

The Child Care Workforce

Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) members operate thousands of licensed child care centers, making ECEC the voice for tens of thousands of child care teachers and directors. These practitioners are among the experts in early care and learning, and they make an enormous difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of children every day.

Research indicates a direct relation between the early childhood-specific training of the caregiver and the quality of care. However, resources to support and programs to provide training and education in the early childhood field are limited.

With more than 2.3 million individuals working in child care and early education across the country, from family child care providers to classroom aides and teachers, issues affecting the workforce are many and often complex.

There is a crisis in the early childhood workforce and it is time for a national dialogue to address:

- Appropriate qualifications
- Pathways to advancement
- Recruitment and retention

Staff Qualifications and Pre-Service Requirements

Expectations concerning the qualifications of the early childhood workforce are in flux. While a consensus in research is elusive, many – but not all – supporters of state-funded preK programs have embraced the B.A. requirement for teachers as a proxy for quality or as a mechanism to attain parity with K-12 teacher salaries. Others promote intentional, sequential training and certification. Pre-service requirements for all who work with young children are critical for the health and safety of the children in care. Rigorous background checks, training and education that includes child development issues are required by ECEC members, and should be available throughout the field.

But programs must also comply with staff-child ratio requirements and that means a new employee may be needed right away in the classroom. And, training and education programs must be available and accessible to individuals who work full-time and need a way to pay for tuition. Requirements cannot overlook the labor market dynamics that condition realities for the early childhood workforce. At the current level of public and private investment, wage levels remain relatively low, making training and education costs a serious challenge. So workforce reforms, however attractive their promise, cannot precede resources.

The highest levels of education are important goals, but there are many steps that need to be put in place along the way. Mentoring and training are critical components, as is an underlying commitment to working with young children and their unique developmental needs. Regardless of the required qualification, what matters most is teacher effectiveness, the interaction between the adult and the child in the classroom.

What Our Members Say About Finding the Right Teacher

"The more states come up with requirements that look good on paper, the harder it is to find good people."

To meet increasing requirements and qualifications:

- States and the early childhood field need time for implementation – a minimum of 5 years to plan and prepare for a higher benchmark.
- States should phase in a pre-service requirement if a teacher is able to team up with a teacher already qualified.
- States need additional resources to expand the availability of, and increase access to, community colleges and universities offering coursework and degrees in early childhood education.
- Teachers and program providers need resources to support release time, tuition and fees, and other costs of training and education.

Multiple Pathways to Advancement

There are many pathways to advancement of the workforce. ECEC members, like the larger child care community, participate in training provided by child care resource and referral agencies, statewide organizations, community colleges and other institutions of higher education. Many ECEC members provide their own research-based training program for staff free of charge. Some ECEC members even provide college tuition as an employment benefit. The structure and implementation can be a model for states in designing true systems for professional development.

What Our Members Say About Meaningful Career Paths

"Early childhood educators should have a legitimate participatory role in their own career development."

The child care workforce needs:

- Opportunities for training and education that are meaningful, relevant and on a professional pathway, not a complicated patchwork.
- Access to training and education locally, or even online, through community-based training and institutions of higher education.
- Funding supports to access training and educational opportunities.
- Incentives and awards for educational achievements.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention are critical issues for the early childhood workforce.

Low wages, challenging work, and limited career advancement can make it a difficult job to keep. Every day, this field loses qualified people to jobs that pay more and reward more.

At current levels of private and public investment, resources are insufficient to reward the workforce at significantly higher levels.

One of the biggest challenges reported by ECEC members is finding qualified, effective, and committed individuals who want to work with young children at prevailing levels of pay in this field. There is great concern about meeting the current demand for employees, as well as how to recruit the workforce of the future.

The child care workforce needs:

- Increased private and public funding sufficient to support higher levels of compensation and benefits.
- Mentoring programs, a support network that encourages them to stay in the field.
- Opportunities for advancement in the field.

What Our Members Say About Recruitment and Retention

"Our workforce is in a gross crisis, and our field is behaving as if we are not."

