

# **Time to Revamp and Expand:**

## **Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs in California's Institutions of Higher Education**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# Executive Summary

The past decade has seen an unprecedented explosion of knowledge in the science of child development. We now know a great deal more about the dynamics and the importance of early learning – and with this growing awareness of how young children learn and what they need to succeed in school, states and communities are rapidly shifting their attention toward investments in higher-quality early education and preschool programs, especially for children living in poverty. Hand in hand with this effort, many states are also beginning to turn new attention toward the professional development of teachers and providers in the early care and education (ECE) workforce.

Most recently, planning has gotten well underway for the possible creation of a Preschool For All system in California, which would likely result in increased education and training requirements for preschool teachers. Indeed, several counties already implementing local Preschool for All systems, notably Los Angeles and San Mateo, as well as a Preschool For All initiative scheduled for the June 2006 ballot, are setting the standard of a BA plus credential for preschool teachers. At the national level, Head Start has also raised its teacher requirements in recent years.

These and other developments have created an urgent need for policy makers and program planners to understand the current capacity of California's higher education system, and its ability to respond to growing demands for teacher preparation in the ECE

field. As publicly funded preschool programs expand and teacher requirements change, the state's college and universities may need to rapidly adapt their early childhood programs and offerings. How ready is California's higher education system for such a change?

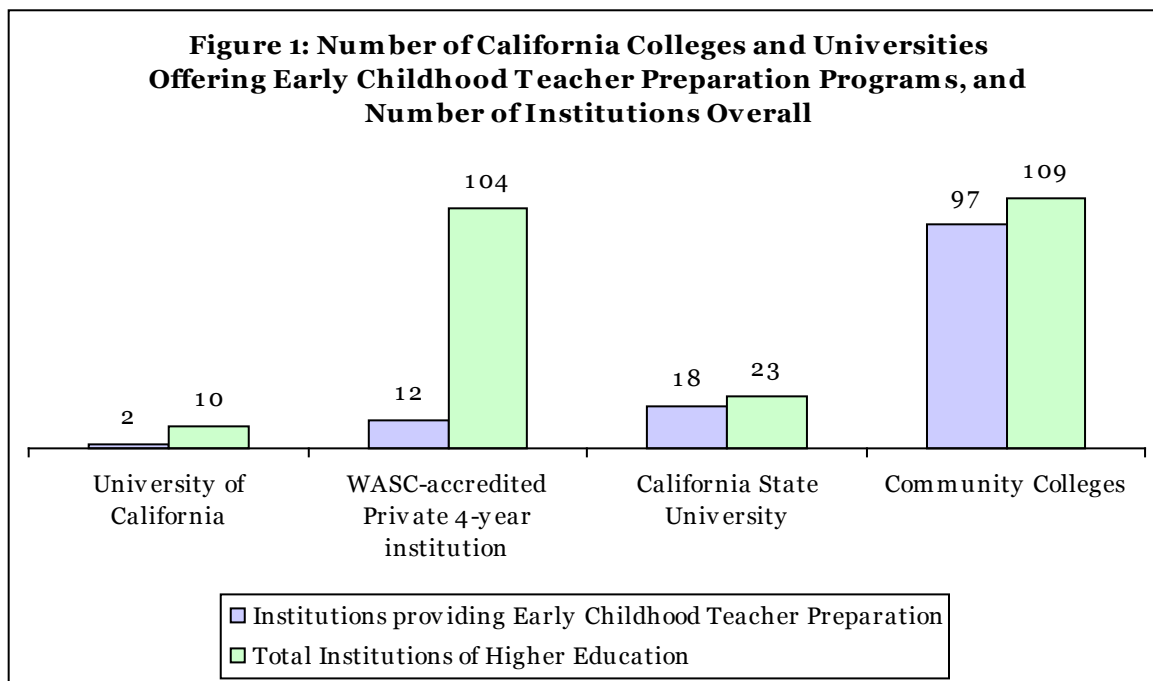
This report presents the results of an inventory of nearly all (98.5%) of the California institutions of higher education that train adults to teach children under the age of five, including certificate, associate, bachelor's, master's and PhD programs. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at the University of California at Berkeley collaborated in a nationwide census in 2004 with the National Pre-kindergarten Center (NPC) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For this study, we used a California-specific version of the NPC interview, seeking to:

- Provide the field with accurate baseline data about the number of degree-offering programs preparing teachers to work with children ages birth to five, the characteristics of faculty in those programs (including educational background, race/ethnicity, and tenure status), the characteristics of enrolled students, and the kinds of coursework and practicum experiences provided;
- Compare early childhood teacher preparation programs along certain key variables (e.g., faculty race/ethnicity) with the institutions in which these programs operate;

- Describe the challenges that programs face in meeting the professional development needs of the early care and education workforce; and
- Explore how institutions seek to make their programs accessible to current members of the early care and education workforce, many of whom are working full-time, earn a low income, and/or have limited English proficiency.

At each institution, we sought to interview the early childhood department chair, or

the program director or coordinator. When they did not have exact figures available to them, we asked respondents to give estimated numbers; for example, about the number of enrolled students, or the number of degrees or awards given annually. As a result – although they were provided by the respondents who were most likely to be very familiar with program requirements and students’ experiences – all numbers in this report should be viewed as estimates.



# Findings

## *Program Characteristics*

# 1.

In California, 136 institutions of higher education – or approximately one-half of the state’s public colleges and universities and private, accredited colleges and universities – are engaged in preparing teachers to work with young children prior to kindergarten. Reflecting California’s current regulatory requirements, about three-quarters of these programs are at the community college level, and opportunities for upper-division and graduate-level work in early childhood education are very limited.

# 2.

At a time of rising calls for professionalism, including the attainment of college degrees and credentials, the state’s higher education system is still geared mostly to entry-level work in the ECE field. Currently, most early childhood students in California are working toward a Child Development Permit or other certificate short of an associate degree. Reflecting current regulatory requirements, more than five times as many students are estimated to be attending a two-year institution as are pursuing a bachelor’s degree or higher.

## *Student Characteristics*

# 3.

California’s population of early childhood students is very diverse in terms of ethnicity and language; many speak a language other than English; and at the community college level, approximately one in five face significant challenges in completing course work in English.

# 4.

Most of California’s early childhood students are working full-time. While most students go on to work with children ages birth to five, those who earn bachelor’s degrees are more likely to go on to elementary school teaching.

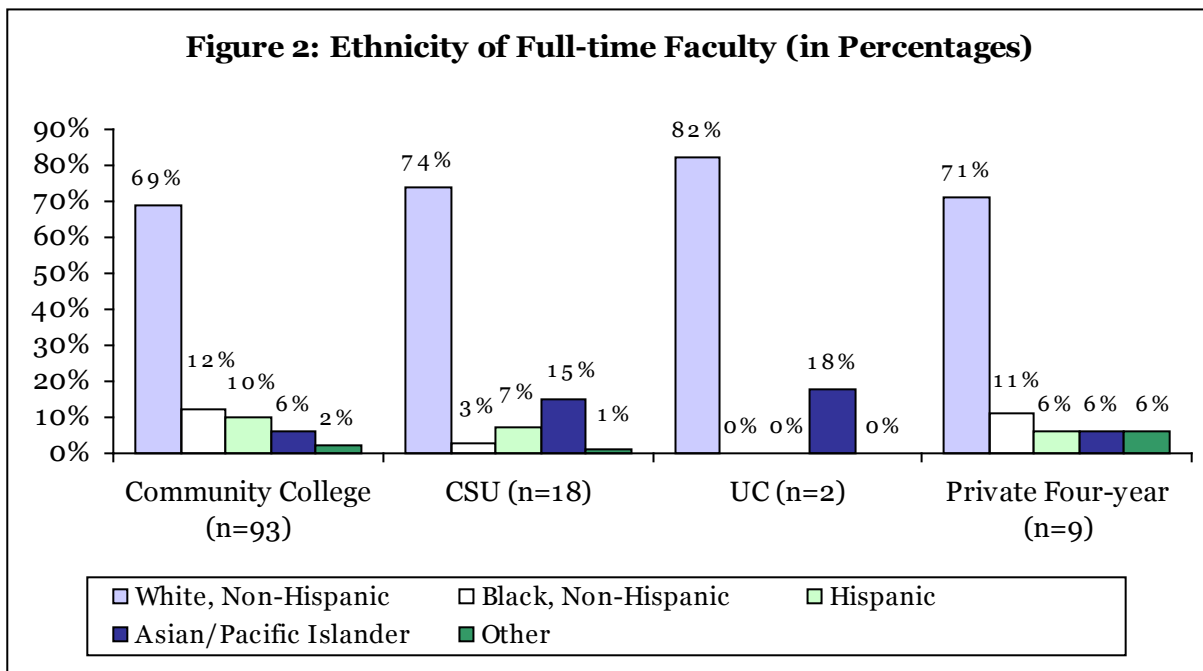
## Faculty Characteristics

# 5.

The faculty of California’s early childhood teacher preparation programs are much less diverse as a group than their students. Nearly one-half of programs have a 100-percent White, non-Hispanic full-time faculty, and one-quarter have a 100-percent White, non-Hispanic part-time faculty.

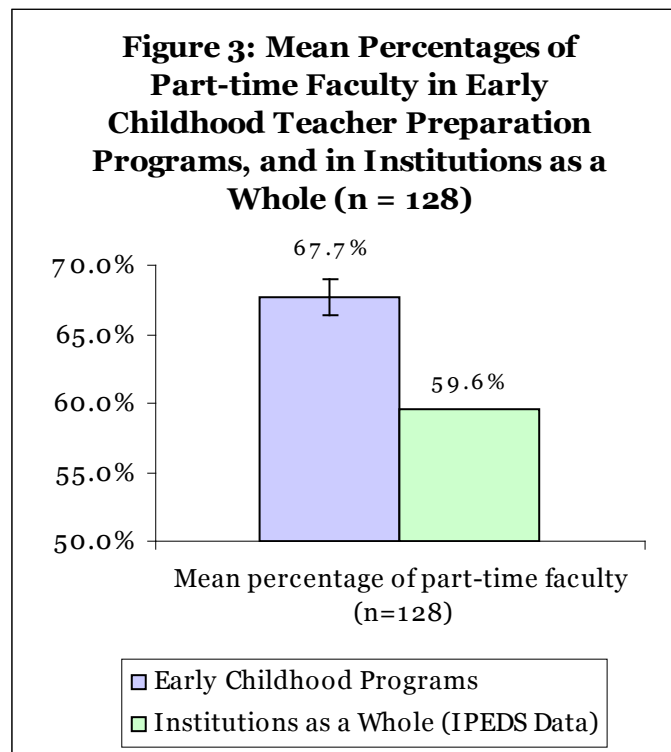
# 6.

Most faculty members of California early childhood teacher preparation programs have earned a master’s degree or higher. But community colleges are more likely to have faculty with a degree in early childhood specifically covering children birth through four (70 percent) than institutions offering a bachelor’s degree or higher (45 percent). Community colleges are also more likely to have faculty with direct experience working with young children (87 percent) than institutions offering a bachelor’s degree or higher (62 percent).



# 7.

Roughly two-thirds of faculty members at California’s early childhood teacher preparation programs are part-time, adjunct faculty. On average, these programs employ fewer full-time faculty members than other programs at their institutions, and early childhood faculty serve more students than do faculty in other programs.



## *Programs of Study*

# 8.

Most of California’s early childhood teacher preparation programs offer courses covering a wide range of topics identified by the field as relevant and important for early educators. Many programs, however, do not require a full course in a variety of topics widely identified as critical to the profession – in particular, the topic of dual language learning and bilingualism, given the increasing number of dual language learners in California’s preschool-age population. Most degree programs require students to complete a field practicum; most certificate programs offer a practicum, but may not require it.

## *Language Supports for Students*

# 9.

Only about one-fourth of the state’s early childhood teacher preparation programs offer language support for students learning English as a second language. The institutions with greater numbers of students having difficulty with English are more likely to offer such support.



## *Challenges*

### **10.**

The major student-related challenges at California's early childhood teacher preparation programs are: competing work or family responsibilities; lack of academic preparation or skill; insufficient funds for financial aid; a shortage of opportunities for fieldwork or practica; and rising demand for courses and supports in languages other than English.

### **11.**

The major faculty-related challenges at these programs are: the difficulty of attracting and retaining a diverse faculty, and the shortage of full-time faculty positions.

### **12.**

The major institutional challenges at these programs are: the inability to serve the number of students who want to enroll; articulation and transfer of credits; and a lack of support for the program from the institution as a whole.

### **13.**

The persistence of low wages in the early care and education field remains the greatest community-related challenge for California's early childhood teacher preparation programs. Changing teacher requirements, and limited numbers of quality early childhood practicum sites, are also significant challenges.

# *Recommendations*

## *Colleges and Universities*

### **1.**

In order to assure the professional preparation of highly qualified early care and education teachers – particularly in light of a possible Preschool For All system for the state’s four-year-olds – we recommend increased resources to California institutions of higher education to:

- Expand lower-division programs in early childhood studies, and increase opportunities for supervised practicum experiences;
- Develop more upper-division and graduate programs in early childhood studies and teacher preparation;
- Hire more full-time early childhood faculty members;
- Develop targeted programs to attract and retain a more culturally and linguistically diverse faculty, paying particular attention to the need for securing upper-division faculty with appropriate expertise and experience related to working with young children;
- Update and revamp the courses of study that higher education programs in early childhood offer, based on new knowledge of the skills and competencies that teachers need to develop in order to work in this field;
- Create opportunities for early childhood faculty to update and renew their knowledge and skill, based on emerging research and changes in the ECE field;
- Serve a diverse and rising early childhood student population, and to preserve and strengthen the cultural and linguistic diversity of the state’s ECE workforce, in order to best serve the state’s diverse population of children and families. This would include a range of academic supports to make higher education more accessible, especially for those who face challenges in pursuing college course work in English (e.g., enhanced career and academic counseling; cohort groups; substitutes; accessible course offerings and practica); and
- Create new incentives to encourage students to pursue degrees in early childhood/child development and to remain in this field.

## *State Policy*

# 2.

In order to secure impetus, resources, and overall direction for statewide systems change in the professional preparation of the early childhood teaching workforce, we recommend a statewide process, such as a Blue Ribbon Committee, with authority to:

- Create a blueprint for a well-articulated higher education and certification system, with greater ease of transfer between community college, upper division and graduate programs;
- Develop a comprehensive set of ECE teacher skills and competencies, based on the latest research knowledge about how young children learn and succeed;
- Design a relevant early childhood teacher certification system;
- Promote improved teacher compensation in early care and education, in order to better attract students to the field and retain them as teachers; and
- Create incentives and guidelines for institutions of higher education across the state to increase their program offerings in early childhood studies.

## *Public Awareness*

# 3.

We recommend a concerted statewide effort to build public awareness of:

- The knowledge and skills required to work effectively with children prior to kindergarten;
- Why advanced levels of education are necessary and appropriate for teachers in the ECE profession; and
- Why compensation must be raised, with the use of public resources, in order to increase teacher retention and continuity in the ECE profession without further burdening families who pay for ECE services.

## Further Research

# 4.

In order to extend our knowledge about the effective preparation of teachers in the field of early childhood education and child development, we recommend:

- A coordinated effort at all early childhood teacher preparation programs to track their current students (e.g., their numbers, their demographic characteristics, and degrees and awards given), as well as their career pathways once they leave programs (e.g., what happens, how long they stay in the field);
- Further research on best practices for producing effective early care and education teachers, including high-quality practicum experiences for early childhood students in appropriate community sites that reflect diverse populations; and
- Further research on best practices for preparing teachers to work effectively with young children who are second language learners.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the mid-twentieth century, California was a national leader in providing high-quality early care and education for young children and in training effective early childhood teachers. While some elements of this legacy can still be seen – for example, in the state’s extensive and accessible community college system – a host of demographic, social and policy changes over the past decades have created the urgent need to revamp and expand the state’s capacity to train a high-quality early education workforce. Expectations are rising for teacher skills and training, and California’s child population is becoming more and more linguistically and culturally diverse. It is

widely agreed that the cornerstone of high-quality early care and education programs is the skill and professional preparation of teachers. Yet public investment in the programs that are charged with preparing such teachers fall far short of how we prepare and support teachers of children in Grades K-12. Now, to assure that the next generation of California’s early educators will be effectively prepared to meet a host of new challenges, our institutions of higher education need assistance in becoming ever-stronger sources of opportunity and leadership for this vital profession.