

The Unifying Framework of the Early Childhood Education Profession: First Edition

One of the best things our country can do to support and improve outcomes for 40 million children, birth to age 8, and their families is to make significant, substantial, and sustained investments in high-quality early childhood education. To ensure these investments are most effective, and because positive relationships are at the core of quality, Power to the Profession is focused on early childhood educators— and committed to equitably advancing an effective, diverse, and well-compensated profession across all states and settings.

Where We Are Going: Audacious Vision

This first-edition Framework offers a bold vision for a future structure for the early childhood education profession in which:

- Each and every child (0-8) across all settings, is supported by early childhood educators with 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 are prepared at the ECE III level (earning 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.

Where We Are Now: Difficult Current Realities

As a result of our collective failure to adequately invest in high-quality child care and early learning, children aren't getting what they need, families are paying more for child care than for housing, and the workforce is paid so little that nearly half live in families that depend on public assistance. This scarcity environment has resulted in a disjointed, inequitable, and undervalued field in which some educators have increased their educational attainment (though not their compensation), while many other educators still work in states and settings where they are not required to meet even minimal educational qualifications.

Getting from Here to There: A Pathway to a Unified Framework (First Edition)

Getting from where we are to where we want to go requires a bridge that embraces our future workforce and honors our existing one. With our shared vision in mind, implementation of the framework will include recommendations for policies that acknowledge and address the serious challenges today's workforce faces in accessing and attaining credentials and degrees.

We also elevate our implementation commitments, noting that:

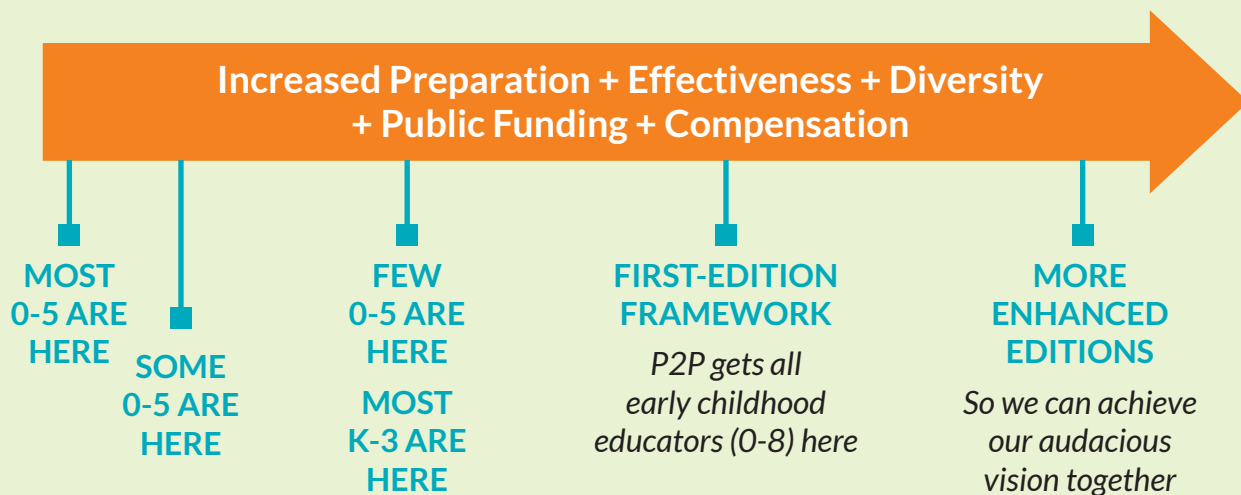
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for increased educational requirements without advocating for funding to provide requisite supports and attendant compensation.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for new regulations without advocating for funding and time to implement the regulations.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for policies that disproportionately and negatively impact educators from communities of color.
- ➔ We *will* advocate for policies that mitigate unintended consequences and support existing, meaningful pathways for advancement.
- ➔ We *will* advocate to establish and implement timelines that recognize the challenges faced by the existing workforce to realistically meet new regulations and requirements.

Getting from Here to There: The Unifying Pathway

In this first edition of the framework, we are mobilizing the early childhood field to establish the common language to immediately move forward with a unified agenda for all that paves the way for a visionary future.

This goal is in keeping with the National Academy of Medicine’s charge to establish pathways and multiyear timelines. Future iterations of the framework will build on this foundation, evolving as the field evolves.

The reality is that current public policies and financing systems that impact the practice of early childhood educators are far from the unifying pathway recommended by Power to the Profession.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below represent key components of our unifying framework. The first three are part of the Power to the Profession's Decision Cycle 345 (differentiating pathways and preparation). The fourth comprises Decision Cycle 6 (compensation).

1. Create one early childhood education profession with three distinct and meaningful designations: ECE I, II, and III.

NOW: Our workforce is inequitable and stratified, with many labels, designations, and roles that vary within and across states, sectors, and settings. The complexity and inconsistency of our system means that we fail to recognize differences in preparation, skills, and experience.

RECOMMENDATION: Create a structure in which the cacophony of labels and roles is reduced to three distinct and meaningful designations. Each early childhood educator within these designations will be prepared to work as part of a teaching team, with unique roles and responsibilities. Compensation and responsibilities will increase as individuals increase the depth and scope of their expertise, regardless of the setting of their job.

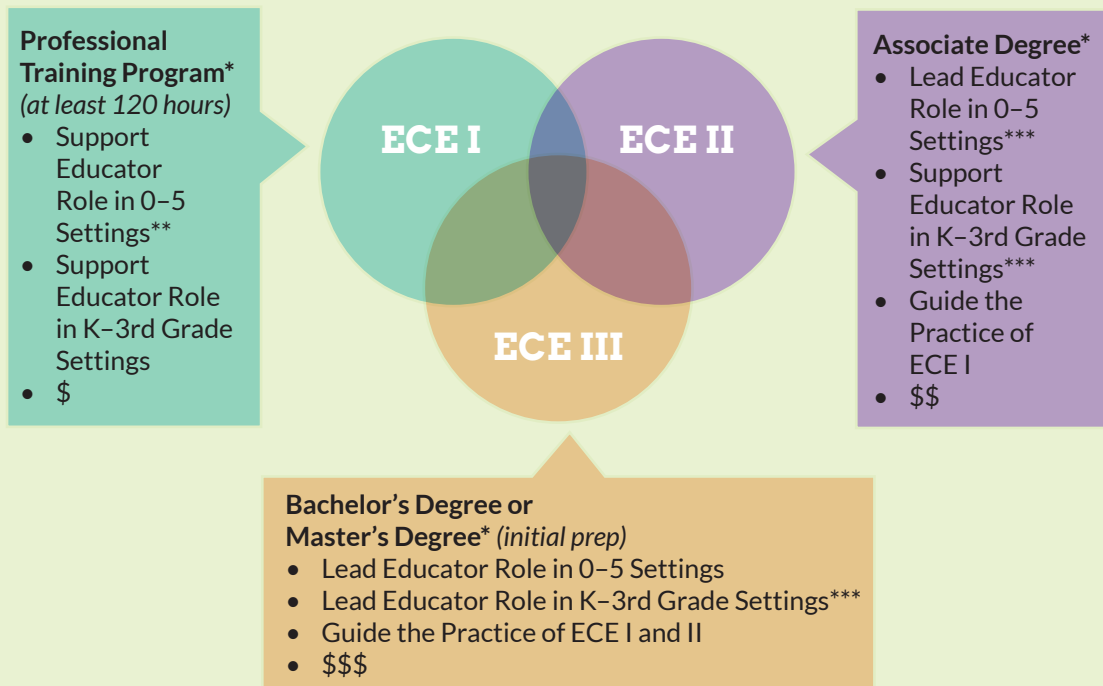
2. Establish the primary set of preparation programs.

NOW: We have a hodge-podge of preparation programs of uneven quality. There is little alignment within or across states or colleges. There is little accountability. The system's chaos disproportionately harms candidates without power and privilege. Community colleges are playing an important role in preparing students for future success, but we face a threat of perpetuating systemic inequalities and must increase access and attainment at the bachelor's and associate degree levels as well.

RECOMMENDATION: Establish a primary set of pathways, aligned to the designations, roles, responsibilities, and compensation of the profession. This structure will reduce the fragmentation of the field while recognizing that the science of early learning is equally complex for children from birth through age 8. We recommend establishing four primary pathways, with different requirements, each demanding completion of an organized program of study in early childhood education: 1) professional training program¹; 2) associate degree; 3) bachelor's degree; and 4) master's degree (initial preparation). We will work to eliminate systemic barriers to higher education, and we encourage innovative models and pathways that maintain a commitment to quality.²

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- 1 Completers may meet the educational requirements for industry-recognized national credentials like the Child Development Associate® (CDA) national credential and other portable credentials.
 - 2 Other qualifying professional preparation programs, particularly non-degree awarding programs or programs in freestanding institutions, will also be incorporated, as needed, when this unifying framework is implemented. To be considered comparable to the primary set of professional preparation programs listed above, additional programs will be held accountable for meeting the profession's guidelines, governance, and accountability standards, upon being determined and agreed upon through the P2P Decision Cycle process. This accountability will include demonstrating alignment to the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators as they prepare early childhood educators. In addition, Decision Cycles 7 and 8 will explore these accountability structures and provisions more deeply, including the possibility of accreditation reciprocity.

Comparable Compensation for Comparable Preparation, Competence, and Responsibilities



*Organized program of study in early childhood education, aligned at the appropriate depth and breadth of the [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#). ECE I completers may meet the educational requirements for industry-recognized national credentials like the Child Development Associate® (CDA) national credential and other portable credentials.

**Additional and innovative guidance, support, and supervisory models will need to be explored, developed, and evaluated, particularly in support of early childhood educators working in family-based child care home settings. Roles will continue to shift as public financing significantly increases to support all families with children in all settings and sectors.

***Progression, not regression. In state-funded preschool programs (as defined by NIEER), 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.

\$ Compensation (including benefits) increases with greater responsibility and deeper preparation. Compensation is aligned with comparable roles in public K-12 settings. The deep need for increased investment (for compensation and more) cannot come on the backs of parents or educators. Additional state investment is necessary, but not sufficient. Increased federal support is essential.

3. Generalize first, then specialize.

NOW: Specializations reinforce fragmentation without agreed-upon competencies. The current variation in preparation and credentials allows for individuals to create specializations and professional niches without understanding the full birth through age 8 developmental continuum that is core to the identity, responsibilities, and practice of the early childhood education profession.

RECOMMENDATION: Every early childhood educator must have a general early childhood education foundation as articulated in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (currently being reviewed by the field). Then, educators at each of the three professional designation levels will be eligible and should be encouraged to specialize as a means of deepening their knowledge and practice and creating a professional niche. The Task Force encourages accelerated pathways to specializations, such as blended programs.

4. Ensure comparable compensation (including benefits) for comparable qualifications, experience, and responsibilities.

NOW: At an average of \$10.60 per hour, compensation is too low for the average early childhood educator to live on, while the sum of it is too high for the average early childhood setting to afford. The math doesn't work, which means that those who are required to earn higher qualifications face a reality that has been true for decades: those who graduate from college with a degree in early childhood education have the lowest projected earnings of all college graduates. This reality is felt deeply and disproportionately by women of color, and its impact is broad. Undercompensating educators undermines quality and reduces both parental and educator choice.

RECOMMENDATION: State and federal policymakers must increase investments in early childhood education that are sufficient to support these vision-oriented recommendations to achieve fair compensation for the profession. Specifically, compensation should:

- ➔ be comparable for early childhood educators with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities, regardless of the setting of their job;
- ➔ include an adequate benefits package;
- ➔ increase commensurate with increased preparation and competency; and
- ➔ not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served.

Everyone working within the early childhood education field, regardless of their level of education or training, should earn no less than the amount needed to cover basic living standards and we support raising the floor. In addition, as we seek to advance as an early childhood profession, we look not to self-sufficiency as the baseline for comparability, but rather to public school salary scales as the minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities.

We also recognize that, while removing disparities within the early childhood profession birth through age 8 is an important step forward, it is also an insufficient long-term goal. So we also are recommending that early childhood educator salary schedules and benefits ultimately be determined following a review of salary schedules for members of other professions who care for children in the same age range, and for those who have similar functional responsibilities.

A significant and substantial investment in early childhood education is well worth the cost. We reject the argument that our country doesn't have the money to fund full and fair compensation. We have the resources. This means recognizing that paying the costs of high-quality early childhood education is a revenue-generating investment over time, resulting in a broad range of benefits that accrue to individuals and society at large. It also means recognizing that improving quality and equity in early childhood education requires prioritizing investments directly in the education and compensation of the professionals serving children and families rather than in the structures and supports set up around them.

Increased Public Funding Demands Increased, Profession-Led Accountability

One of the barriers to increased compensation through public investment has always been the lack of an answer to the questions: *compensation for whom? and for doing what?* Power to the Profession, by establishing clarity about who early childhood educators are and what they will be accountable for, gives all of us and our allies a fighting chance at getting the significant and sustained public investments we need, directed toward the education and compensation of early childhood educators. They are at the heart of Power to the Profession and investing in them is one of the best ways to significantly and sustainably improve outcomes for children and families.

Task Force Members

- ➔ American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
- ➔ American Federation of Teachers
- ➔ Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators
- ➔ Child Care Aware of America
- ➔ Council for Professional Recognition
- ➔ Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
- ➔ Early Care and Education Consortium
- ➔ National Association for Family Child Care
- ➔ National Association for the Education of Young Children
- ➔ National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators
- ➔ National Association of Elementary School Principals
- ➔ National Education Association
- ➔ National Head Start Association
- ➔ Service Employees International Union
- ➔ ZERO TO THREE

The complete Task Force draft is available at www.powertotheprofession.org.