

# **Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation**

Albert Wat, National Governors Association

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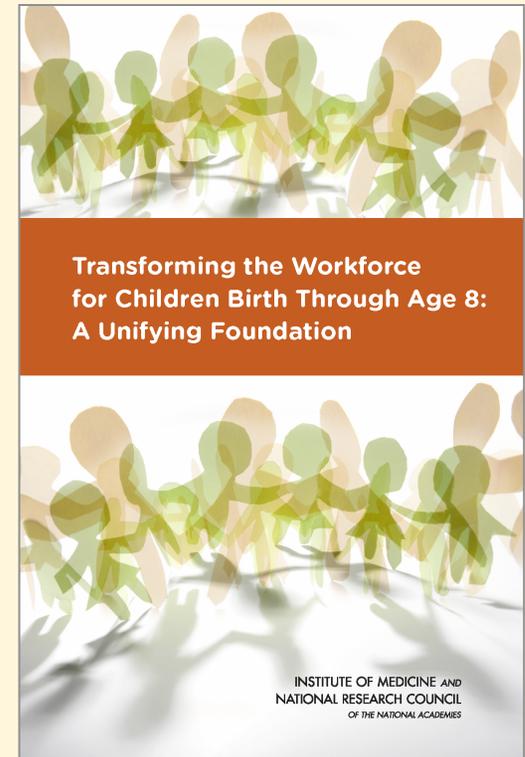
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# Abbreviated Statement of Task

How can the science of children's health, learning, and development inform how the workforce supports children from birth through age 8?



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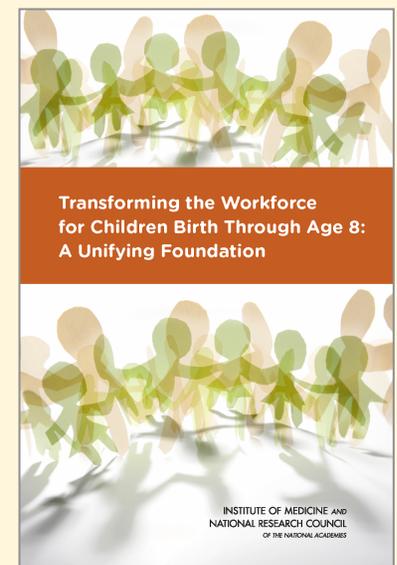
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# Study Process and Approach



## ***Information Gathering Sources***

- Document review
- Public sessions
- Site visits and interviews
- Practitioner advisors



# Practitioner Advisors

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## Key Messages

*Children are already learning at birth.*

*Development and learning in the early years is rapid and cumulative – and is the foundation for lifelong progress.*

*Adults who provide for the care and education of children birth through age 8 bear a great responsibility for their health, development, and learning.*

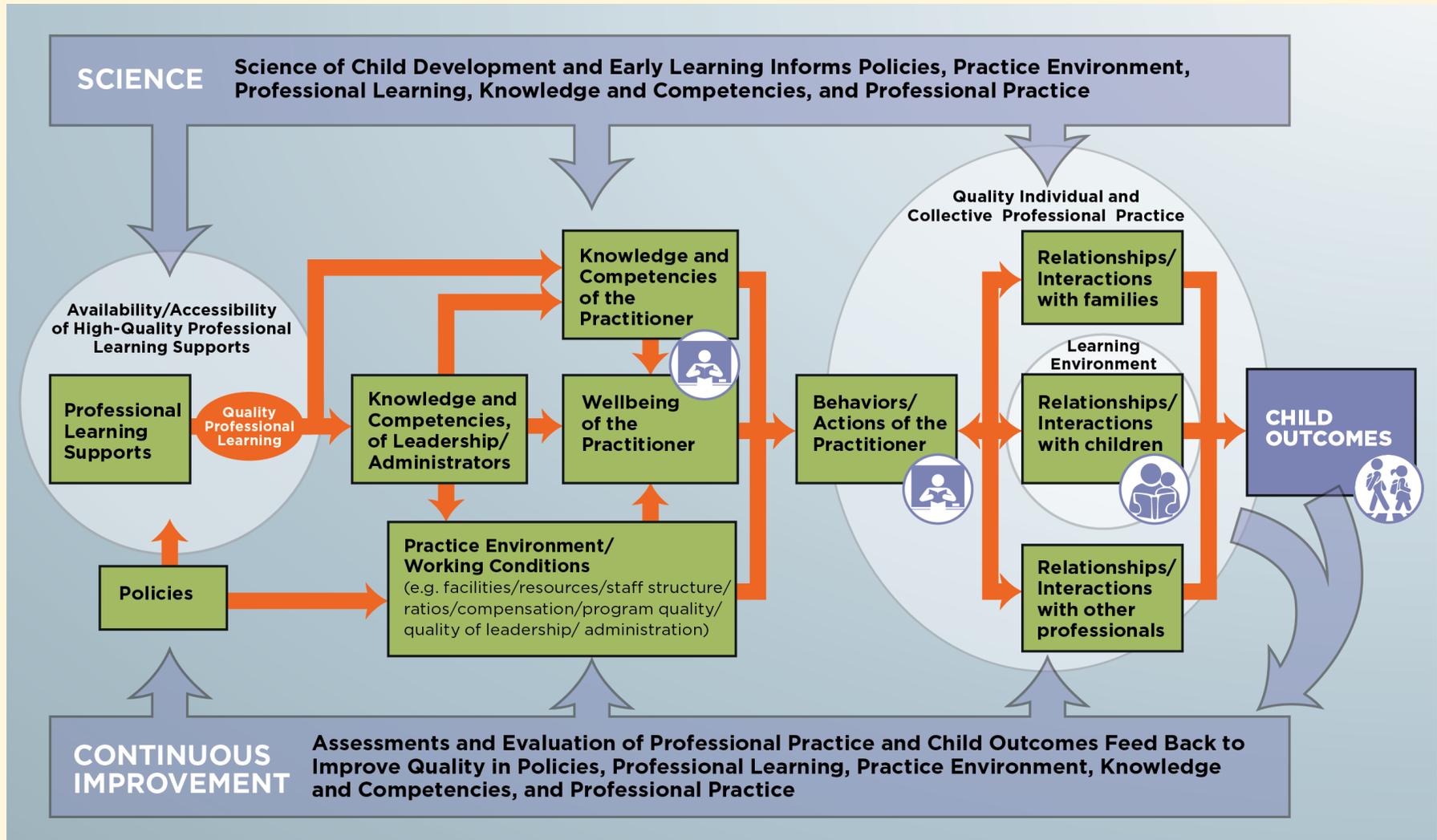
## Key Messages

*Just when consistent, continuous support is so important, the systems and services that children encounter – and the systems that support the adults who work with them – are fragmented.*

*Practices and policies have often not kept pace with what we know about the sophisticated knowledge and competencies required to provide high-quality care and education for children birth through age 8.*

*High-quality practice requires more than individual mastery of competencies.*

# Many Factors Contribute to Quality Practice



# Overview of Recommendations: A Blueprint for Action

## **Vision:**

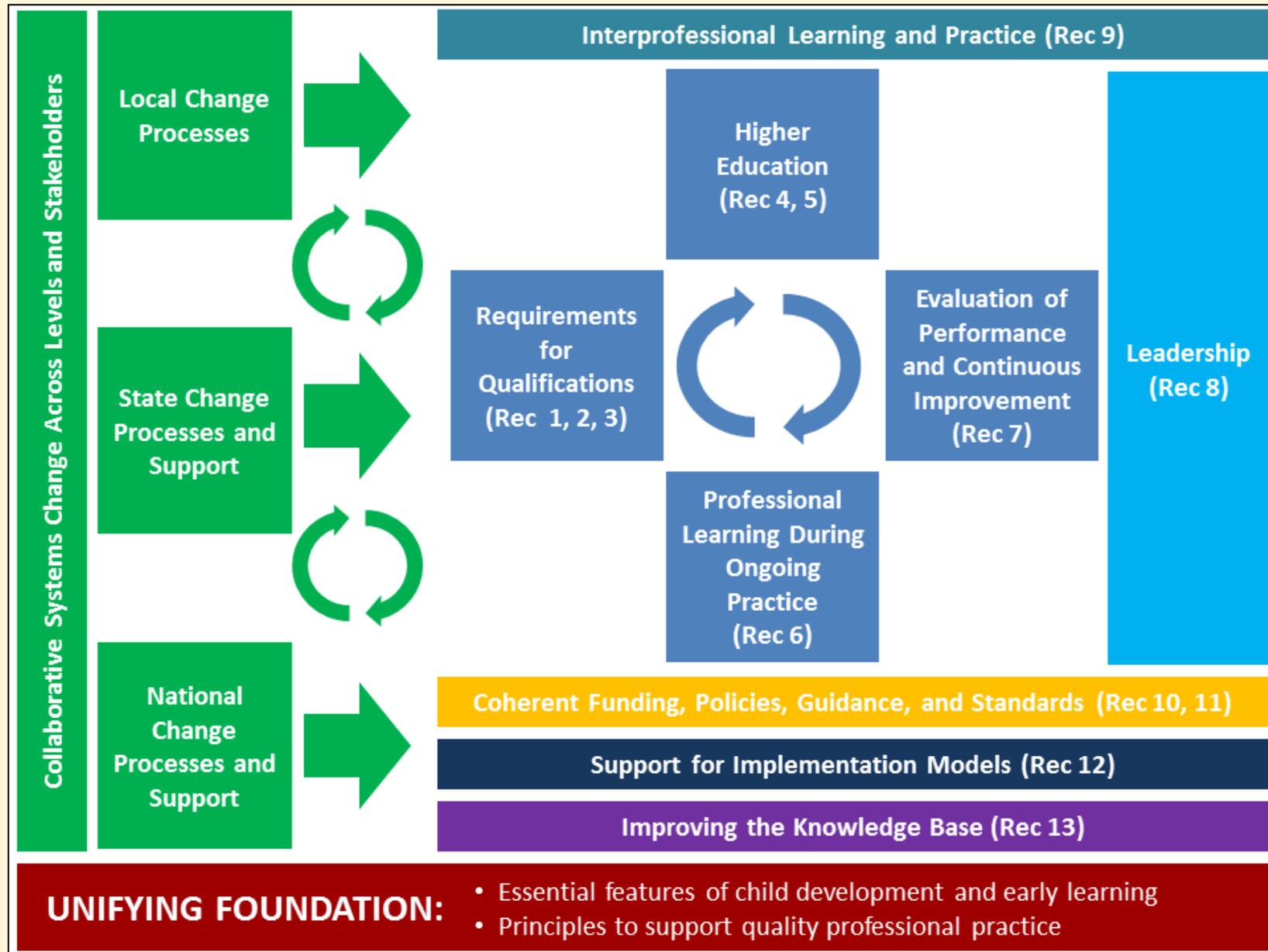
A care and education workforce for children birth through age 8 that is unified by a foundation of the science of child development and early learning, shared knowledge and competencies, and principles to support quality professional practice at the individual, setting, systems, and policy levels.

## **As a result:**

All children experience high-quality and continuity in support for their development and early learning.



# Overview of Recommendations: A Blueprint for Action



# Core Competencies

- Commonalities between ECE and K-12 professional competencies
- Areas for improvement
  - Implementation
  - Content-specific pedagogy
  - Implications of poverty, stress, trauma on practice
  - Clarity on social-emotional learning, approaches to learning, executive function, etc., etc., etc.
  - Dual language learners – beyond respect
  - Technology – both for professional learning and for instruction
- Areas for alignment between ECE & K-12
  - Assessment
  - Family engagement

# Competency-Based Qualification

**Recommendation 1: Strengthen competency-based qualification requirements for all care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.**

*Actions:*

Government agencies and nongovernmental organizations at the national, state, and local levels should review their standards and policies for workforce qualification requirements for all care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8 and revise them as needed to ensure they

- are competency-based;
- align consistently with the principles delineated in this report;
- reflect foundational knowledge and competencies shared across professional roles, as well as specific and differentiated knowledge and competencies matched to the practice needs and expectations for specific roles.

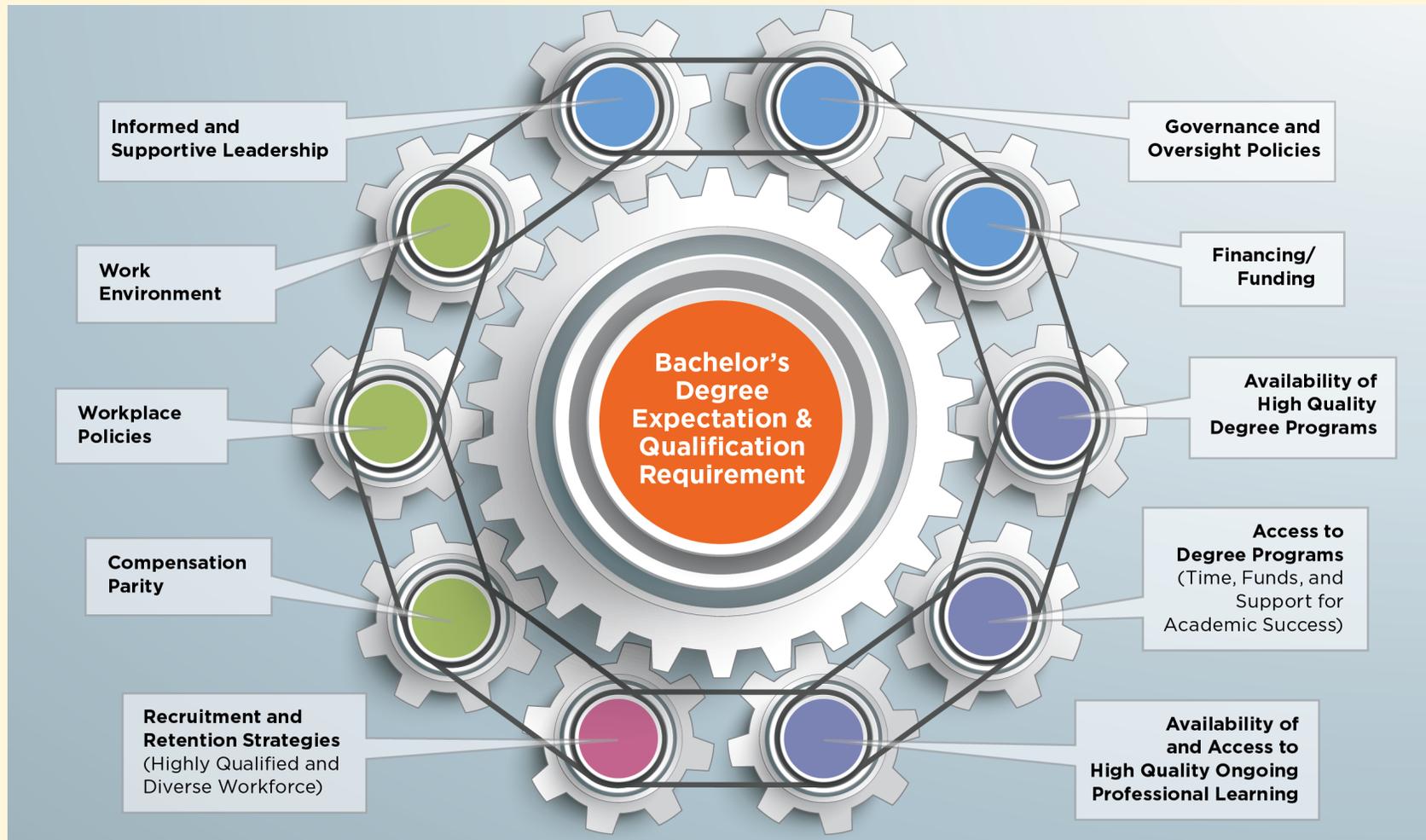
# Degree Requirements for Lead Educators

**Recommendation 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.**

## *Context:*

- The current differences in expectations across professional roles lag behind the science of child development and early learning, which shows that a similar high level of complex knowledge and competencies is needed for educators working with young children of all ages.
- Disparate degree requirement policies create a bifurcated job market, both between elementary schools and early care and education as well as within early care and education as a result of differences in degree requirements that are already in place.
- Lower educational expectations perpetuate the perception that educating children in some settings or at some ages requires less expertise than others, making it difficult to support policies that will maximize the potential of young children and the early learning programs that serve them.
- Greater consistency will bring the care and education sector in line with other sectors, such as health and social services, which do not vary in minimum expectations for similar professional roles based on the age of the children they work with.

## Implement in the context of efforts to address other interrelated factors:



**A degree requirement that doesn't stand alone**

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# Degree Requirements for Lead Educators

**Recommendation 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.**

## *Actions:*

State leadership and licensure and accreditation agencies, state and local stakeholders in care and education, and institutions of higher education, should collaboratively develop a strategy that is

- multiyear, phased, multicomponent, and coordinated strategy,
- tailored to local circumstances
- coordinated for changes at the individual, institutional, and policy levels

Federal government agencies and nongovernmental organizations should

- align policies for programs they support with transition pathways and timeline for a minimum bachelor's degree requirement
- develop incentives to encourage the transition
- dedicate resources from existing and new funding streams and technical assistance programs to support the transition in all settings and systems

# Higher Education: Interdisciplinary Foundation

## **Recommendation 4: Build an interdisciplinary foundation in higher education for child development.**

### *Actions:*

- Institutions of higher education should support a core of requirements for coursework, other learning activities, and field-based learning experiences, as a shared interdisciplinary foundation for professional roles working with children from birth through age 8 in education, social services, and health/allied health professions.
- Federal and state government agencies and nongovernmental organizations that fund initiatives in higher education should incentivize this interdisciplinary, core foundation approach for fields related to young children.
- Voluntary accrediting agencies and governmental oversight mechanisms for educational and research institutions should include in their review criteria the extent to which such an interdisciplinary, core foundation approach is used.

# Higher Education for Care and Education Professionals

## **Recommendation 5: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals.**

### *Actions:*

Institutions of higher education should

- review and revise the requirements and content of programs for students preparing for practice as care and education professionals working with children from birth to age 8

- work with local practice communities to contribute a practice-based perspective to the design of higher education programs; and to identify and develop appropriate and diverse field placements

- establish cross-institutional relationships that bolster the quality, availability, and accessibility of higher education programs for care and education professionals

# Ongoing Professional Learning

**Recommendation 6: Support the consistent quality and coherence of professional learning supports during ongoing practice for professionals working with children from birth through age 8.**

*Actions:*

State and local governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders should collaboratively develop a clearinghouse and quality assurance system for locally available services and providers for professional learning during ongoing practice.

These tools should

- promote awareness of and access to consistent quality and content in professional learning
- promote joint participation in professional learning activities across settings and professional roles

Federal and state government agencies and nongovernmental organizations that fund or provide technical assistance should incentivize greater consistency and parity in ongoing professional learning opportunities across settings and roles, including support for state/local clearinghouses and quality assurance systems.

# Ongoing Professional Learning

**Recommendation 6: Support the consistent quality and coherence of professional learning supports during ongoing practice for professionals working with children from birth through age 8.**

## *Implementation Considerations:*

To be successful, collective efforts to improve systems for professional learning during ongoing practice must place equal emphasis along the 0-8 age continuum and across professional roles and settings. For example,

- those who provide care and education for infants and toddlers and who practice in settings outside of centers and schools need greater access to infrastructure for professional learning
- for early elementary educators, the competencies needed to work with the youngest students can be overshadowed in broader K-12 professional learning systems.

# Leadership

**Recommendation 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.**

## *Context:*

Elementary school principals, early care and education center directors or program directors, and other administrators are an important factor in the quality of early learning experiences for children. Ideally they

- help care and education professionals strengthen their core competencies
- create a work environment in which they can fully use their knowledge and skills
- select appropriate content and activities for professional learning
- have the knowledge and competencies to hire and supervise educators who are capable of working with children in the settings they lead

# Leadership

**Recommendation 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.**

*Actions:*

For **early care and education leaders**, early-childhood policy and research organizations and governmental and nongovernment funders should review and update existing statements of core competencies and qualification requirements to better reflect instructional leadership and provide guidance on the implications for qualifications and professional learning.

For **early elementary principals**, federal, state, and local departments of education, voluntary accrediting and certification entities, and institutions of higher education should better integrate early learning principles and best practices throughout the principal development pipeline, including certification programs for school administrators; coursework, practicum, and evaluation requirements for principal candidates; and ongoing professional learning support systems.

## Support for Implementation: Coherent National Guidance

**Recommendation 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.**

### *Actions:*

National nongovernmental organizations that offer resources and support for the care and education workforce should collaborate to provide and periodically update shared, coherent foundational guidance for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8. This collaborative effort should represent professional roles across settings and age ranges.

Local, state, and national governmental and nongovernmental organizations, institutions of higher education, and those who provide professional learning should use this guidance to align and augment their own standards for care and education professionals who work with children from birth through age 8.

# Support for Implementation: Coherent National Guidance

**Recommendation 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.**

*Actions:*

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with national philanthropic and other private-sector funders, should jointly convene an initial meeting among relevant national nongovernmental organizations. This meeting should aim to:

- catalog current related activities,
- develop a plan for a more permanent organizational infrastructure for a collaborative effort to provide national standards and guidance,
- identify the needed participants,
- develop a common agenda and initial priorities, and
- solicit funding commitments for ongoing support.

# Support for State and Local Implementation Models

**Recommendation 12: Support comprehensive state- and local-level efforts to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.**

## *Context:*

Systems and supports for children – and the professionals who work with them – are diffuse and decentralized, and many of the solutions to support quality and consistency need to be developed locally, within the context of specific state and local environments.

# Support for State and Local Implementation Models

**Recommendation 12: Support comprehensive state- and local-level efforts to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.**

*Actions:*

Federal and state government agencies and national nongovernmental organizations should support collective efforts at the state and local levels to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.

To this end, they should collaborate to provide technical support and cross-sector financial resources, including public-private partnerships, that can be combined with local resources.

To model this approach, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with national philanthropic and other private-sector funders, should jointly fund at least ten local or state coalitions to undertake 10-year initiatives for a collective effort to review, assess, and improve professional learning and workforce development for the care and education workforce for children from birth through age 8.

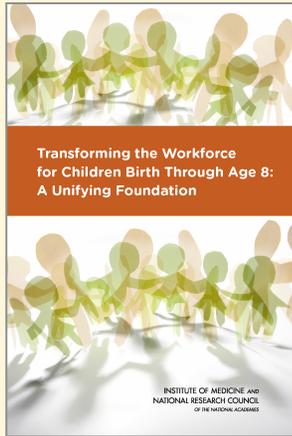
# Support for State and Local Implementation Models

**Recommendation: Support comprehensive state- and local-level efforts to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.**

## *Actions:*

State or local coalitions should be supported to:

- Ascertain the current status of the local care and education workforce across professional roles, settings, and age ranges
- Map the local landscape of stakeholders in professional learning and workforce development
- Identify strengths, gaps, unmet needs, and fragilities in current systems.
- Estimate resource needs, and develop a plan for financing and resource mobilization to increase, diversify, and strategically allocate funding that takes into account public investments at the federal, state, and local levels; investments from private philanthropic and corporate sources; and out-of-pocket spending
- Establish and clearly articulate priorities, planned activities and policy changes, timelines, and benchmarks for progress.
- Facilitate ongoing stakeholder coordination and sharing of information related to funding, activities, and data collection and use.
- Contribute to regular knowledge exchange so that other localities implementing can learn from the models iteratively and in real time.



## Call to Action

This report calls for a commitment to the pathways that will lead us to the systems and policies that we *need* (rather than making do within the systems and policies that we *have*).

This is not fast, easy, or cheap. It will require a strategic, progressive trajectory to transform the professional landscape, accompanied by significant commitment, mobilization of resources, and innovations in financing.

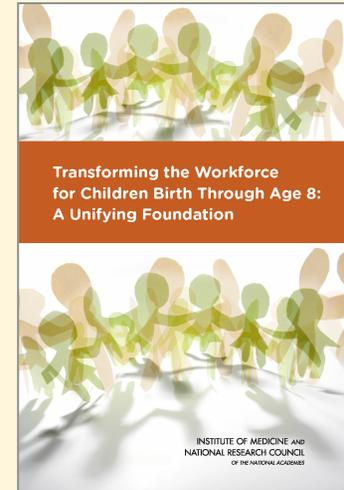
But the status quo will perpetuate today's fragmented approach, resulting in less than adequate support for children's development and learning.

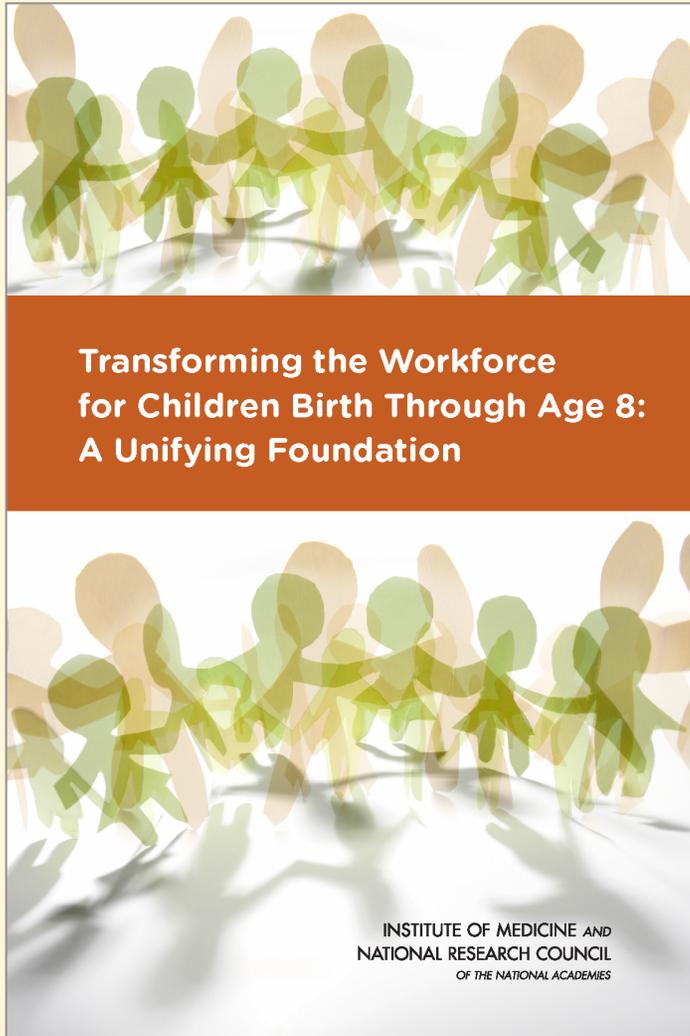


# Final Thoughts

The committee anticipates the actions laid out in this report will transform the workforce:

- Elevate the perception of the professionals who work with children from birth through age 8:
  - Recognize their complex and important role and the intellectually, physically, and emotionally challenging nature of their work.
  - Recognize the deep, extensive, and ongoing professional learning and other support that is required for them to be successful.
- Improve the quality of professional practice, the quality of the practice environment, and the status and well-being of the workforce.
- Retain highly effective practitioners and bolster the recruitment of a robust and viable pipeline of new professionals.
- **As a result:** Get things right from the very beginning for all children, laying the foundation for their lifelong progress.





**Transforming the Workforce  
for Children Birth Through Age 8:  
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