

January 2021



Broader, Deeper, Fairer:

Five Strategies to Radically Expand
the Talent Pool in Early Education

Cody Kornack
National Head Start Association

Ashley LiBetti
Bellwether Education Partners



The **National Head Start Association** is a not-for-profit organization committed to the belief that every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, has the ability to succeed in school and in life. The opportunities offered by Head Start lead to healthier, empowered children and families, and stronger, more vibrant communities. NHTA is the voice for more than one million children, 270,000 staff, and 1,600 Head Start grantees in the United States. Visit www.nhsa.org and follow @NatlHeadStart for more information.



The **HeadStarter Network** is a non-profit organization created to provide a nimble, interdisciplinary, and forward-looking engine for driving innovation in early childhood development and education. We constantly seek to apply best practices and innovations from technology, business, and academia to shape new models of early childhood education.



Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. We do this by helping education organizations accelerate their impact and by working to improve policy and practice. Bellwether envisions a world in which race, ethnicity, and income no longer predict opportunities for students, and the American education system affords all individuals the ability to determine their own path and lead a productive and fulfilling life.



We wish to express our thanks to the **PNC Foundation** for its ongoing support of innovation, creative thinking, and collaboration to advance the field of early childhood development and education through its signature philanthropic initiative, PNC Grow Up Great®. The PNC Foundation's long standing support of interdisciplinary efforts, like the one that produced this report, help facilitate an exchange of knowledge among a diverse array of experts from both within and external to early childhood education. It is our fervent hope that the creative ideas and recommendations contained in this report will lead to meaningful change in practice that furthers our shared goal of advancing high quality early childhood education. Thank you, PNC Foundation, for your generous support.

Buffett Early Childhood Fund

investing in the early years



The Irene E. & George A.
Davis Foundation

Editorial and Production Support

Megan Hustad, editor

Tommy Sheridan

Rachel Hutchison, project manager

Tim Oppenheim

Caitlyn Maltese, designer

Yasmina Vinci

Susannah Agi, designer

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to the experts from across the country who contributed their time to informing this work. Specifically, a sincere thank you to those who participated in the Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst, advised the creation of that event, and provided expert insights throughout this process.

Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst Advisors

Ashley Beckner, Imaginable Futures

Ashley LiBetti, Bellwether Education Partners

Bill Potapchuk, Community Building Institute

Carol Brunson Day

Gladys Haynes, Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Isabelle Hau, Imaginable Futures

Lenny Lind, Covision Design LLC

Sharon Yandian, Office of Head Start

Interviewees

We are particularly grateful to the following people whose insights and expertise informed the recommendations in this paper.

Gail Joseph, EarlyEdU Alliance (Rethink Degree Attainment)

Dr. Calvin Moore, Jr., Council for Professional Recognition (Redefine Credentials)

Pamm Shaw, YMCA of East Bay (Optimizing Practice-Based Training)

Randi Wolfe, Tikkun Consulting (Optimizing Practice-Based Training)

Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst Participants

Amanda Atkinson, Public Health Management Corporation

Angel Royal, American Association of Community Colleges

Binal Patel, Neighborhood Villages

Brenda Eiland Williford, Start Early

Brent Maddin, Arizona State University

Calvin Moore Jr., Council for Professional Recognition

Carolyn Lyons, Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Chaka Booker, The Broad Center

Cynthia D. Jackson, Educare Learning Network

Damon Carson, Neighborhood House Association

Dianna Wallace, Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children

Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Office of Head Start

Ellen Galinsky, Bezos Family Foundation

Gail Joseph, EarlyEdU Alliance

Gladys Haynes, Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Ireta Gasner, Start Early

Jeremy Owens, Southern New Hampshire University

Jessica Rothenberg-Aalamim, CellEd

Jillian Herink, Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children

Joan Lombardi, Early Opportunities LLC

John Pruette, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Julie Paden, PNC Foundation

Karissa Coltman Burnett, TulsaCap

Kimberly Merritt, Arizona State University

Liz Marino, Duet

Marquita Davis, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Mary Walachy, Davis Foundation

Matthew Capps, Midwestern State University

Maureen Weber, Early Learning Indiana

Melissa Brodowski, Office of Early Childhood Development

Nikki Burnett, Educare

Pamm Shaw, YMCA of the East Bay

Rachel Robertson, Bright Horizons

Rebecca Butler, Columbus State Community College

Ron Herndon, Albina Head Start

Sam Hall, Boulder Journey Schools

Shelley Metzenbaum, The BETTER Project

Susie Billingsly, Bright Horizons

Teresa Collins, District 1199C Training & Upgrading

Teri Talan, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

Yichen Feng, Lumos Capital Group

Table of Contents

Click on each title below to jump directly to the corresponding section.

<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	1
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	2
EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE PREPARATION: <u>Current Landscape and Key Challenges</u>	4
STRATEGY 1: <u>Redefine Credentials</u>	6
STRATEGY 2: <u>Rethink Degree Attainment</u>	9
STRATEGY 3: <u>Optimize Practice-Based Training</u>	12
STRATEGY 4: <u>Expand Job-Embedded Coaching</u>	14
STRATEGY 5: <u>Connect In-Service Preparation to Career Advancement</u>	16
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	18

Executive Summary

Our country faces a confluence of crises: a raging pandemic, economic destabilization, and a long-coming public reckoning with systemic and historic racism. The early childhood workforce is a linchpin to creating a stronger future as our country recovers from these crises, but they are often under-prepared and under-supported. Building on ideas from the Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst, the HeadStarter Network, Bellwether Education Partners, and the National Head Start Association explore in this report how early childhood educator preparation could be improved for the educators themselves, as well as for the children and families they serve. A critical question for decision-makers across sectors will be: “Who all is going to teach the next generation of learners, and how can we ensure they are prepared and supported in their work?”

The strategies outlined here reflect the unique opportunity we have, born out of the pandemic, to capitalize on society’s newfound acknowledgement of the importance of early childhood education. Simultaneously, the national conversation on race empowers early childhood stakeholders to rethink the ways in which 1) preparation and professional advancement can lead with equity, and 2) how a profession that is disproportionately women of color can be valued and compensated for the foundational work they do.

THE FIVE STRATEGIES EXPLORED IN THIS PAPER:

1. Redefine Credentials

- Develop a single national repository for all Child Development Associate credential (CDA) training options, including pass rates, credit articulation, and information on standardized indicators of quality
- Create a second national credential that layers onto the current CDA and indicates that educators have an increased level of understanding across key subject areas and is held in equal esteem to a four-year degree

2. Rethink Degree Attainment

- Create an online “super university” tailor-made for early childhood, combining a number of key elements that currently only exist independently of one another

3. Optimize Practice-Based Training

- Elevate the role of apprenticeships as an entry point into the early childhood profession
- Establish additional opportunities to expand practice-based training

4. Expand Job-Embedded Coaching

- Increase opportunities for “credit-bearing” coaching, i.e., formalize opportunities to receive credit for on-the-job professional development

5. Connect In-Service Preparation to Career Advancement

- Create new opportunities for early educators to advance in their careers while remaining in the classroom
- Explore ways to formally recognize and compensate early educators for successfully completing certain types of in-service professional learning

While this year has tested the early childhood sector, it has also revealed to decision-makers and other stakeholders a necessary path forward—one that leverages the early childhood workforce as a catalyst for positive change. Current events present an unmissable opportunity to reevaluate the status quo and reimagine what could be.

Introduction

Early childhood providers supply indispensable services, from early intervention to social-emotional skill-building to school readiness, that proved essential in helping children and families get through this tumultuous time. In addition, some programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, support the social determinants of health in families, and health is critical to children's ability to learn. However, the predominant narrative sweepingly frames ECE as "child care"—a place for children to go so that their caregivers can return to work—which effectively stifles a crucial conversation about a high-quality early childhood system and the workforce that upholds it.

Not only can early childhood play a critical role in helping the country recover from the crises that have plagued 2020, but the early childhood sector can be the foundation upon which we rebuild by creating stable jobs, supporting families in achieving financial stability, pursuing equity, and supporting the development of our youngest learners. Regardless of how, or if, our nation's leaders use this opportunity, one thing is certain: the effectiveness of the entire system hinges on the success of our early educators. Without early educators, there are no early childhood providers. Without *effective* early educators, there are no high-quality early childhood providers.

High-quality preparation and ongoing training are crucial to being an effective early educator. As it exists now, however, preparation often fails early educators. Early educators are left stranded to figure out on their own how to effectively work with children, without the resources or support to do so. To ensure all children—particularly the country's most vulnerable children—are served well, early educator preparation must be improved.

In summer 2020, the Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst, hosted by the HeadStarter Network, in collaboration with Bellwether Education Partners, Community Building Institute, and Covision Design, convened dozens of forward-thinking early childhood researchers, early childhood workforce educators, practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists to spark new ideas for improving early educator preparation. Participants came to the event knowing that conversations about early educator preparation can fall into familiar patterns; together, this group leveraged those existing ideas to build something new. Among the questions they wrestled with: *What would it take to retool early educator preparation to be excellent, accessible, and directly connected to educators' practice? What would it look like to start with intentionality around diversity, equity, and inclusion to actively attract people who are underrepresented in the field—and ensure they are included from the beginning?*

THE FIVE STRATEGIES EXPLORED IN THIS PAPER:

Conversations from the Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst generated five promising strategies to an effective educator preparation system. Each of these strategies offers policymakers, practitioners, and the early childhood community a potential path forward:

1. **Redefine Credentials**

Create a Child Development Professional credential, a new, nationally recognized lead teacher credential tailored to early educator competencies

2. **Rethink Degree Attainment**

Partner with an existing four-year regionally accredited institution of higher education to build an online degree program that provides early educators with the necessary content, training, and wraparound supports

3. **Optimize Practice-Based Training**

Strategically build on and expand early childhood apprenticeships

4. **Expand Job-Embedded Coaching**

Develop a credit-bearing coaching model

5. **Connect In-Service Preparation to Career Advancement**

Design career advancement opportunities that increase early educators' effectiveness and that early educators can pursue while remaining in the classroom

Each strategy is covered in a section of this paper, and each section consists of four components:

- Background of the strategy and how it drives effective preparation, across industries and in education
- Detailed analysis of one promising strategy
- Recommendations for moving a promising strategy forward
- Example of a comparable strategy in practice

Introduction

It is crucial to note that these strategies are worth exploring, but they must be considered in the context of evolving circumstances and be responsive to pressing needs. Rather than these strategies serving as guidance of what *should be done* to improve early educator preparation, they offer strategies for what *could be done*.

Implementing the promising strategies highlighted here is at once exceptionally simple and frustratingly complex. Improving early educator preparation is not just about disrupting the current system, but it is a function of designing new strategies and improving existing strategies, then implementing them with fidelity at scale. Indeed, certain components of the strategies highlighted here may already exist at a local or regional level, but have yet to proliferate systematically, let alone become part of the field's institutional knowledge.

To truly improve educator preparation, these strategies are intended to be pursued simultaneously and designed to reinforce, not compete with, one another. And finally, these strategies are grounded in principles. Specifically, this work assumes that, in order to be successful, any strategy to improve early educator preparation must follow the following principles.

Essential Principles for Implementation



CHAMPION EQUITY. All future efforts to improve early educator preparation must not negatively affect minority populations, be mindful of potential unintended consequences, and support the advancement of Black, Indigenous, and people of color. A commitment to pursue equity will be bolstered by the other principles below, including co-creation; designing entry points to the profession that credit experience; and increasing access to affordable, high-quality preparation.



INVOLVE EDUCATORS. Early childhood educators must be part of the development of new educator preparation models, from recruitment to design to implementation and onwards. Ensuring that early childhood educators are central to this process increases the odds of arriving at solutions that are fully compatible with what early educators need to succeed.



PAY FAIRLY. New solutions must not compel those pursuing in-service professional learning to pause or forego pay for training. Veteran educators should not lose ground or wages as they build new competencies; similarly, new educators and paraprofessionals should be compensated for their work from the start.



CREDIT EXPERIENCE. Any entry point to an equitable system of early childhood educator preparation should include a “show what you know” for credit element. When existing competencies are overlooked or disregarded, experienced professionals spend time and money on programs that stand to have little-to-no impact on their teaching practices.



BE HUMAN. Preparation programs need to account for participants' real-life circumstances. That may mean considering participants' child care needs, optimizing flexible classes and ways to participate, and making financial support accessible.

Early Educator Preparation:

Current Landscape and Key Challenges



As our country embarks on economic recovery, the early childhood sector presents the single greatest lever for positive change on a societal level, for both the early childhood workforce and for children. Working parents and caregivers—including those who are out of work, working fewer hours, or in modified schedules currently due to COVID-19 health risks—depend on care for their children in order to participate in the workforce. The vast majority of these children are cared for in K-12 public schools; however, parents and caregivers are not better positioned to return to work if their elementary-aged child is at school but their preschooler is at home. Economic recovery depends on the participation of parents in the workforce at scale, and economic recovery for individuals with young children depends on early childhood education. What's more, “the share of parents of children under age 5 who are working or looking for work has remained steady, between 77 and 79 percent, since the late 1990s.”¹ A huge slice of the population needs high-quality ECE in order to maximally contribute to economic recovery for their families and society.

Interactions with effective early educators, particularly those who create caring environments with rich cognitive stimulation, improve children's academic and social outcomes.² To be effective, educators must know what to teach but also how to teach. They must individualize their teaching, which requires an internalized understanding of the science of how young children grow cognitively, social emotionally, and physically, and they must be able to deploy that knowledge in real time, tailored to individual children's strengths and needs.³

In theory, preparation equips educators to teach learners from diverse backgrounds and abilities. The type of preparation they complete varies, as does the sequence in which they complete it. Ideally, the work to improve their practice would not end upon entering the classroom but continue throughout their careers. For the purposes of this work, we define three consistent types of early childhood workforce preparation.

THREE TYPES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE PREPARATION

Formal Coursework	Formal coursework is credit-bearing and housed within an institution of higher education, as part of a degree-granting program. Formal coursework content often includes theory of child development and learning, subject-specific concepts, and methods of teaching and pedagogy. Prospective educators enroll in these programs as part of their pre-service preparation. Current educators do so as part of their in-service professional learning, as a way to improve their practice, and/or to obtain a degree.
Practice-Based Training	Practice-based training—also called student teaching, clinical practice, or field experience—is again most often completed by both prospective and current early educators as part of degree-granting programs, alongside formal coursework. In practice-based training, educators learn under a mentor teacher in an early childhood classroom. Ideally, this takes place in the type of setting educators currently or will teach in, as well as with specific populations of children, such as children with disabilities or dual-language learners. In theory, practice-based training gives early educators the opportunity to immediately apply lessons from their formal coursework to the classroom.
In-Service Professional Learning	In-service professional learning builds educators' skills after they enter the classroom. It consists of a range of activities, including coaching and mentoring, workshops and trainings, conferences, and professional learning communities. External partners or program staff, such as center directors, instructional coaches, or educators with specialized skills or areas of expertise, may deliver in-service professional learning. Formal coursework or practice-based training in the pursuit of upskilling or degree or certificate attainment can also be considered in-service professional learning.

These components are leveraged to improve early educator preparation, on their own and when combined with other approaches. Degree-granting programs and approaches like the Child Development Associate (CDA), certification programs, badges, micro-credentials, and apprenticeships integrate these distinct components of preparation to varying degrees in different configurations.

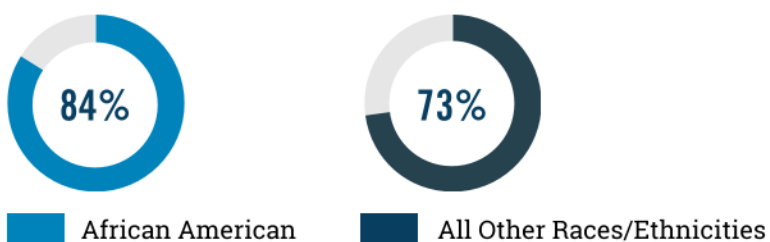
Yet all of these approaches to preparation face challenges with quality, access, and connection to practice. These challenges are most pronounced in degree-granting programs. There is no fieldwide consensus on what constitutes a high-quality degree-granting early childhood program, let alone how best to implement those standards in formal coursework or practice-based training. Research also raises questions about whether degree attainment truly improves educators' practice. Further, current early educators struggle to access and complete degree-granting programs for purely logistical reasons—prohibitively high tuition costs; classes scheduled during the work day, located far from their center of employment, or only offered in English; and inability to meet practice-based training requirements in the ECE center in which they work. The status quo of early educator preparation is particularly problematic given early educators are increasingly encouraged—if not required—to obtain bachelor's degrees (see Sidebar: Bachelor's Degrees in Early Childhood).

At the same time, these challenges are not absent from other types of preparation, which is discussed in greater detail below. Coaching, for example, is a promising form of in-service professional learning, but varies in quality across providers.

Other challenges revolve around recognition and inclusion. Educators are rarely formally recognized or compensated for participating in development opportunities that improve their work with children, while existing early childhood credentials lack focus on working with children from diverse backgrounds.

To be clear, the current preparation landscape is not monolithic. Broad swaths of the preparation ecosystem go against the status quo. And preparation is worth pursuing: it is the primary vehicle educators use to improve their work with children. At the same time, without dramatic change, early educator preparation will continue to fail to meet the complex needs of educators and children.

CENTER-BASED EDUCATORS EARNING LESS THAN \$15 AN HOUR, BY RACE/ETHNICITY⁶



Diversity in the Early Childhood Workforce

Work to reimagine early childhood workforce preparation must begin with the understanding that 40 percent of the workforce consists of women of color who are underpaid. This critical part of our workforce not only earns less in comparable positions when educational attainment is controlled for, but disproportionately holds lower-ranked, lower-paid jobs.⁶ Further, most means of increasing in position and compensation rely on institutions of higher education which present barriers to access, as well a predisposition toward a status quo born out of a history of racism that persists today.

The well-documented systemic inequities that exist in the early childhood workforce are harmful not only to the goals of professional advancement but also to our children. Even as the United States diversifies faster than researchers had predicted, children of Black, Indigenous, and people of color face systemic disparities. However, regarding children's relationship to their early childhood educators, the science is clear: learning from educators whom children can see themselves in cannot be overstated.⁷

Ensuring that educator preparation supports diversity and the advancement of Black, Indigenous, and people of color is critical to advancing equity among educators, children, the profession, and society as a whole.

Bachelor's Degrees in Early Childhood

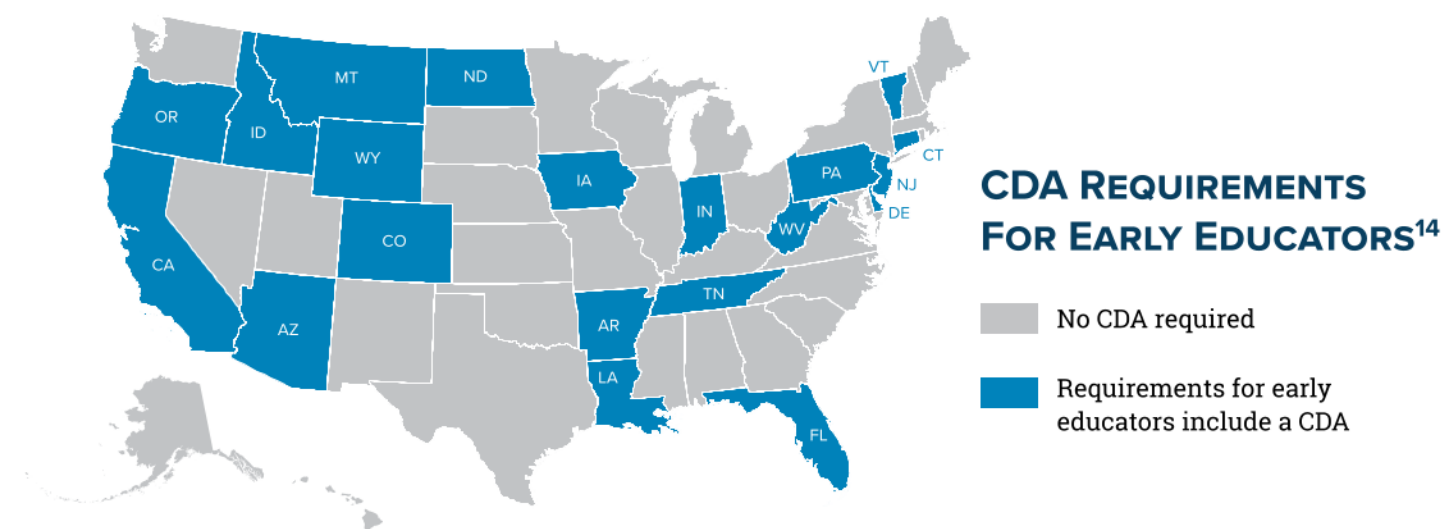
Over the past 20 years, policymakers have increased degree requirements for early educators, trending towards bachelor's degrees as the expectation for lead teachers. Research from the 1990s and 2000s suggested that early educators with bachelor's degrees were more effective than those with a high school diploma. However, more recent research raises questions about bachelor's degrees and educator effectiveness. There is also evidence suggesting that, because of inequitable access to degree-granting programs, requiring bachelor's degrees reduces the diversity of the workforce—a disservice to educators and children in programs.⁴

The contours and details of the debate surrounding early educator qualification requirements have been covered in depth elsewhere and will not be discussed further here.⁵ By design, this analysis does not take a position in the bachelor's degree debate. Instead, the authors' read of the research is that early educators should have some form of high-quality postsecondary training, but that no specific credential or degree guarantees an educator will be effective in the classroom. At the same time, this paper does not exclude pathways to bachelor's degrees as strategies for moving forward.

STRATEGY 1: Redefine Credentials

“Credential” is an umbrella term for formal qualifications that signal a level of training, expertise, competency, or experience. They often indicate that an individual has achieved a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform a specific job, particularly for an entry-level position. Degrees, certifications, badges, micro-credentials, diplomas, and licenses, among others, are all considered credentials. The type and significance of credentials varies across sectors.

Certifications are a common credential that indicate specialized training. They can be industry-specific, such as the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) credential in the financial sector. The CPA credential is the longest standing credential for accountants, and certain activities can only be conducted by recognized CPAs (e.g., performing audits).⁸ In information technology, the Certified Data Professional credential recognizes specialized skills and can be tailored to multiple disciplines.⁹ Other certifications are relevant across industries and positions, such as Six Sigma¹⁰ or the Project Management Professional (PMP) certification.¹¹



In early childhood, the **Child Development Associate (CDA)** is an entry-level credential designed specifically for beginning early educators as a best first step into the profession, though pursued by seasoned early childhood professionals as well. The CDA is a competency-based credential, grounded in the content that is most relevant and necessary for the profession, and the lessons are practice-based.¹²

To obtain a CDA, one must complete 120 hours of training and 480 hours of work experience, be observed by a professional development specialist during a verification visit, and pass an online exam. The 120 hours of formal training span eight subjects. For example, for the preschool setting, the eight subjects covered include:

1. Planning a safe and healthy learning environment
2. Advancing children’s physical and intellectual development
3. Supporting children’s social and emotional development
4. Building productive relationships with families
5. Managing an effective program operation
6. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
7. Observing and recording children’s behavior
8. Understanding principles of child development and learning¹³

The CDA is widely recognized and used in a variety of ways. In the ECE sector it is the most commonly pursued credential other than formal degrees. Currently, more than 20 states have requirements for early educators that include a CDA.¹⁴ CDA-certified individuals can also qualify as Head Start assistant teachers and Early Head Start teachers.¹⁵ While the CDA primarily serves as preparation for entry-level educators, those who have been in the profession for years may also benefit from CDA coursework. Its flexibility translates to a wide range of applications, from supporting high school students who wish to enter the profession, to serving as content for early childhood college credit, to supporting an integrated coaching model for those already in the profession. Further, the certification is relevant for those teaching in any early childhood setting whether they work in a center-based program, family child care home, or with a home visiting program.



LOOKING FORWARD:

Child Development Professional Credential

The CDA credential is a high-potential lever for improving early educator workforce preparation. However, it remains under-recognized as a lever for change in the early childhood field’s effort to both modernize and professionalize the early educator workforce. Addressing key challenges with the current CDA may improve the credential’s reach and effectiveness.

There is opportunity to leverage the CDA’s strongest attributes and build on the CDA in two distinct ways to better support workforce preparation:

1. Name and assess the quality of options for obtaining a CDA

Developing a single national repository that names and assesses the various options for those interested in obtaining a CDA would help potential candidates navigate their options, including ascertaining which programs will result in college credits. The immense flexibility of the application and use of the CDA perhaps obscures its purpose and even its quality—a challenge that a national repository would address.

2. Develop a second national credential that layers on the CDA to develop further expertise among educators.

Developing a second national credential that layers on the CDA experience creates a true alternate pathway into the profession through an effective, scaffolded certification pathway. Ultimately, it would be the goal that the second, layered credential would be held in equal esteem to four-year degrees.¹⁶

Specifically, the field should establish a new national credential, the Child Development Professional (CDP) credential, which requires training and preparation beyond what is required by the CDA. By building on the existing CDA infrastructure, CDPs could leverage the accessible nature and well-established recognition of the current CDA, contributing to the credential’s portability. An early educator with a CDA would complete additional training to earn a CDP.

CHALLENGES

Variation across trainers who range from national organizations to local providers to state governments. ¹⁷	No guarantee that the credential will be counted as course credit or lead to a pay raise.	A varied audience that has left some in early childhood education unaware of it altogether.
--	---	---

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Standardized indicators of quality of the CDA courses would support candidates in identifying high-quality choices.	Pass rate on first exam attempts would empower candidates to navigate the options available to them.
Publicly available feedback and ratings for CDA Professional Development Specialists would create quality assurances.	Information about credit articulation should be in a prominent place that allows candidates to make side-by-side comparisons of different options.

Innovator Spotlight

The Sooner, The Better

In DC’s [First Step](#) program and the Philadelphia School District’s [Career and Technical Education](#) program, high school students can earn a CDA while concurrently working towards their high school diploma. While supporting students in obtaining “real-life” experience, the work experience required by the CDA is paid, easing young adults’ entry into the profession with little-to-no financial risk.

Learning from Other Sectors: Faster, Better, Cheaper

For years, coinciding with a growing tension between competency-based preparation and traditional academic preparation, stakeholders have questioned the perception that four-year degrees are synonymous with effectively prepared professionals. Google’s recently launched [certificate program](#) is treated as a four-year degree for their hiring purposes, takes six months to complete, and is affordable, with financial aid available.

In this model for advancement, the current CDA would continue to serve as the “best, first step,” by focusing on competencies needed to enter the profession. Upon completion of the current credential, recipients would effectively hold a “driver’s permit,” and be able to serve as assistant teachers under the supervision of others, as is widely the case for current CDA holders. Upon completion of a CDP, recipients would be considered as qualified as four-year degree holders, as Google has done with their [certificate programs](#), and be sufficiently prepared to serve as lead teachers.

With regard to the substance and requirements of the credential, CDP candidates would be required to enter the training having passed the CDA exam and holding 2,040 hours (or two full years) of experience in the classroom. CDP course content would cover subjects including classroom management (including supervision of assistant teachers), effective use of technology in early childhood, data collection and assessment, inclusion and anti-racist practices, trauma-informed care, and teaching practices to support dual language learners, in addition to delving more deeply into the topics addressed in CDA coursework.

Often, coursework pertaining to racially and ethnically sensitive practices and implementation of developmentally appropriate practice is not covered in great depth in CDA coursework.¹⁸ CDP coursework would return in greater detail to these critically important areas, establishing a greater understanding and level of mastery across teaching practices. It may also be worth exploring whether CDP could include specializations in mental health, disabilities, dual language instruction, or others.

Recommendations

- 1. Research institutions, philanthropists, and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) should assess and inform improvements to the current CDA.** Making reforms requires new information. OPRE, which oversees research related to Head Start and child care, research institutions, and other entities should work to conduct a study to fully understand the current application of the CDA. Data collection efforts with regard to who enrolls in the CDA, how long they participate, and how much their hourly rates increase following certification should be included in the scope of this work. Further, pre- and post- assessments should be done to measure the progress that individuals make in their teaching practices through participation in the credential courses.
- 2. Philanthropists, nonprofit organizations, the Office of Head Start, and the Office of Child Care should seek to develop the CDP through a competitive grant-making process.** In order to develop and implement such a credential, substantial research would need to be done to understand what are the skill gaps between the current CDA program and bachelor’s programs and what the implications are of those gaps for the practice of early childhood professionals and the children with whom they work. Beginning with a pilot program making the CDP available to a representative sampling of current CDA holders, a research base would be developed to highlight the effectiveness of the credential.
- 3. Tribal Colleges should be included in developing CDP adaptations that are culturally and linguistically relevant for educators teaching in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.** National credentials have the potential to improve the quality of educators, increase the pool of qualified educators, and support culturally and linguistically relevant practices of educators in a systematic way. As a part of Recommendation 2, the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care should compel the developer of the CDP to collaborate with Tribal Colleges to increase the value and reach of the credential.
- 4. States should aim to integrate credentials of tiered value into their child care licensing and requirements for public preschool educators.** Whether it is the CDP or another credential that ultimately layers atop the CDA coursework, states should support the credential as a legitimate, alternate pathway into the profession by integrating it into existing requirements around educator qualifications. Armed with research on the effectiveness of the credential that would be developed through Recommendation 2, states should look to integrate the CDA and CDP as a true alternate pathway, equal to a four-year degree, that encourages professionals to remain in the profession. The tiered credentials should be reinforced by presence in national policy, like the Head Start Act in addition to state licensing and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS).
- 5. The current CDA curriculum and hours should be expanded to include training relevant to effectively supporting diverse classrooms.** Such training should provide educators with effective tools to ensure their practice is racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically sensitive. Younger generations are increasingly racially and linguistically diverse, and there is an increased research base identifying and tracking the consequences of bias practices in the classroom. It is of the utmost importance that educators have a deep understanding of their own biases and are not only prepared to support diversity in their classrooms but that they are also able to integrate anti-racist practices to support children’s healthy growth and development.

STRATEGY 2: Rethink Degree Attainment

The challenge with degree-based compensation:

- 1) degree attainment comes at a **high cost for an underpaid workforce**, and
- 2) research suggests that completing degree requirements—particularly those for a bachelor's degree—**may not lead to improvements in instructional practice.**²⁵

Across professions, formal degrees—associate's, bachelor's, master's, professional, or doctoral degrees—can act as currency that buys professionals mobility in their chosen sector and higher compensation for their work.¹⁹ In social work, for example, a bachelor's in social work (BSW) is required for entry-level, administrative positions. Clinical positions require a master's in social work (MSW), and moving from a BSW to an MSW leads to a compensation increase.²⁰

Civilian federal employees are compensated through a system called the [General Schedule](#) (GS). The GS is a 15-point scale that ranges from GS-1 (the lowest) to GS-15 (the highest). GS employees are typically guaranteed a minimum grade based on their educational attainment (employees with a high school diploma start at GS-2, bachelor's degrees start at GS-5, and master's degrees at GS-9). Then, employees are able to move up the bands, receiving corresponding bumps in compensation based on experience and education.²¹

The majority of K-12 schools have similarly structured pay schedules. Exact salaries are determined locally but are typically connected to degree attainment, years of experience, and certifications. One of the most common pathways to a pay and position increase in K-12 teaching is through attaining a master's degree.²²

Degrees also drive compensation and titles for early educators. The structure varies by state and setting, but increasingly, assistant teachers must have an associate's degree and lead teachers must have a bachelor's degree. [Thirty-five states](#) require preschool educators to have a bachelor's degree.²³ Lead teachers are paid more than assistant teachers; the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) estimates that lead teachers earn, on average, 9.3 percent more than assistant teachers.²⁴

Given a typical rate of compensation increase, it can take years for early educators to receive a return on investment for the time and money spent qualifying to serve as a lead teacher.



LOOKING FORWARD: Premier University

The challenges with early childhood degree-granting preparation programs create a high-potential opportunity for disrupting the current system: enter what we'll call **Premier University**. If realized, the premier university conceptualized below would coalesce components of early childhood preparation that currently only exist on their own. If combined, these components would create an online, accredited, and degree-granting institution of higher education with content and wraparound services designed specifically for current and prospective early educators.

The key features of Premier University's model (outlined on the next page) address the current challenges with degree-granting preparation programs.²⁶ A model like Premier University could boost both the quality of early educator preparation and access to it, ultimately creating an early educator workforce better equipped to work effectively with students.

Key Features of Premier University

- ✓ Educators would attain an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in early childhood.
- ✓ All courses would be competency-based, project-based, and credit-bearing.
- ✓ Course content would be grounded in early childhood standards and competencies.
- ✓ General education courses would be designed so that educators build the relevant skills through early childhood examples (e.g., educators work with student-level data in a statistics course).
- ✓ Instructional faculty would have extensive classroom experience and demonstrated evidence of culturally responsive instructional effectiveness. They would come from and be reflective of the diversity of the community.
- ✓ All courses would be priced affordably and offered at flexible times and locations.
- ✓ Educators would work through the program in a cohort of peers.
- ✓ Existing credits would transfer and count toward degree completion.
- ✓ One-on-one coaches would support educators in building course-related skills and competencies.
- ✓ One-on-one “Success Managers” would provide educators with resources and support to complete the program, such as support completing financial aid documentation, skill development in time management, career matching, and check-ins that acknowledge success and support accountability.

Existing well-established entities—[EarlyEdU](#), [Western Governors University](#) or [Southern New Hampshire University](#), and [PelotonU](#) or [Duet](#) (see Innovator Spotlight)—provide complementary pieces of Premier University’s puzzle, but they have not yet been combined to form this type of institution. If brought together with intentionality, these three entities might holistically address early educator preparation needs.

EXISTING COMPONENTS ADDRESSING EDUCATORS’ NEEDS

<p>EarlyEdU</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competency-based courses for individuals are based on highly curated early childhood educator content²⁷ • Courses are made to be adopted and adapted by universities • Virtual coaching component for classroom practices is included
<p>Southern New Hampshire University/ Western Governors University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students enroll in accredited associate and bachelor’s degree programs • Classes have project-based design and are flexible to meet students’ schedules • Does not currently offer any degrees in early childhood
<p>Duet / Peloton</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates coaching throughout for students (enrollment, financial aid, nudges, job search, etc.)

Innovator Spotlight

Learning from Other Sectors: Southern New Hampshire University & Duet

Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is an accredited university that offers courses online and in-person. SNHU's College for America offers project-based courses that support the development of a wide range of competencies while providing maximum flexibility to accommodate the learning needs of all students.

SNHU partners with Duet and PelotonU to provide wrap-around coaching to students that supports degree attainment, aids in navigating financial supports, and meets the needs of working students.

Building with Purpose: EarlyEdU

EarlyEdU combines teaching theory, applied learning, and research to deliver comprehensive courses that support the growth of early childhood educators. Individuals can join to participate in courses, and institutes of higher education (IHEs) can access content for courses they are offering to those pursuing a degree in early childhood education.

Recommendations

- 1. The philanthropic community should fund the development of the collaborative that would serve as Premier University.** While core components of this work already exist, such a collaborative requires leadership, start-up funding and infrastructure development, and expert adaptation. This development should be guided and informed by practitioners who are currently educators.
- 2. The regionally accredited four-year university that houses Premier University should work to maximize the articulation of prior coursework and demonstrated competencies, including CDA certificates, as credits.** Credit for experience must be included in every preparation pathway.
- 3. Federal and state policy should support educators in their efforts to acquire a specialized four-year degree by integrating financial incentives for early educators.** This can be achieved through tiered tax credits, loan forgiveness, and increasing federal and state funding for child care and Head Start to specifically support the workforce.
- 4. In line with establishing Premier University as a high-quality, affordable option, Congress should double the [Pell Grant](#) award amount to increase access to higher education among low-income and moderate-income students and families.** Pell Grants, made available to students of families earning less than \$60,000 per year, provide college aid to cover the costs of tuition, housing, and materials for low-income students. They play a critical role in increasing access to degrees. In 2020, students can receive up to \$6,345; however, particularly as so many students and families recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19, even the maximum award arguably only lessens the financial burden among a population that may not be able to attend college otherwise. Doubling the funding to \$12,690 for those under current eligibility would make a substantial difference.

STRATEGY 3: Optimize Practice-Based Training

Electricians, millwrights, and glaziers complete apprenticeships; surgeons, rheumatologists, and pediatricians complete residencies. Apprenticeships and residencies are examples of practice-based training, where prospective employees build competencies necessary for a profession by working alongside current workers and are compensated for doing so. Prospective employees complement practice-based training with formal coursework or job-related classroom training.

Practice-based training in K-12 education looks different. The vast majority of K-12 educators do their practice-based training as part of degree-granting programs, completed during pre-service preparation, and are not compensated for that work. Residencies and apprenticeships are increasingly common in K-12, but still make up a small fraction of the entry points into the profession.²⁸

Practice-based training is often considered the most important component of educator preparation, and many efforts to improve early educator preparation focus on apprenticeships.

As with apprenticeships in other fields, but distinctly different from the majority of practice-based training in education, apprenticeships for the ECE workforce follow an “earn while you learn” model, where apprentices build the competencies to be an early educator, work toward a specific credential, and are paid for their work, including gradual increases as they achieve program milestones.

A variety of ECE apprenticeship models currently exist.²⁹ An apprentice, for example, can be a family child care provider earning a state-specific permit; or a Head Start teacher working toward a bachelor’s degree. Most existing ECE apprenticeships have similar design features: they include credit-bearing courses, and as such, are operated by a partnership that includes an early childhood provider and IHE, most often community colleges, and in some cases, a funding or sponsoring entity, local union, sector intermediary, or resource and referral agency.

ECE apprenticeships often institute structural supports that research shows support educators’ access to and completion of preparation programs. For example, apprenticeships may offer financial aid to cover education costs, convenient class locations and times, flexibility in practice-based training, advising services, access to child care for their own children, and cohort-based program design.³⁰ Further, apprentices tend to reflect a more diverse pool of candidates than traditional pre-service pathways.

The [U.S. Department of Labor](#) (DOL) recently approved early childhood education as an “apprenticeable occupation,” creating a policy environment more conducive to early educator apprenticeships. In order to be recognized by the DOL as a Registered Apprenticeship, an apprenticeship must have five key components;³¹ states may also have their own standards and approval processes for apprenticeships.



LOOKING FORWARD: ECE Apprenticeships +

ECE apprenticeships should be the cornerstone of practice-based training for early educators, and access to ECE apprenticeships should be expanded. Additionally, the field should explore an “Apprenticeships+” structure, complementing apprenticeships with additional practice-based training opportunities.

Existing ECE apprenticeship models offer an opportunity for drastically improving the quality of early educator workforce preparation. Prospective and current educators can benefit from the skill building and salary increases that come with apprenticeships. To maximize the benefit of apprenticeships, however, these programs must further saturate the field. Doing so is contingent on additional funding, particularly for educator salaries. As discussed in the recommendations below, becoming a Registered Apprenticeship through the DOL increases access to existing funding streams.

Creating new types of practice-based training is another way to improve the quality of early educator preparation. In nursing, for example, nurse interns rotate positions. They build skills in different specialties, studying under veterans in those roles, and obtain a stronger understanding of how the specialties fit together. Early educators could participate in similar practice-based training. Gaining experience under mental health consultants, family engagement teams, special education interventionists, and data specialists would build educators’ competencies in complementary aspects of a classroom instruction position.

Exploring opportunities to expand practice-based training is a prime example of how the strategies highlighted in this work should complement each other. Methods of practice-based training can be a formally recognized career advancement opportunity, for example, or a component of job-embedded coaching.

Innovator Spotlight

Apprenticeship as a Workforce Strategy: Early Care & Education Pathways to Success

[Early Care & Education Pathways to Success](#) (ECEPTS), a California-based sector intermediary, currently sponsors apprenticeships for four sectors within the early care and education (ECE) industry: Head Start and state-funded preschool teachers, licensed Family Child Care Providers, ECE Home Visitors, and youth interested in working in ECE or human/social services. ECEPTS and its employer and college partners provide a suite of supports to apprentices, including: on-the-job coaching, “success managers” to support program completion, no-cost college coursework offered in community-based settings on evenings and weekends, embedded tutoring, soft skills and technology training, and a cohort learning experience. ECEPTS apprenticeships are registered—or in the process of registering—with the [US Department of Labor](#) and the [CA Division of Apprenticeship Standards](#).³²

Recommendations

- 1. Remove barriers that early childhood apprenticeships face in accessing existing labor and workforce funding streams.** A key obstacle to expanding access to ECE apprenticeships is securing sustainable funding. A foundational characteristic of the apprenticeship model is that apprentices are hired and paid as employees from the first day of their apprenticeship. Other industries have the resources (i.e., profit margin) to cover the cost of apprentices’ wages, but the early childhood industry operates on thin margins that make it prohibitively expensive for employers to do so.

Historically, ECE apprenticeships have been funded through sources including private philanthropy, tuition assistance programs such as [T.E.A.C.H. scholarships](#), and dedicated state or local funding and grant programs. But there are robust funding streams that have been out of reach for ECE apprenticeships, such as funding through the [USDOL Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) and workforce training through programs such as the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#).

The challenges to accessing existing, sustainable funding vary between states, but state and federal policymakers must address the unintended barriers that prevent ECE apprenticeships from accessing these funds, and create a more coherent, equitable, accessible funding system. Crucially, funding sources must be allowed to dedicate funding specifically to low-wage industries like early childhood that provide services critical to the healthy operation of the economy at large.

- 2. The [Office of Head Start](#) should create a National Center focused on the early childhood workforce.** The Office of Head Start funds eight National Centers. Each National Center focuses on a specific topic area (e.g., National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement) and develops resources and guidance to support improvements in program quality in that topic.³³ Although funded by the Office of Head Start, National Center resources are not restricted to Head Start providers; they are publicly available to all early childhood providers.

A National Center focused on early childhood workforce development would support efforts to train highly effective, well-prepared early educators. In the context of ECE apprenticeships, a National Center could support the proliferation of apprenticeships by providing capacity-building funding to ECE sector intermediaries to offer technical assistance to state and local systems, employers, and institutions of higher education that want to develop such programs, including guidance around model design, apprenticeship registration, employer engagement, and program implementation. The National Center could provide guidance, for example, on developing quality standards, building community-based partnerships, engaging institutions of higher education and ECE employers, securing sustainable funding, and identifying and addressing systemic barriers.

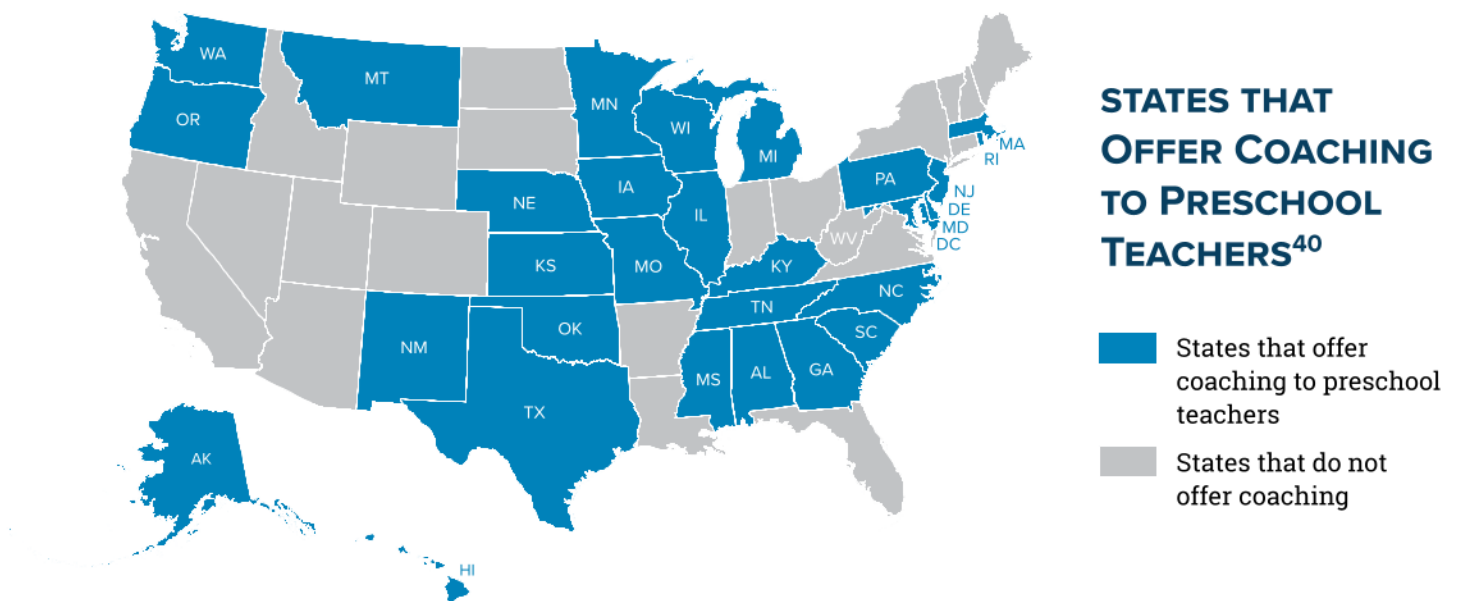
STRATEGY 4: Expand Job-Embedded Coaching

Job-embedded training fuels employee development across professions. Employers invest in performance management systems, feedback sessions, development training, continuing education courses, mentorship programs, and conferences, all in an effort to make employees more effective in their current positions. The underlying assumption is that employees come to the job with a set of foundational competencies and knowledge but need to hone their abilities to perform their specific job well.

In education, “in-service professional learning” is the catchall term for job-embedded training.³⁴ Estimates suggest that schools spend about \$18 billion on professional development every year,³⁵ with questionable returns on that investment.³⁶ One exception to that finding: coaching.³⁷

Coaching has one of the strongest bodies of research among efforts to improve early childhood workforce preparation.³⁸

Individualized coaching is increasingly common in early childhood settings—in part due to local, state, and federal efforts—but “coaching” means different things in different contexts. In the most effective models, coaching is individualized, intensive, sustained support tailored to educators’ specific strengths and challenge areas. Educators work one-on-one with a designated coach over an extended period of time to define and meet personal improvement goals connected to the work they do every day. Effective coaching models can improve educators’ instructional practice.³⁹



LOOKING FORWARD: “Credit-Bearing” Coaching

Effective coaching offers clear benefits for providers, educators, and children. That said, coaching can be costly and labor intensive, and there is little extrinsic incentive to invest in rigorous, effective models. Introducing additional incentives to engage in effective coaching can help. Specifically, the field should explore “credit-bearing” coaching.

A credit-bearing coaching model would extend the impact of existing coaching models. In credit-bearing coaching, educators receive course credit for their work with their coaches. Educators can apply these credits toward degree attainment or other credentials. In the near term, credit-bearing coaching models would require a partnership between an early childhood provider and an accredited IHE.

There is precedent for this type of extrinsic incentive. Several states allow coaching to be used to meet continuing education requirements (see Innovator Spotlight). A coaching model that offered course credit would be exponentially more compelling, as the majority of early childhood programs require educators to obtain formal degrees—specifically associate’s and bachelor’s degrees—to advance in their career.⁴¹

If designed well, credit-bearing coaching would leverage research-based best practices in effective educator preparation to ensure coaching warrants course credit. As with existing high-quality coaching models, credit-bearing coaching would be job-embedded, informed by and tailored to data on individual strengths and challenges areas, and oriented around goals designed to improve educators’ instructional practice. Coaching sessions would occur regularly and consistently throughout the educator’s tenure.

Credit-bearing models would also have explicit and rigorous qualification requirements for coaches, based on credentials, effectiveness in the classroom, and demonstrated competencies. Content would be delivered in real time through multiple avenues, including [After Action Reviews](#),⁴¹ synchronous and asynchronous virtual observations of peers’ and coaches’ instruction, and [Reflective Supervision](#).⁴³

Credit-bearing coaching addresses several challenges with existing early educator preparation. Because it is grounded, physically and substantively, in the early childhood center, this model makes course credit—and therefore degree attainment—more accessible to current educators, including those who struggle to complete traditional seat-time credit. Critically, expanding credit-bearing coaching would offer strong preparation that is competency-based, practice-based, and directly connected to educators’ specific contexts.

Innovator Spotlight

Formally Recognizing the Value of Coaching: New York State

New York has a statewide credential, called the [New York State Training and Technical Assistance Professional Credential \(T-TAP\)](#), designed specifically for early childhood professional development providers, including coaches. T-TAP serves as a quality assurance process and is administered by an external partner, the [New York Association for the Education of Young Children \(NYAEYC\)](#).⁴⁴ Early educators working with coaches who hold the T-TAP can count coaching hours toward the state’s Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) [training requirements](#).⁴⁵

Recommendations

- 1. Early childhood providers and IHEs should partner to collaboratively design and deliver a credit-bearing coaching model.** In the absence of a systems-level model, credit-bearing coaching can be piloted through localized provider/IHEs partnerships. Providers and IHEs should work together, for example, to create coaching content that is eligible for credit, institute quality-control mechanisms, and define coach qualifications. Continuous improvement should be a priority: providers and IHEs should regularly evaluate the credit-based coaching, connecting components of the model back to educators’ instructional practice, demonstration of competencies, and effect on children’s learning outcomes.
- 2. States should enact policy changes that mitigate barriers to credit-based coaching.** A successful credit-based coaching model rests on certain pre-conditions across higher education systems, teacher certification regulations, and early childhood funding environments. States should assess the degree to which current policy hinders or enables credit-based coaching and, where necessary, implement changes. Specifically, states should look for opportunities to:
 - Develop articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions so that coaching-based credits are accepted for associate’s or bachelor’s degree requirements⁴⁶
 - Design a statewide coaching credential, similar to the [Colorado Coaching Credential](#),⁴⁷ tailored specifically to the competencies necessary to be an effective coach in a credit-bearing model
 - Provide start-up and technical assistance funding to partnerships of providers and IHEs to develop pilot models
 - Accept coaching credit as part of teacher licensure requirements

STRATEGY 5: Connect In-Service Professional Learning to Career Advancement



Across a range of industries, within the United States and internationally, research suggests that employee satisfaction, retention, and performance is driven in part by having opportunities for advancement.⁴⁸ “Advancement opportunities” is a broad term, encompassing a multitude of steps along a career trajectory. Historically, advancement opportunities have been largely vertical and linear, where employees could only advance their careers through climbing the organizational hierarchy, generally into roles with more management responsibilities and a corresponding pay raise. Increasingly, however, employers are introducing lateral and nonsequential advancement opportunities that employees can pursue while remaining in their role (see Innovator Spotlight). Near-peer leadership positions, temporary job rotations, externships, strategic upskilling, and fellowships, for example, allow employees to gain recognition—and often higher pay—while simultaneously building competencies that help them become more effective in their roles. In other words, career ladders have evolved into career lattices,⁴⁹ and both employees and employers benefit from this shift.

Vertical career ladders also historically dominated advancement opportunities in education. In the typical upward career trajectory, educators move from the classroom into administrative roles (e.g., center director). However, the skills that made an educator effective in the classroom do not necessarily translate into success as an administrator.⁵⁰ And, more importantly, taking high-performing educators *out* of the

classroom and *away* from students is antithetical to schools’ mission to provide excellent education.

As a result, over the past several decades, both the early childhood and K-12 fields have explored advancement opportunities that keep experienced, high-value teachers teaching. Hybrid teacher-leader roles are some of the most common lateral advancement opportunities for early educators. In hybrid teacher-leader roles, the educator remains in the classroom but also takes on a set of complementary responsibilities, often to guide or support other teachers. In many early childhood providers, for example, educators may also serve as mentor teachers, instructional specialists, data coaches, or professional learning facilitators.

But the impact of hybrid teacher-leader roles in early childhood is limited. The degree to which these roles are financially rewarded or are truly seen as career advancement is inconsistent. And they do not directly improve educators’ instructional practice. Instead, hybrid teacher-leader roles capitalize on educators’ competencies to support other teachers. These roles may reinforce educators’ work in the classroom; instructional coaches improve their own practice through observing others, for example, and professional learning facilitators build skills through teaching skills. But this particular advancement opportunity does not reward educators for upskilling or pursuing in-service professional learning to improve their instructional practice.



LOOKING FORWARD: In-Service Professional Learning

Research shows that authentic career advancement opportunities can benefit educators, providers, and children. Even so, there is a dearth of these opportunities within early childhood. At a minimum, the early childhood field should look to other industries to identify potential advancement opportunities for educators. These new advancement opportunities, as well as the hybrid teacher-leader roles that already exist, should be designed to deliver recognition, professional status, and compensation while letting educators remain in the classroom.

Further, it is worth rethinking the incentives behind in-service professional learning. Early educators rarely receive formal recognition or compensation for in-service professional learning (outside of degree attainment). To improve early educator preparation, the early childhood field should explore in-service professional learning that early educators can pursue as a way to advance in their careers.

In other fields, job rotations and fellowships are common. In early childhood, similar opportunities could be configured to fit the needs of specific providers. A mental health consultant could rotate into a mental health consultant position at a different center to

Innovator Spotlight

Job Rotations and Fellowships: General Motors, Edelman, and The Advisory Board

Job rotations are essentially exchange programs, where high-performing employees switch into similar roles in different departments or locations to build skills that they then bring back to improve their performance in their original positions. General Motors has such a [rotation program](#); an electrical engineer, for example, may temporarily move into software engineering.⁵¹ [Edelman](#), a public relations and marketing firm, allows high-performing employees to apply to move into the same position in different office locations, often internationally.⁵²

Fellowships are similarly temporary. Fellows remain in their same position but complete additional tailored coursework and training. Employers may grant fellows flexibility regarding their usual work schedule and responsibilities in order to help them complete successful fellowships. There is often a cost associated with participating in a fellowship program, which employers may cover. The [Advisory Board Fellowship](#), for example, is an 18-month program designed to build leadership skills in healthcare executives. After successfully completing the program, participants earn a certificate and recognition as a Fellow of the Advisory Board.⁵³

learn under a new leadership team, or a lead teacher could complete a fellowship in play-based learning or trauma-informed care strategies to employ in their work with students. Early childhood providers could also create their own set of endorsements or badges that roll up into title changes. An assistant teacher, for example, could earn a bilingual instruction endorsement by completing a certain number of hours of instruction in a language other than English. None of these opportunities remove educators from the classroom.

Regardless of the specific design, all advancement opportunities based on in-service professional learning should incorporate features necessary for success:

- Educators must apply to participate, and only educators who meet key criteria would be eligible to do so (e.g., delivers high-quality instruction as measured by CLASS, nominated by peers or leadership, has expertise in working with historically underserved students);
- The content would be rigorous and explicitly designed to improve educators' work with children; and
- Opportunities would come with additional responsibilities and accountability, similar to those that come with a promotion or new role.

[Studies](#) from other fields suggest that formal in-service development structures, and the increased recognition that accompany them, may be just as effective for employee retention and satisfaction as pay increases.⁵⁴ However, to maximize the benefit of these opportunities, educators should receive additional compensation for pursuing them.

Recommendations

1. **State and federal policymakers, the philanthropic community, and other early childhood stakeholders should create additional fellowships, job rotations, and certifications to incentivize in-service skill development that improves instructional practice.** Several early childhood-focused certifications exist: degree-based credentials such as the [Child Development Associate](#), the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards [early childhood generalist certification](#), subject-specific endorsements required as part of state teacher licensure, and early childhood badges and microcredentials. In addition to these, there is potential for additional certifications grounded in instructional competencies specific to early childhood, as well as formal and widespread job rotations and fellowships.
2. **Early childhood providers should design advancement opportunities based on in-service professional learning that improves educators' effectiveness in the classroom.** Early childhood providers can, with relatively low lift, design a system that recognizes educators for investing in their own in-service professional learning. Badges, microcredentials, and certificates, developed in-house, in collaboration with a network of other early childhood providers, or with the state early childhood association, would provide the foundation for a more comprehensive system. Again, ideally educators would be compensated for this work, but early childhood providers could institute lower-cost rewards, such as role changes or title bumps, additional flexibility or paid time-off, or stipends until sustained financial compensation is possible.

Conclusion

The crises that arose in 2020 magnified systemic weaknesses and inequities inherent to the current early childhood system that long pre-date COVID-19. While this year has tested the early childhood sector, it has also revealed to decision-makers and other stakeholders a necessary path forward—one that values early childhood and focuses on the workforce as a catalyst for positive change. Essentially, current events have created an opportunity, if not a necessity, to reevaluate the status quo and reimagine what could be.

To take advantage of that opening, the Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst convened diverse practitioners, experts, and decisionmakers to explore what existing, innovative educator preparation should be scaled and what needed preparation is yet-to-be created. Through congressional work on the *Higher Education Act*, the *Head Start Act*, or the *Workforce, Innovation, and Opportunity Act*, through philanthropy, or local innovation, each of the strategies raised during the Early Childhood Workforce Catalyst, and further explored here, can create progress for the workforce as a profession and for the children served by them.

Endnotes

1. [Working Parents Are an Endangered Species. That's Why Democrats Are Talking Child Care](#)
2. [From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development](#)
3. [Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation](#)
4. [Let the Research Show: Developing the Research to Improve Early Childhood Teacher Preparation](#)
5. See, e.g.: [Do Preschool Teachers Really Need to Be College Graduates?; A Matter of Degrees: Preparing Teachers for the Pre-K Classroom; Mandating Child-Care Degrees: Degree Requirements for Child-Care Workers May Improve Industry, but Raise Concerns for Low-Paying Field; Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care \(ECEC\); Pre-K Teachers and Bachelor's Degrees: Envisioning Equitable Access to High-Quality Preparation Programs.](#)
6. [Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment](#)
7. [The Impact of Teacher Diversity in Education](#)
8. [Credentials](#)
9. ["An Institutional Analysis of the Formation of Jobs in Software Work in the United States, 1945-2001; PhD thesis, The London School of Economics and Political Science](#)
10. [The Council for Six Sigma Certification](#)
11. [PMP Certification | Project Management Institute](#)
12. [History of Child Development Associate \(CDA\) Credential](#)
13. [Council for Professional Recognition: Preschool](#)
14. [Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#); In addition, 35 states identify the CDA in licensing either as a requirement for an early childhood teacher or director, or in some combination with other credentials for both.
15. [Head Start Policy and Regulations § 1302.91: Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements](#)
16. An effort to explore the feasibility of a national early childhood lead teacher credential is underway.
17. "The Council for Professional Recognition does not provide training nor do we specifically endorse any training program or CDA curriculum. It is the Candidate's responsibility to evaluate and select a training organization, agency or institution to complete their training." [CDA Credentialing Program FAQs](#)
18. [Preparing Teachers of Young Children: The Current State of Knowledge, and a Blueprint for the Future. Part 2: Effective Teacher Preparation in Early Care and Education: Toward a Comprehensive Research Agenda](#)

Endnotes

19. [Measuring the value of education: Career Outlook: US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
20. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: [Social Workers](#)
21. U.S. Office of Personnel Management: [General Schedule Overview](#)
22. [Do Master's Degrees Matter? Advanced Degrees, Career Paths, and the Effectiveness of Teachers](#)
23. [Pre-K Teachers and Bachelors Degrees: Envisioning Equitable Access to High-Quality Preparation Programs](#)
24. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: [Preschool Teachers](#); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: [Teacher Assistants](#)
25. [Let the Research Show: Developing the Research to Improve Early Childhood Teacher Preparation](#)
26. Interview with Gail Joseph of EarlyEdU Alliance
27. Content is research and evidence based and aligns with [Head Start's Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#).
28. [Trading Coursework for Classroom: Realizing the Potential of Teacher Residencies](#)
29. [Creating Pathways to College Degrees Through Apprenticeships](#)
30. [It Takes a Community: Leveraging Community Colleges to Transform the Early Childhood Workforce](#)
31. [The U.S. Department of Labor: Discover Apprenticeship](#)
32. [ECEPTS Apprenticeships](#)
33. [Training and Technical Assistance](#) | Office of Head Start | ACF
34. As noted, in early childhood, in-service professional learning is not necessarily job-embedded. Completing requirements for degree attainment, e.g., may also be done as part of an educator's in-service professional learning.
35. [Putting School Budgets in Teachers' Hands](#)
36. [Breaking the Habit of Ineffective Professional Development for Teachers](#)
37. See, e.g., [The Effect of Teacher Coaching on Instruction and Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of the Causal Evidence](#)
38. [Let the Research Show: Developing the Research to Improve Early Childhood Teacher Preparation](#)
39. See, e.g., [Effectiveness of Comprehensive Professional Development for Teachers of At-Risk Preschoolers, Journal of Educational Psychology](#)
40. [NIEER State of Preschool, 2019](#); Design and implementation of coaching models varies across states. Not all preschool teachers in each state have access to coaching (e.g., Alaska only offers coaching to Head Start teachers; only certified preschool teachers in Kentucky receive coaching).
41. See, e.g., [National Institute for Early Education Research: The State of Preschool 2019; Staff qualifications and competency requirements | ECLKC](#)
42. [Guide to the After Action Review](#)
43. [Reflective Supervision: Putting It into Practice | ECLKC](#)
44. [Training and Technical Assistance Professional Credential](#)
45. [New York State Office of Children and Family Services: Policy Statement](#)
46. For more on articulation agreements, see [It Takes a Community: Leveraging Community Colleges to Transform the Early Childhood Workforce](#)
47. [Colorado Coaching Credential FAQ](#)
48. See, for example: [The Impact of Career Satisfaction on Job Performance in Accounting Firms. The Mediating Effect of General Competencies](#); [Defining Advancement Career Paths and Succession Plans: Critical Human Capital Retention Strategies for High-Performing Advancement Divisions](#); [Factors Affecting State Government Information Technology Employee Turnover Intentions](#); [Development and Retention of Generation Y Employees: A Conceptual Framework](#); [Enablers that Aid in Retention of Millennial Workforce](#); [Implementing a Corporate Career Lattice: the Mass Career Customization Model](#)
49. For more on career ladders and lattices, see: [The Corporate Lattice: Rethinking Careers](#); [Career Ladders vs. Career Lattices](#); [How the Corporate Ladder Became the Corporate Lattice](#)
50. [Listening to Voices at the Educational Frontline: New Administrators' Experiences of the Transition from Teacher to Vice-Principal](#)
51. [A Look Inside GM's Two-Year, Entry-Level Rotational Program](#)
52. [Global Mobility](#)
53. [Advisory Board Fellowship](#)
54. [How Fleet Bank Fought Employee Flight](#)