

# Teaching the Teachers of Our Youngest Children

The State of Early Childhood Higher Education in Maryland

## Highlights

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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 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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The views presented in this report are those of the authors.

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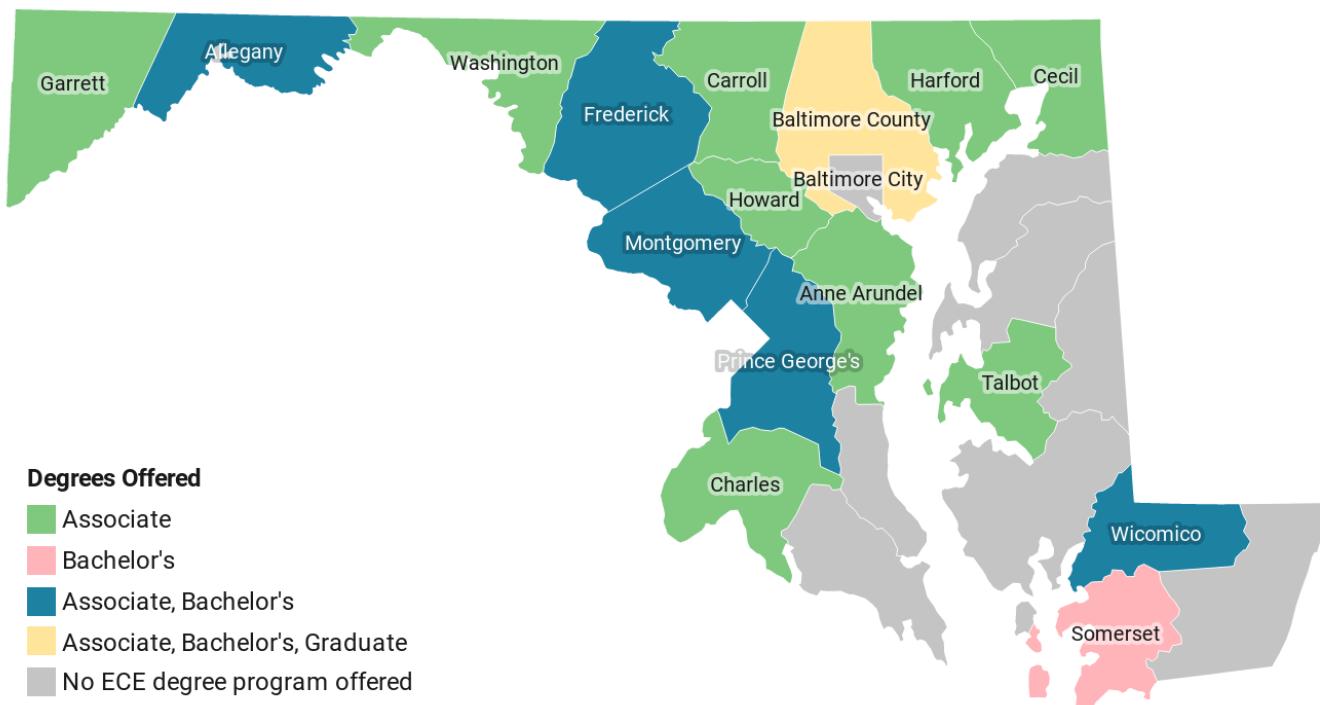
# Introduction

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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

Maryland is home to more than 430,000 children under the age of six; 73 percent of these young children have all available parents in the labor force and thus potentially need child care.<sup>3</sup> Stakeholders and advocates in Maryland are committed to advancing strategies that improve ECE services, including workforce preparation and development in order to ensure that early educators have what they need to meet the complex needs of young children.<sup>4</sup> 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 *Maryland Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory* and the extent to which ECE 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 Maryland*, and the accompanying technical report present the full findings.

## Distribution of Maryland Early Childhood Degree Programs, by County



# 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

Most Maryland early childhood degree programs identified their primary goal as teacher preparation across early childhood and elementary school settings or as

preparation for multiple roles in many types of settings. While these programs offer a range of topics related to child development and approaches to teaching, the age-group focus varied, depending on degree level. Associate degree programs were more likely to require a focus on children birth through pre-K, while bachelor's degree programs were more likely to focus on children in pre-K and elementary school.<sup>5</sup> Availability of content related to administration and leadership is inconsistent across both degree levels.

## FINDING TWO: FIELD-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Requirements and Age-Group Focus

Bachelor's degree programs are more likely than associate degree programs to require students to participate in student teaching or practica. When such field-based learning experiences are required, students across degree programs are more

likely to participate in a practicum experience. However, there is little consistency as to the duration, frequency, and age-group focus of these field experiences.

## FINDING THREE: PORTRAIT OF FACULTY

Employment Status, Demographics, and Professional Background

Maryland early childhood degree programs are staffed with a mix of part- and full-time faculty. Faculty members are primarily White women who are monolingual (speaking only English) and therefore less diverse than Maryland's child population.

Most faculty members across both degree levels reported having had academic preparation specific to early childhood, and most associate degree faculty members also reported having worked in an ECE professional role in the past decade.

## **FINDING FOUR: FACULTY PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERTISE**

Faculty Perspectives on Course Content, Teaching Experience and Capacity, Professional Development Background, and Professional Development Interests

Maryland early childhood degree faculty members were more likely to consider the inclusion of socioemotional development important, compared to other course content. In general, faculty members were more likely to report feeling that all content areas were “very important” for teachers working with school-age children. Across

content areas, faculty members reported feeling least capable of preparing teachers to work with infants/toddlers, as compared to older children. Maryland early childhood degree program faculty members reported particular interest in professional development related to working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds and children with special needs, as well as techniques for engaging families.

## **FINDING FIVE: SUPPORTING STUDENTS**

Services Offered and Program Articulation

Maryland 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 than

bachelor’s degree programs to offer blended programs (combining online and in-person courses) as well as other access supports such as alternative class schedules and classes in community locations. Across both degree levels, programs provide little academic support for students and even less specifically for adult English-language learners. Although most degree programs participating in the *Inventory* reported having an articulation agreement with at least one other college or university, inconsistent articulation was reported as a challenge by the majority of programs.

## **FINDING SIX: PROGRAM CHALLENGES**

Faculty and Program Needs

Maryland early childhood degree programs experience challenges related to the time and resources faculty members require to fulfill their responsibilities, as well as the need for faculty members with specific expertise, such as teaching dual language

learners. The majority of program leads indicated that the low pay of the ECE field has led to challenges in recruiting and retaining students.

# 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 the age-group focus

changing depending on the degree level. Faculty members reported feeling most capable of teaching topics related to engagement with families of school-age children. Faculty members expressed varied levels of interest in professional development in this topic area, with associate degree faculty members expressing higher interest than bachelor's degree faculty members.

## FINDING EIGHT: EARLY MATHEMATICS

Required Offerings, Faculty Attitudes, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Across both degree levels, programs were less likely to require math content for infants and toddlers, compared to older children. Similarly, faculty members were less likely to rate the inclusion of early mathematics as "very important" for infants

and toddlers, compared to preschool- and school-age children. More than one-half of faculty members across both degree levels reported that they had not participated in math-related professional development in the past two years.

## FINDING NINE: DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Required Offerings, Faculty Attitudes, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Although faculty members consider the inclusion of teaching young dual language learners (DLLs) to be important in the preparation of teachers, they reported feeling least prepared to teach this topic, compared to all other topics asked about in the *Inventory*. Faculty members were not

highly likely to have participated in professional development about DLLs, and interest in ongoing dual language learner-related professional development varied by degree level and topic area.

# Recommendations

Here, we outline an approach to strengthening early childhood workforce development in Maryland, with an emphasis on higher education. The efforts should be coordinated among key stakeholders in Maryland (including the Maryland Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood and the Maryland Higher Education Commission), and their success is predicated on identifying new resources from state, federal, and philanthropic sources.

## 1. Unify expectations for early childhood workforce preparation

- Expand the Pre-K-3rd endorsement to begin at birth (similar to the certification available for Special Education for Infant/Primary that covers birth to third grade) to ensure that educators working in early childhood and early elementary have an understanding of development and learning taking place prior to pre-kindergarten.
- Strengthen the connections between the Maryland Child Care Credentialing Program and degrees granted by institutions of higher education in order to facilitate streamlined pathways for early educators to work toward attainment of higher credentials and degrees; and
- Align early education degree program course requirements with state standards and competencies, such as the Maryland Early Learning Standards Birth – 8 Years.

## 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 early elementary grades;
- 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:

- Increased financial and technical support for students enrolled in blended or fully online degree programs;
- Alternative class schedules and locations;
- Academic counseling;
- Cohort models; and
- Financial resources for students.

## **5. Establish partnerships among and improve articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions**

- Ensure that all community colleges have a comprehensive articulation agreement with a four-year college or university that is geographically accessible to students; and
- Offer dedicated advising staff who can provide students with the necessary guidance to take full advantage of articulation agreements, including information on the transfer process, required courses, and accepted credits.

## **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 specific skills and knowledge;
- 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;
- 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;
- Identify options to increase faculty members' expertise in working with college students, young children, and families of diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds; and
- Provide opportunities for faculty members to pursue professional development related to teaching dual language learners, including strategies to develop the language, literacy, mathematical, and cognitive abilities of this population.

## **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;
- Establish an ongoing fund with well-articulated expectations for faculty members' professional development honoraria and program improvement grants;
- Develop additional opportunities for faculty professional development in the areas of preparing practitioners to work with children with special needs, children from diverse backgrounds, and children who have experienced trauma; 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2014/ReportFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Hernandez, D.J. (2011). *Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. Albany, NY: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.fcd-us.org/double-jeopardy-how-third-grade-reading-skills-and-poverty-influence-high-school-graduation/>; Karoly, L.A. (2009). *Preschool Adequacy and Efficiency in California: Issues, Policy Options, and Recommendations*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG889.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG889.pdf); Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M.R., Espinosa, L.M., Gormley, W.T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K.A., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M.J. (2013). *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*. Washington, DC: Society for Research in Child Development & New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation (2019). *Child population by single age in Maryland*. Kids Count Data Center. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/100-child-population-by-single-age?loc=22&loct=2>.

<sup>4</sup> Hyson, M., Horm, 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; 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 & Chicago, IL: Erikson Institute; Swartz, S.E., & Johnson, J.E. (2010). *Review of Recent Research on Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

<sup>5</sup> Data also were collected from two master's degree programs in Maryland specifically identified as early childhood education. As they cannot be de-identified, the data collected for these master's degree programs are not included in this report.