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Using the Early Childhood Workforce Index to Inform State Advocacy, Policy, and Action: Strategies for State Leaders

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Early educators' skills, knowledge, and well-being are inseparable from the quality of children's early learning experiences. The [Early Childhood Workforce Index](#) provides a baseline description of early childhood employment conditions of the nearly 2 million people — mostly women — paid to care for and educate our youngest children, and assesses related policies on a state-by-state basis. This primer provides a frame for why attention to the workforce is critical, introduces state leaders to the Index, and suggests ways to use the Index to advance a stronger workforce.

Why does the early childhood workforce matter?

There is scientific consensus that early childhood education is central to shaping children's lifelong knowledge and skills. The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the National Academies, in their major study, [Transforming the Workforce](#), have underscored the central role of early educators to quality early care and education. Their conclusion: "adults who are underinformed, underprepared, or subject to chronic stress themselves may contribute to children's experiences of adversity and stress and undermine their development and learning."

Yet, workforce policies that have the potential to bolster the preparation, support, and compensation of early educators currently fall short, undermining early learning for millions of children.

Did you know?

Earnings: Child care workers, nationwide, earn a median hourly wage of \$9.77; preschool teachers fare somewhat better, earning a median hourly wage of \$13.74. In contrast, the median national wage for kindergarten teachers is \$24.83. Even early educators who hold a bachelor's degree earn less than their colleagues who teach older children.

Public income support participation: Participation among child care worker families in public support programs such as Medicaid or food stamps is high (46 percent), when compared to the 26 percent participation rate across the U.S. workforce as a whole.

Qualification requirements: Only 11 states have established a minimum foundational level of education and training of a Child Development Associate credential or vocational training for early education staff working in all licensed programs outside of public pre-K; only 23 state public pre-K programs require a minimum of a bachelor's degree for lead pre-K teachers across all settings.

Work environments: The professional work environments for teachers are largely insufficient and receive limited attention. Just 12 states include paid time for planning/preparation as a quality benchmark within their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.

Compensation strategies: Only 4 states have salary and salary schedule parity for all of their pre-K teachers, regardless of setting, and just 14 states have a wage stipend or early educator tax credit designed to provide some type of income boost to educators.

Financial resources: No state with a public pre-K program spends the same or more per child on pre-K compared with K-12.

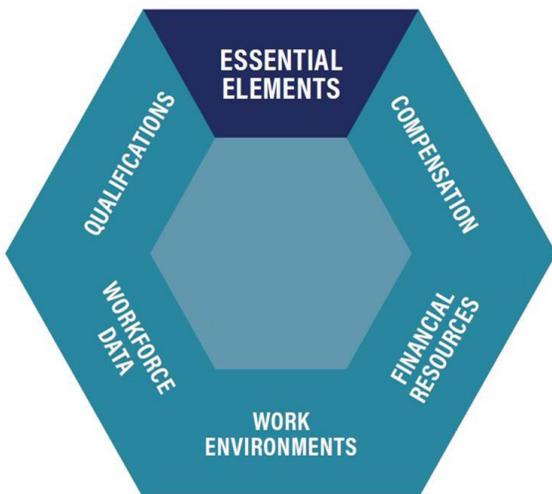
How can I learn about the status of and policies impacting the early childhood workforce in my state?

Size and status. Each state has its own [Index profile](#) that details:

- Size of the early childhood workforce in your state;
- Median earnings of child care teachers, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers versus other professions;
- The percent increase or decrease in early educator wages between 2010 and 2015; and
- Use of public income supports by the early childhood workforce (only for states where this data was available).

See your [state profile](#) or visit the [online mapping tool](#) for cross-state comparisons

Family and income support policy. Two critical areas outside of ECE workforce policy are included – income supports, including child care assistance policies, and supports for health and well-being. As these policies provide an important avenue for improving the jobs and well-being of early educators and their families, the Index provides a state by state assessment of seven policy indicators in these areas.



ECE workforce policy. Five essential elements of public policy within early childhood are addressed, state by state:

- Qualifications;
- QRIS & work environments;
- Compensation strategies;
- Financial resources; and
- Workforce data.

While the policy areas are inter-related, and ultimately, addressing more than one policy is necessary, by breaking this down into five ECE workforce policy areas, states can focus on practical next steps that best reflect an individual state's current context. For each of the five elements, there are policy indicators that help states identify a pathway to making headway for the early childhood workforce.

How does the Index assess workforce policies and how can you frame the issue in your state?

Qualifications

Adequate preparation and access to foundational knowledge is necessary for teachers to develop the skills to provide high-quality learning experiences for children.

Indicators

- BA for all pre-K teachers?
- At least CDA or vocational training for licensed providers?

Framing the Issue in your State

“In our state, the qualifications a child can expect her teacher to meet depend more on what her family can afford and the types of programs available in her area, than on her developmental and educational needs.

Compensation Strategies

Achieving substantial and sustained improvements in the quality of early childhood education services depends on upgrading the rewards associated with employment. Appropriate compensation and economic security are indispensable for attracting and retaining skilled educators.

Indicators

- Salary parity for pre-K teachers?
- Wage supplement?

Framing the Issue in your State

“Poor compensation of the workforce in our state undermines our efforts to improve quality and to attract and retain a skilled and stable workforce. While some progress has been made with supplements to wages, we have not yet been able to fundamentally shift the earnings of the teachers of our youngest children.

Workforce Data

Designing and implementing professional development and strengthening the workforce requires up-to-date and comprehensive information about the workforce.

Indicators

- Formal data collection mechanism?
- Includes compensation?
- Reports data publicly?
- Comprehensive?

Framing the Issue in your State

“Improving the status of our early educator workforce rests on our ability to describe basic demographic, education, and employment characteristics. Currently, we collect only limited data on the workforce, and only for those in certain settings or funded programs. This makes it challenging to answer questions like “how prepared is the current workforce to provide effective care and education to all our state’s children” or to understand the reach and effectiveness of current policies.

Financial Resources

Upgrading the early childhood workforce requires mobilizing additional and more sustainable public funding.

Indicators

- State reported extra CCDBG spending?
- State applied for federal grant?
- Ratio of pre-K to K-12 spending over 50%?

Framing the Issue in your State

“Multiple funding streams can make it challenging to consider financial strategies to improve conditions across ECE settings. Yet, if we want to ensure that every child in our state has the opportunity to thrive, it is critical that we strategize on how to finance access to affordable high quality early care and education.

QRIS & Work Environments

Workplace supports such as paid planning time and paid time for professional development are needed to ensure ongoing reflection, development, and educator well-being.

Indicators - Included in QRIS Standards:

- Paid time in professional development?
- Paid planning and/or preparation time?
- Salary schedule/benefits?
- Same for home providers?

Framing the Issue in your State

“Teachers in the K-12 system can typically expect their jobs to include policies and resources that support teacher development and well-being. Unlike their K-12 counterparts, most early educators in our state cannot rely on provisions for professional supports like paid planning time, a salary schedule that accounts for education and experience, and health and leave benefits.

How can I use the Index to make headway in my state?

Raising Awareness—what it is and why it is important

Taking Action—how policymakers can support improvements for the workforce



Raising Awareness:

- Examine your state's current efforts to address workforce policy and tailor the information in the Index to the current context
- Create a plan of action with short-term and long-term actions

Increasing Salience:

- Build understanding of the urgency of the problem and frame solutions (use your [state profile](#) and [info-graphics](#) that are designed to assist you)
- Educate stakeholders about your state's strengths and gaps relative to other states that are compelling in your context
- Inform coalitions and partners working on early childhood issues of the importance of the workforce to quality or other common goals in order to gain commitment to a workforce agenda

Taking Action:

- Identify key gaps within a policy area where your state is **stalled**
- Build on areas of strength where your state is **edging forward** or **making headway**

Where is your state in understanding that there is a problem to be solved? If you are trying to raise awareness, you can use the state specific earnings data to show the large number of educators in your state and the low salaries. It may be helpful to frame this in terms of the positive impact participating in a high-quality program has on children. If your state already understands the important role of early educators, but not what actions can be taken to raise the floor of support, look at the policy priorities that are motivating decision-makers (e.g., closing the achievement gap, expanding access to ECE services, addressing low wage work), and link the workforce information to those priorities. And finally, if your state fully understands the issues and wants to take action, the Index can help by showing clear policy indicators that can be adapted to your state.