

*Three ways state boards can elevate the profession and improve outcomes for kids.*

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by Sara Vecchiotti

## Transforming the Early Care and Education Workforce

The field of early care and education (ECE) and state boards of education alike have focused much attention on the quality and effectiveness of ECE programs.<sup>1</sup> Yet state boards ought also to consider the professionals that directly serve or oversee services to young children. Strong programs and strong outcomes depend on well-prepared, competent, appropriately compensated, and supported ECE professionals.

Now is the time to professionalize the ECE workforce, improve preparation and professional learning, and enhance practice. Several state boards have begun this work, exercising policymaking authority when they have it and working collaboratively with state partners and stakeholders, which all boards can do.

### Why Focus on the Workforce?

Lead teachers, teacher assistants, home-based providers, coaches, master teachers, principals, and administrators

comprise the ECE workforce, and all are integral to creating enriching, nurturing learning environments for young children and ensuring high-quality teacher-child interactions.<sup>2</sup> Yet quality varies markedly across programs. The quality of program content, components, supports, and implementation differ, and programs are delivered inconsistently, with practices that fail to reflect recent developmental science.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, early educators have varied competencies, qualifications, compensation, and professional supports, all of which affect program and classroom quality and help achieve positive child outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

The status of the ECE profession reflects the complex, fragmented, disparate ECE system itself. In all 50 states, early educators' educational backgrounds and qualifications differ depending on whether they teach in state prekindergarten, Head Start, or child care, as well as compared with family child care settings.<sup>5</sup>

Further, 35 of 59 state pre-K initiatives require the lead teacher to have a bachelor's degree, 51 require specialized training in pre-K, and 19 require teacher assistants to have a child development associate credential or equivalent.<sup>6</sup>

National Survey of Early Care and Education data reveal overall that education levels were higher for those serving children age 3 through 5 (45 percent with at least a four-year degree) than for those serving younger children (19 percent with at least a four-year degree).<sup>7</sup> These variances are important: Research suggests a link between specialized training in ECE to acquire key competencies and classroom quality and child outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

However, obtaining a degree does not guarantee teacher competence. Teacher preparation programs within institutions of higher education also vary widely in terms of coursework, clinical/field-based preservice practice, and induction supports, as well as whether developmental science informed program design.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, there is room to align definitions of what ECE professionals should know and be able to do in instructing and supporting children's learning with determining standards for what curricula, field experiences, and induction supports adequately prepare student teachers.

A focus on training and knowledge is not enough. Improving compensation and supporting well-being is also essential. ECE professionals are routinely compensated at low-income levels, even for those with high levels of educational attainment. In fact, large percentages of the workforce need public assistance to support their own children and families—34 percent of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and 46 percent of child care workers. Compare this with the 13 percent of elementary and middle school teachers and 53 percent of fast food workers receiving assistance.<sup>10</sup> Economic worry leads to stress and depression, potentially affecting teacher well-being, which in turn can hamper teachers' ability to be supportive of and responsive to children in the classroom.<sup>11</sup>

Well-being also stems from whether professionals feel supported within their work environment, which includes their ability to access supports for professional learning. Professional development that is of high quality, intentional in purpose and design, and focused on effective instructional strategies can improve teacher practice and thereby improve child outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

However, not all ECE professionals have such opportunities for ongoing learning.<sup>13</sup>

Moving toward more unified ECE professional systems—from preparation to competencies to compensation and professional supports—can help reduce the wide variability in program and classroom quality and better support children.

## What Is the Field Doing?

Much is happening in the field of ECE to transform the profession. For example, the Power to the Profession initiative convenes 15 ECE professional and member organizations in a national taskforce to define a shared framework of knowledge and competencies, qualifications, and compensation for all professionals working with children birth through age 8.<sup>14</sup> Currently, five states within the Power to the Profession initiative are engaged in intensive state-based communications and advocacy building work.<sup>15</sup> As a follow-up to the groundbreaking workforce report from the Institute of Medicine/National Research Council (IOM/NRC) in 2015, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has organized implementation teams in several states that are focused on realizing specific recommendations from the report.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the National Governors Association supported six states in development of a policy agenda to strengthen the ECE profession through workforce investments and strategies; another cohort of states is scheduled for 2018.<sup>17</sup> Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) focused efforts on teacher preparation articulation agreements and compensation in several states.<sup>18</sup> The Center for Enhanced Early Learning Outcomes and the BUILD Initiative sponsored roundtables that convened states on instruction tools, credentialing, and implementing IOM/NRC recommendations.<sup>19</sup> The Foundation for Child Development has supported the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the National League of Cities, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to help several states and cities focus on ECE workforce issues.<sup>20</sup>

## What Can State Boards Do?

There are several ways state boards can exercise their policymaking authority and their roles as advocates and consensus builders to

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strengthen the ECE workforce. Boards have varied roles in this domain: setting requirements for core early learning standards, advancing workforce credentialing and preparation, and improving professional development opportunities. Across the country, 16 state boards have authority over standards, 32 have authority over preK-12 teacher licensure, and 28 have sole authority over teacher preparation programs.<sup>21</sup>

All boards have the power to transform the workforce. Table 1 shows how board authorities align with the recommendations of the IOM/NRC report and three key goals: professionalize the field, improve preparation and professional learning, and enhance practice.

**Goal 1: Professionalize the Field.** The 32 state boards with authority over preK-12 teacher licensure can set core competencies for early learning educators as the basis for certification and licensing, thereby strengthening competency-based qualifications.<sup>22</sup> Rather than starting from scratch, states can benefit from the ongoing efforts of the Power to the Professions taskforce, which is working toward defining these competencies.<sup>23</sup>

In rethinking competencies, state boards should ask these questions: Do current qualification and certification requirements align with what teachers and principals should know and be able to do to support children's learning? Are the required competencies informed by child developmental science? Are they informed by what the field and ECE profession see as needed competencies? Are the ECE administrator and principal leaders who are included in planning representative of mixed-delivery systems? Boards can work to answer such questions, and in conjunction with other state agencies, can examine qualifications and adopt competencies for professionals across the birth to age 8 continuum.

The IOM/NRC report provides a starting point for establishing core knowledge and competencies.<sup>24</sup> For example, it suggests that all ECE professionals should know how children develop and learn across the developmental domains (cognitive, socioemotional, etc.), and they should know how the areas of development interact to promote children's learning and further development. Armed with such

knowledge, early educators can create goal- and objective-based learning opportunities and use a portfolio of instructional strategies to support individual learning trajectories.

**Goal 2: Improve Preparation and Professional Learning.** Another relevant area of board authority relates to establishing standards for accreditation of preparation programs for teachers and administrators, and such standards should align with the competencies required for teacher certification and licensure. Through such accreditation, state boards can influence how early educators are prepared and align preparation standards with core competencies.

Questions to consider in rethinking standards for teacher preparation: Are teacher education programs adequately preparing students to meet the demands of ECE settings? Are programs preparing administrators and principal leaders who are well versed in ECE? Is content, curriculum, and pedagogy aligned with the required competencies? Are efforts focused on recruiting and retaining a diverse ECE student population? Are programs effectively providing preservice clinical, field-based practical experiences and supporting graduates in their first years of teaching? Do institutions of higher education have articulation agreements supportive of a career ladder?<sup>25</sup>

**Goal 3: Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice.** State boards have a significant role, alongside their education agencies, in planning and implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and administering federal assistance programs, as well as developing rules and regulations for the administration of state programs, including state pre-K.

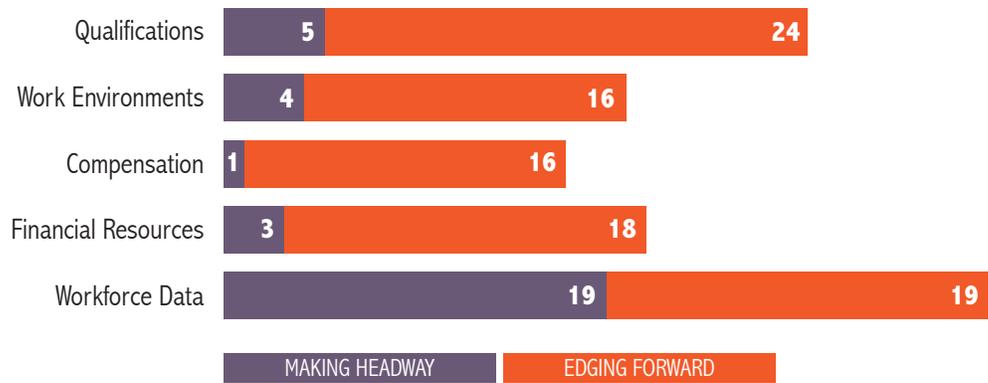
Questions to consider: Does the state have an overall vision and plan for ECE? How can a state use ESSA to strengthen the ECE workforce and coordinate it with other state plans and efforts? How can opportunities for professional learning and collaboration within ESSA be used to improve the quality of ECE practice? Are early educators and kindergarten and elementary school teachers themselves compensated at a level equivalent to that of secondary educators? Boards can help direct ESSA implementation

**Table 1. ECE Workforce Recommendations, Goals, and Board Authorities**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Authority</b>
1. Strengthen competency-based qualification requirements for all care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
2. Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
3. Strengthen practice-based qualification requirements for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
4. Build an interdisciplinary foundation in higher education for child development.	Improve Preparation & Professional Learning	Accreditation of preparation programs
5. Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	Improve Preparation & Professional Learning	Accreditation of preparation programs
6. Support the consistent quality and coherence of professional learning supports during ongoing practice for professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice	Professional Development Systems & ESSA implementation
7. Develop a new paradigm for evaluation and assessment of professional practice for those who work with children from birth through age 8.	Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice	Professional Development Systems & ESSA implementation
8. Ensure that policies and standards for care and education leaders encompass the foundational knowledge and competencies needed to support high-quality practices for child development and early learning.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
9. Strengthen collaboration and communication among professionals and systems within the care and education sector and with closely related sectors, especially health and social services.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
10. Support workforce development with coherent funding, oversight, and policies.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
11. Collaboratively develop and periodically update coherent guidance that is foundational across roles and settings for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
12. Support comprehensive state- and local-level efforts to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
13. Build a better knowledge base to inform workforce development and professional learning services and systems.	All Three Goals	All Authorities

Source: Institute of Medicine/National Research Council, "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age Eight: A Unifying Foundation," 2015.

**Figure 1. State Progress in Early Workforce Policies**



Source: Marcy Whitebook et al., “Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016” (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California, 2016).

toward a focus on the ECE workforce and provide opportunities for gaining the following:

- sustained, embedded, data-driven professional development for ECE teachers and leaders (Titles I, II);
- specialized knowledge in professional development for curricula, literacy, assessment, family engagement, school readiness, dual language learners (Titles I, II);
- staff coaching by experienced teachers, principals, and faculty through higher education partnerships (Title II);
- induction programs and ongoing evaluation for administrators and teachers in preK-3 (Titles I, II);
- residency programs for teachers, principals, and other school leaders (Title II).

ESSA implementation also gives boards opportunities to support recruitment, hiring, and selection of promising, diverse, effective ECE educators (Title II). Boards can also work through ESSA implementation and in their advocacy role to ensure appropriate compensation. Establishing parity for teachers in community-based organizations with public school counterparts for Title I preschool programs and state pre-K is an important first step.

### Four State Boards Make a Start

Much work remains to develop supportive ECE workforce policies at the state level (figure

1). To support state efforts, the Foundation for Child Development provided funding to NASBE to work with four state boards that committed to focus on the ECE workforce by rethinking early educator competencies and certification, preparation programs, career pathways and professional development, and evaluation. Below is a brief description of the work occurring in each state:

- The Iowa State Board of Education is working with its department of education to define early learning standards for every K-3 classroom and strengthen policies to support Iowa’s ECE workforce. Part of the work includes developing knowledge and skills-based competencies and providing professional learning for K-3 educators that aligns with early learning standards.
- Michigan’s state board is developing a strategic framework for an infrastructure to support a qualified ECE workforce serving children birth through age 8. The work involves integrating personnel development systems across the ECE workforce; aligning career pathways to core knowledge and competencies; examining licensure programs, standards, tests, and grade bands; determining professional learning opportunities; and proposing policy recommendations to support the ECE workforce.
- Nebraska’s state board is reviewing requirements for ECE leaders and expanding professional development opportunities (e.g., online

training) for teachers, principals, and other administrators with responsibilities for educating children from birth through third grade.

- The New York State Board of Regents established a Blue Ribbon Committee on Early Learning to help launch a unified, competency-based early educator preparation program that addresses the diverse needs of children in their early years and a professional development system for the ECE workforce.

While the state boards are working individually, they will also collaborate in other ECE workforce efforts that the National League of Cities and NAEYC are leading. Such joint work and peer-to-peer learning is expected to link and leverage varying levels of government systems (state boards of education and municipal leaders) and professional associations (state/local NAEYC affiliates) to create a more effective, inclusive policymaking approach.

## Conclusion

There is ample opportunity for state boards to improve outcomes for children by strengthening the early care and education workforce and thereby improving the quality of early care and education. Ensuring that ECE professionals have the knowledge, supports, and resources they need to support children's learning is one avenue to improving the quality of teacher-child interactions and of children's learning environments.

Children will not receive benefits from early care and education unless ECE professionals are adequately prepared, competent, supported, and well compensated. By enhancing the ECE workforce, state boards can ensure that all children have a chance to receive a high-quality early education. Unless states focus on the ECE workforce, the extant context of fragmented, inconsistent ECE systems and varying ECE program quality will continue. Moreover, children will continue to miss opportunities for equitable, high-quality ECE experiences that can help them reach their full potential. ■

<sup>1</sup>E. S. Peisner-Feinberg et al., "The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go to School: Technical Report" (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, 2000); W. T. Gormley et al., "The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development," *Developmental Psychology* 41, no. 6 (2005), 72–84; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for

Children and Families, Head Start Impact Study, Final Report (Washington, DC, January 2010); Yoshikawa et al., "Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education" (New York and Washington: Foundation for Child Development and Society for Research in Child Development, October 2013); Deborah A. Phillips et al., "The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution and the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy, April 20, 2017).

<sup>2</sup>In 2015, the Institute of Medicine/National Research Council (IOM/NRC) released "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age Eight: A Unifying Foundation." The consensus report stemmed from multidisciplinary, independent, objective, and nonpartisan expert committees that provided thorough issue reviews and evidence-based recommendations. The IOM/NRC report highlighted the importance of the ECE workforce for program quality and positive outcomes for young children. See also Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2000); B. K. Hamre, "Teachers' Daily Interactions with Children: An Essential Ingredient in Effective Early Childhood Programs," *Child Development Perspectives* 8, no. 4 (2014): 223–30; Diane Early et al., "Teachers' Education, Classroom Quality, and Young Children's Academic Skills: Results from Seven Studies of Preschool Programs," *Child Development* 78, no. 2 (2007): 558–80.

<sup>3</sup>Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, "From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families" (Boston, MA, 2016); Phillips et al., "Current State of Scientific Knowledge."

<sup>4</sup>Center of Developing Child, "From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts"; Ajay Chaudry, "The Promise of Preschool Education: Challenges for Policy and Governance" in Phillips et al., "Current State of Scientific Knowledge," 75–84.

<sup>5</sup>Marcy Whitebook et al., "Early Childhood Workforce Index—2016" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2016).

<sup>6</sup>National Institute for Early Education Research, "The State of Preschool 2016: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2017).

<sup>7</sup>National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, "Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings, National Survey of Early Care and Education," *OPRE Report #2013-38* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

<sup>8</sup>IOM/NRC, "Transforming the Workforce"; M. Bueno, et al. "A Matter of Degrees: Preparing Teachers for the Pre-K Classroom" (Washington, DC: Pew Center on the States, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>IOM/NRC, "Transforming the Workforce"; Marcy Whitebook, "By Default or by Design? Variations in Higher Education Programs for Early Care and Teachers and Their Implications for Research Methodology, Policy, and Practice" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2012); Marcy Whitebook and Lea J. E. Austin, "Early Childhood Higher Education: Taking Stock across the States" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2015).

<sup>10</sup>Whitebook et al., "Early Childhood Workforce Index."

<sup>11</sup>E. J. De Schipper et al., "Cortisol Levels of Caregivers in Child Care Centers as Related to the Quality of Their Caregiving," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 24, no. 1

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(2009): 55–63; Lieny Jeon, et al., “Pathways from Teacher Depression and Child Care Quality to Child Behavioral Problems,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 82, (2014): 225–35; R.C. Whitaker et al., “Workplace Stress and the Quality of Teacher–Children Relationships in Head Start,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 30 (2015): 57–69.

<sup>12</sup>Ruben Fukkink and Anna Lont, “Does Training Matter? A Meta-Analysis and Review of Caregiver Training Studies,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2007):

294–311; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, “Toward the Identification of Features of Effective Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators, Literature Review” (Washington, D.C., 2010).

<sup>13</sup>IOM/NRC, “Transforming the Workforce”; McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, “Quality Standards Drive Professional Development Opportunities” (Wheeling, IL: National Louis University, 2016).

<sup>14</sup>The program is described here: <http://www.naeyc.org/profession/overview>.

<sup>15</sup>The states participating are Indiana, Iowa, New Mexico, New York, and Wisconsin.

<sup>16</sup>IOM/NRC, “Transforming the Workforce.” The project is described at <http://www.nas.edu/i2I>. The states participating are California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Virginia, and Washington, and the region of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia is also participating.

<sup>17</sup>Governors in the following states participated: Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Utah, and Washington.

<sup>18</sup>States participating in these efforts are Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. In addition, T.E.A.C.H is also active in Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.

<sup>19</sup>The states that participated are California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington.

<sup>20</sup>The states participating include Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, and New York. The cities participating include Hartford, Connecticut; Jacksonville, Florida; Kansas City, Missouri; and Richmond, Virginia. Rochester, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle serve as advisor cities.

<sup>21</sup>Winona Hao, “Advancing the Early Learning Workforce through State Policies,” *Policy Update* 23, no. 25 (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 2016); email communication from Winona Hao, September 22, 2017.

<sup>22</sup>See IOM/NRC recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 8.

<sup>23</sup>The four states in NASBE’s early learning group will be considering these competencies as part of their efforts.

<sup>24</sup>IOM/NRC, “Transforming the Workforce,” p. 496–501.

<sup>25</sup>Table 1 shows state boards could be instrumental in implementing IOM/NRC recommendations 4 and 5 regarding preparation and high-quality practice.



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funds can be used to assist pre-K students in the transition from early childhood education programs to elementary school programs. Title I plans must include a description of how local

education agencies will “support, coordinate, and integrate” Head Start services to enable smooth transitions between Head Start and elementary school programs. ESSA requires that districts reach agreements with Head Start programs and other early education programs. These agreements should include plans to organize joint transition-related training between child care providers and kindergarten teachers and specific instructions regarding the transfer of student records.

**2. Provide tools and guidance to assist in local planning of transition activities.** While it is important to preserve local flexibility when it comes to decision making, states have a role to play in establishing best practices around the transition process. Resources such as West Virginia’s Ready, Set, Go! School Readiness Framework and the Colorado Department of Education’s catalog of training videos are good examples of how states can provide tools that can be easily modified for a local setting.

**3. Consider establishing a grant program to encourage districts to prioritize transitions.** A grant program can be an effective means of allowing for local flexibility and innovation while still allowing for state guidelines around the most effective use of funds. States can use a grant program similar to Oregon’s KRPI program to encourage districts to make the kindergarten transition process a priority. Grants can be structured to incentivize research-informed transition activities, such as joint planning, data sharing, and professional learning opportunities.

**4. Bring child care center directors and principals together to improve transitions and alignment between early learning and elementary school settings.** Bringing center directors and principals together to discuss transition practices, share data, and coordinate standards, curricula, and assessments is an effective method for breaking down barriers that have traditionally hindered a smooth transition between early education settings and elementary schools. The opportunity for principals and directors to connect also makes it more likely that principals will begin building relationships with students and families prior to kindergarten entry. ■

<sup>1</sup>Amy B. Schulting, Patrick S. Malone, and Kenneth A. Dodge, “The Effect of School-Based Kindergarten Transition