



New York  
Early Childhood  
Professional  
Development  
Institute

## Building the Pipeline for a Successful Early Childhood Workforce in New York

### A NEW POLICY AGENDA: RECRUITMENT

Early childhood education has received unprecedented attention in recent years. In New York City, the expansion of universal prekindergarten, known as “Pre-K for All,” has heightened the demand for an early childhood workforce with the complex and specialized competence to effectively nurture young children’s development. Two years ago Governor Cuomo extended support of Pre-K programs to include three-year-old children in high-need communities. In mid-2017, Mayor DeBlasio introduced his goal to extend Pre-K for All to include three-year-old children beginning with two school districts in high need areas. The developmental science of early childhood education has affirmed that there is an increased need for more highly skilled and effective early educators for young children from birth through age eight.<sup>1</sup>

Just as the demands and expectations for early childhood programs are soaring, the qualifications of the early childhood workforce are in decline.<sup>2</sup> Despite the widespread understanding of the importance and need for excellent early childhood educators, the field has neglected to recruit a sufficient number of talented and qualified individuals to the early childhood field. The status quo must change.

### WHAT WE KNOW

- Early childhood educators shape young children’s development: appropriate, stimulating, and responsive teacher-child interactions can positively alter a child’s developmental trajectory.
- Effective early childhood educators:
  - Integrate theory and practice to provide optimal instruction and emotional support for young children’s academic learning
  - Possess strong organizational, communication, and leadership skills
  - Demonstrate optimism, grit, passion, and persistence in achieving their goals<sup>3</sup>
  - Are culturally and linguistically knowledgeable about the children and families with whom they work<sup>4</sup>
- Licensing requirements and teacher preparation programs’ admissions criteria are not sufficiently rich and rigorous to select the most promising candidates.
- A large portion of the early childhood workforce has low literacy abilities and weak academic skills,<sup>5</sup> which impedes the quality of their work with young children.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute has identified the following seven recommendations to improve recruitment and raise the caliber of early childhood candidates:

- 1. *Target Resources to Support Equitable Access to Early Childhood Careers:*** Provide a range of supports that help to ensure that candidates who face barriers to entering the profession, including individuals for whom English is not their native language, first generation college students, and those who have had poor high school or early college preparation, are supported to pursue and succeed in early childhood careers. At the same time, we must identify and eliminate structures that may perpetuate inequitable access to viable early childhood careers.
- 2. *Offer Financial Incentives:*** Financial incentives, such as scholarships and forgivable loans, would encourage promising individuals to enroll in early childhood preparation programs. Paid residencies and signing bonuses would also attract potential educators to pursue careers in early education.
- 3. *Review Admissions Criteria:*** Early childhood teacher preparation programs must review admissions standards to ensure they are responsive to the workforce that would best support young children. Admissions should extend beyond achievement tests and consider interviews, writing samples, and letters of recommendations when identifying early childhood educator candidates. New protocols for candidate selection that have been effective in other sectors should also be investigated and researched.
- 4. *Align Qualifications and Compensation:*** We must align the experience, education, compensation, and ongoing training requirements for early childhood and K-12 teachers throughout New York State. In order to attract and retain highly qualified and effective candidates, early childhood educators should be compensated with viable salaries and benefits.
- 5. *Improve Early Childhood Teaching Conditions:*** Supportive teaching conditions, such as planning time and sufficient developmentally informed materials, can improve the quality of early childhood education careers by ensuring educators are respected and supported.
- 6. *Launch Communications and Public Relations Campaign:*** A large-scale campaign that raises public awareness about the value of early childhood in the lives of young children would elevate the status of the field. With broader recognition about rewarding

careers in early childhood, a recruitment campaign could be designed to invite potential candidates to consider careers in early childhood education.

- 7. *Establish Outreach in Higher Education:*** Ensure that teacher preparation faculty, admissions staff at 2- and 4- year institutions of higher education, and high school guidance staff are well-informed about early childhood career pathways and guide interested candidates to pursue careers in early childhood education.

## A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHER RECRUITMENT

Several factors need to be addressed in order to recruit passionate, smart, skilled, diverse, and dedicated early childhood educators: creating a greater understanding of the value of early childhood education, making early childhood careers more viable and attractive, shifting entry into the field, and encouraging a culturally competent workforce.

### 1. *Value Early Education*

Young children thrive when their early childhood educators are well educated about child development and understand the evidence-based strategies that support each child's innate curiosity and drive to learn. A tremendous obstacle to ensuring a high quality workforce relates to the perception of early childhood work as simply babysitting. Early childhood educators are arguably the most important educators young children will encounter throughout their school lives. Early childhood educators help children with the basic life skills, such as focusing on their work and relating to their peers and adults, that are needed for school and lifelong success. Moreover, they must introduce foundational literacy and math concepts to children through the lenses of science, social studies, and the expressive arts. Great early childhood educators compliment the intense drive that young children are born with—to delve into the world around them with scientific curiosity—and to make meaning from every stimulating experience. A major focus of our recruitment efforts must focus on raising awareness that effective early childhood educators' capacity and qualifications are on par with the K-12 teaching workforce and other human service professions.

### 2. *Improve the Quality of Early Childhood Careers*

Any effort to ensure that early childhood education is an attractive field must improve the conditions of the

work. Although caring for and educating children can be extremely rewarding, there are major problems with the status quo. First, early educators earnings are abysmal. Recent data indicate that the median hourly wage for a child care worker in New York State was just \$12.24 and a preschool teacher hourly wage was just \$14.95 an hour. As a consequence of these low wages, 59% of child care workers participate in at least one form of public income support such as food stamps.<sup>6</sup> These low earnings only thwart efforts to provide young children with excellent care. Addressing compensation so it aligns with the qualifications we ask early educators to attain is essential to recruitment.

Another way to enhance the quality of early childhood work is by addressing teaching conditions, such as time to plan and work with colleagues, stable schedules, and the resources for learning materials to provide developmentally appropriate practice. Supportive teaching conditions are essential for educators to implement practices that will help children reach significant developmental milestones; moreover they promote a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, and sustained professional learning in which teachers and children thrive.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that early childhood educators “seek work environments that have a high level of staff cohesion and collaboration, effective administration, and opportunities for teacher leadership.”<sup>8</sup> Absent these supports, we will continue to struggle to attract and retain a diverse and highly skilled workforce. Policymakers and program leaders share the responsibility of ensuring that educators have the supports they need to enter the field and thrive.

### **3. *Shift Entry to the Field***

There are three main components that affect entrance to entering the early childhood field: higher education programs, licensing requirements related to educator qualifications, and employers’ hiring decisions. Each has a large role to play in any effort to improve recruitment and strengthen the field. Currently, almost any interested applicant can find a place in the field without any assurance that they have the attitudes, skills, and knowledge it takes to effectively teach and nurture young children.

Within higher education, teacher education programs have been frequently criticized for their weak admissions criteria. Furthermore, early childhood faculty express concern about the basic reading, writing, and math skills of their candidates. It is widely believed that our institutions of higher education do little to recruit and cultivate promising early childhood educators. Teacher preparation programs should emphasize applicants’ communication skills, rich life experience, and cultural and linguistic diversity. Despite these findings, research

has found that over the past three decades, teachers with low academic skills have been entering the profession in much higher numbers than teachers with high academic skills.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, excellent early educators need to have the social skills and emotional wellbeing to engage in this highly personalized work.

Another challenge is that the requirements to become a certified early childhood educator are uneven. Unlike other professions, early childhood educators who have not yet met minimum job requirements are able to work with children: scores of uncertified early childhood educators with a study plan are responsible for children’s safety, health, and development. Educators may stay on their study plan for years with little imperative to continue their professional growth. Fortunately, recent regulatory changes are addressing this issue, but inconsistencies persist at the moment.

Lastly, employers’ hiring decisions impact recruitment to the workforce. Recent research has shown that child care center directors do not tend to hire the most qualified and experienced candidates.<sup>10</sup> Rather than hire candidates with bachelor’s degrees and more than two years of experience, they hire those who have attained an associate’s degree and have between two months and two years of experience. Equally troubling, and in conflict with our goals for the early childhood workforce, the research found racial bias in hiring practices. Applicants with African American- or Hispanic-sounding names are significantly less likely to receive an interview request than otherwise identical applicants with white-sounding names. Greater awareness among employers about these trends, as well as incentives to ameliorate these deleterious hiring practices are needed to elevate the field and recruit a diverse and stellar workforce.

### **4. *Attract a Culturally Competent Early Childhood Workforce***

There is an urgent need to ensure that recruitment efforts are attuned to improving and sustaining a diverse and culturally and linguistically competent early childhood workforce. In New York State, 55% of young children identify as a race other than non-Hispanic White.<sup>11</sup> Our workforce should be equally diverse: children’s outcomes are better when children have the same racial background as their teachers.

Intentional efforts are needed to facilitate equitable access to early childhood careers. Currently, candidates for whom English is not their native language, first generation college students, and those who have had poor high school or early college preparation encounter barriers to successfully entering and navigating admissions to teacher preparation programs. Supports such as financial assistance and academic and career coaching



can help students overcome obstacles. New York has some projects in place to facilitate equity in the early childhood workforce. For example, QUALITYstarsNY, the state's quality rating and improvement system, provides tuition support to elevate the qualifications of teaching staff in participating programs, yet funding is currently inadequate to serve enough individuals. The Institute's Career Development Services Center provides free, comprehensive guidance to all current and aspiring early childhood professionals. These and other efforts should be expanded in our recruitment

### Promising Approach: T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®

Early childhood professionals' notoriously low compensation—wages and benefits—steers promising candidates away from the field. The soaring costs of higher education also discourage prospective teachers from pursuing a career in early education. Financial aid for higher education through scholarships or loan forgiveness is one compelling strategy to attract candidates to the field. Within our field, the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® project is widely recognized for its impact on elevating the field, especially for educators who are first generation college students. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® enhances both the formal education and compensation of early childhood educators and directors in center-based programs and licensed family child care homes. Recipients receive scholarships to pursue formal education to be completed during a prescribed period of time. Evaluations of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® project implemented in North Carolina found that the program has met its goals of raising participating educators' formal education, compensation, and retention.<sup>12</sup>

## CONCLUSION

New York cannot and need not settle for a minimally qualified early childhood workforce. To achieve a highly functional early childhood system, we must invest in new efforts to recruit culturally competent, bright, dedicated, and passionate early childhood educators. It is crucial that any effort that elevates admissions address inequity and enrich the diversity of the early childhood workforce.

## ENDNOTES

<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>.

<sup>2</sup>Herzenberg, S., Price, M., & Bradley, D. (2005). *Losing ground in early childhood education: Declining workforce qualifications in an expanding industry, 1979-2004*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

<sup>3</sup>Duckworth, A. L., Quinn, P. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2009). Positive predictors of teacher effectiveness. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(6), 540-547.

<sup>4</sup>Garcia, E. (2012). Why English is not spoken here: Creating a system that supports linguistic and cultural diversity for young children. In S.L. Kagan and K. Kauerz (Eds.) *Early childhood systems: Transforming early learning*. Teachers College Press: New York

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<sup>6</sup>Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2016) *Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016: New York*. Retrieved from <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2016/Index-2016-New-York.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Almy, S. & Tooley, M. (2012). *Building and sustaining talent: Creating conditions in high-poverty schools that support effective teaching and learning*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust. Retrieved from [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Building\\_and\\_Sustaining\\_Talent.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Building_and_Sustaining_Talent.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Whitebook, M. (2014). *Building a skilled teacher workforce: Shared and divergent challenges in early care and education and in grades K-12*. Retrieved from [http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Building-a-Skilled-Teacher-Workforce\\_September-2014\\_9-25.pdf](http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Building-a-Skilled-Teacher-Workforce_September-2014_9-25.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>Henke, R.R., Chen, X. & Geis, S. (2000). *Progress through the Teacher Pipeline: 1992-93 College Graduates and Elementary/Secondary School Teaching as of 1997*. NCES 2000-152. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

<sup>10</sup>Herbst, C & Boyd-Swan, C. (2017). The demand for teacher characteristics in the market for child care: Evidence from a field experiment. IZA Discussion Paper No. 10702. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10702.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>Kids Count Data Center: New York State: Child population by race and age group. Retrieved from [www.datacenter.kidscount.org](http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org)

<sup>12</sup>Child Care Services Association. (2007). *The Early Childhood Workforce: Making the case for education*. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood & Child Care WAGE\$® Projects: Annual program report 2006-2007. Chapel Hill, NC: Author.

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The New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute is a public/private partnership that brings together a range of public agencies, a consortium of private funders, and the nation's largest urban university to build a comprehensive system of workforce development for individuals who work with young children in New York.

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