsible for covering the costs associated with their children's participation.

Variations in personnel systems, particularly for those who work with children before and after kindergarten entry, accompany these differences in service delivery and funding responsibility. The early childhood workforce is also substantially more diverse: less than 20 percent of K-12 teachers are from minority groups, compared with approximately 40 percent of early educators (see *About the Early Childhood Workforce*, p. 5), which more closely aligns with the demographics of children birth to age five.

services, a system that provides higher quality and more equitable treatment of educators, and consequently, more equitable services for children and families. In some states, policymakers, advocates, and business and philanthropic leaders are actively engaged in seeking solutions to the long-standing and pervasive problems working against building a highly skilled and stable early educator workforce.

Designed to provide states with a baseline appraisal of ECE workforce policies with the aim of spurring progress, the *Early Childhood Workforce Index* identifies the current status of state-level early childhood workforce policies in five categories:

1. Qualifications;
2. QRIS and work environments;
3. Compensation strategies;
4. Financial resources; and
5. Workforce data.

**Qualifications:** With respect to preparation, we appraise whether state expectations for early educators, as codified in state qualification requirements, are consistent across settings and services for children of all ages and in line with the recommendations based on the science of child development discussed under the qualifications category further on. We also explore what states are doing to provide incentives for those currently employed in early childhood jobs to further their education and training.

**QRIS and Work Environments:** Educators' ability to apply their knowledge and skills and to continue to hone their practice requires a work environment that supports their ongoing learning, prioritizes time without child responsibilities for professional activities (such as planning and sharing with colleagues), and offers dependable benefits that ensure their well-being. Thus, our second category appraises how quality improvement initiatives, represented by the [Quality Rating and Improvement Systems](#)<sup>54</sup> now operating in most states, provide direction for early childhood programs in this regard — specifically, whether quality elements, such as paid planning time, are included in QRIS ratings.

**Compensation Strategies:** Achieving substantial and sustained improvements in the quality of services — the desired outcome of many policies enacted across the states — depends on upgrading the reward and status associated with early childhood employment. This undertaking will require investments and policies aimed at reducing inequities in pay for those with equivalent education, increasing the premium for educational attainment, and ensuring the well-being of early educators through sustainable wages commensurate with the value of their work. In our third category, we examine whether and to what extent states are directly tackling poor compensation.

## Data Sources for Early Childhood Workforce Policies

There is no single source of comprehensive information about early childhood workforce policies across all 50 states, although the [Office of Child Care](#)<sup>55</sup> compiles a variety of early care and education data for each state. Additional 50-state databases and reports track legislation and data at a higher level of detail for specific early childhood initiatives, such as the [NIEER Preschool Yearbook](#)<sup>56</sup> and the [Quality Rating and Improvement Systems Compendium](#).<sup>57</sup> Where possible, we have relied on these databases to inform our assessment of states.

In addition, from February to May 2016, CSCCE scanned state-level early care and education agency websites and reached out to representatives within each state, including state administrators and advocates, in order to clarify information and identify recent changes and new initiatives in early childhood policy in their respective states. We received responses from all states but one.

**Financial Resources:** We examine investment of state dollars (in addition to federal allocations) spent on ECE as our fourth category, in recognition that upgrading early childhood jobs — and the equally pressing need to expand access to high-quality services and relieve financial pressures on families — necessitates mobilizing additional and more sustainable public funding.

**Workforce Data:** Finally, in the absence of standard qualifications for early educators across settings, program types, and ages of children served, the states' ability to design and target professional development opportunities depends on up-to-date, comprehensive information about the workforce. Furthermore, without tracking who is staying in and who is leaving early childhood employment, states are unable to assess whether they are making progress in strengthening the aggregate knowledge, skills, and compensation of the early childhood workforce.

It is important to emphasize that the inaugural edition of the *Index* is intended to provide a baseline. We focus on whether states have policies in place as a starting point, but are unable to assess implementation or how well these policies are working in practice. In addition, some potential indicators in each category were not possible to include in this edition due to lack of quality data or reporting. Therefore, the indicators selected are not comprehensive, but are intended to represent first steps toward better policy and practice. For this reason, we spotlight states that are making progress or that demonstrate additional aspects of good practice. Future iterations of the *Index* may raise the bar for assessment as states continually move forward.

## Early Childhood Workforce Policies Summary

Reflecting the now widely understood importance of the first years of life, efforts are underway to improve the quality of early care and education in every state across the United States. These initiatives prominently feature strengthening the competencies of the workforce. Some states have gone further than the minimum expectations outlined in federal guidance. They recognize that the early learning experiences of their youngest children will reverberate for years to come in their educational system, labor force, and general health and welfare of their citizenry.

Notwithstanding the many significant efforts underway, the appraisal of state ECE workforce policies presented in this section of the *Index* reveal a troubling state of affairs, particularly when considered in light of the status of earnings and economic security for early educators presented in Earnings & Economic Security, p. 9. Across categories related to qualifications, work environments, compensation, and financial resources, the majority of states were appraised as stalled or edging forward. Only a handful of states were



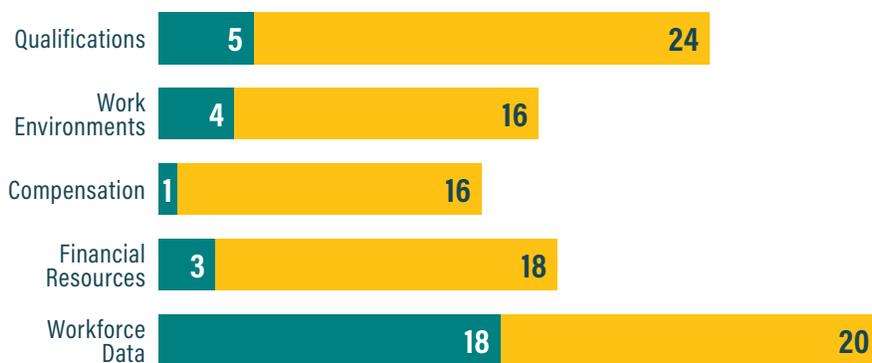
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assessed as making headway across these categories, even though, for this first edition, making headway was typically defined short of optimal policy. A somewhat higher number of states were making headway for workforce data.

Absent more robust attention to an integrated strategy of preparation, support, and compensation policies with increased and dedicated funding, the current ECE system's inequities, inefficiencies, and ineffectiveness will continue largely unabated. In the concluding section of the report, we propose some principles to guide state assessment of their ECE workforce policies and suggest specific recommendations for each category.

**Figure 4.6**

States Making Headway & Edging Forward in Early Childhood Workforce Policy



**MAKING HEADWAY**

**EDGING FORWARD**