



## Policy Brief:

# CAREER PATHWAYS Supporting Early Childhood Educators

June 2021



A career pathway is like a highway with its entry, exit, and re-entry ramps, marked by increasing levels of education and experience, each step linked to increased compensation. For early childhood educators, career pathways include roles working directly with children in programs, providing professional development and coaching, faculty in higher education, designing curriculum, and government agencies that administer programs and policies.

The Institute of Medicine's (IOM) expert consensus report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*<sup>1</sup>, calls for a minimum standard of a bachelor's degree in early childhood education by 2025 for all lead teachers, regardless of program setting. Recognizing that most of the 2 million-plus early childhood educators need support to reach this goal, the experts call for states to create "comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement."

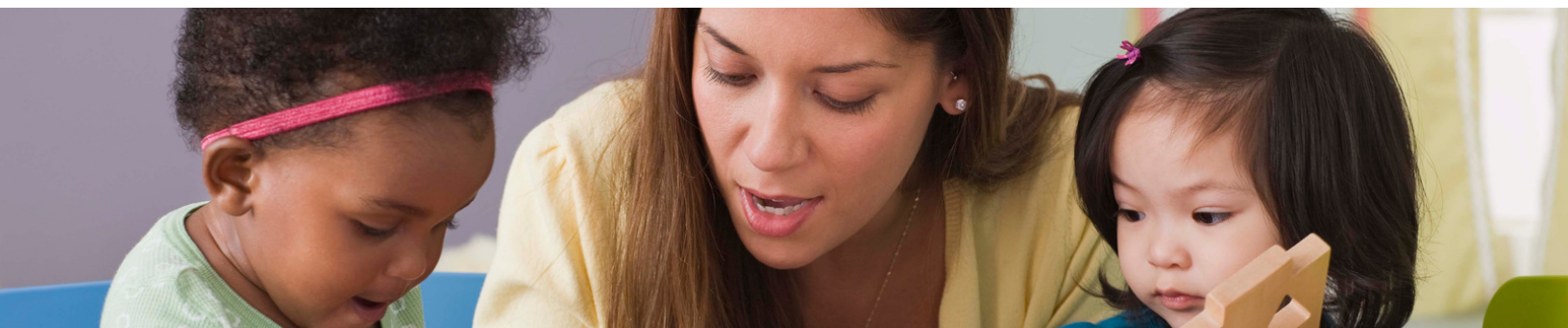
In the 2014 bipartisan reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Congress required States and Territories to "provide for a progression of professional development which may include encouraging the pursuit of postsecondary education."

## Strengthening the Early Childhood Career Pathway Infrastructure

Historically for low-wage workers and people of color, pathways have many systemic barriers: preparation for and access to higher education, lack of degree articulation in higher education, professional development that does not result in education credit, and wages that do not rise with additional education and credentials. As much attention needs to be paid to the infrastructure of the multiple systems that construct a pathway as to the supports to individuals as they move through the pathway.

Through a variety of initiatives led by the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center, state teams have come together to examine strengths and gaps in their pathways and successfully pursue policy changes to break down barriers.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/19401>.



# Strengthening the Early Childhood Career Pathway Infrastructure Cont.'d

| Articulation Project  | Moving the Needle on Compensation   | Innovative Counseling  | Higher Education Barriers to Access and Success  |
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| <p>Participating states improved articulation of college coursework and degrees from two-year institutions of higher education to four-year institutions within the state by identifying and implementing various strategies that either directly or indirectly affected the intended goal.</p> | <p>State teams identified and addressed policy barriers, funding gaps, and advocacy efforts that would create, within states, a climate more conducive of the larger compensation work still to come.</p> | <p>States refined their counseling approach with scholarship recipients toward their certificate and degree completion goals. Strategies included more counseling contacts and support, use of peer mentors, online discussion boards, and the development of an Individualized Professional Development Plan.</p> | <p>Through data analysis and surveys, the Center has published issue briefs on each of the pathway barriers to better define the problems and to offer some promising practices that are working across the country to address them.</p> |

## T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGES® Supporting Individual Pathway Progress

The national, evidence-based, and data-driven T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program (T.E.A.C.H.) provides comprehensive support for the diverse field of early childhood educators to move forward on their career pathways. T.E.A.C.H. helps states leverage the resources to provide comprehensive pathway support through a blend of scholarship, individualized counseling, and wage bonuses for the diverse early childhood workforce. The Child Care WAGES® program provides a wage supplement twice a year to teachers, directors, and family child care providers, tiered based on education levels. By requiring Child Care WAGES® recipients to remain in their program sites for six months, it stabilizes the quality of child care by reducing turnover that undermines children’s development and program quality stability. Both programs motivate early childhood educators to seek more education and credentials that provide them greater pathway mobility.

## Policy Recommendations

### State and Local Recommendations

- State and Local Workforce Boards should include the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program and Child Care WAGES® program administrators as well as other degree-granting and credit-bearing professional development providers on State and Local Workforce Boards for planning, alignment, and investments in career pathways for early childhood education roles.
- States should include the early childhood career pathway in their Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) plans.

## State and Local Recommendations Cont.'d

- As part of a state's workforce data collection, states should collaborate with early childhood workforce registries and agencies and ensure that data is collected on the demographics of all those in the field as well as education and credentials, compensation types and levels, and turnover/churning rates across all settings and sectors.
- Ensure that career technical education, apprenticeships, and higher education coursework for early childhood educators are accessible for different native language speakers and meets the needs of students who are working full time.
- Create substitute teacher pools and child care options for early childhood educators to support their ability to take additional coursework and for class preparation.

## Federal Recommendations

- Include representatives of the Office of Child Care and the Office of Head Start in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Early Childhood Development in any formal and informal task forces and interagency working groups dealing with workforce development, apprenticeships, and postsecondary access and affordability.
- Collect data through the State Child Care and Development Fund administrators, Head Start Collaboration Office, other federal early childhood education programs on the workforce demographics across settings, sectors and roles, ages of children served, compensation types and levels, education and credentials, and geographic disbursement and make the data publicly available.
- Increase the funding for a higher maximum federal Pell Grant and provide outreach to early childhood educators on grants, loan forgiveness, and loan cancellation financial aid options.
- Increase the funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School program to expand campus-based child care for students.
- Modify the Occupational Standards Classification in the U.S. Department of Labor to accurately reflect the different roles in early childhood education as opposed to the different settings and sectors of early childhood education.

### The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® supported pathway of Miracle Brame, Indiana

Teaching in an after-school program in a low-income neighborhood in Indiana, Miracle said she was motivated by “the energy, curiosity, individuality and eagerness that each child brought.” Right out of high school she started her education with an eye toward social work, meanwhile, her director asked her to get her Child Development Associate Credential. After starting a family of her own, she circled back to her long-held dream of a bachelor's degree. She earned several degrees and is now a T.E.A.C.H. advisor at the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children.

With a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship providing her with support along each step of the career pathway, she earned a Child Development Associate Credential; Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education (Associate of Science & Associate of Applied Science); Bachelor's Degree in Education Preschool-Grade 3, Mild Intervention; currently working on a Master's Degree in Leadership Development. As a result, she was able to pursue positions of part-time Afterschool Floater; Teacher Assistant; Lead Teacher; Center Director; T.E.A.C.H. Advisor. Due to the T.E.A.C.H.'s compensation support and her professional role options, she has had an 89% real wage increase when controlling for inflation over 13 years.



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