



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

HIGHLIGHTS
OCTOBER 2015

By Lea J.E. Austin, Marcy Whitebook, Fran Kipnis, Laura Sakai,
Felippa Amanta, and Ferheen Abbasi



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

© 2015 Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
All rights reserved.

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
www.irl.berkeley.edu/cscce

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.

Suggested Citation:

Austin, L. J. E., Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F., Sakai, L., Amanta, F., & Abbasi, F. (2015). *Teaching the Teachers of Our Youngest Children: The State of Early Childhood Higher Education in California, 2015. Highlights*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

Teaching the Teachers of Our Youngest Children was made possible through the generous support of the David & Lucile Packard Foundation and the Heising-Simons Foundation.

The views presented in this report are those of the primary authors only and do not reflect the opinions of the report’s funders.

INTRODUCTION

Today, 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,ⁱ in light of mounting evidence about inadequate and unequal educational quality, particularly for children of color and those living in low-income families.ⁱⁱ

A decade ago, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) issued *Time to Revamp and Expand: Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs in California's Institutions of Higher Education*.ⁱⁱⁱ The findings identified multiple areas in need of improvement in California also common to early childhood higher education programs in other states.^{iv} The report called for increased resources to enable California institutions of higher education to expand programs, update courses to reflect emerging scientific evidence about supporting early development, increase and improve opportunities for field-based learning, hire more—and more diverse—ECE faculty, increase support services for students, and improve articulation among institutions offering a range of programs.

In the following pages we highlight findings from the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory* and the changes over the last decade in the extent to which California ECE higher education programs offer course content and experiences associated with effective teacher preparation. We also examine how these institutions of higher education are adapting to emerging research and changes in the California policy environment.

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN CALIFORNIA TODAY

One hundred and forty-five public and private institutions of higher education constitute a complex network of early childhood degree programs in California. This network includes 103 public community colleges offering 190 associate degree programs, and 42 public and private colleges and universities offering 50 bachelor's and 29 master's degree programs in early childhood. There is only one doctoral program currently operating in the state.

Distribution of California Institutions of Higher Education Offering Early Childhood Degree Programs¹



¹Population of degree programs based on data collected in the 2013-2014 academic year.

²Contra Costa county has associate and master's degree programs, but no bachelor's degree programs.

PART 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION, THEN AND NOW

Part 1 of the report examines changes over the last decade in program offerings, faculty characteristics, student supports, and institutional challenges.

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

Today, as was true a decade ago, titles ascribed to California early childhood degree programs do not represent a clear indication of their content. Programs that share the same moniker may not share the same primary goal, and programs with disparate monikers may share similar primary goals. One-half or fewer California early childhood education degree programs identify teacher and/or administrator preparation as their primary goal. Early childhood degree programs offer a range of topics related to child development and approaches to teaching, but content focused on infants and toddlers is notably underrepresented at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. Some progress has been made in the last decade with regard to incorporating content relevant to preparing educators to work with the linguistically diverse population of young children in California. Few programs offer in-depth focus on topics related to leadership and administration.

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

Most early childhood education students are not required to complete student teaching, in contrast to those preparing to work with older children. Typically students completing an early childhood degree participate only in practica, and there is little consistency as to the duration and frequency of the experiences. Compared to a decade ago, even fewer degree programs require field-based exposure to infants and toddlers.

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

California early childhood degree programs continue to rely heavily on part-time faculty, as they did a decade ago, and they do so at rates higher than other departments in their institutions. California's early childhood faculty workforce reflects limited racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, although there has been some increase in racial and ethnic diversity over the last decade. Most faculty members report having had academic preparation specific to early childhood, and having worked in an array of ECE professional roles. Most faculty, however, have not had recent experience with teaching children, particularly infants and toddlers.

California early childhood degree program faculty members are particularly interested in professional development related to utilizing technology in teaching and working with college students, children, and families from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic backgrounds.

FINDING FOUR: SUPPORTING STUDENTS
Services Offered, and Ongoing Challenges

Over the last decade, California early childhood degree programs have continued to offer multiple types of support services designed to help students access resources

and strengthen their academic skills. Coursework has become more accessible as programs have increased their offerings of courses online and during alternative hours such as evenings and weekends. Ongoing resources to sustain and expand these student services remain a challenge for many institutions trying to help students complete their degrees. Resources needed to support students for whom English is a second language has increased for bachelor's degree programs over time.

FINDING FIVE: PROGRAM CHALLENGES
Faculty and Program Needs

California early childhood degree programs continue to experience challenges related to the shortage of full-time faculty, a lack of diversity among faculty, and a lack of

support more broadly for early childhood teacher preparation. Early childhood faculty members are in need of resources to support their ability to participate in professional development and program planning. Challenges related to articulation have dropped dramatically over the last decade, suggesting that significant improvements have been made in this area.

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, and to changes in the California policy environment, specifically the implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK).

FINDING SIX: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Faculty Attitudes, Offerings, Teaching Experience, and Professional Development

Faculty 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

domains of socio-emotional and motor development. Multiple topics related to family engagement are embedded in all levels of degree programs as well as multiple subject credential programs, with some variation in age-group focus by degree level and topic. Most faculty reported having taught content related to family engagement in the last two years, and many expressed interest in professional development in this topic area.

FINDING SEVEN: EARLY MATHEMATICS

Faculty Attitudes, Offerings, Experience, and Professional Development Interests

Faculty 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 all levels of degree and multiple subject credential programs, with variation among degree levels by topic and by age-group focus. The least required content focus was reported for infants and toddlers and for supporting English language learners in the development of mathematical knowledge. Many faculty members do not consider themselves prepared to teach early math content, yet, as a group, faculty report only moderate interest in ongoing math-related professional development.

FINDING EIGHT: PREPARING TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

Course Offerings, Field Experience, and Credential Program Challenges

California early childhood degree programs and multiple subject credential programs report uneven requirements for course content focused on transitional kindergarten. Early childhood degree

programs and multiple subject credential programs report limited requirements and opportunities for field-based learning focused on transitional kindergarten; student teaching in

a transitional kindergarten setting was required by only one multiple subject credential program, was an option in only 32 percent of programs, and was unavailable in 44 percent of programs. Multiple subject credential programs report challenges in preparing students to work in transitional kindergarten classrooms.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

We outline below an approach to reconfiguring and strengthening early childhood higher education in California. 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. Rationalize 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, for teachers and administrators across settings and with similar levels of education; and
- Amend the current requirement of 24 ECE units for multiple subject credential holders teaching in TK to ensure that it includes the appropriate content and rigor, and develop specific recommendations to enable those with bachelor's or higher degrees in ECE to access TK positions by obtaining the equivalent of a multiple subject teaching credential, based on their prior knowledge, skills, and experience.

2. Strengthen program content and equity across the age span.

- Strengthen required content related to development and pedagogy across multiple domains with particular attention to infants and toddlers and working with children and adults from diverse linguistic, racial/ethnic, and economic backgrounds;
- 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 that are focused on children from infancy through TK; and
- Identify strategies for multiple subject credential programs to include field-based learning experiences focused on children in TK.

3. Increase faculty support.

- Establish an ongoing fund, with well-articulated expectations for honoraria for individual faculty professional development and for program improvement grants;
- Increase the number of full-time faculty positions necessary, at a minimum, to align ECE degree program staffing configurations with those of other departments, and to allow for adequate advising of and time with students; and
- Investigate strategies used in a variety of disciplines (e.g., health, education, social welfare) to develop a minority faculty development program, such as a fellowship, to increase minority representation among faculty.

END NOTES

Complete list of references can be found in the [full narrative report](#).

ⁱ Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014

ⁱⁱ Yoshikawa et al., 2013; Hernandez, 2011; Karoly, 2009

ⁱⁱⁱ Whitebook, Bellm, Lee, & Sakai, 2005

^{iv} Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006