



Teaching the Teachers of Our Youngest Children

The State of Early Childhood Higher
Education in Washington

Highlights

Abby Copeman Petig, Elena Montoya,
Lea J.E. Austin, & Bethany Edwards

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Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
Institute for Research on Labor and Employment
University of California, Berkeley



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Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
Institute for Research on Labor and Employment
University of California, Berkeley
2521 Channing Way #5555
Berkeley, CA 94720
(510) 643-8293
<http://cscce.berkeley.edu/>

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) was founded in 1999 to focus on achieving comprehensive public investments that enable and reward the early childhood workforce to deliver high-quality care and education for all children. To achieve this goal, CSCCE conducts cutting-edge research and proposes policy solutions aimed at improving how our nation prepares, supports, and rewards the early care and education workforce to ensure young children's optimal development.

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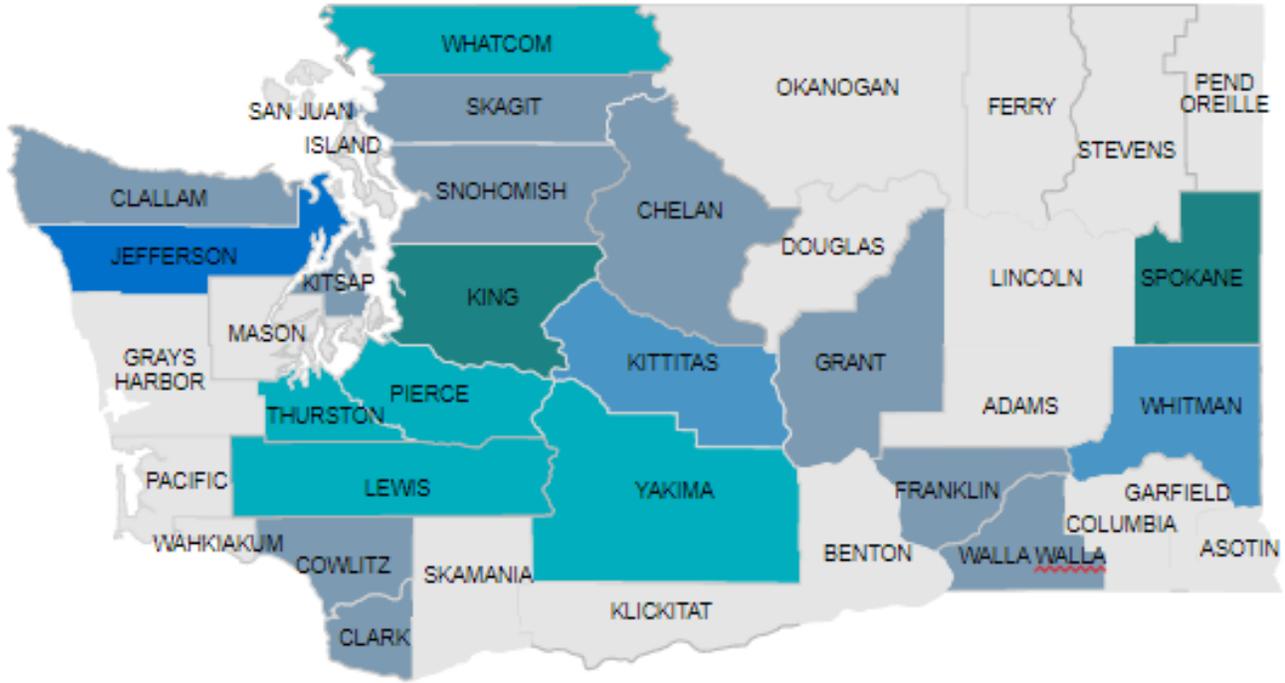
Introduction

The importance of early care and education (ECE) to children’s lifelong learning and to our nation’s economic well-being is recognized up to the highest levels of government and in businesses, schools, and living rooms across the country. This understanding represents a dramatic shift from earlier decades and carries with it heightened expectations for what teachers of young children should know and be able to do,¹ especially in light of mounting evidence about inadequate and unequal educational quality for many children, particularly those of color and those living in low-income families.²

The state of Washington is home to more than 566,000 children under the age of six.³ About 306,000 of these children have all available parents in the workforce and, thus, potentially need child care.⁴ Like many states in recent years, Washington has committed public and private resources toward multiple efforts to improve early care and education services, including early education degree and certification programs, in order to improve the preparation of their graduates to meet the complex needs of young children.⁵ Critical to these efforts is the establishment of a well-coordinated, comprehensive professional preparation and development system that can prepare and support an incoming generation of educators, while also strengthening the skills of the existing early education workforce. Institutions of higher education are crucial to meeting the evolving and increasing demands identified as improving developmental and learning outcomes for the state’s young child population.

The following pages highlight findings from the *Washington Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory* and the extent to which early childhood higher education programs offer course content and learning experiences that are associated with effective teacher preparation. The full narrative report, *Teaching the Teachers of Our Youngest Children: The State of Early Childhood Higher Education in Washington*, and the accompanying technical report present the full findings.

Distribution of Washington Early Childhood Degree Programs



Legend:

- No Early Childhood Degree Program
- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Associate and Bachelor's
- Bachelor's and Master's
- Associate, Bachelor's, and Master's

Part 1: Early Childhood Higher Education, Mapping the Scene

This section of the report examines program offerings, faculty characteristics, student supports, and institutional challenges.

FINDING ONE: PROGRAM OFFERINGS Goals, Course Content, and Age-Group Focus

of topics related to child development and approaches to teaching — a reflection of their program goals — both associate and bachelor’s degree programs tend to require more content focused on preschool-age children than children birth through age two or school-age children. Across degree levels, the availability of content related to administration and leadership is inconsistent.

Most Washington early childhood degree programs identify their primary goal as preparing students to work in multiple roles involving young children, working in many types of settings. While these programs offer a range

FINDING TWO: FIELD-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES Requirements and Age-Group Focus

associate and bachelor’s degree programs are far less likely to be required to complete a student teaching experience.

All students earning either associate or bachelor’s degrees in early childhood are required to complete a practicum experience, though there is little consistency as to the duration and frequency of these field-based experiences. In contrast, students in both

FINDING THREE: PORTRAIT OF FACULTY Employment Status, Demographics, and Professional Background

faculty members reported having had academic preparation specific to early childhood and also having worked in an array of ECE professional roles in the past decade.

Washington early childhood degree programs are staffed with a mix of part- and full-time faculty, who are primarily women, white/Caucasian, and monolingual English-speaking. They are therefore less diverse than Washington’s young child population. Most

FINDING FOUR: FACULTY PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERTISE Faculty Perspectives on Course Content, Teaching Experience and Capacity, Professional Development Background, and Professional Development Interests

preparing teachers to support dual language learners. Washington early childhood degree program faculty are particularly interested in professional development related to working with children and families

Washington early childhood degree faculty were more likely to consider the inclusion of socioemotional development very important, compared to other course content. In general, faculty members reported feeling most capable of preparing teachers to work with preschool-age children. Across content areas, faculty members reported feeling least capable of

who have experienced trauma and children and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as strategies for mentoring adult students and supervising students in clinical experiences.

FINDING FIVE: SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Services Offered and Program Articulation

Washington early childhood degree programs offer multiple types of support services specifically tailored to help early childhood education students access resources and strengthen their academic skills. Associate degree programs are more likely to offer blended programs (combining online and in-person courses) and alternative class schedules, while bachelor's degree programs are much more likely to offer cohort models in which small groups of students progress through the program together. Across degree levels, about one-half of programs offer academic tutoring for math and reading and writing. Although the vast majority of associate degree programs have articulation agreements with specific universities, inconsistencies and limitations related to articulation and transfer credits remain a challenge.

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FINDING SIX: PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Faculty and Program Needs

Washington early childhood degree programs experience challenges related to the recognition and valuation of the early childhood education field and to provision of the resources necessary to support student learning. Program leads and faculty members also identified the need for faculty members with specific expertise and who represent diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Early childhood faculty members are likewise in need of resources to support their ability to participate in professional development and program planning.

Washington early childhood degree programs experience challenges related to the recognition and valuation of the early childhood education field and to provision of the resources necessary to support student learning. Program leads and faculty members

Part 2: Early Childhood Higher Education, An Evolving Landscape

This section of the report examines how institutions of higher education are adapting to emerging research in three key domains: family engagement, early mathematics, and dual language learners.

FINDING SEVEN: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
Required Offerings, Faculty Attitudes, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Faculty members consider the inclusion of family engagement to be important in the preparation of early childhood teachers. Multiple topics related to family engagement are embedded in all levels of degree programs, with some variation in age-group focus by

degree level and topic. Faculty members expressed varied levels of interest in professional development in this topic area.

FINDING EIGHT: EARLY MATHEMATICS
Required Offerings, Faculty Attitudes, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Faculty were least likely to rate the inclusion of early mathematics “very important,” compared to other content areas for teachers working with infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children. Nevertheless, multiple topics of early mathematics content are embedded in required course content, with variation among degree

levels by topic and age-group focus. Most faculty members reported that they consider themselves prepared to teach early math content. Interest in ongoing math-related professional development varies by degree level and topic area.

FINDING NINE: DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS
Required Offerings, Faculty Attitudes, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Faculty members consider the inclusion of teaching young dual language learners to be very important in the preparation of teachers. Multiple topics that focus on dual language learners are embedded in required course content, yet variation exists among degree levels by topic and age-group focus, with

bachelor’s degree programs far more likely to require this content. While most faculty members consider themselves prepared to teach topics related to dual language learners, interest in ongoing dual language learner-related professional development varies by degree level and topic area.

Recommendations

Here, we outline an approach to strengthening early childhood workforce development in Washington, with an emphasis on higher education. The efforts should be coordinated among key stakeholders in the state, including the Washington Department of Early Learning, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and representatives from the higher education community, including the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Council of Presidents. These recommendations are predicated on identifying new resources from state, federal, and philanthropic sources.

1. Unify expectations for early childhood workforce preparation

- Build on the existing MERIT professional development system to expand access to and participation in professional development opportunities throughout the state that reflect foundational knowledge for early educators across age groups and auspices aligned with the Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals and the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines;
- Provide clear roadmaps to identify whether the course of study in a particular degree program is intended to prepare practitioners for the demands of teaching young children and/or for leading ECE programs or whether the course of study is designed for other purposes; and
- Align early education degree program course requirements with state standards and competencies, such as the Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals and the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines.

2. Strengthen program content and equity across the age span

Provide resources to develop and support participation in faculty professional development to enable faculty members across degree programs and institutions to collaborate with other experts to develop and enhance program content standards related to:

- **Child Development and Pedagogy**, preparing teachers to work with children of different ages, including:
 - Infant development and learning across multiple domains; and
 - Methods of teaching and pedagogy for children of different ages;
- **Early Mathematics**, addressing:
 - Children's mathematical understanding from infancy through early elementary grades; and
 - Developmentally appropriate pedagogy for early mathematics instruction across the birth-to-age-eight age span;

- **Dual Language Learners**, emphasizing:
 - Recognition of the value and importance of supporting children’s home-language development as they also learn English, with an emphasis on very young children;
 - Strategies for using observation and assessment in teaching young dual language learners and strategies to support the mathematical, literacy, language, cognitive, and socioemotional development of young dual language learners; and
 - An understanding of the strengths and needs of adults from diverse linguistic, racial/ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to support their entry and retention in the ECE field; and
- **Trauma**, preparing practitioners to work with children and families who have experienced trauma.

3. Strengthen the application of field-based learning experiences

- Provide resources and support to faculty members across degree programs and institutions to develop degree program standards for the timing, frequency, and duration of field-based experiences, with opportunities focused on children from infancy through preschool;
- Develop differentiated field experiences for pre- and in-service students. For pre-service students, extend more opportunities for in-depth student teaching experiences, and for in-service students, explore and implement models that accommodate those already working in classrooms, while also providing quality experiences (e.g., the California Mentor Teacher Program);
- Implement additional opportunities for student teaching experiences, in which students are engaged in classrooms for a longer period of time and are given increasing responsibility related to curriculum development, instruction, and assessment; and
- Provide field-based learning opportunities for students to engage with:
 - Infants and toddlers;
 - Children with special needs;
 - Children who are dual language learners;
 - Families; and
 - Community organizations that support children and families.

4. Provide increased access and supports for students

Implement or expand the following supports for early childhood education students across the state to ensure that a diverse current and incoming workforce can successfully meet standards and attain competency:

- Blended and non-traditional formats for degree programs;
- Alternative class schedules and locations;
- Targeted academic counseling;
- Cohort models; and
- Financial resources for students.

5. Improve and expand articulation agreements across institutions

- Increase the number of articulation agreements between institutions that grant associate and bachelor's degrees;
- Ensure that articulation agreements are comprehensive and that coursework is aligned across institutions so that students are able to realize the maximum benefit of the agreements;
- Provide dedicated personnel at community colleges for student advising to ensure that students have adequate information and guidance for seamless transfer between institutions; and
- Expand the availability of and access to portable and stackable certificates that articulate and lead to degree completion across higher education systems.

6. Build a leadership pipeline reflective of the diversity of the state's ECE practitioner and child populations

- Identify the appropriate course of study and degree level (associate, bachelor's, graduate) for each leadership role based on the specific skills and knowledge outlined in the Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals;
- Ensure training and ongoing professional opportunities for faculty teaching coursework on supervision, administration, and leadership development in undergraduate and graduate degree programs;
- Identify options to create leadership pathways and/or programs;
- Ensure an adequate number of degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level that offer the appropriate course content; and
- Investigate and develop strategies used in other professions (e.g., health, education, social welfare) to create faculty development programs — such as a fellowship or grant — intended to increase ethnic and linguistic diversity among faculty, particularly in key leadership positions.

7. Increase faculty supports

- Develop strategies to support an increase in the number of full-time faculty members, with sufficient release time, who can share in administrative responsibilities;
- Identify and implement best practices for supporting adjunct faculty;
- Establish an ongoing fund with well-articulated expectations for faculty members' professional development honoraria and program improvement grants; and
- Ensure adequate resources, including funding, staffing, and dedicated time for program planning and improvement.

Endnotes

A complete list of references can be found in the full narrative report.

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