

# Qualifications & Supports for Training/Education

The provision of free schooling for all children in grades K-12 throughout the nation has long been recognized as a public good that contributes to many economic and social benefits. To achieve these benefits, a wide consensus has developed across states and types of school settings (public, charter, private) that these teachers should obtain at least a bachelor's degree. In public schools, teachers are also required to obtain provisional certification before they begin teaching and are typically expected to have participated in a pre-service student-teaching experience.<sup>58</sup>

All but one state has established a set of core knowledge and competencies, identifying what early educators — from novice to expert — should know and be able to do.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the adoption of these core competencies has not translated into consensus about the minimum education requirements for teachers working with children prior to kindergarten, and it is rare for these teachers to be individually certified, except in public pre-K programs, where certification is more likely to be required.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast to many other developed countries,<sup>61</sup> the U.S. has yet to fully recognize ECE as an educational endeavor or to embrace it as a public good, as with K-12 education. Early care and education programs originated from two separate historical traditions over the last century: some had a primary emphasis on offering custodial care for children while their parents worked (e.g., day nurseries, child care), and others had a focus on promoting early learning (e.g., nursery schools, Head Start, public pre-K).<sup>62</sup> This bifurcated view of ECE services contrasts with the more unified purpose of K-12 education and is embedded in state laws governing qualifications for the early childhood workforce, which in turn have shaped public perceptions that the work requires limited education, training, skill, and expertise. These perceptions are further reinforced by the developmental attributes of young children in which learning is foundational and largely occurs through spontaneous interactions with adults, play with peers, and participation in daily routines, all of which require facilitation by trained educators. Yet the nature of early learning may obfuscate the highly skilled, intentional work of educators, leading to the false and harmful impression that specialized training comparable to that required in K-12 education is unnecessary.<sup>63</sup>

## Qualifications

The 50 states and the District of Columbia set their own qualification standards for early educators, and those requirements vary widely not only across states, but within states according to setting and source of funding. States typically require one set of qualifications for teachers in regulated home-based programs, another for those in center-based child care, and another for public preschool teachers. Other qualifications set by the federal government for military child care, Early Head Start, and Head Start programs add further complexity to the array of requirements in a given community. In any state, the qualifications a child can expect her teacher to meet are dependent not on her developmental and educational needs, but rather on the type of programs that are available and affordable given her family's circumstances. This state of affairs is not only inequitable for children, but inefficient — confusing to families and cumbersome for the workforce to navigate.

Nor are uneven qualifications across systems in keeping with what we now know about early development. Throughout the nation, a gap exists between the research evidence on the central role that early educators play in facilitating learning and development and

## MAINTAINING DIVERSITY, DISRUPTING STRATIFICATION

Nearly 40 percent of early educators are from historical minority groups (see About the Early Childhood Workforce, p. 5), which approaches a child population in which about 50 percent also represent historical minority groups.<sup>65</sup> This diversity should be lauded as a strength and is in stark contrast to the K-12 teacher workforce, which is composed of less than 20 percent of people of color.<sup>66</sup> Extant data reveals, however, that people of color are disproportionately concentrated in lower-status and lower-paying jobs in certain settings and have limited representation in administrator and director roles as well as teacher educator and other leadership and decision-making roles in the field. This inequity has implications for whose perspectives and voices are (and are not) reflected in decisions about early education, from the classroom to boardrooms to the tables where policies are made.

There are legitimate concerns about how higher teacher qualifications could threaten the diversity of the early childhood workforce, given the evidence of persistent barriers to accessing higher education among various historical minority groups, particularly blacks and Hispanics.<sup>67</sup> But rather than limit progress toward raising qualifications, awareness of these concerns, coupled with the documentation of racial and ethnic stratification, present an opportunity to develop targeted strategies and investments that maintain the diversity, yet also disrupt the stratification of the workforce. Research has documented that early educators — including those from historical minority groups and/or for whom English is not their primary language — can successfully earn a college degree and do so at rates higher than the average college transfer student, with particular supports in place.<sup>68</sup> Five categories of student support have shown particular promise in contributing to success among working adult students: (1) learning communities, such as cohort programs; (2) access-based support, such as classes or services at nontraditional hours or in more accessible locations; (3) financial support; (4) academic advising and counseling; and (5) skill-based support, such as tutoring, English-language assistance, or computer training.<sup>69</sup> Consideration of these challenges and supports should be considered a starting point. Critical examination of these issues of stratification and access to higher education — including foundational training, which articulates into higher education — is required to better understand and address long-standing barriers and to develop strategies for change.

the codified expectations of early educators' knowledge and abilities. While a few systems treat preschool teachers as part of the teaching workforce, the persistently low qualifications that have been set for most educators working with children birth to age five perpetuates the notion that teaching in early education is low-skilled work.

Recognizing the disconnect between the science of early development and policy/practice,

the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the National Academies assert in their 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*,<sup>64</sup> that increased coherence in qualification requirements, such as those for credentialing and licensure, would improve the consistency, continuity, and quality of learning experiences for children from birth through age eight. The report urges governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations at local, state, and federal levels to engage in a mutual review process aimed at ensuring that all requirements are based on “foundational knowledge and competencies necessary across professional roles.”

Furthermore, based on a comprehensive review of the science of child development and early learning, the report asserts that lead educators working with infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and those in early elementary grades require equivalent levels of knowledge and competencies and should be on “equal footing in their preparation for practice.” In recognition of the aspirational nature of such a goal, the authors call for transitioning to a minimum bachelor’s degree with specialized knowledge and competencies for all lead teachers of children from birth through age eight. The report also acknowledged that various roles (e.g., assistant teacher, teacher, and administrator) in a variety of settings (e.g., schools, centers, homes) currently have different expectations and requirements. Accordingly, the report emphasized the importance of establishing structures that delineate a career pathway from entry to leadership roles. This career pathway should include opportunities for all early educators to access foundational skills and knowledge, whether via higher education or entry-level training that articulates into higher education.

Today, no states have qualification systems in line with the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council recommendation for equivalent lead-teacher qualifications across settings for all children birth to age eight. Among the steps to realize this goal, the report calls on higher education programs to provide students with foundational knowledge about development and learning throughout the birth-to-age-eight continuum, in addition to differentiated instruction for specific age ranges and subject matter. In many states that lack degree-based certification standards for teachers across early childhood settings, this improvement will require reforms to the higher education system; too often, any course of study within one of several disciplines related to early childhood, however tangentially, has been considered acceptable educational preparation for teaching in or administering a program serving children prior to kindergarten.<sup>70</sup>

Nonetheless, access to teachers who are equally well prepared is critical for all children, regardless of where they receive early learning services. Over time, we will assess state progress in this regard. In our assessment of states for this inaugural edition of the *Index*, we examine how states regulate entry requirements for lead teachers in child care centers and providers in home-based settings, as represented by minimum educational requirements included in state licensing laws. We also assess whether state educational requirements for lead teachers in state-funded pre-K programs are set at a bachelor’s degree or higher. We do not include certification requirements for pre-K teachers because ECE does not have a uniform educational baseline, and certification (if required) may be linked to a two-year degree or completion of a certain number of college units. K-12, in contrast, does have a uniform educational baseline, and certification is understood as linked to a four-year degree or an additional requirement beyond this higher education.

As noted (see Financial Supports for Education), all but two states provide scholarships for early educators to pursue a degree or credential. Although limited reporting prevented us in this first edition from assessing the reach of these scholarships relative to the early childhood workforce population, we hope to include this aspect in future editions.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORTS FOR EDUCATION

As described earlier (see About the Early Childhood Workforce, p. 5) a substantial proportion of the current early education workforce exceeds minimal regulatory requirements; many teachers working in school- and center-based early care and education programs have earned bachelor's degrees, and most have completed some *early childhood development-related* college coursework, although degree attainment or college course work is far less common for those working in home-based

spent on initiatives to raise educational levels across settings. For example, nearly all QRIS include staff qualifications in their rating system, and with the exception of Arkansas and South Dakota, all states and the District of Columbia offer scholarships to pursue a degree or credential (e.g., a Child Development Associate® credential or CDA), although these scholarships are generally limited in number. Currently, it is not possible to assess the reach of these scholarships, as states are generally unable to provide an estimate of the proportion of the workforce that participates in these programs (see Workforce Data, p. 56).

**“ However, scholarships and bonuses do not substantially change teachers' economic status, as they do not necessarily provide an ongoing wage increase.**

settings.<sup>71</sup> In an effort to narrow the gap between the regulatory requirements and the knowledge and competencies that early educators should optimally acquire, considerable public and private resources have been

**Scholarships:** The wide adoption of scholarships across states owes much to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship program, established in 1990 and currently operating in 24 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>72</sup> These efforts have been critical to providing access and opportunity for members of the current workforce to attain education and increase their knowledge and skills.

**Bonuses:** To further incentivize increased qualifications and specialized training among early educators, 15 states have implemented bonuses: monetary awards in recognition of educational achievement. Many of these incentives are explicitly linked to the state's scholarship program. The amounts provided

vary widely across states and within state programs, depending on degree or credential levels achieved. Most awards are within the \$100–500 range, although in some programs awards of approximately \$1,000–1,500 are also possible at higher levels of educational achievement (e.g., bachelor's or master's level). Georgia's Awards for Early Educators program stands out for its comparatively high bonus amounts, with awards of \$1,200 for obtaining a CDA and up to \$2,500 for obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree.<sup>73</sup> Yet the median annual salary for a child care worker in Georgia is \$19,053, and it is \$28,205 for a preschool teacher.<sup>74</sup> A one-time addition of \$2,500 for achieving a bachelor of arts or master's degree still would not put these early educators anywhere near the median kindergarten teacher salary of \$53,840. Further, the program is funded entirely by a federal Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge grant and will be discontinued when the grant ends.

Scholarships and bonus incentives for early childhood teachers may reduce the financial burden associated with continued education, such as tuition, books, or taking unpaid time off work in order to pursue professional development. They may also potentially contribute to teachers' long-term earning power by increasing their education, though this earning potential remains comparatively low (see Earnings and Economic Security, p. 9). However, scholarships and

bonuses do not substantially change teachers' economic status, as they do not necessarily provide an ongoing wage increase. Some T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood<sup>®</sup> scholarship programs are an exception, to the extent that ECE settings agree to provide a raise, rather than a bonus, to staff upon completion of the scholarship program. Nevertheless, even these increases have limited impact: the average increase in wages for bachelor's degree scholarship recipients across T.E.A.C.H. programs was eight percent, or an increase of \$.80 per hour for a teacher making \$10 per hour.<sup>75</sup>

Bonuses and scholarships are not permanent features of the early childhood infrastructure and thus are vulnerable to changes in state budgets and priorities, which affect the number of people they can serve, the levels of support they can provide, and their potential enduring impact. Because of unpredictable funding, scholarships and bonuses are often limited to those working in certain types of programs, serving particular groups of children, earning below a certain wage, or participating in particular initiatives, and therefore, they do not provide opportunities for all early educators and do not adequately address inequities in ECE services.

## Assessing the States: Qualifications

### ***Indicator 1: Does a state require a minimum of a bachelor's degree for lead pre-K teachers, similar to educational requirements for K-3 teachers?***

With the exception of Hawaii, whose pre-K program operates solely in public schools, state pre-K programs operate in both public schools and community-based organizations providing ECE services. Public pre-K programs are offered in 43 states plus the District of Columbia, and 10 states offer two or more programs, although few of these programs serve more than 50 percent of children.<sup>76</sup> Of states with public pre-K programs, 23 require a minimum of a bachelor's degree for lead pre-K teachers across all settings and across all programs (for states with more than one state-funded pre-K program).<sup>77</sup> An additional 14 states require a bachelor's for pre-K teachers but only for certain types of programs or settings.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Indicator 2: Does a state set the minimum qualification levels at a CDA or vocational training for licensed providers?***

We focus on whether states require teaching staff working in



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## CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE CREDENTIAL

The Child Development Associate® credential (CDA) represents a core set of educational competencies and practical experiences for teaching staff in early childhood settings. The CDA requires 120 hours of instructional and professional education related to six core competencies and 480 hours of teaching experience in a classroom and includes direct observation to document competence, family questionnaires, and a national exam. The CDA may be incorporated into a state's certification system and/or may be required by certain programs like Head Start and Early Head Start. The CDA can serve as an entry point into college education for those who are already working in the early childhood field as well as those coming into the field directly from high school and can be made available in any language in which an educator works.<sup>79</sup> As an organized, competency-based credential, the CDA represents foundational knowledge and skills essential for early childhood educators, and thus, the credential, or its equivalent, can serve as an initial marker of specialized training and experience for those responsible for children in center- or home-based settings. Ideally, foundational knowledge, if not a prerequisite, should be acquired within a defined period of time after employment commences. For example, Early Head Start allows center-based teachers 12 months and home-based providers 24 months to attain the CDA, and the Department of Defense requires all new personnel to complete 40 hours of orientation and additional training within 90 days of employment.<sup>80</sup>

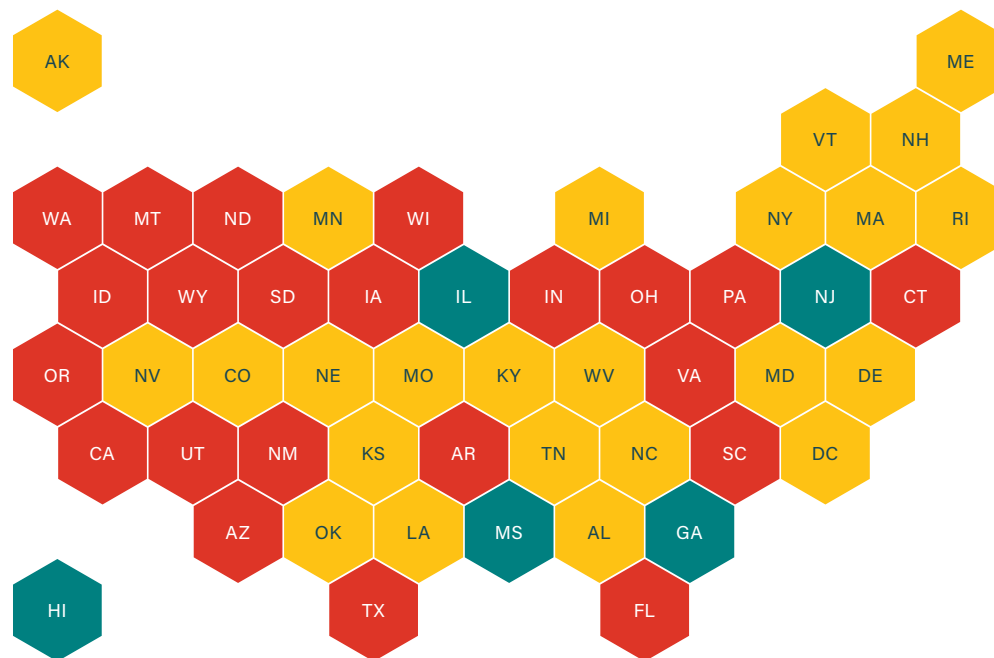
center- or home-based licensed programs outside of the public pre-K system to hold a CDA (preschool, infant and toddler, or family child care CDA) or to have vocational training, at a minimum. Only 11 states have a minimum requirement for early educators working outside the pre-K system, which is at least a CDA or completion of a substantive vocational program, and only Georgia and Vermont require this for *both* center- and home-based providers. Most states require only a high school diploma, some training, or in some cases, nothing at all.<sup>81</sup> Ten states have no requirements for center-based lead teachers, and a further 23 states have no requirements for group home-based providers.<sup>82</sup>

### State Assessment

We found 22 states to be **stalled**, having met none of these indicators; 24 states **edging forward**, having met one of the indicators; and five states **making headway**, having met both indicators. See Table 4.1 for a state-by-state overview of each indicator and the overall assessment.

Figure 4.1

State Map of Qualifications Assessment



**STALLED:** the state has made limited or no progress

**EDGING FORWARD:** the state has made partial progress

**MAKING HEADWAY:** the state is taking action and advancing promising policies

## LOAN FORGIVENESS FOR K-12 & ECE IN MAINE

Due to the high cost of higher education, loan forgiveness programs can be another way to ease the financial burden of increasing qualifications and training and widening access to higher education opportunities. Two federal programs provide opportunities for loan forgiveness for early educators. The Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program<sup>83</sup> offers up to \$17,500 in loan forgiveness, but only for teachers who work in certain elementary and secondary schools for at least five years, and this program is therefore limited to eligible pre-K teachers in school settings, who make up a small proportion of the early childhood workforce. In contrast, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness<sup>84</sup> (PSLF) Program is open to most early educators, including those working in licensed child care settings, but requires students to make payments on their loans for 10 years before debt is forgiven, which is likely to be a substantial burden given the low earnings of most early educators.

States also have the opportunity to offer loan forgiveness for educators. According to a cross-state scan by CSCCE, 15 states have a loan forgiveness program for K-12 teachers. Like the federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, these state programs are, by and large, only open to teachers in public schools, which may include some pre-K teachers, but otherwise are not open to the majority of early educators. An exception is the Educators for Maine program, which provides loan forgiveness to students in Maine “pursuing careers in education or child care and planning to work in Maine after graduation.”<sup>85</sup> Students must be pursuing teacher certification or a qualification as a child care provider. Loans are provided of up to \$3,000 annually (\$12,000 total) for undergraduate students and up to \$2,000 annually (\$8,000 total) for graduate students. These loans are paid directly to the college or university, and students may have one year — or in certain circumstances, two years — of their loan forgiven for each year of service as a teacher or child care provider.

### Policy Recommendations: Qualifications

- Establish a minimum educational requirement that reflects foundational knowledge for *all* early educators.
- Develop well-defined career pathways, linked to requirements, from entry through leadership roles.
- Ensure that all members of the current workforce, including historical minority groups and English-language learners, have opportunities to access foundational and advanced training and education along an articulated continuum that encompasses vocational training through college degrees..

*For additional policy recommendations, see the [Early Childhood Workforce Index Executive Summary](#).*

Table 4.1	Qualifications Indicators & Assessment by State		
State	B.A. for All Pre-K Teachers	At Least CDA/Vocational for Center-/ Home-Based Providers	Overall Assessment
Alabama	X		Edging forward
Alaska	X		Edging forward
Arizona			Stalled
Arkansas			Stalled
California			Stalled
Colorado		X	Edging forward
Connecticut			Stalled
Delaware		X	Edging forward
District of Columbia	X		Edging forward
Florida			Stalled
Georgia	X	X	Making headway
Hawaii	X	X	Making headway
Idaho	N/A		Stalled
Illinois	X	X	Making headway
Indiana			Stalled
Iowa			Stalled
Kansas	X		Edging forward
Kentucky	X		Edging forward
Louisiana	X		Edging forward
Maine	X		Edging forward
Maryland	X		Edging forward
Massachusetts		X	Edging forward
Michigan	X		Edging forward
Minnesota		X	Edging forward
Mississippi	X	X	Making headway
Missouri	X		Edging forward

Table 4.1	Qualifications Indicators & Assessment by State		
State	B.A. for All Pre-K Teachers	At Least CDA/Vocational for Center-/ Home-Based Providers	Overall Assessment
Montana	N/A		Stalled
Nebraska	X		Edging forward
Nevada	X		Edging forward
New Hampshire	N/A	X	Edging forward
New Jersey	X	X	Making headway
New Mexico			Stalled
New York	X		Edging forward
North Carolina	X		Edging forward
North Dakota	N/A		Stalled
Ohio			Stalled
Oklahoma	X		Edging forward
Oregon			Stalled
Pennsylvania			Stalled
Rhode Island	X		Edging forward
South Carolina			Stalled
South Dakota	N/A		Stalled
Tennessee	X		Edging forward
Texas			Stalled
Utah	N/A		Stalled
Vermont		X	Edging forward
Virginia			Stalled
Washington			Stalled
West Virginia	X		Edging forward
Wisconsin			Stalled
Wyoming	N/A		Stalled
TOTAL	23	11	

## Endnotes

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- 71 However, not all early educators with bachelor's degrees have the opportunity to specialize in early childhood or to gain applicable experience through student teaching, see Whitebook & Austin (2015); Whitebook, M., Austin, L.J.E., Ryan, S., Kipnis, F., Almaraz, M., & Sakai, L. (2012). *By Default or By Design? Variations in Higher Education Programs for Early Care and Education Teachers and Their Implications for Research Methodology, Policy, and Practice*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from [http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/ByDefaultOrByDesign\\_FullReport\\_2012.pdf](http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/ByDefaultOrByDesign_FullReport_2012.pdf)
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- 84 See Federal Student Aid. *Public Service Loan Forgiveness*. Retrieved from <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>
- 85 See Finance Authority of Maine. (n.d.) *Educators for Maine Program*. Retrieved from [http://www.famemaine.com/maine\\_grants\\_loans/educators-for-maine-program/](http://www.famemaine.com/maine_grants_loans/educators-for-maine-program/)