

# Preparing a Profession

Perspectives of Higher Education  
Leaders on the Future of the  
Early Childhood Education  
Workforce



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**Preparing a Profession: Perspectives of Higher  
Education Leaders on the Future of the ECE**

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# Preface

Between January and May 2021, I conducted interviews with close to 30 higher education leaders. My goal was to better understand their perspectives about the current state of the early childhood education (ECE) field and their institutions' role in strengthening the profession.

The interviews occurred several months after a 15-member coalition NAEYC led released a sweeping roadmap for transforming the ECE profession (*Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*) to be well prepared, well compensated, diverse, effective, and equitable (see [Appendix B: About Professional Designations in Power to the Profession](#) on page 24). The recommendations addressed career pathways, preparation, competencies, responsibilities, and compensation for professionals caring for and educating children from birth through age 8 across states and settings.

Institutions of higher education, national higher education policy organizations, and individual leaders in higher education will be critical partners in developing this professional ECE field of practice. Ensuring the field has the ability to thrive depends on their willingness to wield their power and make ECE a priority. It likewise depends on how they proceed as partners in addressing the systemic barriers that now often leave ECE credential and degree programs with little status and support while simultaneously leaving too many current and prospective educators, particularly those who speak languages other than English; those who come from low-income communities and communities of color;

and those who are first-generation students unable to access, afford, and complete degrees. The *Unifying Framework* presents recommendations specifically for higher education programs, which are intended to increase the overall accessibility, quality, status, funding, and effectiveness of those degree programs (see [Appendix C](#)).

The interviews with higher education leaders were not designed to secure their buy-in for the *Unifying Framework's* recommendations. The discussions were much more open-ended. But I was struck by how much alignment there was between their views and the *Unifying Framework*—both in their diagnoses of the problems and their suggestions for how their institutions can contribute to solutions.

One silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has greatly increased awareness about the importance of the Early Childhood Education field to the economic prosperity of the country and the overall well-being of children, families, and communities. As the following pages document, higher education leaders agree, and this report summarizes our conversations in the context of key themes, highlights, and recommendations that came out of those conversations. I hope this report contributes to the ongoing discussion underway in all sectors—education, business, government, and philanthropy—about what it will take to strengthen the ECE field so that quality early education and child care become equitably accessible and affordable for all families *and* a viable career path for a diverse group of educators working across all states and settings.

Onward!



**Rhian Evans Allvin**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
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 Education of Young Children

# Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) and higher education are not often linked in the public sphere, yet both are critical infrastructure in the United States and both prepare individuals to understand what it means to be part of society. In addition, higher education is the primary pipeline for preparing effective early childhood educators. There are more than 2,000 ECE professional preparation programs located in institutions of higher education (IHEs) in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Council for Professional Recognition holds the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and many institutions offer preparation programs for the CDA. Many of these degrees are located in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Minority Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities.<sup>2</sup> Community colleges play a critical role in ECE degree programs as more than half of bachelor's degree graduates attended community colleges.<sup>3</sup>

And who are these institutions of higher education preparing? Fifty-two percent of center-based early childhood educators hold a postsecondary degree, with 35 percent holding a bachelor's degree. Comparatively, 31 percent of licensed home-based providers hold a postsecondary degree, with 17 percent holding a bachelor's degree.<sup>4</sup> Given that a bachelor's degree is required for a K–12 teaching license in all states, all K–3 educators hold a bachelor's degree.

However, even as the ECE profession is calling for a better-prepared ECE workforce and the science of child development points to the complex skills and knowledge required of early childhood educators to effectively practice with young children, many ECE degree programs find themselves vulnerable to program and budget cuts due to low enrollment caused by low compensation and a public perception of a low status profession. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these vulnerabilities. In May 2021, NAEYC surveyed the early childhood higher education community to understand the impact of the pandemic. More than 600 faculty from 400 institutions responded. The findings are concerning:

- Almost two-thirds of the programs have experienced decreases in student enrollment.
- Over one-third of programs have seen a decrease in ECE candidates graduating.
- Thirty percent of programs have experienced budget cuts.
- Eighteen percent of programs have experienced faculty and staff cuts.
- Thirteen percent of programs indicated they are worried that their program is in danger of closing over the next 12-18 months.
- Two percent of programs have closed during the pandemic.

While these data make clear that the stability and sustainability of early childhood higher education programs are in jeopardy, it is also the case that the short and long-term stability and sustainability of

1 This number includes 1,300 associate degree, 1,069 bachelor's degree, 612 master's degree, and 84 doctoral programs, as determined by data that NAEYC gathered in 2016 to create the [Early Childhood Higher Education Directory](#).

2 There are approximately 569 Hispanic Serving Institutions (<https://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSIs.asp>), 101 HBCUs (<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=667>), and 32 Tribal Colleges and Universities (<https://sites.ed.gov/whiaiane/tribes-tcus/tribal-colleges-and-universities/>) in the United States.

3 Daniel Foley, Lynn Milan, and Karen Hamrick, *The Increasing Role of Community Colleges among Bachelor's Degree Recipients: Findings from the 2019 National Survey of College Graduates* (Alexandria, VA: National Science Foundation, 2020), <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf21309>.

4 Marcy Whitebook, Caitlin McLean and Lea J.E. Austin, *Early Childhood Workforce Index - 2016* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2016), retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2016-index/>.

child care programs are at both a crisis point and an important inflection point. Child care is expensive—both for child care providers and for the families that participate in the programs. Families cannot pay any more than they already are for child care, with many already paying more monthly in child care than for their housing or for in-state college tuition. Yet at the same time, early childhood educators are among the lowest-paid employees in the country, often making less than dog-walkers and fast-food restaurant workers. Meanwhile, higher education leaders are under pressure to prepare graduates for living-wage careers. Given that early childhood educators are among the lowest-paid college graduates, it is not surprising that ECE degree programs often hold the lowest status within IHEs.<sup>5</sup>

It is with these realities in mind that in the spring of 2021, with support from the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, NAEYC embarked on a series of interviews with nearly 30 higher education leaders—in IHEs and in national higher education organizations—to understand their perspectives about the current state of the ECE field and their institutions’ role in strengthening the profession. The insights from these interviews, as well as a new Early Childhood Higher Education Advisory Council, will inform NAEYC’s agenda to increase higher education’s investment in ECE degree programs. The buy-in, investment from, and advocacy of higher education leaders—presidents, provosts, chancellors, and deans—will be essential to sustain and grow ECE degree programs in the coming years to meet the needs of the ECE workforce and the expectations of the ECE profession.

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5 Kristen Broady and Brad Hershebein, *Major Decisions: What Graduates Earn Over Their Lifetimes* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, October 8, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/10/08/major-decisions-what-graduates-earn-over-their-lifetimes/>.

# A Challenging Landscape

In their interviews, higher education leaders universally pointed to the value of high-quality ECE and the important role early childhood educators play in society. Many referenced the strong scientific and economic data documenting ECE's benefits that emerged during the pandemic, when child care was more readily acknowledged as essential to the economy. Several referenced the nonnegotiable need for equitable access to high-quality ECE with a well-compensated workforce as a fundamental racial and gender equity issue and moral obligation for the country.

But they simultaneously acknowledged that, despite the science, too many decision makers still perceive ECE as babysitting, which ties into the two biggest challenges they identified for the ECE field and higher education:

- lack of compensation for early childhood educators
- minimal requirements for degrees and aligned competencies.

These two challenges are connected as well: If early childhood educators are going into positions with minimal requirements and everyone is compensated similarly and poorly, what is their incentive to obtain a postsecondary degree? And from the higher education perspective, if there are not strong, specific employment and salary outcomes to serve as a measure of the institution's success, what is their incentive to invest in their ECE degree programs? In addition, IHEs confronted and identified the challenge that too many employers of early childhood educators neither prioritize nor require degrees beyond state requirements or are unwilling or unable to pay commensurate salaries to make the degrees worthwhile.

**“Higher education has found it hard economically to sustain ECE programs in the face of poor salary prospects for their graduates. Despite growth as a profession, the pool of applicants for bachelor’s degree credentials is challengingly thin.”**

—Dr. Camilla Persson Benbow, Patricia and Rodes Hart Dean of Education and Human Development, Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College

## Compensation

Early childhood educators on average earn \$11.65 per hour, making so little that nearly half live in families who are eligible for public assistance, and only 15 percent have employer-sponsored health insurance.<sup>6</sup> Even for those who earn a bachelor’s degree, particularly in birth-through-age-5 settings, the wage increase is not substantial, with the average hourly wage being \$14.80 for educators with a bachelor’s degree in Head Start settings and \$13.50 for those with a bachelor’s degree in non-public birth-through-age-5 settings. Within the ECE workforce, there are significant wage differentials depending on where and with whom individuals are working. Those working in private birth-through-age-5 early learning settings, even when they are supported with patchwork public

6 Whitebook, McLean and Austin, *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2016*; Marcy Whitebook, Caitlin McLean, Lea J.E. Austin, and Bethany Edwards, *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2018), retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2016-index/>; Caitlin McLean, Lea J. E. Austin, Marcy Whitebook, and Krista L. Olson, *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2021), retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/report-pdf>; Marcy Whitebook, Deborah Phillips, and Carollee Howes, *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years After the National Child Care Staffing Study* (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2014), retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/worthy-work-still-unlivable-wages/>.

funding sources like child care subsidies, (family child care and community-based centers) often earn less than those working in primarily publicly-funded settings (Head Start and public schools). Those working with the youngest of children (infants and toddlers) often make less than those working with older children (preschool and early elementary grades). As such, even candidates who are passionate about ECE are frequently and understandably unwilling to invest the time, energy, and finances in a degree that does not lead to adequate compensation in the form of wages and benefits.

The challenges of low compensation are compounded by the inequitable and structural barriers students face in obtaining degrees, including student loan debt, which is disproportionately burdensome to Black students,<sup>7</sup> inaccessible transportation, and unaffordable child care for their own children. In addition, too many students hold credits in coursework that do not transfer, resulting in significant additional costs. Some interviewees pointed to bachelor's degree candidates with 300 hours of coursework from associate degree programs that do not transfer into the bachelor's program.

The higher professional salaries and better health insurance and retirement benefits at elementary schools were common themes. One interviewee mentioned finding ECE students in tears because they wanted to work with 3- and 4-year-olds but couldn't pay their mortgage, so they took a higher-paying position working with older children in the elementary school system.

## Credentials

While there has been significant progress in the last few years to develop an early childhood professional field of practice, in most states, licensed child care requires minimal educational attainment for educators across roles. In limited settings, such as publicly funded preschool in some states, the minimum required preparation can be as high as a bachelor's degree.

**“I also know that so much of what happens from age 0—5 is done with a patchwork quilt of oversight, standard setting, compliance, both formal and informal.**

While there are wonderful people doing the work and a lot of informal situations are terrific in neighborhoods and communities, this is an opportunity in search of a whole lot of investment. Children need to get the kind of programmatic human support and protection that parents and grandparents want for them.

**The number-one barrier for our students to retention and completion is financial—period.**

So many of our students feel that their educational journey from poverty to degree attainment is a community effort and their role is to lift as they climb.

**College attainment is increasingly critical to earn something other than minimum wage.**

They want the American Dream, and you can't get that from this field as it is currently constructed. We recognize this is an important field that doesn't get enough attention with respect to Black and low-income children.

**We want to see credentialing and compensation.”**

—Dr. Michael Lomax, President and CEO, United Negro College Fund

7 Melanie Hanson, “Student Loan Debt by Race,” EducationData.org, updated July 10, 2021, <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-by-race>; Melissa Cominole and Alexander Bentz, *Debt After College: Employment, Enrollment, and Student-Reported Stress and Outcomes* (RTI International on behalf of National Center for Education Statistics, April 2018), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018401.pdf>.



Yet as one interviewee noted, creating a professional field of practice requires market-based drivers that currently do not exist; he observed that the incentive structures are much different for other professional fields in the United States and for teacher preparation in other countries. In his estimation, American school districts and/or employers see teacher preparation programs as a way to reduce teacher shortages and “fill slots.” Leading countries, on the other hand, view teacher preparation as a science-based discipline that requires advanced pedagogical knowledge and strong clinical or practicum experience.

The lack of adequate preparation—and compensation—results in massive turnover in the education field; estimates range from 17 percent to more than half of all K–12 educators leave in the first five years in the classroom, and annual turnover in ECE is estimated between 26 to 40 percent.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the United States spends billions a year to replace teachers<sup>9</sup>. One interviewee asked: “How do we disrupt this economic model?”

## Structure And Supports

As part of the challenges faced by students and embedded in higher education’s structure, interviewees pointed to the multitude of ECE degree programs in their institutions; these programs go by different names, have different purposes, and reside in separate colleges (though ECE often sits within their colleges of education, which generally are considered “low status”). While in some instances this variety makes sense, it also can confuse students, silo content, and create too narrow a path for graduates if one program results in a discrete license but another does not.

**“There is this near-universal acknowledgment that the practice of ECE is important to us socially and individually. I am struck by the disconnect between the esteem for practitioners and the failure to acknowledge that financially.”**

—Dr. Christina Whitfield, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

These challenges are magnified by the structural barriers in IHEs related to preparing ECE degree candidates, including difficulty recruiting faculty to teach night and weekend classes, difficulty providing child care during class time, lack of mentorship for students of color exacerbated by the lack of educators of color in some communities and settings, and inadequate capacity to maintain cohort models, practicums, and career services. These student supports are essential for all learners but are particularly critical to the success of English language learners and first-generation college students in ECE degree programs; many of them are simultaneously working full time, which makes it difficult for them to get release time and juggle all the competing demands of school, work, and life.

8 Lucinda Gray and Soheyla Taie, *Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study* (NCES 2015-337) (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, April 2015), retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015337.pdf>; Mariana Haynes and Ann Maddock, *On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, July 2014), <https://mk0all4edorgjxy8xf9.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PathToEquity.pdf>; Emily Tate, “The Pandemic Has Compounded the Turnover Problem in Early Childhood Education,” *EdSurge*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-02-09-the-pandemic-has-compounded-the-turnover-problem-in-early-childhood-education>.

9 Carroll, T.G. 2007. Policy Brief: The High Cost of Teacher Turnover. National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future; Carver-Thomas, Desiree, and Linda Darling-Hammond. 2017. *Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It*. Learning Policy Institute, August 2017.

# Glimmers of Hope

While we have a steep hill to climb, there are glimmers of hope. Each of the interviewees pointed to signs of progress and a changed paradigm where ECE degree programs are becoming more equitably accessible, affordable, and valued.

## Impact of External Support

State, county, and federal government investments have a major impact. When these public entities make commitments like public preschool or large investments in child care, the market demand increases, which can then raise the supply of well-prepared early childhood educators. Governors, mayors, and legislative bodies can play a particularly important role; when they signal support through budget allocations and multi-year early childhood investments, colleges and universities become more willing to take the risk of investing in quality ECE programs. For example, according to interviewees, the commitment to expanding public preschool in California, New Jersey, and San Antonio, Texas, led to larger investments from IHEs in their ECE preparation programs.

Virtually all interviewees also mentioned the impact of business and philanthropic support on ECE programs; when the private and philanthropic sectors initiate demand for ECE degree programs, they become a top priority. The California State University system, for example, with 23 campuses, is aligning its curriculum and clinical practice in order to ensure ECE degree candidates, like their K-12 credential program counterparts, are prepared to teach English language learners.<sup>10</sup> In describing the changes, Dr. Pia Wong, associate dean for research and engagement at Sacramento State University's College of Education, said, "In 25 years in the Cal State System, this is the initiative I am most proud of."

**"When the Chancellor arrived, he really raised up ECE and collaboration. The credence we have given the field, the chancellor coming to meet folks, and the scale of the fellowship have made our ECE degree programs a centerpiece for the community college system."**

—Kate Connor, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, Truman College

Similarly, California Polytechnic State University's (Cal Poly Pomona) ECE degree program was initially funded with a \$2 million donation and is now the fastest-growing degree program and has the highest graduation rates at the institution. It is the first program in the California State University system to achieve NAEYC higher education accreditation. Prior to this investment, no permanent faculty taught in the program; now there are five. The program also has an exceptionally strong articulation agreement with the local community college. Dr. Nancy Hurlbut, Chair of Early Childhood Studies in the College of Education and Integrative Studies at Cal Poly Pomona, said they would not have the graduation success without a strong articulation agreement.

Although licensing of individuals is only required for a small percentage of the ECE workforce, (typically those working in public school settings), states that have made progress in aligning their licensing and degree requirements have created an environment where it is more straightforward for postsecondary institutions to collaborate around shared goals.

<sup>10</sup> "Teacher and Educator Preparation," Office of the Chancellor, California State University, <https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/teacher-education>.

Many interviewees also cited the importance of federal and private research dollars in stimulating demand, promoting program quality, and elevating the status of an institution or program. According to one interviewee, in the top 100 universities in the United States, the leading metric is research dollars per faculty member. This helps explain why science, engineering, and medicine are so important to the perceived success of an institution and its leadership. Research funding, much like tuition and program demand, also helps attract renowned faculty. On the positive side, the science documenting the many benefits of early learning, combined with a stronger national emphasis on addressing the structural inequities and biases that have led to deep racial inequality, offer more promising opportunities for additional ECE research dollars.

## Leadership of Community Colleges and Institutions Serving Students of Color

Positive shifts are occurring disproportionately at the associate degree level. Several interviewees representing community college systems cited ECE degree programs as their strongest offering, with the highest number of faculty and the most interest from external business and political partners. They spoke of accelerated innovations as a result of this support. Interviewees pointed to many instances where ECE faculty have risen to positions of prominence, including one who is now a community college president. The comparatively high return on investment in associate degrees, along with the community colleges' intentional development of partnerships with employers and communities, seems to be hitting the sweet spot of market demand; as a result, financial investments in a subset of ECE preparation programs are continuing to increase even while community colleges, writ large are still suffering from pandemic-related enrollment fallout.

**“Our status has changed rapidly in recent years. When we got the legislative mandate for the uniform articulation agreement, it pushed us into a place of having a better relationship with our university partners. There is a joint faculty committee that governs that agreement. When we are on those calls with our university counterparts, we are respected.”**

—Dr. Lisa Mabe Eads, Associate Vice President of Academic Programs, North Carolina Community Colleges

Mandatory articulation agreements between associate and bachelor's degree programs and opportunities for community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees (discussed later in the report) are growing. These mandatory agreements shift the power dynamic so that governance systems, leadership, and faculty in associate and bachelor's degree institutions are on more equal footing. Allowing community colleges to offer four-year degrees is experimental and controversial but shows signs of early promise<sup>11</sup>.

Importantly, HSIs, HBCUs, and Tribal Colleges and Universities also are playing key roles in advancing ECE. With close to half of the ECE workforce identifying as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), the intentionality with which these institutions enroll, retain, and graduate early childhood educators in quality programs is critical, and they are making substantial progress. According to one interviewee, the dropout rate among Latino/a students has declined from 40 percent to 9 percent in the past 15 years. Many of these learners begin at community colleges, making the articulation between associate and bachelor's degree institutions even more important.

11 Koenig, Rebecca, “What If Students Didn't Have to Leave Community Colleges to Earn Bachelor's Degrees?”. EdSurge, April 13, 2021. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-04-13-what-if-students-didn-t-have-to-leave-community-colleges-to-earn-bachelor-s-degrees>

## Leadership Matters

Not surprisingly, higher education interviewees pointed to the direct connection between the willingness of IHE leadership to put the weight of their position behind prioritizing ECE and the status, significance, and growth of the field. When system leaders—regents, chancellors, provosts, and deans—declare ECE an institutional priority, it becomes one, and the investments tend to follow.

Interviewees were especially intrigued by the idea of a “professional field of practice” for ECE. They immediately saw how this elevated status would attract political support and drive student demand while making postsecondary institutions more interested. Several mentioned the unbreakable connection among a “discipline,” employment opportunities, research dollars, and student demand. For example, integrating ECE and special education programs has created a status that sometimes does not exist in standalone ECE degree programs. Similarly, more elementary education degree candidates are seeing the value in learning about the developmental science of early childhood, so they are choosing ECE degrees as a pathway to a career in elementary education.

With increased investment in ECE, however, some interviewees feared that “training programs” with uneven quality could increase. They recognized the need for postsecondary institutions to hold themselves accountable for the consistency, rigor, and quality of their programs.

**“I started as the director of the campus child development center. Everything I needed to know about supporting students’ postsecondary success was embedded in that early childhood framework and environment.”**

—Dr. Margaret Annunziata, President, Isothermal Community College

**“If you have strong leaders in early education who become department chairs, deans, and/or provosts, there tends to be a strong program.”**

—Dr. Shirley Raines, President Emerita, University of Memphis; Speaker, Author, and Leadership Development Consultant

# Three Promising Opportunities

The interviews also focused on opportunities for IHEs to help strengthen the ECE field. The timing is right: The field itself has taken the lead in developing a comprehensive framework for change, with significant recommendations for higher education (see Appendix C). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly raised awareness among policymakers, employers, parents, and others about the centrality of quality ECE to a functional economy and equitable society.

In that context, our interviews focused on three specific opportunities for higher education: (1) accelerate innovations in aligning ECE associate and bachelor's degrees, (2) promote ECE program accreditation, and (3) offer child care to faculty, staff, and students as part of their association with the institution.

## Opportunity One

### Accelerate Innovations in Associate and Bachelor's Degree Alignment and Student Supports

With such a large percentage of early childhood educators initiating their postsecondary journey at a community college, it is essential for associate and bachelor's degree colleges and universities to successfully create seamless articulation agreements. According to New America, 35 states have guaranteed articulation agreements in which bachelor's institutions must accept all credits from in-state students transferring from community colleges with associate degrees, yet more is needed.<sup>12</sup>

Interviewees reinforced and identified with the essential role community colleges play in the higher education system. They cited strong partnerships

as a core equity issue in order to ensure BIPOC early childhood educators have full and complete access to the entire postsecondary pipeline. Some of the strategies being used are widely accepted and adopted while others are experimental and/or controversial.

Many states and systems require a certain percentage of bachelor's degree candidates to come from community colleges, which has required four-year institutions to partner more effectively. For example, the University of California system mandates that half of entering students be community college transfer students. Several interviewees cited higher graduation rates among students transferring from community colleges, creating a more efficient and effective approach to delivering four-year degrees.

Despite the many articulation agreements across the country, far too many students still find themselves caught in an endless loop of uneven transfer rules, and there is still too much burden on students to “figure it out” on their own. For example, students have to identify at the beginning of their associate degree program if they are interested in ultimately attaining a bachelor's degree because the coursework for a terminal associate degree is often much different than the coursework for students who intend to transfer. In this regard, one interviewee talked about how much more work needs to be done in aligning general education requirements into discipline interests. She cited English and statistics as examples, asking, “Why couldn't English coursework be integrated with text that is about ECE . . . or statistical analysis tied to the development of young children?”

Encouragingly, some colleges and universities with ECE lab schools have integrated their lab school experience with the requirements for clinical practice and/or provide stipends or free enrollment in return for a certain number of work hours at the school.

<sup>12</sup> Elin Johnson and Wesley Whistle, “How States and Systems Can Work Toward Making Transferring Smoother,” New America, February 10, 2021, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/how-states-and-systems-can-work-toward-making-transferring-smoother/>.

### What Early Childhood Education Can Learn from Other Professions

Establishing a professional field of practice is not a new idea. In the past 100 years, a number of fields have taken ownership of their professional practice and, as a result, have improved salaries, independence, trust, and practice autonomy for their practitioners and researchers. The interviewees were asked to identify other professions that ECE could use as possible models, especially female-dominated professions and other high-skill, low-wage fields.

Interviewees widely cited nursing as the most aligned profession. They mentioned the growing complexity of the practice; the high demand, status, and salary for nurses; and the relentless march for increased degree requirements. They were impressed by the irony: as professional standards were increased for nurses, so did market demand for their services. They cited a coordinated, powerful effort by the field and professional associations to strengthen the profession. They noted that additional postsecondary degrees led to additional practice autonomy and supervisory roles. Indeed, an increasing number of nurses across the country have gone on to become hospital administrators.

In addition, a wide range of industries have grown as respected professional fields. Social work, allied health professions, nutrition sciences, and child life professionals are also potential models for the ECE field. Some interviewees saw parallels in public health. In particular, some cited the transformation of the market demand for a master's degree in social work as an example to study. Hospitality is gaining prominence, particularly driven by major institutions such as Cornell University and Michigan State University, which have four-year degree programs. Similarly, agriculture and culinary programs are increasing in status, in part driven by the farm-to-table movement. The evolution of degree programs for physician assistants and psychologists is another model, and one interviewee said emergency medical technicians and criminal justice programs are rising in stature, speculating that their growing status was because they are male-dominated professions. Several cited market demand as a key factor in a field's evolution, singling out fast-growing information technology (IT) and all computer-oriented programs. Others cited welding, a very specific skill that

**“During my 12 years as president of the University of Memphis, I watched the evolution of nursing, the demand for nurses, and the concern over the quality of nursing degrees. We struggled to train the faculty who would train the students, so we had to educate our own in order to meet the standards. The impetus was that hospitals began demanding more skill. Early childhood education employers need to start demanding a higher skilled workforce.”**

—Dr. Shirley Raines, President Emerita, University of Memphis; Speaker, Author, and Leadership Development Consultant

traditionally hasn't attracted much interest in higher education. However, recent market demand has caused associate degree programs to pay attention. Industry support is exposing more high school students to the field and strong apprenticeship programs that lead to degrees and credentials are increasing. In both IT and welding, apprenticeships and “earn and learn” models seem to be ideal.

One interviewee specifically cited K–12 teaching as a field not to emulate. Because every state has a unique approach with multiple types of credentials and certifications, the system is chaotic and inflexible, and the profession doesn't own the practice—state governments do. Colleges of education are forced to “teach to the test” without fully preparing candidates for degrees that promote practice autonomy or reciprocity across states. The many certifications and regulations also create silos and fiefdoms that can almost never be overcome.

Colleges and universities must recognize that most ECE students have to work and go to school simultaneously. Bachelor's degree programs could offer their coursework on community college campuses to make the experience more student centered. They also could integrate night and weekend courses, child care, cohorts, and online learning to create more seamless transitions for students.

Several interviewees mentioned the essential need to partner with community-based organizations so that ECE degree candidates are fully supported by the communities in which they will live and work. City Colleges of Chicago, for example, started offering courses in community-based settings so that wraparound services, including child care, were available to students. This approach helped attract and retain students and offered clinical practice in diverse settings that reflected the community and its many cultures.

California has a classified employee grant program where paraprofessionals, many of whom represent the ethnic and racial makeup of the local community, easily move from associate to bachelor's programs and then earn their teaching credential.

North Carolina has a mandatory uniform articulation agreement through which 57 colleges actively participate to support candidates in obtaining an ECE bachelor's degree. Twelve institutions in the University of North Carolina system offer licensure programs and accept transfers, and eight have non-licensure programs. This mandate has generated a few positive changes. Community colleges and university partners have a better relationship that is governed by a joint faculty committee. Community college interviewees said they are much more respected since the mandate went into effect. The community college system has garnered more political support as the General Assembly sees them as strong partners in helping the state solve workforce challenges—increasing the relevance of their degree programs. One interviewee from North Carolina said ECE degree programs have never been better positioned.

Indiana has one community college system: Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana. While it offers multiple degrees and certificates, the associate of science degree has been identified and qualified as a

**“We can offer an all-in, four-year degree recognized by the industry, at a two-year cost. That is \$10,000 all-in, and it is game changing. Our regional four-year institutions are trying to get to a point where they can offer one-year for under \$10,000. We are opening the door and creating access to consumers that haven't historically been consumers of higher education. And, we are addressing our goal, which is diversity of the workforce. Our degrees are an excellent investment for philanthropy. Endowing a few million dollars in funds for a \$10,000 degree goes much further than for \$80,000 degrees. We are flipping the narrative.”**

Dr. Rob DeHaas, Vice Provost, School of Education Dallas College

single articulation pathway so that Ivy Tech students lose no credits when they transfer to a baccalaureate program in Indiana. Currently all state universities (except the flagship university in Bloomington) have voluntarily created guaranteed admission for these transfer students, and an effort is underway to make this guarantee universal.

Another strategy is to let community colleges offer limited and discrete bachelor's degrees. Dallas College is among those that have gone in this direction. In 2017, the Texas State Legislature began allowing community colleges to award bachelor's degrees, limited to three high-need workforce areas: nursing, IT, and ECE. With leadership from the chancellor, Dallas College conducted a landscape analysis and made ECE its top priority after determining that the community needed 4,500 early childhood educators serving children from birth through third grade and

that four-year institutions were not producing enough candidates. Increased state funding for full-day preschool helped drive the increased demand. Local stakeholders and philanthropists were enthusiastic about the innovation.

So far, Dallas College is the first and only community college in Texas to be approved to grant a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and teaching. It took multiple years to win the necessary approval, first from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, then from the regional university accrediting agency, and finally from the state board of teacher certification, which oversees licensure. Interviewees said that this rigorous process should reassure those who fear this innovation amounts to an "anything goes" mandate.

## Opportunity Two

### Accredit Early Childhood Education Degree Programs

Accreditation of higher education preparation programs across a multitude of professions (e.g., nursing, architecture, engineering) is seen as essential for ensuring that each profession's workforce is proficient in the necessary competencies for effective practice. Accreditation serves as a marker of accountability to the public, a seal of approval from the profession, and a continuous improvement framework for the programs. In other professions, accreditation bodies work closely with states to review programs, providing assurance that graduates of accredited programs seeking licensure are "safe to practice." States often require that accrediting bodies hold recognition from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or the US Department of Education (USED) in order to develop these partnerships. CHEA and USED recognition provide external validation that the accrediting body promotes academic quality, has sound standards and policies, and is transparent with the public about the quality of their accredited programs.

Accreditation, though, remains a voluntary option for ECE professional preparation programs. The long-standing challenges of the profession—low

**"I put a high value on accreditation. Individuals will say, 'I come from an accredited program.' You honor that. It elevates the program within the university because it comes from an external accreditor."**

Dr. Mildred García, President, American Association of State Colleges and Universities

**"When it comes to registries and state systems, we need to make sure we function holistically and integrate in local, state and national efforts to avoid the potential of isolation of any one of these important pieces. This will help us create common systems and language across the country for our field and our teachers."**

—Kate Connor, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, Truman College

wages and low external value but high skills—have impeded many professional preparation programs from pursuing accreditation. Many of these programs are undervalued and under-resourced within their higher education institutions. They have difficulty making the case for the funding and resources needed to pursue accreditation, given that higher education leaders are under pressure to elevate programs preparing graduates for living-wage careers and close programs that do not.

With this context in mind, most of the interviewees enthusiastically supported professional accreditation of ECE degree programs. Many cited the role accreditation has played in professionalizing other fields, which has led to increased perceived value and compensation for their workforces. Accreditation also



has reassured the public that a floor of excellence is being met. Many interviewees said that professional accreditation gives a degree program and its faculty more standing and prestige among their peers at the institution and across institutions. One mentioned the role that professional accreditation plays in the profession “policing” itself, which in turn minimizes the need or desire for the public sector to intervene and over-prescribe and regulate.

Some interviewees pointed to the example of medicine, which has greatly reduced mortality rates since strengthening its accreditation systems more than a century ago. Several cited the accountability and consistency accreditation provides to students, who deserve to know that the program they are spending their time and money on is worth the investment. Also, accreditation helps programs get past the idea that their *only* role is to meet workforce requirements and instead allows them to lean into the deep science and pedagogy that undergirds quality practice. One interviewee suggested that if done well, accreditation brings standards without standardization.

At the same time, interviewees offered a number of cautions. Many suggested that too many accreditation processes (in the programmatic, national, and regional accreditation realms) have become or run the risk of becoming “checklists” rather than an engaged approach for continuous improvement and changing behavior. Others mentioned that some professional accreditation systems lack cultural competency, which should be nonnegotiable, particularly given the diversity of the country’s workforce. As one interviewee said speaking of accreditation process in general, “Accreditation as it applies to higher education has been discriminatory and biased; it is a protector of the status quo.”

Several interviewees specifically expressed concerns about state-based accreditation systems. First, they said that the bar is too low, and states inherently aren’t equipped to be steeped in the knowledge, skills, and competencies for each discipline. Second, having states create their own accreditation systems leads to inconsistencies that limit and inhibit reciprocity and ease of entry for the workforce. Related, requiring each program to meet both state-based competency requirements and a national accreditation model can be overwhelming. Aligned to this concern is

**“Thinking of myself, we have two adult daughters, but when they were 2 and 3, my husband worked for a company that had child care onsite.**

**We felt they were safe and learning—teachers had bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees. I remember thinking, if I can trust these early childhood professionals, I can be a better employee.”**

**Dr. Marquita Grenot-Scheyer**, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Educator Preparation and Public School Programs, The California State University

Since 2006, NAEYC has operated a higher education accreditation system to recognize the quality of ECE associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degree programs. Approximately 20 percent of early childhood associate degree programs are accredited, and the number of accredited bachelor’s and master’s degree programs has grown since NAEYC expanded to these degree levels in 2016. To achieve accreditation, programs must demonstrate that they are effectively preparing candidates in the profession’s competencies (previously NAEYC’s 2010 *Professional Preparation Standards* and now the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*). Programs must provide evidence of key program design components (e.g., mission, faculty quality, program of study, program governance, and resources), curriculum, and field experiences that meet NAEYC’s higher education accreditation standards. Recently, the accreditation system achieved CHEA recognition, an important external validation of its quality.

the uniqueness of each state-based ECE workforce registry system, which requires programs to align to and/or create their own independent competencies. This dynamic can create a vacuum with many

reporting entities requiring similar information. One interviewee suggested that NAEYC higher education accreditation, because it is based on the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, should serve as full and complete program approval in every state<sup>13</sup>.

Interviewees suggested that the keys to a successful professional accreditation system are funding and incentives. Funding is essential in order to recruit and retain quality faculty. And, if employees and the public are not demanding graduates from an accredited program, institutions have limited external incentive to absorb the expenses and extensive time commitment.

## Opportunity Three

### Extend Child Care Benefits to Faculty, Staff, and Students

In addition to preparing professionals for the workplace, IHEs are also large employers, driving broad economic growth and stability in their communities and states. The interviews probed how leaders of these institutions could extend these benefits on their campuses.

All interviewees recognized their critical role as a major employer. Most acknowledged that their child care programs are limited and only serve a fraction of the demand from faculty, classified staff, and students. They cited the large expense, which requires making a threshold decision about the value of that investment in attracting and retaining a workforce and student population. They also acknowledged that if child care isn't subsidized, it is out of reach for a large number of employees.

One of the most aggressive approaches we learned about was through The City University of New York (CUNY). According to Sherry Cleary, university dean for early childhood initiatives, CUNY serves 1,600 children across 17 campus child care centers, all of which are on campus with one exception. They have

**“I have never met anyone who doesn't want to be the best they can be for young children. The system prevents it.**

Higher education must find money for scholarships and provide the range of supports people might need to navigate higher education while they are working. This is only harder for people of color because we make it that way.

**When people who want to pursue higher education have the supports they need, they not only succeed—they thrive.**

They thrive in middle age, they thrive no matter how long they have been working.

**That is proof to us that they are not the problem—we are the problem.**

When we changed our culture in higher education and ensured students they would never be on their own, it was a blazing success. This is true for both two- and four-year degrees.”

**Sherry Cleary**, University Dean for Early Childhood Initiatives, The City University of New York

made this commitment because they understand that a significant number of their student population are parents who, in order for them to pursue higher education, need a range of supports, and child care is one of them. In this model, center directors have two jobs: provide high-quality ECE to young children and support the success of the student parent. They know when a student parent is experiencing stress in their finances or relationships, housing

<sup>13</sup> As the interviewer, NAEYC's CEO did ask about accreditation overall in the context of quality assurance and preparation but did not seek specific commentary on NAEYC higher education accreditation. As such, this particular recommendation from an interviewee was provided in addition to his/her response to the question about accreditation in general (see Appendix A).

insecurity, or academic trouble. The costs of child care are heavily subsidized, and almost every site has a waiting list. Part of their success stems from their commitment to and knowledge of how to blend funding streams. Their program is supported by the Child Care & Development Block Grant, state and city funds, and CUNY funds, and many of the programs have a CCAMPIS (Child Care Access Means Parents in School) grant. Just about every parent pays something, but some parents pay as little as \$5 per week. Most of the 17 campus child care centers also serve as the campus lab school, welcoming students and faculty from a range of academic disciplines including but not limited to early childhood, child development, psychology, nursing, special education, and rehabilitation sciences.

Some interviewees drew a distinction between the role of lab schools and child care programs on campus. They said lab schools both serve children and their families and provide an excellent clinical experience for their ECE students. Campus child care programs, on the other hand, primarily serve as a place to care for and educate faculty, staff, and students' children and are not necessarily connected to institutions' ECE degree programs. In some instances, interviewees distinguished between the level of quality between the two kinds of programs despite the fact that we have clear evidence that all early childhood programs can and should dually exist to keep children safe while their parents and guardians are at work and school and provide a high-quality early childhood experience. Many colleges and universities subsidize lab school programs but often invest only in the physical infrastructure and/or the occupancy costs of child care programs. For large university and college systems, the decision to offer child care is left up to each campus. Some programs are run by partner organizations.

Interviewees also discussed differences in need. For example, college and university employees and community members often need regular care (full time or part time), but according to interviewees, many students primarily need occasional drop-in care. It is difficult to accommodate both in a single program model or without sophisticated scheduling

**“We do have some colleges in our system that have a lab school that serves students and faculty. I think it is greatly beneficial.**

**The research shows it helps with student attendance, etc. The reason we do not have more of them is because of the liability and costs.**

**However, students have their own on-site practicum and can complete observation and gain field experience with faculty supervision. I think all campuses should have one.”**

Dr. Mary Olvera, Education  
Program Administrator, North  
Carolina Community Colleges

techniques and programs that stay open in the evening and weekends.

Some institutions provide employees with a stipend so that they can find community-based child care that meets their needs. This seems like a particularly interesting solution when the “campus” is distributed across geographic locations in different cities. However, it is critical to maintain a foundation of quality as a top priority for selecting community-based providers.

Regardless of whether IHEs are using the approach of a lab school, on-site, or off-site, subsidized, and community-based child care, interviewees universally agreed that child care is a critical benefit to students, faculty, and staff; it is an investment worth making; and that the demand dramatically outpaces supply across the country.

# Next Steps

## Partnering for Change

Interviewees all agreed about the need to create a professional field of practice for ECE, raise the status of ECE degree programs, and create a marketplace that values professional preparation. So, what will it take to get there? How does the ECE field engage with more higher education leaders to assure them that this effort is worth their time, attention, and financing? Interviewees were eager to engage on this topic and advanced a variety of ideas.

Their top recommendation: Promote the well-documented benefits of high-quality ECE. Several said to lead with the science; that is what convinced them. IHEs believe in promoting science, expanding practice through science, and translating science to practice; ECE addresses those sweet spots. Relatedly, postsecondary education and high-quality ECE both help advance the human condition, so make this connection explicit for higher education leaders.

Interviewees also made a strong case for ECE as a lever to promote racial equity, another priority in higher education. They cited the clear evidence that racial inequities begin at birth, and by the time a learner is ready for postsecondary education, the gaps are too great and costly to overcome effectively. Thus, colleges and universities that want to move beyond lip service about racial equity have an obligation to do their part in making ECE a valued degree program. This will require confronting their own structural biases and disparities that further stratify degree holders by race.

The pandemic's public health crisis was on everyone's mind. Interviewees communicated a sense of urgency about leveraging the workforce crisis emerging from the pandemic, particularly for women, to make the case for increased investments in ECE. The timing is perfect for higher education leaders to use their significant influence with state policymakers, to the extent that they can. Some interviewees pointed to recent examples of increased collaboration

**“Public higher education is driven by two factors—research and students. That is our funding model. Driving demand for degree programs with financial aid and creating a pipeline of research dollars is what will motivate public institutions of higher education.”**

—Dr. Gregory Washington, President,  
George Mason University

**“Higher education is always looking to see how they can be good partners to their communities. Not just the university community. One of the best ways higher education can be a good neighbor is by assisting with the educational challenges their surrounding communities have. By helping communities with ECE, they are helping their community get kids ready for a strong start in kindergarten.”**

—Dr. Camilla Persson Benbow, Patricia  
and Rodes Hart Dean of Education  
and Human Development, Vanderbilt  
University's Peabody College

between higher education and workforce agencies, which should be expanded. One suggested, “Higher education keeps women in the workforce and keeps the economy going.”

Some interviewees pointed out that increased market demand from employers and public funding will spur additional leadership by higher education. They reiterated that the more public dollars (massive influx of tuition assistance and research dollars) are invested at the state and federal level overall, the more likely a robust marketplace will emerge and higher education will respond. This is especially true related to compensation for the workforce. Public funding must be dedicated to and accountable for professional salaries for early childhood educators. This includes the accountability employers have in requiring degrees and paying professional salaries in order to drive demand for postsecondary degrees.

Interviewees promoted the need for cross-state reciprocity and nationally aligned systems. State-specific approaches bifurcate the demand for degrees, making it too unique and specialized to create the broader student demand that will drive enrollment and institutional investments.

Overall, organizations and interviewees expressed a strong interest in partnering with NAEYC and the ECE field to advance these priorities. Many interviewees simply said: This is just the right thing to do. They are willing to invest their time, energy, and resources to deliver on the promise of high-quality ECE degree programs and, in the process, create a broader professional field of practice that will benefit early child educators, families, children, and communities alike.

**“Don’t waste a good crisis. How many working mothers had to pull out of the workforce [during the pandemic]? This is not a theoretical problem. This is our problem. It is incumbent upon us to provide leadership in solving it.”**

—Dr. Christina Whitfield, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

**“The conversation that I have with higher education and leaders is about the challenges our students face.**

They are the same challenges they faced when they started kindergarten. The students who need remediation to be prepared for postsecondary coursework are the same students who needed extra literacy supports in elementary school.

If we do not invest in ECE, then we will continue to see students as they work their way through the educational system who are not well served.

**The only way to close equity gaps is to do it at the beginning.**

Preparing highly qualified early childhood educators is the right thing to do and the only way we change this.”

—Dr. Margaret Annunziata, President, Isothermal Community College

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**Dr. Gregory Washington**,  
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State Higher Education Executive  
Officers Association

**Dr. Pia Wong**, Associate Dean for  
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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol with Higher Education Leaders

These questions were used with leaders of institutions of higher education and were slightly adapted when interviewing leaders of national higher education organizations.

- 
- How do you perceive the current status of early childhood education as a degree program within your institution of higher education (IHE) and IHEs in general?
  - Has the status of early childhood education degree programs changed over time? If so, what has driven that change?
  - What are the biggest systemic barriers impeding investments in the status of and demand for ECE degree programs?
  - In other professions, accreditation of the professional preparation programs is mandatory. For the early childhood education profession, it is currently voluntary. What is your perspective on mandatory accreditation from the ECE profession?
  - Are there other professional fields that you believe have evolved in their status within higher education (particularly high skill, low wage professions)? If so, what are they and what prompted the evolution?
  - For this field in particular, what are the most ideal and innovative relationships between associate and baccalaureate degree programs?
  - Does your institution provide child care to students, faculty and/or the community? If so, what is the cost/benefit of offering on campus child care?
  - Do you have recommendations about key messages, advocacy strategies, etc. that would be helpful toward our goals of both increasing higher education leadership's understanding of the value of early childhood education (both to the country and to their own institutions) and investment in ECE degree programs?
  - Are there initiatives you are engaged in that would dovetail or align to this work?
  - What would motivate you and your institution to participate in an initiative like this?
  - When you think of prominent leaders across IHE, are there people who come to mind with whom we should speak? People who would become champions for this issue?

## Appendix B

# About Professional Designations in Power to the Profession

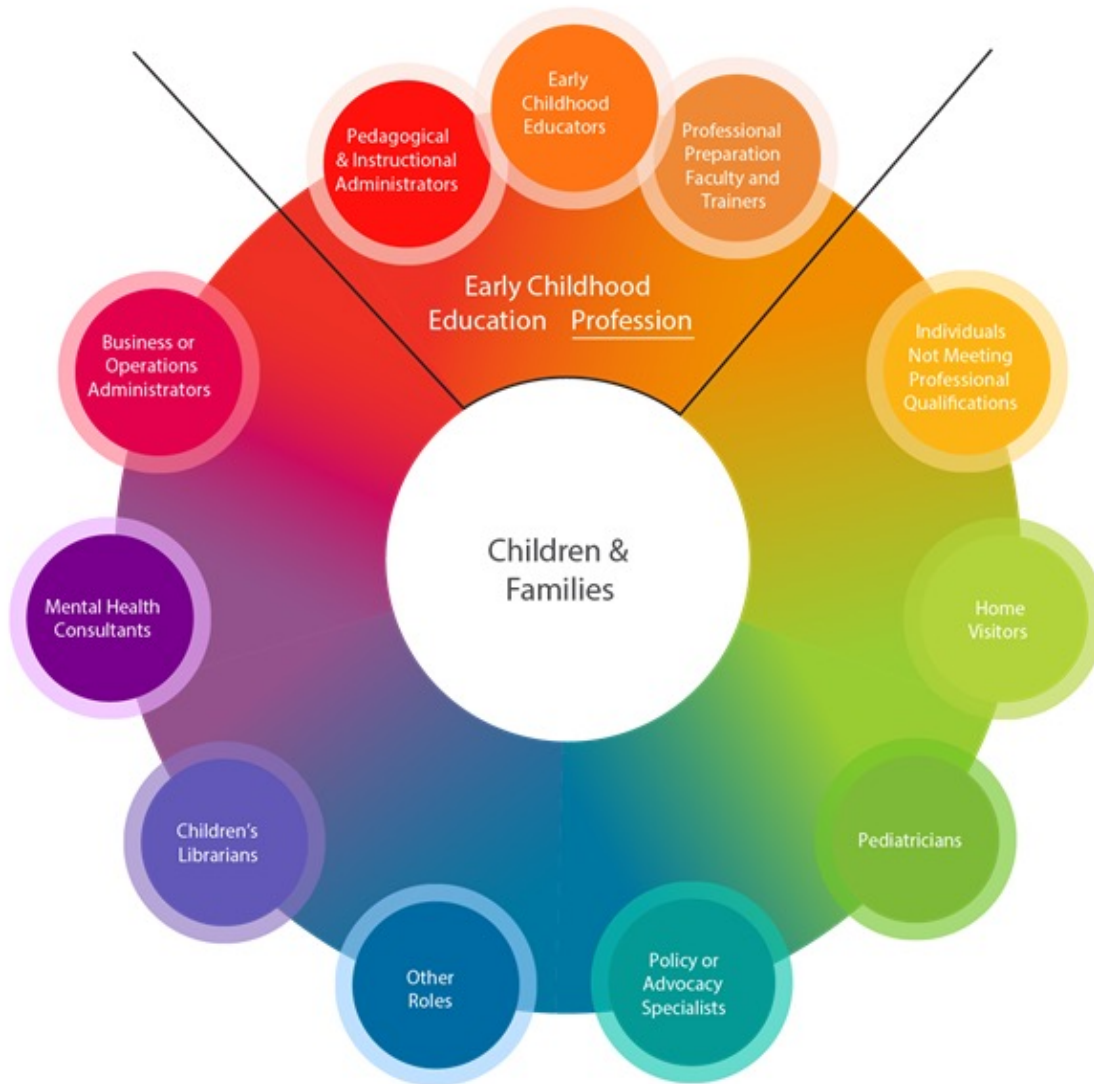
Power to the Profession, a three-year effort by 15 membership organizations, grew out of a 2015 report from the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Vision*. This report thoroughly and decisively laid out the scientific rationale for a professional field of practice in ECE. Much like an earlier report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000), it made clear that the cognitive, language and literacy, social and emotional, and physical growth of young children is at its height in these early years: a key argument for making increased public investments in high-quality education for children from birth. It also made clear that realizing the potential gains requires early childhood educators to have discrete knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through essential postsecondary degrees. The core recommendation of Power to the Profession resulted in a consensus document articulating a roadmap to creating a well-prepared, diverse, effective and well-compensated early childhood education profession. The *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* called for three distinct designations in the profession—Early Childhood Educator I, requiring a high school diploma and 120 training hours, leading to a credential; Early Childhood Educator II, requiring an associate degree in ECE; and Early Childhood Educator III, requiring a bachelor’s degree or entry-level master’s degree in ECE. This last designation reflects the conclusion of the *Transforming the Workforce* report, which recommends that a bachelor’s degree be required for all lead teachers in ECE settings.

As a parallel part of the Power to the Profession process, the ECE field also agreed to a unifying set of *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, developed collaboratively and held by NAEYC on behalf of the profession. These standards and competencies contain a scope of practice for each of the three designations of the profession, which will be recognized through a license to practice granted to individual early childhood educators. These recommendations, along with the many others outlined in the *Unifying Framework*, are explicitly designed to achieve the goal of ensuring that each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, equitable, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce across all states and settings.



## Appendix C

### Viewing the Recommendations in the *Unifying Framework* Through a Higher Education Lens



The vision that guides the *Unifying Framework* is that each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce. To achieve this vision, which is grounded in the National Academy of Medicine's *Transforming*

*the Workforce* report, we need to build toward a future structure for the early childhood education profession in which:

- each and every child, birth through age 8, across all settings, is supported by early childhood educators who have recognized early childhood degrees and credentials;

- early childhood educators at all levels of the profession are valued, respected, and well compensated for the important roles they play;
- educators with lead responsibilities across settings and age bands earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, at a minimum;
- anyone who wants to become an early childhood educator, at any level, has equitable access to affordable, high-quality professional preparation and development that supports them in developing the agreed-upon set of knowledge, skills, and competencies; and
- early childhood educators at all levels are well compensated in accordance with the complex and demanding work they perform, as part of a system that recognizes the cost of quality and finances early childhood education as the public good that it is.

**Recommendation:** The early childhood education profession will adopt the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (formerly known as the 2010 NAEYC Standards for Initial and Advanced Early Childhood Preparations Programs) as the foundational knowledge and skills required for all early childhood educators.

**Recommendation:** Create one early childhood education profession with three distinct and meaningful designations: Early Childhood Educator (ECE) I, Early Childhood Educator (ECE) II, and Early Childhood Educator (ECE) III. Each designation has an associated scope of practice, expected level of professional preparation, and expected level of proficiency in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators.

**Recommendation:** Early childhood educators with ECE II and ECE III designations can serve in lead roles in early learning settings: ECE II graduates can serve as leads in birth through Pre-K settings and ECE III graduates can serve as leads in birth-through-age-8 settings. In state- and district-funded programs, where *state-funded* is defined by the National Institute for Early Education Research, provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K–12 public school system, ECE II graduates can serve in the support educator role. ECE III graduates must serve in the lead educator role.

**Recommendation:** The primary professional preparation pathways are: the professional training program, the early childhood associate degree program, and the early childhood bachelor's degree/initial master's degree program. Other qualifying professional preparation programs, particularly non-degree-awarding programs or programs in freestanding institutions, will also be incorporated as needed and as they meet the profession's guidelines and accountability expectations.

**Recommendation:** ECEs should generalize first, then specialize. They must have a general early childhood education foundation as articulated in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators. Depending on the mission or conceptual framework of the professional preparation program, a concentration may be part of the generalist foundation. Professional organizations, not state or federal agencies, should be responsible for developing, administering, and issuing specializations.

**Recommendation:** Direct increased public funding to professional preparation programs that meet the following accountability expectations:

- All preparation programs identified in Power to the Profession operate as part of an organization or institution that is legally approved by a designated state government agency or entity.
- All preparation programs must earn accreditation or recognition from an early childhood professional preparation accreditation or recognition body approved through the professional governance body.
- All preparation programs must ensure that graduates can successfully demonstrate proficiency in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators, which may include completing licensure assessments that are developed for and recommended by the profession for ECE I, II, and III levels.
- All preparation programs must advance seamless articulation strategies that streamline pathways through postsecondary education, reduce duplication of coursework, and support multiple entry points into the pathways so that individuals may more easily advance their preparation and role in the profession.

In order to meet the accountability expectations, professional programs need to receive and provide the following infrastructure, resources, and supports. In addition, programs need and will thrive with investment, respect, and engagement from higher education leadership, including chancellors, presidents, provosts, deans, and boards of trustees.

### Supports for Faculty and Professional Development Specialists

- Each program has at least one full-time faculty or professional development specialist who oversees the early childhood education program.
- All faculty or professional development specialists have qualifications aligned to the expectations set by early childhood professional preparation accreditation/recognition bodies.
- Faculty and professional development specialists are adequately compensated for the work that they do.
- Faculty-to-student ratios are comparable to other clinically based programs within the institution.
- Faculty and professional development specialists have access to relevant and ongoing professional development.
- Faculty and professional development specialists reflect the diversity of the early childhood education students and/or demographics in the United States.

### Institutional Supports

- Adequate data systems and technology allow faculty and professional development specialists to monitor individuals' progress in the programs and analyze and report on students' performance data and other metrics.
- Partnerships with high-quality field experience sites are accessible to students (including students already working in early learning settings) and provide an exposure to a range of high-quality settings, including center-based, school-based, Head Start, Early Head Start, and family child care.
- Resources and time are dedicated for faculty to support and maintain accreditation and other quality improvement efforts to meet Power to the Profession recommendations.

### Supports for Students

- Resources are provided for targeted supports for students, including cohort models, formal mentoring, and advising programs, with particular attention to English language learners, developmental education, and first-generation students.
- Resources are available to recruit diverse students and ensure programs have sufficient numbers of students to offer courses.
- Resources are available to explore innovative and flexible models for delivering course content, ensuring students are prepared to successfully demonstrate competencies.

**In addition, programs need and will thrive with investment, respect, and engagement from higher education leadership including chancellors, presidents, provosts, deans and boards of trustees.**