



TEACHING THE TEACHERS OF
OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN:
THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER
EDUCATION IN NEW YORK, 2015

HIGHLIGHTS
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By the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment,
with Child Trends



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT
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The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) was founded in 1999 to focus on achieving comprehensive public investments which 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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Editor: **Dan Bellm**

INTRODUCTION

Midway through the second decade of this century, 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 particularly in light of mounting evidence about inadequate and unequal educational quality for many children, especially those of color and those living in low-income families.²

In recent years, New York, like many states, has committed public and private resources toward multiple efforts to improve educational services and to ensure that teacher education degree and certification programs can better prepare their graduates to meet the complex needs of young children of all ages.³ Critical to responding to this need is the establishment of a well-coordinated and comprehensive professional preparation and development system that can prepare an incoming generation of professionals while also strengthening the skills of the existing early education workforce. Institutions of higher education are critical to meeting the evolving and increasing demands which have been shown to improve developmental and learning outcomes for the state’s young child population.

The New York Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) with its partner members, New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute and the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children engaged the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) to conduct this assessment, by implementing the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory*.⁴ The Inventory is a research tool used to describe the landscape of a state’s early childhood degree program offerings at the associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels, and to provide a portrait of early childhood faculty members.

In the following pages we highlight findings from the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory*, specifically the extent to which New York ECE higher education programs offer course content and experiences associated with effective teacher preparation.

PART 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY

Part 1 of the report examines program offerings, faculty characteristics, student support, and institutional challenges.

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

New York early childhood degree programs report differing goals for preparing students. More than one-half of associate degree programs identify their primary goal as preparing students for multiple roles involving working with young children in a variety of settings, while nearly three-quarters of bachelor degree programs and nearly one-half of master's degree programs identify their primary goal as preparing students for teaching and/or administrative roles in early childhood or early childhood/elementary settings. Degree programs offer a range of topics related to child development and approaches to teaching, but the topics and coursework vary by degree program and age-group focus, with required course content focused less on infants and toddlers than on older children. Fewer programs offer an in-depth focus on topics related to leadership and administration.

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

Students earning a bachelor's degree or master's degree in early childhood are typically required to complete a student teaching experience, and to participate in additional practica. In contrast, the majority of students completing an associate degree in early childhood participate only in practica. When age groups are required for field experiences, degree programs are more likely to require a focus on preschoolers and school-age children than on infants and toddlers.

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

New York early childhood degree programs are staffed by a mixture of full-time and adjunct and/or part-time faculty. Faculty members are primarily women, White/Caucasian, and monolingual English speaking. Across degree levels, one-quarter to more than 45 percent of faculty report being 60 years or older. Most faculty members report having had academic preparation specific to early childhood, and over one-half of associate, bachelor's, and master's degree faculty report having worked in an array of ECE professional roles in the past decade. Most faculty, however, have not had recent experience

teaching children, particularly infants and toddlers. New York early childhood degree program faculty members are particularly interested in professional development related to working with children who are dual language learners as well as utilizing technology in teaching.

FINDING FOUR: SUPPORTING STUDENTS
Services Offered and Ongoing Challenges

New York early childhood degree programs offer multiple types of support services designed to help students access resources and strengthen their academic skills.

Almost all degree programs offer financial aid and academic counseling to students. Most associate and master's degree programs offer alternative work schedules for working adults, and the majority of associate degree programs report offering classes off-campus in community-based settings. Bachelor's programs are less likely to offer flexible schedules. Primary challenges for many institutions include having sufficient resources to ensure that faculty members' administrative duties do not interfere with time spent with students, and insufficient ability to recruit students.

FINDING FIVE: PROGRAM CHALLENGES
Faculty and Program Needs

New York early childhood degree programs experience challenges related to time and resources to fulfill faculty responsibilities, the need for faculty members with specific

expertise, and the need for a more racially and ethnically diverse faculty. Early childhood faculty members are in need of resources to support their ability to participate in professional development and program planning.

PART 2: EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION, AN EVOLVING LANDSCAPE

Part 2 of the report examines how institutions of higher education are adapting to emerging research related to the importance of family engagement and early mathematics to young children’s development and learning.

FINDING SIX: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT Faculty Attitudes, Required Offerings, and Professional Development Interests

Faculty members consider the inclusion of family engagement to be very important in the preparation of early childhood teachers, and rank its importance on a par with the domain of socio-emotional development. Multiple topics related to

family engagement are embedded in all levels of degree programs. Faculty members express varied levels of interest in professional development in this topic area.

FINDING SEVEN: EARLY MATHEMATICS Faculty Attitudes, Required Offerings, Faculty Self-Assessment, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Faculty members consider the inclusion of early mathematics to be less important than other domains in the preparation of teachers. Multiple topics of early mathematics content are embedded in required course content, with variation

among degree levels by topic and by age-group focus. Many faculty members do not consider themselves prepared to teach early math content. Interest in ongoing math-related professional development varies by degree level and topic area.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

We highlight below our recommendations to reconfigure and strengthen early childhood higher education in New York. Our approach is predicated on the identification of new resources from state, federal, and philanthropic sources, as well as the reallocation of a portion of existing revenues for quality improvement and workforce system development.

1. Unify expectations and pathways for early childhood workforce preparation

- Erase the divisions in professional expectations and preparation across and within age groups in the birth-to-age-eight spectrum by establishing a coordinated and comprehensive approach to early childhood certification that reflects the knowledge, skills, and experience needed of teachers and administrators, irrespective of setting;
- Provide clear roadmaps for students enrolling in degree programs that fulfill teacher education or director requirements (e.g., UPK, New York City public pre-K, QRIS, or Early Head Start/Head Start teachers and assistant teachers), and enable students to assess whether a given course of study meets their needs and goals for teaching young children and/or for assuming leadership roles in ECE programs; and
- Provide clear information statewide about the types of skills that students will be expected to develop in each program, the age group of children they will be prepared to work with, and the professional credentials and certifications articulated within various degree programs (e.g., Child Development Associate Credential, the Infant-Toddler Care and Education Credential, Birth to Grade 2 Certification, or the Program Administrator Credential).

2. Strengthen program content and equity across the age span

- Engage faculty groups representing different degree levels and types of institutions, as well as other experts, to strengthen required course content, with particular attention to infant and toddler development and learning across multiple domains, methods of teaching and pedagogy for children of different ages, early mathematics, working with children with special needs, and working with children and adults from diverse linguistic, racial/ethnic, and economic backgrounds; and
- Engage faculty groups representing different degree levels and types of institutions to develop degree program standards for the timing, frequency, and duration of field-based experiences, with opportunities focused on children from infancy

through Grade 2 and that differentiate experiences for pre-service and in-service students.

3. Build a leadership pipeline

- Engage early childhood degree programs in discussions of strategies and needed resources to align and/or develop course content with the Children’s Program Administrator Credential to ensure that early childhood students have access to administrator preparation;
- Establish a process to identify the specific skills and knowledge needed for common leadership roles in ECE (including teacher leaders, coaches, site administrators, program/quality improvement managers, and teacher educators);
- Establish a process to develop course content aligned with the “professionalism and leadership” and the “administration and management” competencies of New York state’s core knowledge and competencies for early educators (New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, 2012);
- Identify options to create leadership tracks and/or programs, particularly at the graduate degree level, including leadership and administration in infant and toddler programs. This effort should explore options to draw upon existing resources, such as joining administrative and infant and toddler educator competencies, to establish a leadership pathway for leaders of infant and toddler programs; and
- Investigate strategies used in a variety of disciplines (e.g., health profession/nursing) to establish pipeline programs within the educational system to improve opportunities for minorities to attain leadership roles in the early childhood field.

4. Prepare an incoming generation of faculty

- Investigate strategies used in a variety of disciplines (e.g., health, education, and social welfare) to develop a minority faculty development program, such as fellowship opportunities, to increase minority representation among faculty, and develop a plan tailored to the ECE field in New York; and
- Establish and fund an in-service academy, with well-articulated expectations for individual faculty professional development and for program improvements (e.g., mentoring initiatives, expanding the faculty knowledge base related to infants and toddlers, and other content areas identified as needed).

5. Increase faculty support

- Develop strategies to support an increase in the number of full-time faculty, with sufficient release time, who can share in administrative and student advising responsibilities, and implement best practices to support adjunct faculty;
- Provide resources and opportunities for faculty to engage in the early childhood community they serve (e.g., visiting early childhood programs, participating in workforce development forums) in order to better understand the current context in which their students are expected to teach, and to lend their expertise to improvement/policy efforts;
- Establish an ongoing fund, with well-articulated expectations, for honoraria for individual faculty professional development and for program improvement; and
- Ensure that faculty have access to relevant professional development and field based-learning experiences for themselves, particularly in the topic areas of teaching practitioners to work with children who are dual language learners, and teaching practitioners to use technology with children.

END NOTES

¹ Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014) *Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://www.irlle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ReportFINAL.pdf>

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³ Swartz, S. E., & Johnson, J. E. (2010). *Review of recent research on early childhood teacher education programs*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development. Ray, A., Bowman, B., & Robbins, J. (2006). *Preparing early childhood teachers to successfully educate all children: The contribution of four-year undergraduate teacher preparation programs*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development, and Chicago, IL: Erikson Institute. Hyson, M., Horn, D.M., & Winton, P.J. (2012). Higher education for early childhood educators and outcomes for young children: Pathways toward greater effectiveness. In Pianta, R. (Ed.), *Handbook of early childhood education* (pp. 553-583). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

⁴ Kipnis, F., Ryan, S., Austin, L. J.E., Whitebook, M., Sakai, L. (2012). *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

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