Informal Pathway:
Summary of Literature Review & Promising Practices

Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG)
University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies

Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG)

Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies
University of Florida

Herman T. Knopf, Ph.D.
Mary Kay Rodgers, Ph.D.
Maya Schreiber, M.A.
Abby Pike, Ph.D. (consultant)
Phillip Sherlock, Ph.D.
Dévonja Daley

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Florida Division of Early Learning (DEL) engaged the Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECRPG) at the University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies (AZCEECS) to develop recommendations for designing an **early learning informal career pathway.** The pathway must consist of competency-based, stackable content from onboarding to micro-credentials and summative credentials for professionals serving children birth through age five. Recommendations will be informed by: (1) a review of professional literature and primary source documentation of existing programs and infrastructure being implemented in Florida and throughout the U.S., (2) key informant interviews with national and Florida early childhood professional development systems experts, (3) cost modeling to ensure recommendations are financially feasible, and (4) ongoing guidance and input on the recommendations from a Statewide Advisory Committee composed of Florida early childhood professional development system experts. Grounded in input from multiple sources and experts, final recommendations will facilitate the state's vision and commitment to its youngest learners and their families by effectively addressing the needs of the early care and education systems workforce and their employers.

Florida has an established *formal* pathway that supports early childhood professionals in attaining academic degrees in the field of early care and education. As part of the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) legislation passed in 2005 (Florida Department of Education, 2007), the Florida Legislature mandated that approved early childhood credentials articulate into at least nine credit hours at all state colleges. Florida state colleges also have a common course numbering system that makes transferring credits between institutions of higher education more seamless (https://flscns.fldoe.org/). Florida state colleges offer early childhood certificates for college credit on a variety of topics including early childhood development, infant/toddler, preschool, special needs, and management; these also meet the state requirements for credentials (https://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/academics/). This combination of policies facilitate entry onto a formal pathway in the early childhood field for college credit that is a unique process in the U.S. and a testimony to Florida's commitment to the early childhood workforce. This formal pathway provides a strong foundation upon which to build an informal pathway.

While Florida has clearly defined staff and director credentials, an informal pathway that intentionally builds workforce skills and supports career advancement has not yet been developed. The quality of content and the delivery of initial onboarding, annual in-service, and other state approved micro-credentials, specializations, and

credentials varies widely and does not consistently develop core knowledge and skills. The competency assessment within the established credential system is also inconsistent and of mixed utility. Professional learning investments in clock hours and supports such as coaching do not consistently align with Florida's Early Learning Professional Development Standards or contribute toward recognized credentials, creating a confusing and frustrating experience for the workforce and untapped opportunities to advance their careers. Collectively, this inconsistency compromises the intended impact of Florida's credential system. The lack of quality assurance for the professional learning opportunities that meet in-service and approved credential requirements impedes employers' ability to consider these accomplishments as evidence that prospective teachers possess the competencies to facilitate learning among young children and partner effectively with their families. While all early childhood educators meet their annual in-service training requirements, it is important to note that most professionals in the field do not have formal education. In fact, 56.85% of the workforce does not have formal education beyond high school and 12.44% did not report their education level (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2023). Therefore, **the recommendations that will come from this project are critically important, stand to strengthen Florida's early childhood workforce, and can enhance the impact of the state's significant investment in professional development for tens of thousands of early childhood professionals each year.**

This report is the first step in a process to envision and recommend an informal pathway to support Florida's early childhood educators. The report summarizes existing literature and systems that will inform the work of the Statewide Advisory Committee. The ECPRG conducted an extensive search and discovered limited documentation describing the components of successful informal career pathways and their impacts. The minimal documentation of effective extant informal pathways presents both a challenge and an opportunity to design an innovative informal pathway that reflects the unique strengths and needs of Florida. This report describes: (1) the established Florida professional development requirements, (2) a sample of innovative approaches currently implemented in local Florida communities, (3) examples of informal pathways from other states, and (4) in the appendices, a summary of relevant literature about the characteristics of professional learning that contribute to program quality. This report concludes with a description of five key elements that are important to ensure the forthcoming pathway will effectively support educators.

Career Pathways

A career pathway for educators of young children should provide recognition of accumulating expertise and the attainment of professional development milestones and include informal and formal pathways (Cheng et al., 2018; Early et al. 2007; Limardo, Sweeney & Taylor, 2017; Smillie & McCann, 2020). Formal pathways include a sequence of professional learning experiences that lead to an academic degree conferred by a college or university (Early Education Investment Collaborative, 2023; Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, National Institute for Early Education Research, Bellwether Education Partners, 2020). An informal pathway provides opportunities for the career advancement of early childhood educators when the pathway is logical, cumulative and responsive to the needs of the individual learner (Administration for Children and Families, 2017; Limardo, Hill, Stadd & Zimmer, 2016).

When career pathways are clearly defined, they can map out a professional trajectory that includes the advancement and growth opportunities that are integral to a fulfilling and successful career, allowing prospective educators to "see" themselves in the profession in the long term (Child Care Services Association, 2021). Career pathways also facilitate meaningful improvements in early educators' practices in the classroom and work with families, eventually impacting child outcomes (BUILD Initiative, Zero to Three, 2023). Historically for low-wage workers, pathways have many barriers: preparation for and access to higher education, lack of degree articulation in higher education, professional development that does not result in education credit, and wages that do not rise with additional education and credentials (Child Care Services Association, 2021; Smillie & McCann, 2020; Workman & Ullrich, 2017). As noted in the introduction, Florida has addressed many of the challenges typically associated with articulation into formal pathways. **The focus of this report is ensuring the informal pathway that leads to this formal system is accessible, reliable, and meaningful for individual professionals, early childhood sector employers, and the families they serve.**

In practice, career pathways refer to a range of activities that support prospective and current early childhood educators' advancement in the profession (Administration for Children and Families, 2017; Child Care Services Association, 2021). State initiatives span early career support, such as strategies to recruit new candidates into the profession, to initiatives that establish specializations for educators who want to propel their careers forward or strategies to retain qualified professionals. As defined by the BUILD Initiative and Zero to Three Collaborative Report *Career Pathways (*2023), establishing career pathways is composed primarily of three strategies: (1) Recruiting prospective educators to the profession;

(2) Supporting degree and credential attainment, and (3) Defining career progression. Across the ECE field, local, regional, and state career pathway these strategies exist in various stages of development.

Some of the issues facing the early learning sector when creating comprehensive career pathways are:

- Various points of entry to jobs in the field with different entry-level education and experience requirements and career trajectories that are separate from and do not contribute to horizontal or vertical moves to other jobs in the field;
- Articulation among academic institutions' Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs where coursework, credits, and degrees may or may not transfer from one institution to another (e.g., AA to BA degrees);
- Portability of degrees, certifications, and licensures earned in different states, and whether another locality accepts those degrees/certifications/licensures as meeting the staff qualifications for the same or similar job (i.e., reciprocity);
- Prevailing wages are inadequate to attract, retain, and promote early care and education personnel without outside funding, which is juxtaposed with common public discourse surrounding the high price of early care and education;
- Governance structures that affect cross-agency partnerships needed to create aligned systems and develop the career pathways system itself (Limardo et al., 2016; Smith, Mercado & Williams, 2023).

What Makes an Effective Career Pathway

The ECPRG conducted a thorough review of academic publications and documents that describe existing formal and informal pathways within the early childhood field. An extensive search failed to locate an established framework describing requisite components of a successful informal career pathway that is specific to early childhood education. The Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa), identified characteristics of Career Pathways in 2015; a subset of these characteristics that are relevant to the early childhood industry include:

- Documented skills are aligned with the needs of the industry;
- Supports for individuals to be successful include a full range of secondary or postsecondary education, and apprenticeships;
- Counseling is provided to support an individual's achievement of their education and career goals;

- Education, training, and other services are organized to meet the particular needs of individuals in a manner that accelerates their educational and career advancement to the extent practicable;
- Individuals can attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and the field has at least one recognized postsecondary credential; Individuals enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster (Limardo, Sweeney & Taylor, 2016).

While Florida's current ECE career pathway contains some of these mechanisms, they are fragmented, unaligned with policy and funding structures, and most of all, inconsistent in terms of quality, access, and implementation.[1] The next section of this report provides a snapshot of the current system to highlight these needs.

Florida's Current Early Learning Career Pathway

To inform recommendations for the state's informal pathway, it is important to take stock of existing infrastructure, the existing requirements in Florida, and, wherever possible, utilize these essential building blocks to create a more coherent, accessible, and responsive system. Florida's Division of Early Learning (DEL) has defined the core elements of an informal pathway to include professional learning experiences that do not lead to an academic degree (DEL Rule 6M-4.735). Informal pathways are meant to acknowledge competency attainment through a state designated early childhood credential (DEL Rule 6M-4.735). In 2020, later amended in June 2022, the DEL established Florida's early learning career pathway framework that organizes Florida's educator requirements ([Florida's Career Pathway Framework](#)). There are two age groups for Florida's pathway: Early childhood educators (ECE) and after-school educators (ASE). For both groups of professionals, there are four designations on the career pathway:
- Foundational: DCF Foundational Training & Core coursework
- ECE I / ASE I: Florida Child Care Staff Credential
- ECE II / ASE II: Associate's degree in field[2]
- ECE III / ASE III: Bachelor's degree or higher in field[3]

---

[1] Appendix A outlines key findings from the research on key questions about the aspects of professional learning that contribute to skill development and program quality.
[2] At least 21 credits in identified early childhood-related coursework
[3] At least 36 credits in identified early childhood-related coursework

Florida Early Learning and Afterschool Career Pathway
Certificates, Credentials, and Degrees
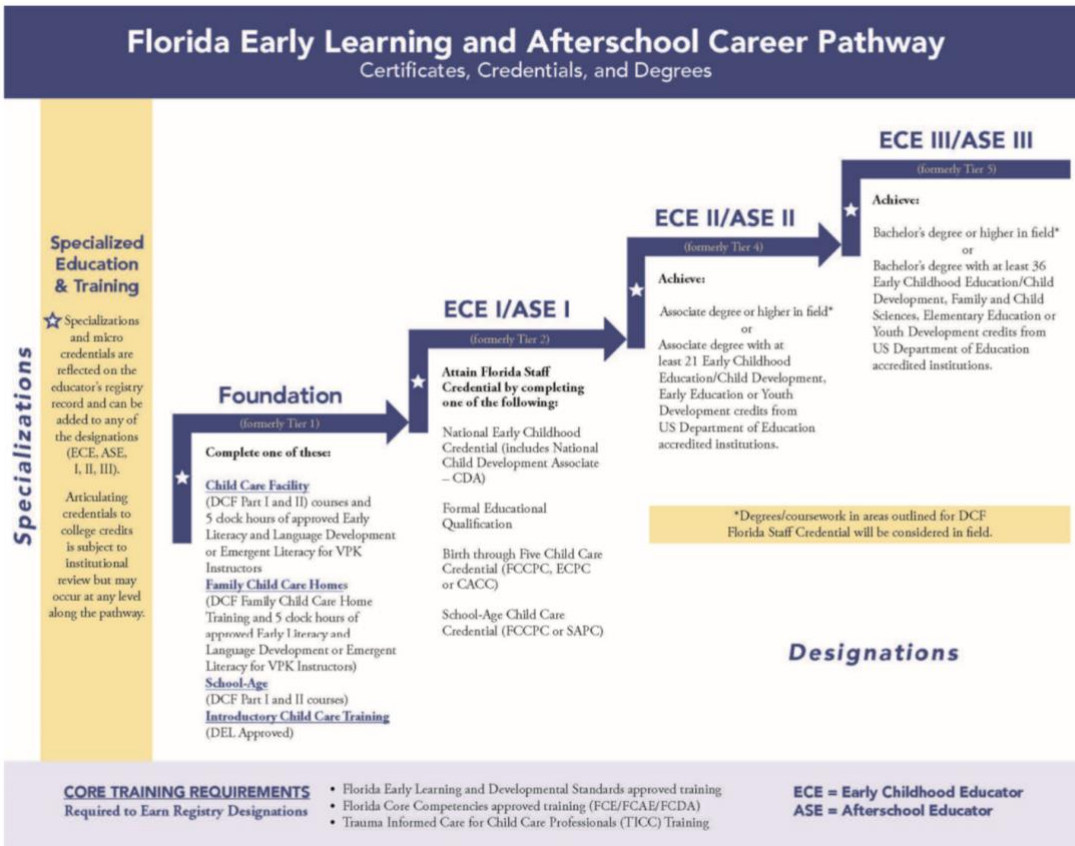
Form DEL-SR 735 (June 2022)
Rule 6M-4.735, F.A.C.

This framework organizes the introductory training requirements and key credentials at the Foundation and ECE/ASE/levels.

The [Florida Early Childhood Professional Development Registry](#) (Registry) tracks educator progress on the career pathway. Once an educator completes their DCF-required training, they may voluntarily apply for an account on the Registry; there is no requirement to do so. Once approved, educators can view all career pathway requirements, upload evidence of their progress on the pathway, and indicate their professional development plan to meet various pathway requirements.

As of December 2023, there were 38,524 educators with an account in the Florida registry through Florida Department of Education (DOE) and Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) ([Florida Early Childhood Professional Development](#)

Registry, 2023) which represents a portion of the workforce.[4] Among Registry participants, 21% of educators had the Foundation designation, 60% of educators had the ECE I/ASE I designation, 10% of educators had the ECE II / ASE II designation, and 9% of educators had the ECE III / ASE III designation. Credential and degree attainments articulate into coursework required for the next step on the career pathway. As noted in the introduction, a Florida Staff Credential (ECE I) counts as nine credits towards an associate's degree (ECE II) in the Florida state college system.

---

[4] The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment estimates the size of Florida's ECE workforce to be over 59,000 professionals. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/florida/

Florida Professional Development System Elements

There are multiple Florida requirements for professional learning and credentials. Each of these elements contribute to a *de facto* informal pathway and will be considered in the recommendations for a re-designed informal pathway. The following are nine key aspects of the Florida landscape that will be considered while developing recommendations for the informal pathway:

- Initial Professional Learning Requirements
- Annual Professional Learning Requirements
- Early Learning Staff Credentials
- Emergent Literacy course requirement for VPK instructors
- Director Credentials
- VPK Director Endorsement
- Micro-credentials and Specializations
- Core Competencies
- Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Scholarship Program

Initial Professional Learning Requirements

All Florida early childhood educators must complete DCF-required introductory training to be permitted to work in a licensed child care facility. These training requirements vary slightly for educators working in center versus home-based providers.

Educators in child care centers must complete the Child Care Facility Training Requirements, which include ([Center-Based DCF Trainings](#)):

1) Part I and Part II foundational coursework (40 hours)
2) Fire extinguisher use and safe sleep/shaken baby syndrome training
3) Literacy training (5 hours, or 15 hours for VPK educators)
4) Standards training for VPK educators
5) Receive a weighted score of 70 or greater on the child care competency exam, which is a proctored exam that must be taken at an approved assessment site.

This training must be started within 90 days of employment (or the competency exam must be completed or an educational exemption submitted) and the training requirements must be completed within one year.

Home-based providers must meet the Family Day Care Home Training Requirements which are the 30 hours of Part I training that include rules and regulations that are specific for family day care homes. Family day care home

substitutes working less than 40 hours a month must only complete 6 hours of training related to licensing rules and regulations (Home-Based DCF Trainings).[5]

Annual Professional Learning Requirements

Additionally, every educator must complete 1.0 credit of a Continuing Education Unit (CEU), or 10 hours, (Center-Based DCF Trainings, Home-Based DCF Trainings). Requirements surrounding in-service training are minimal. These clock hours/CEUs must be in one of 24 categories of key subjects with documentation submitted through the provider's Child Care In-Service Training Record to DCF (page 42-43 of Child Care Provider Licensure Rules).

Early Learning Staff Credentials

Florida requires certain staff to hold Staff Credentials. Each provider must employ one educator with a Staff Credential for every 20 children (i.e. for 40 children, there must be two credentialed educators present) (Child Care Provider Licensure Rules). For VPK, the lead teacher in each classroom must have an approved credential earned within the last five years or an associate's degree or higher (s. 1002.55, F.S).

To hold a Staff Credential, an educator must hold one of the following state or national early learning credentials and/or formal education.
- National Early Childhood Credential (NECC), which includes (DCF NECC): Child Development Associate (CDA); National Child Care Association; Association Montessori Internationale (AMI); American Montessori Society (AMS); or Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education
- Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC)
- Florida Department of Education Child Care Apprenticeship Certificate (CCAC)
- Early Childhood Professional Certificate (ECPC)
- School-Age Professional Certificate (SAPC)
- Formal education: Associates degree in early childhood education or child development, or Associates degree in another field with at least 6 credit hours in early childhood and at least 480 hours of professional experience, or

---

[5] There are three types of exemptions from the aforementioned training requirements. First, educators may receive the "educational exemption" by having an approved early learning credential, associates degrees or higher in a related field. These educators are exempt from completing certain courses in Part I training, based on their level of education. Second, if an educator takes the competency exam before completing their training and receives a score of 70 or greater, they will be exempt from one or more of the introductory courses. Finally, educators employed at the same child care facility since 1992 are exempt from completing all Part II trainings (Child Care Provider Licensure Rules)

Bachelor's degree or higher in one of the identified degrees relevant to the field.

The three most common staff credentials in Florida - CDA, FCCPC, ECPC - are similar. Each recognizes similar educator competencies, requires 120 hours of professional learning, and 480 hours of professional experience. To demonstrate expertise for each credential, educators are required to submit a portfolio, complete an observation, and pass competency exams (see DCF Table aligning expectations for the three most common staff credentials).

Director Credentials

Additionally, every licensed child care provider must employ one individual with a Director's Credential. There is one Director's Credential program identified by DCF that includes three levels of expertise: Level I, Level II, and Advanced. To receive the Director's Credential, all educators must complete the "core" requirements which include:
- Active Staff Credential
- High school diploma or GED
- Part I DCF Training (30 hours)
- In-service training for children with disabilities (8 hours)

In addition to completing the core requirements, educators with a Level I Director's Credential must either complete an approved "overview of child care management" course or provide evidence of a Director Credential issued by a different state. To receive a Level II designation, educators must complete Level I requirements and have a minimum of one year experience as a child care director. To receive an Advanced designation, educators must have two years of experience and either an associate's degree or at least two, three-credit college courses in the identified curriculum areas (DCF Directors).

Micro-credentials and Specializations

Florida offers educators the opportunity to complete micro-credentials and specializations to be designated as experts in an identified focus area. While the Early Learning Professional Development Standards and Career Pathways Handbook lists a series of specializations (page 82), these do not appear to be formalized in their requirements or their categorization within the Registry. Currently, the Department offers the Emergent Literacy Microcredential for early learning professionals in Birth through PreK and the Elementary Literacy Micro-Credential for professionals in PreK through grade 5. Both micro-credentials provide 60 hours of in-service training/6.0 CEUs and a $2,000 completion stipend for eligible early child care personnel and early learning instructional staff.

Core Competencies[6]

In August 2020, Florida updated the core competencies for professionals working with young children. These standards are intended to guide professional development efforts and clarify the level of expertise educators are expected to possess as they attain higher credentials and degrees. The following are the six professions for which Florida has developed professional standards (Form DEL SR 735):

- Early childhood educators
- After School educators
- Directors and administrators
- Career advisors
- Specialists supporting early childhood inclusion
- Early learning coaches

For the purposes of this project, we focus on early childhood educators. To see the full list of competencies and standards for all professions, please see the [Early Learning Professional Development Standards and Career Pathways Handbook](). Florida identifies seven standards for early childhood educators (Form DEL SR 735):

- Health, Safety, and Nutrition
- Child Development and Learning in Context
- Family and Community Partnerships
- Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment
- Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Strategies
- Content Knowledge in Early Childhood Curriculum
- Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator

Within each standard, between one-and-four competencies are outlined to further specify expectations of educators. The competencies outline how educators' level of expertise within each competency is expected to grow as they achieve higher levels (Form DEL SR 735).

Florida T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program

The Florida Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Scholarship Program reflects the national T.E.A.C.H. program and provides scholarships to early learning professionals as they work toward early learning credentials, college credits, and/or college degrees; scholarships cover between 80-90% of the cost of tuition and books based on the type of professional

---

[6] States have each defined the core knowledge and skills needed by the early childhood workforce; Appendix B outlines two national competency frameworks.

development an educator is seeking, whether they work as a home-based or center-based provider, and their position with their current employer. In addition to scholarships, teachers are provided with increased wages in exchange for commitments to remain in the field and/or at their current employer for a specified amount of time. Since it was first implemented in 1998, Florida's T.E.A.C.H. program has awarded more than 67,000 scholarships.

T.E.A.C.H scholarships are available for professionals who meet eligibility requirements and can be applied to cover costs associated with the attainment of credentials or degrees. Credential seeking scholars can work toward a CDA, the Florida Staff Credential, the Florida Director Credential, and/or a credential renewal. Degree-seeking scholars work toward an associate, bachelor's, and/or master's degree in early childhood education. Currently, there are 62 programs, colleges, and universities across Florida that support educators in earning early childhood certificates, credentials, and/or degrees. In exchange for the T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, educators must commit to remaining at their sponsoring provider/program for between six months to one year, depending upon the type of credential/degree they are seeking.

Florida's Current ECE Professional Learning Investments

While some reports have described early childhood professional learning in Florida (Pemberton et al., 2013; Rodgers et al., 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020), research to evaluate these systems has not been conducted. To address this gap, in 2021 DEL commissioned a Professional Development Investment Study and Analysis Report from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) with funding from the federal Administration of Children and Families Preschool Development Grant – Birth through Five Renewal (SREB, 2021). The SREB study collected data from agencies offering publicly funded professional learning opportunities developed for ECE providers and specialists serving children birth to five: DEL, the University of Florida's Lastinger Center, the 30 early learning coalitions (ELCs), and the Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA). Researchers analyzed the information received about each of the 1,712 total courses to identify their alignment to the topics, standards, elements of quality, and best practices in adult learning that were identified in the scope of work. Key findings from the SREB report included:

Lack of Alignment to Key Quality Drivers: Less than half (between 14% and 44% of courses evaluated) addressed the seven core knowledge areas of the 2020 Florida Standards and Key Competencies for Early Childhood Educators. Further, while no Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FELDS) domain was vastly underrepresented in course topics, less than half (Between 19% and 43% of courses evaluated) addressed each FELDS domain, with the least represented being

Social Studies and the most represented being Social and Emotional Development. Six ELCs and the RCMA reported standards using the newest revision of FELDS, but the UF Lastinger Center and the other ELCs that reported standards used the 2017 version of the standards. While the UF Lastinger Center, the RCMA, and most ELCs identified the core knowledge areas and in some cases the individual competencies addressed by their courses, they were not explicitly identified in DEL courses and eight ELCs could not or did not submit this information.

Lack of Authentic Assessments and Clear Assessment Criteria: Less than half of the courses evaluated (41%) contained assessments that could be considered authentic, and only one-third (38%) of courses identified readings and resources that fit the subject and course learning outcomes. More importantly, almost no courses, including those offered by DEL or the UF Lastinger Center, had learning outcomes that used clear assessment criteria within the outcome statements.

Lack of Accurate Data Collection: The quality of the data collected varied widely from agency to agency. For example, enrollment, completion and feedback data were not received from UF Lastinger Center courses, and some ELCs and RCMA did not have information about professional learning opportunities such as course title, description, time commitment, and cost. There was also great variety in the types of opportunities ELCs and the RCMA identified. Most were stand-alone training sessions, but the agencies also included full-day conferences, multi-week courses, book studies, college courses and even a CDA credential path, among other types of opportunities.

Gap Analysis and Evaluation of Priority Topics: Six topic areas from the full list of topics were addressed by at least one-third of all courses in the matrix, while four topic areas were addressed by less than 5% of all courses: Supporting the Development of Children with Special Needs, Trauma-Informed Care, Supporting the Development of School-Age Children, Supporting Kindergarten Transition. No courses addressed Caring for Children in Poverty, Reducing the Impact of Summer Slide, and Identifying and Serving Homeless Children and their Families. Further, while the use of the CLASS tool to assess the quality of adult child interactions is a major systems driver in Florida, there is not clear alignment between the CLASS tool and professional learning investments; it is unclear how courses or coaching are supporting this essential Florida strategy.

Based on their findings, the SREB researchers recommended the following actions:

1. Bring more consistency and foster stronger policy and practice connections by establishing statewide expectations for early learning professional development opportunities. Such expectations should make clear that

professional development opportunities align with measures of child care quality and that providers of early learning professional development collect, maintain, and report data describing professional development opportunities.

2. Early learning professional development providers should collaborate with public sector agency leadership to more effectively incorporate current standards for early learning into the content provided to educators and include assessment of adult-student learning to confirm that they are knowledgeable about state standards; and

3. Support equitable access to high quality professional development establishing a centralized professional learning platform and providing ELC and RCMA administrative rights in this platform. Additionally, investment in content development and delivery should focus on topics related to early learning program leadership and operations, the CLASS tool, and the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment.

As researchers noted:

"Without robust data about the professional learning opportunities available to early learning educators across Florida, there is no way to ensure that public funds are spent on quality offerings that enhance teaching and learning for early childhood professionals and young children." (SREB, 2021, p. 38).

In addition, as the SREB report pointed out, state data shows that in 2020, 14% of Florida's pre-K to 12th grade student population has special needs, while only 3% of professional development opportunities included in the matrix addressed the topic of Supporting the Development of Children with Special Needs. With more than 90,000 Florida students experiencing homelessness, there is no professional development opportunity out of the 1,700 in the matrix that addressed the needs of children and families who are homeless.

Promising Elements of Local Models

There are many local models in Florida from which we can draw insights and lessons. Florida has an abundance of local initiatives that support educator recruitment, retention, and professional learning. Many promising initiatives include elements of an informal pathway that can serve as the building blocks for the forthcoming pathway. While the Stakeholder Engagement Report (Informal Pathway Deliverable 4, forthcoming January 2024) will provide a more robust description of local models and promising practices, the following section provides a brief description of three exemplar initiatives that highlight the ongoing innovation among Florida's ELCs and their partners (information about these specific programs are available in the reference section of this report).

1. **[A$CEND](#), Thrive By 5 (Miami-Dade):** Provides wage supplements based on a combination of coursework and training, CLASS composite score, and longevity in the field in the highest poverty ZIP codes of Dade County.
2. **[ELEVATE](#) (Pinellas):** Provides wage supplements to encourage progression along the Florida Career Pathway among educators already in the field. Educators must be employed at a provider who agrees to set wage increases.
3. **[ASPIRE](#) & [Micro-credentials](#) (Palm Beach):** Through ASPIRE, the Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County helps to offset hiring and training costs in addition to providing coaching for the new teacher's education. Palm Beach State College's Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education offers 12 micro-credentials in key topics with badges that lead to micro-credentials and incentives.

These three initiatives each use different strategic funding solutions to incentivize and support educators in their career advancement. The following are more specific strategies drawn from one or more of these local initiatives which we believe should be considered in the design of a statewide informal pathway.

Increased compensation for professional learning.

All three communities provide salary supplements to educators as they complete professional learning and career advancement activities. The amount of compensation increases as educators complete higher-levels of professional learning, designed to incentivize educators to pursue higher-levels of expertise.

The ELEVATE program determines salary supplements based on an educator's Florida Career Pathway designation. For example, ECE I educators receive a $1,500 supplement while ECE III educators receive a $6,000 supplement. The A$CEND

program also provides wage supplements based on professional learning efforts which have not yet been articulated into formal credentials and degrees. As educators complete higher numbers of CEUs and college courses, they are provided increased wage supplements. For example, an educator who completes 9 CEUs receives $250, annually, while an educator who completes 36 CEUs receives $400, annually. The Palm Beach ASPIRE program incentives range from $950-$1,200/micro-credential.

Prioritize teaching performance.

The A$CEND program incentivizes improved teacher performance, regardless of educator experience with professional learning. In other words, it does not matter what professional learning an educator completes if they are creating a high-quality classroom environment. This is a highly innovative and impactful approach to ensuring pathway designations correlate directly to improved teaching practices.

The A$CEND program recognizes teaching performance, measured by CLASS, in educator designations. In fact, educators can receive larger wage supplements by improving their CLASS score than they can by completing CEUs or formal degrees. For example, educators who score above a 6 on CLASS receive $1,500, annually. Comparatively, educators who complete a bachelor's degree receive $750.

Require employer commitment to increase wages based on professional learning.

The ELEVATE program in Pinellas County provides wage supplements in addition to requiring that the employers who retain participating educators commit to increasing staff wages as their staff reach higher designations on the Florida Career Pathway. This practice ensures more stable wage increases for educators and supports employers in meeting higher compensation plans that are commensurate with educator experience.

Supplement professional learning costs.

The ASPIRE program in Palm Beach, for example, attracts new educators to the field by providing stipends to offset the cost of offset hiring and training costs. Additionally, the Palm Beach ELC provides free coaching to onboard educators into the field and support them in quickly improving their teaching practices.

Promising Elements from Other State Models

There are no states that have a true informal early learning pathway. However, like local initiatives in Florida, there are many career pathways and professional learning programs across the nation with promising elements from which we can learn from and incorporate into Florida's informal career pathway design. The following are noteworthy lessons we draw from other state systems - Delaware, Illinois, Kansas and New York - for consideration in our informal pathway. Information about each state's early learning system and programs can be found in the reference section of this report.

Pathway designations align with staff titles.

Many pathways describe pathway designations in terms of position titles. For example, The Illinois Gateways Career Lattice and Gateways to Opportunity Credential Framework has six levels wherein entry-level candidates are referred to as "teachers aids" and the highest designations are known as "lead teachers" followed by "master teachers". New York uses a similar strategy and identifies which position titles are associated with official certifications. This is highlighted as a promising strategy because it (1) clearly identifies how pathway designations and professional learning correlate to an educator's positionality and career; and (2) provides the title that exemplifies educational attainment, respect, and professionalism that ECE educators are seeking in career advancement.

Pathway considers work and practical experience.

The Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Credential Framework considers work experience along with academic work in all six levels of attainment. For example, Levels 2-6 consider hours of ECE supervised observations, experience, or documented work experience in their assessment of skill level. In Kansas, prior experience of current providers are translated into levels: current providers may enter at level two and advance to level three through Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing.

Pathways provide supplemental support for educators.

Many states provide extensive support for educators interested in entering and progressing along the career pathway. In Kansas, there is a Career Pathway Implementation Team designated to support the project. Illinois provides free orientation sessions. Delaware provides tutoring, English language instruction, and career counseling. New York provides a user-friendly online system which maintains professional portfolios and tracks professional learning for educators. Both Illinois

and Kansas provide individualized career planning. The combination of clearly defined trajectories and supplemental supports for educators are critical to ensuring the pathway will be a tool utilized by educators to support their career growth.

Pathway designates clearly defined target audience.

A few states have clearly defined eligibility criteria for both pathways and professional learning opportunities. This allows them to tailor resources to educators based on their levels of experience and career aspirations. New York has two programs designed for specific audiences. One program targets individuals under the age of 25 with ECE experience who are prepared to apply for college within three months of program completion. The second program supports individuals brand new to the early childhood field. The creation of two tailored programs acknowledges the differences in educators' needs and ensures that different professionals will be provided with information relevant to them.
The Illinois Gateways Credentials are organized as a lattice, with each credential level being designed for specific educational entry points and years of experience. Level One is entry level, and levels two-five are scaffolded with skills, knowledge, and experience, each having unique requirements based on both educational knowledge and career experience.

Pathway bridges the gap of compensation with educational attainment.

In Delaware, the Micro-Credentials Initiative offered in collaboration with the State Literacy Plan validates educators' expertise in early literacy skills and offers financial support, paid release time for educational activities, salary incentives, and bridges salary gaps between ECE professionals and K-12 educators. In Illinois, The Gateways credential program is open to all Illinois child care practitioners but specifically emphasizes quality improvement for license exempt family child care providers with completion of tiers beyond state standards which can lead to additional compensation for caring for children eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program.

Potential Elements for Florida's Informal Pathway

There is minimal guidance on the key characteristics of a successful informal pathway. To inform Florida's development of an informal pathway, the ECPRG identified five key elements that are essential to ensure the forthcoming pathway will effectively support educators. These critical characteristics were derived from a synthesis of existing research, career pathways, and promising practices, and can be used to both assess Florida's current landscape and identify areas of needed improvement and innovation.

Five Key Elements of an Informal Pathway
- Clearly defined pathway requirements include learning experiences that meet quality standards
- Pathway training requirements develop measurable competencies for the early childhood workforce
- Educator designations reliably signify professional expertise
- Pathway requirements align with policy and regulatory requirements
- Supports advancement on the informal pathway

These five elements will be refined in partnership with the Statewide Advisory Committee, used to assess the current strengths and areas for improvement in Florida's professional development landscape, and help inform the next steps in the informal pathway development.

Clearly defined pathway requirements include learning experiences that meet quality standards.

By definition, a pathway is an established route to a specified destination. A pathway for career progression therefore must provide clear signposts for individuals seeking advancement. As applied to the field of early childhood education, an informal pathway must have established experiences, knowledge, and skills that are expected at each stage of career advancement. The required experiences might take the form of online learning modules, specific on-the-job training programs, in-person courses offered by accredited purveyors of adult education, credit for prior learning, and/or demonstrations of competency that make taking the courses unnecessary. The requirements for official designations need to be clearly articulated and implemented consistently so educators and their employers understand what is expected.

To ensure the required content has the desired impact, an informal career pathway must be accompanied by quality standards that outline expectations for professional learning experiences. These may include alignment to core

competencies and/or credential requirements, qualifications of the trainer/instructor, requirements for application to ensure the content is practiced and applied in the early childhood setting, and/or some of the additional elements that are outlined in Appendix A as contributing to the effectiveness of professional learning experiences. Only professional learning experiences that meet quality standards should be recognized as working towards pathway designations.

Pathway training requirements develop measurable competencies for the early childhood workforce.

Historically, ECE disciplines and sectors have had different expectations for professional knowledge and competencies rather than a single set of professional standards. Professional standards vary by role, funding stream, and program type (Zero to Three, 2020). Most states have developed early childhood competencies that define what professionals should know and be able to do (Cheng et al., 2018; NAEYC, 2019; Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, National Institute for Early Education Research, Bellwether Education Partners, 2020) including the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to effectively function in a role. State core competencies should be used to inform the *what* around professional development to ensure investments are aligned to developing these competencies (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009; National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2008). Competencies are underutilized and are not typically a policy driver or a means for creating coherence in either informal pathways or professional development systems.

Having a series of requirements and steps on an informal pathway is meaningless if the required professional learning experiences do not build the competencies the workforce needs to effectively support the development and learning needs of young children. Each of the professional learning experiences must be explicitly connected to the cultivation of relevant competencies that are documented and acknowledged by official designations. Like most states, Florida's core competencies are not utilized as part of initial or ongoing training requirements or the awarding of credentials. There are opportunities to pave new ground in the field and integrate the core competencies and meaningful assessment of these skills into the informal pathway. This will both strengthen the implementation of the informal pathway as well as ensure professionals arrive at higher education more prepared with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue a formal pathway.

Educator designations reliably signify professional expertise.

An important feature of a functional career pathway is a clear identification of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations associated with different positional titles. When progressing along a career pathway, it is commonly understood that over

time, individuals acquire knowledge and expertise that lead to higher levels of proficiency. As this proficiency improves, an individual becomes more reliable, autonomous, and responsible delivering increased value to the employer, which is typically acknowledged through promotion (in title and compensation). It is therefore critical that a career pathway explicitly name the improved statuses within the field of practice. Positional titles that are associated with demonstrable improvement in expertise help employers identify suitable candidates to fill workforce gaps and help guide state and local infrastructure investment. Unlike designations on a formal pathway, which are solely based on attainment of degrees and carry inherent credibility, an informal pathway must operationalize criteria for meeting position-related accomplishments that will be valued and recognized by educators, employers, and other stakeholders. Two important questions that will be considered throughout this project are: Do the professional learning requirements associated with each designation support improved teacher competencies? How can we be confident professionals in each pathway designation hold the skillset assumed to be associated with their designation?

Pathway requirements align with policy and regulatory requirements.

There must be policy and regulatory alignment to make the informal pathway meaningful and facilitate its success. An existing example of this is the VPK requirement that lead-teachers must have at least an approved credential if not a degree; this requirement caused a significant increase in the number of ECE professionals in the state with staff credentials. To be meaningful, informal pathway levels must be built into funding requirements for both how providers are funded as well as requirements for organizations (such as early learning coalitions) that are funded to provide professional development.

Note: The informal pathway designed through this project must include microcredentials. Florida rule provides definitions of micro-credentials and specializations. A "Microcredential" is a short sequence of training or professional development that leads to mastery in a certain topic, subject or competency, and may stack onto other credentials." "Specialization" is a sequence of coursework or training focused on specific topics such as infant-toddler, trauma-informed care, inclusion, etc. Specializations can be formal or informal" (6M-4.735). Although the distinctions between them and the requirements of what constitutes each have not yet been defined in practice, these definitions provide a foundation upon which to build.

Support to encourage advancement on the informal pathway.

Employers of early childhood educators play an important role in facilitating the career advancement of their employees. Through opportunities to learn important

skills while on the job, and by providing accommodations to participate in other learning opportunities to support knowledge development, employers have the potential to actively support early childhood educators. Additionally, existing state systems have a stake in ensuring opportunities to support career advancement are available to increase the likelihood that young children and their families have meaningful early learning experiences. Potential state supports include career counseling services and financial assistance to cover lost wages while engaged in professional learning experiences.

Conclusion & Next Steps

This report serves as the foundation for the creation of Florida's informal pathway. Findings provide both the research team and engaged stakeholders with a deeper understanding of four key inputs that will be used in designing the first draft of Florida's informal pathway: (1) the literature on informal pathways in states and effective professional learning experiences, (2) existing Florida systems, (3) promising state and local practices, and (4) five key elements necessary for a successful informal pathway. Information on these inputs will be supplemented by the upcoming report on stakeholder engagement which will outline findings from focus groups and expert interviews in January 2024.

In partnership with DEL, the ECPRG plans to leverage the Statewide Advisory Committee to build upon the findings from this literature review. Specifically, the ECPRG will work with these stakeholders to assess Florida's current strengths and opportunities for improvement across the five key elements of an informal pathway, which will serve as an important step for guiding the ECPRG in the first draft of the informal pathway. Through these conversations, the ECPRG and the Statewide Advisory Committee will identify current systems that already support essential pathway elements, systems that will need to be re-designed or created for the first time, and promising practices from within and outside of Florida that can be leveraged to design an effective, impactful informal pathway for our early childhood workforce.

References

Archibald, S., Coggshall, J. G., Croft, A., & Goe, L. (2011). *High-Quality professional development for all teachers: Effectively allocating resources.* Research & Policy Brief. National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.

Barnett, S. (2004). *Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Bridges, M., Fuller, B., Huang, D. S., & Hamre, B. K. (2011). Strengthening the early childhood workforce: How wage incentives may boost training and job stability. *Early Education & Development,* 22(6), 1009-1029.

BUILD Initiative, Zero to Three. (2023). *Career Pathways: In Brief: Learning from the new round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants.*

BUILD Initiative, Zero to Three. (2023). *Child Care Access-Focused Strategies: In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants.*

BUILD Initiative, Zero to Three. (2023). *Workforce Compensation: In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants.*

Burchinal, M., Howes,C., & Kontos, S.(2002). Structural predictors of child care quality in child care homes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* 17,87–105.

Burchinal, M., Cryer, D., Clifford, R.M., & Howes, C. (2002). Caregiver training and classroom quality in child care centers. *Applied Developmental Science,* 6(1): 2–11.

Burchinal, M., Hyson, M., & Zaslow, M. (2008). *Competencies and credentials for early childhood educators: What do we know and what do we need to know?* NHSA Dialog Briefs, 11(1), 1–8.

Buyesse, V., Winton, P., & Rous, B. (2009). Reaching consensus on a definition of professional development for the early childhood field. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 28(4), 235-243.

Calderon, Chang, H. (2006). *Getting ready for quality: The critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled, ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce*. Oakland, CA: Tomorrow.

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, National Institute for Early Education Research, Bellwether Education Partners. (2020). *Early educator preparation and compensation policies: Voices from 10 States.* Early Educator Investment Collaborative.

Cheng, I.F., Koralek, R., Robinson, A., Russell, S., Schwarz, D., & Sarna, M. (2018). *Career pathways in early care and education: A career pathways design study.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

Child Care Services Association (2021). *Career pathways: Supporting early childhood educators.* Chapel Hill, NC: Child Care Services Association. Retrieved at https://www.childcareservices.org/2021/06/22/career-pathways-for-early-childhood-educators-a-policy-brief/

Clarke-Stewart, K., Allison, D., Vandell,L., Burchinal,M., O'Brien,M., & McCartney,K. (2002). Do features of child care homes affect children's development? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (17):52-86.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational Researcher,* 38, 181-199.

Early, D., Maxwell, K., Burchinal, M., Bender, R., Ebanks, C., Henry, G., Iriondo-Perez, J., Mashburn, A., Pianta, R., Alva, S., Bryant, D., Griffin, J., Howes, C., Jeon, H-J, Peisner-Feinberg, E., Vandergrift, N., & Zill, N. (2007). Teachers' education, classroom quality, and young children's academic skills: Results from seven studies of preschool programs. *Child Development*, 78 (2), 558-580.

Early Educator Investment Collaborative. (2023). *Advancing ECE workforce compensation and equity: Key conditions for a national lead teacher certification.*

Egert, F., Fukkink, R. G., & Eckhardt, A. G. (2018). Impact of in-service professional development programs for early childhood teachers on quality ratings and child outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research,* 88(3), 401-433. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317751918

Florida Department of Education Office of Early Learning (2007). *Technical assistance paper #: 07-02: 2004-05 and 2005-06 School District Prekindergarten*

Program Participation and Impact of Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education.

Fukkink, R., & Lont, A. (2007). Does training matter? A meta-analysis and review of caregiver training studies. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22, 294-311.

Infurna, C. (2020). What makes a great preschool teacher? Best practices and classroom quality in an urban early childhood setting. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 13 (2): 227-239.

Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). 2015. *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Kelley, P., & Camilli, G. (2007). *The impact of teacher education on outcomes in center-based early childhood education programs: A meta-analysis* (NIEER Working Paper).Retrieved from https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/teachered.pdf

Kids Count Data Center. (2020). Children in poverty by age group in Florida. https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5650-children-in-poverty-by-age-group?loc=11&loct=2#detailed/2/11/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/17,18,36/12263,12264

Kontos, S., & Wilcox-Herzog, A. (1997). Teachers' interactions with children: Why are they so important? *Young Children*, 52(2), 4-12.

Lemoine, S. (2020). *Defining competencies for the early childhood workforce*. Washington, DC: Zero To Three.

Limardo, C., Hill, S., Stadd, J., & Zimmer, T. (2016). *Accessing career pathways to education and training for early childhood professionals*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Early Learning.

Limardo, C., Hill, S., Stadd, J., & Zimmer, T. (2016). *Accessing career pathways to education and training for early childhood professionals.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Early Learning.

Manning, M., Garvis, S., Fleming, C., Wong, T. (2017). *The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood care and learning environment.* Campbell Systematic Reviews 2017:1 DOI: 10.4073/csr.2017.1

Mayfield. W., & Cho, I. (2022). *The national workforce registry alliance 2021 workforce dataset: Early childhood and school-age workforce trends.* National Workforce Registry Alliance.

McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). *Early childhood workforce index – 2020.* Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/report-pdf/

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *Professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

National Professional Development Center on Inclusion. (2008). *What do we mean by professional development in the early childhood field?* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

National Professional Development Center on Inclusion. (2011). *Competencies for early childhood educators in the context of inclusion: Issues and guidance for states*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development.* Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Neuman, S., & Cunningham, L. (2009). The impact of professional development and coaching on early language and literacy instructional practices. *American Educational Research Journal,* 46(2), 532-566.

Norris, Deborah J.2001. Quality of care offered by providers with differential patterns of workshop participation. *Child and Youth Care Forum* 30 (2):111–121.

Pemberton, D., Thorman, A., Rippley, D., & Langley, L. (2013). *A comprehensive evaluation of Florida's early childhood professional development system.* Gainesville, FL: UF Lastinger Center for Learning.

Power to the Profession. (2020). Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession. Retrieved from : https://powertotheprofession.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Power-to-Profession-Framework-03312020-web.pdf

Rodgers, M.K., Leite, W., Ye, J., Gilliam, W., Glaser, L., & Thorman, A.; (2016). *Early Learning Performance Funding Pilot Project: Final Evaluation Report 2015-2016*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida's Office of Early Learning.

Rodgers, M.K., Leite, W. L., Hagler, N., Zhou, S., He, J., Qiu, Y., Glaser, L., Thorman, A., Reyes, C., Hurley, L. (2017). *Early Learning Performance Funding Project: Final Evaluation Report 2016-2017*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida's Office of Early Learning.

Rodgers, M.K., Qiu, Y., Leite, W., Hagler, N., Mathien, T., Schroeder, S., Reyes, C., Thorman, A., Glaser, L., and Fish, G. (2018). *Early Learning Performance Funding Project: Final Evaluation Report 2017-2018*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida's Office of Early Learning.

Rodgers, M.K., Hagler, N., Qiu, Y., Mathien, T., Park, J., & Faiello, M. (2020). *Early Learning Performance Funding Project: Cumulative Evaluation Final Report, 2014-2019.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida's Office of Early Learning.

Sharrock, E., Schaeffing, A., Rosenthal, L., & Wong, T. (2023). *A snapshot of ECE apprenticeship programs*. Bank Street College of Education. https://educate.bankstreet.edu/bsec/13

Sheridan, S., Edwards, C.P., Marvin, C., Knoche, L. (2009). Professional development in early childhood programs: Process issues and research needs. *Early Educ Dev*. 2009 May 1;20(3):377-401. doi: 10.1080/10409280802582795. PMID: 19809599; PMCID: PMC2756772.

Smillie, S., & McCann, M. (2020). *Strengthening the early childhood education workforce.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Smith, L., Mercado, K., & Williams, T. (2023). *Apprenticeships: building a strong childCare workforce pipeline.* Washington, DC: Bipartisan Policy Center.

Southern Regional Education Board. (2021). *Final PD investment study and analysis report.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education Division of Early Learning.

The Administration for Children and Families. (2017). *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Policy Statement on Early Childhood Career Pathways.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Children's Trust, The Children's Forum Early Learning Career Center. (2022). *Thrive By 5 Quality Improvement System Workforce Study 2022.* Miami, FL: The Children's Trust.

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2020). Florida Homelessness Statistics. https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/fl/

Whitebook, M., & Ryan, S. (2011). *Degrees in context: Asking the right questions about preparing skilled and effective teachers of young children*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Workman, S., & Ullrich, R. (2017). *Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program.* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Zaslow, M., Tout, K., Halle, T., Vick- Whittaker, J., Lavelle, B. (2010). *Toward the Identification of features of effective professional development for early childhood educators.* Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Education.

Appendix A: An Examination of ECE Workforce, Education, and Professional Learning Research

The ECE workforce is the most critical component of quality in an early childhood program. All teachers need to have foundational knowledge of child development and be able to lead activities that promote children's learning at various ages. This important role requires that teachers have formal education and training in early childhood education. And while the demand for a child care workforce with early learning competencies is increasing, the workforce is shrinking. However, acquiring a credential or degree while on the job is a challenging task for an underpaid and under-resourced workforce. Over the past ten years, the workforce nationally has dropped from more than two million to about 1.6 million child care teachers, program administrators, and family child care providers. The decline comes at a time when demand for child care is growing. Research estimates that 1 in 3 children under age 6 with all parents in the labor force does not have access to child care programs (Smith, Mercado & Williams, 2023).

Currently, a host of contributing factors greatly impact the growth and sustainability of a strong and qualified ECE workforce (Limardo et al., 2016) including:

- Insufficient staffing
- High levels of attrition
- Poor compensation
- Inadequate access to high quality and connected professional development
- Limited career advancement opportunities
- Inaccessible and/or unaffordable higher education degree programs

Qualifications for lead teachers differ by state or territory and range from no or little preservice training to university degree. Furthermore, some states and territories have strict requirements on the number of in-service training hours while others do not require ongoing training (Whitebook et al., 2011).

Do higher qualifications for ECE teachers produce better outcomes for children?

There is extensive literature showing that higher levels of teacher qualifications are associated with higher-quality staff-child interactions (Eggert, Fukkink, & Eckhardt, 2019). A recent meta-analysis (Manning et al., 2017) has strengthened this general finding, reporting that higher teacher qualifications were positively associated with higher process quality in centers, including in domains such as language and

reasoning stimulation. While this meta-analysis involved more than 70 distinctive samples, only a small number of studies on infant/toddler classrooms/playgroups were included.

Yet other studies in the literature have questioned the value of additional education beyond a two-year degree for ECE teachers. Some suggest higher qualifications could force a number of current members of the workforce out of their jobs and reduce workforce diversity (Calderon & Chang, 2006; Whitebook, 2011). Many researchers doubt whether higher education could absorb the new demands resulting from these added teacher requirements and/or question whether the attendant costs are a valuable use of ECE funds, particularly when so many additional children are in need of services and parents struggle with affordability (Bridges et al., 2011).

ECE Professional Development and Learning
What does quality professional learning look and sound like?
Translating key knowledge into practice can be a daunting challenge for educators, leaders, professional development providers, and the systems that support them. Competencies alone do not impact what is happening in the classroom. A link between national standards, competencies, early learning guidelines, and practices is necessary to create a pathway through which competencies can influence teaching practices and child and family outcomes (NPDCI, 2008; Buyesse, Winton & Rous, 2009)). While the development of standards and competencies can be a complex task, even more challenging is ensuring that competencies play a central role in the preparation and support of the early childhood workforce. Professional development and learning provides the mechanism for moving competencies off the shelf and into action. However, few linkages between competencies and the professional development available for practitioners exist (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, National Institute for Early Education Research, Bellwether Education Partners, 2020).

While educational research has identified the continuing development and learning of teachers as key to improving the quality of educational programs (Desimone, 2009; Early et al., 2007), the *how* of creating effective professional development for educators to transform levels of education is still an area of investigation that is much needed (Barnett, 2003; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009). Professional development is especially important for those teaching the youngest and most high-need children in early learning environments. However, the correlations between teacher formal qualifications and quality in ECE are weak (Burchinal et al., 2008; Kelley & Camilli, 2007; Manning, Garvis, Fleming, & Wong, 2017). Many in-service trainings are available for the ECE workforce, but only a few programs are evaluated and relatively little is known about their

effectiveness. Furthermore, little is known about the mechanisms that foster success for teachers in ECE. In particular, questions related to effective components, the instructional design, and delivery of PD for ECE teachers remain unanswered.
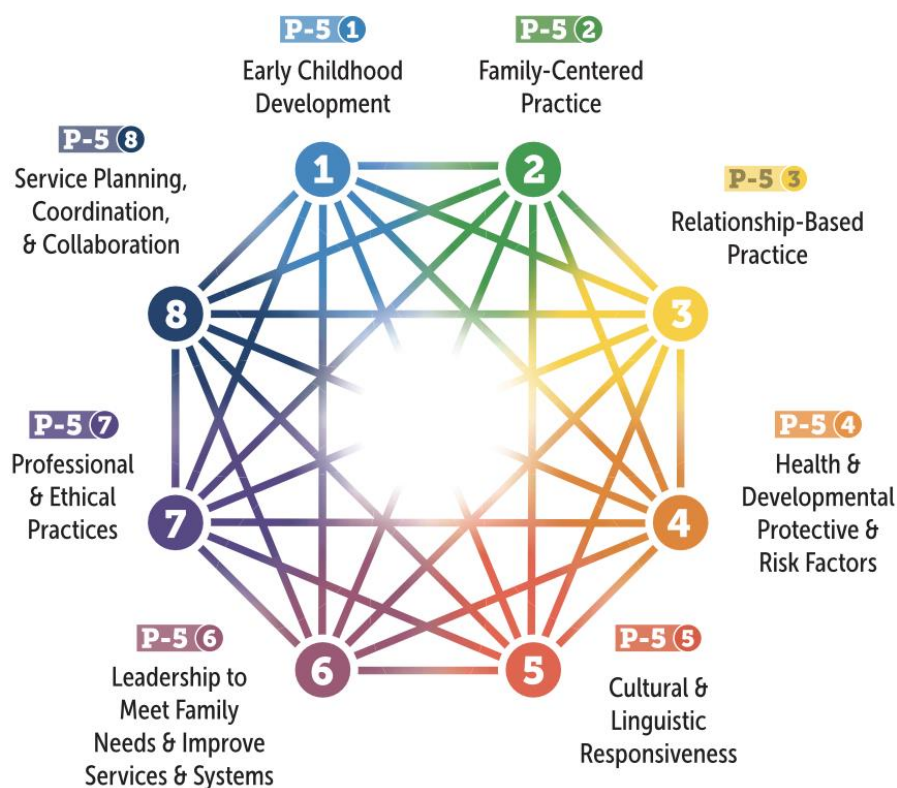
A synthesis of studies examined the connections between program characteristics including levels of teacher education and environmental quality in early childhood settings. This synthesis found that teachers with more education and specialization in early childhood development had higher quality programs and engaged children in best practices (Fukkink & Lont, 2007). Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog (1997) showed that teachers showed positive gains from professional development in the domains of roles (socializing, encouraging play, managing misbehavior); sensitivity (being responsive, not harsh or detached); and teacher talk (frequency and quality of verbal support and stimulation). There is also evidence that indicates the importance of connecting early childhood content and context in teachers' professional development, and researchers suggest that professional development should occur in the learning context of teacher practices in their classrooms, and not at off-site workshops or trainings (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

Other recent findings around professional development in ECE include:

- *Collective participation* of teachers from the same classrooms or schools in professional development can help to support a professional culture and ensure the sustainability of new techniques and skills. In addition, professional development that includes administrators helps to assure that early educators do not receive contradictory messages about what practices to implement or emphasize (Burchinal, Hyson, & Zaslow, 2008).
- In studies of the association between participation in training (PD that doesn't lead to college credit, i.e. informal) and observed quality in early childhood settings, whether or not an early childhood educator has received training has been found to be *related to the quality of programs and sensitivity of interactions between educators and children* (Burchinal et al. 2002; Burchinal, Howes, & Kontos 2002; Clarke-Stewart et al. 2002; Kontos, Howes, and Galinsky 1996; Norris, 2001).
- The few studies that did focus on professional development effects on child outcomes showed positive, but not statistically significant, effects. Thus, the current empirical evidence demonstrates that *specialized training improves the pedagogical competencies of caregivers in childcare, including their professional attitude, knowledge and skills* (Fukkink & Lont, 2007).

Appendix B: Other Competency Models

Zero To Three Competencies for Prenatal to Age 5 (P-5) Professionals

P-5 ① Early Childhood Development
P-5 ② Family-Centered Practice
P-5 ③ Relationship-Based Practice
P-5 ④ Health & Developmental Protective & Risk Factors
P-5 ⑤ Cultural & Linguistic Responsiveness
P-5 ⑥ Leadership to Meet Family Needs & Improve Services & Systems
P-5 ⑦ Professional & Ethical Practices
P-5 ⑧ Service Planning, Coordination, & Collaboration

Source: ZERO TO THREE, 2018, p. 10

Zero To Three's P-5 Critical Competencies define core knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for professionals who work with young children and their families. These comprehensive competencies, created for service providers, supervisors, and managers who work in group settings (center-based and family child care homes) have the broad purpose to "strengthen professional competence on shared fundamental concepts and to facilitate cross-sector partnerships and coordinated service delivery" (Zero To Three, 2020, p. 6). This model was designed to specifically meet the ECE field's identified gaps and needs, and directly advances the call to: (1) specifically support the infant-toddler early childhood education workforce; (2) develop specific and specialized competencies for this population that build on those for all of the ECE workforce; and (3) ensure that competencies address the cross-cultural skills needed to work with diverse populations (Zero to Three, 2020). In addition to providing competencies for the ECE workforce, creators

also provide implementation strategies for system leaders to engage and support stakeholders at every level of influence- system, program, and individuals. More information on these competencies can be found at [Zero To Three Early Critical Competencies](#).

NAEYC'S Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators

The NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation responded to the charge from the *Power to the Profession (P2P) Task Force* to create nationally agreed-upon professional competencies (knowledge, understanding, abilities, and skills) for early childhood educators. The revised competencies, completed in 2018, are based on "Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation" and expands the intent of the standards and competencies to allow application across the early childhood field, including professional preparation programs, professional development systems, licensure, and professional evaluations (Power to the Profession, 2020).

NAEYC's Professional Standards and Competencies were designed to: (1) be comprehensive, but not exhaustive; (2) be aligned with responsibilities of ECE educators; (3) align with InTASC Model Core Teaching Standard to align with larger field of education's (K-12) understanding of effective teaching; (4) provide integrated content, including inclusive practices with every age band of children; (5) provide language and concepts based in the science of human learning and development and reflect the technical language of research and evidence used in the early childhood profession; (6) provide a simplified structure with six core standards; and (7) level standards and competencies to three designations with associated scopes of practice for early childhood educators–ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III.

These standards and competencies are summarized below, and a more comprehensive description along with research and implementation practices can be found at [NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#).

NAEYC Standard	Description
Standard One: Child Development and Learning in	Early childhood educators understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages and characteristics and on the settings in which teaching and learning occur.

Context	They (a) understand and demonstrate positive, caring, supportive relationships and interactions as the foundation for their work with young children. They (b) understand and use teaching skills that are responsive to the learning trajectories of young children and to the needs of each child. Early childhood educators (c) use a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically relevant, anti-bias, and evidence-based teaching approaches that reflect the principles of universal design for learning.
Standard Two: Family–Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections	Early childhood educators understand that successful early childhood education depends upon educators' partnerships with the families of the young children they serve. They (a) know about, understand, and value the diversity in family characteristics. Early childhood educators (b) use this understanding to create respectful, responsive, reciprocal relationships with families and to engage with them as partners in their young children's development and learning. They (c) use community resources to support young children's learning and development and to support children's families, and they build connections between early learning settings, schools, and community organizations and agencies.
Standard Three: Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment	Early childhood educators (a) understand that the primary purpose of assessment is to inform instruction and planning in early learning settings. They (b) know how to use observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment approaches and tools. Early childhood educators (c) use screening and assessment tools in ways that are ethically grounded and developmentally, culturally, ability, and linguistically appropriate to document developmental progress and promote positive outcomes for each child. In partnership with families and professional colleagues, early childhood educators (d) use assessments to document individual children's progress and, based on the findings, to plan learning experiences.
Standard Four: Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices	Early childhood educators understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages and characteristics and on the settings in which teaching and learning occur. They (a) understand and demonstrate positive, caring, supportive relationships and interactions as the foundation for their work with young children. They (b) understand and use teaching skills that are responsive to the learning trajectories of young children and to the needs of each child. Early childhood educators (c) use a broad repertoire of

	developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically relevant, anti-bias, and evidence-based teaching approaches that reflect the principles of universal design for learning.
Standard Five: Knowledge, Application, and Integration of Academic Content in the Early Childhood Curriculum	Early childhood educators have knowledge of the content of the academic disciplines (e.g., language and literacy, the arts, mathematics, social studies, science, technology and engineering, physical education) and of the pedagogical methods for teaching each discipline. They (a) understand the central concepts, the methods and tools of inquiry, and the structures in each academic discipline. Educators (b) understand pedagogy, including how young children learn and process information in each discipline, the learning trajectories for each discipline, and how teachers use this knowledge to inform their practice. They (c) apply this knowledge using early learning standards and other resources to make decisions about spontaneous and planned learning experiences and about curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation to ensure that learning will be stimulating, challenging, and meaningful to each child.
Standard Six: Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator	Early childhood educators (a) identify and participate as members of the early childhood profession. They serve as informed advocates for young children, for the families of the children in their care, and for the early childhood profession. They (b) know and use ethical guidelines and other early childhood professional guidelines. They (c) have professional communication skills that effectively support their relationships and work with young children, families, and colleagues. Early childhood educators (d) are continuous, collaborative learners who (e) develop and sustain the habit of reflective and intentional practice in their daily work with young children and as members of the early childhood profession.

Appendix C: Outline on Career Pathways in Other States

Many states across the country also have formal and informal pathways including Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Virginia, Massachusetts, Kansas, and New York. For the purposes of highlighting existing pathways and systems in other states that are most comparable and helpful to frame Florida's informal pathways project, four states have been selected: Kansas, Illinois, New York, and Delaware. This appendix provides notes on models from these four states with relevant elements that may be useful for Florida.

Kansas

Framework for Pathways:
- Seven levels exist for childcare professionals.
  - Newcomers or early-career individuals start at levels one, two, or three and progress to level four.
  - **Prior experience of current providers are translated into levels:** current providers may enter at level two and advance to level three through Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing.
- Continuous training and experience allow providers to climb to higher career levels, enabling personalized career growth.
- Professional supports embedded in the pathway as well as professional vs higher education
- Registration website: https://kccto.org/shop/ is user friendly
- Have a Career Pathway Implementation Team https://kccto.instructure.com/courses/3600
- Individualized professional development plan has a course and printout

LEVEL	REFERENCE	EDUCATION OR CREDENTIAL	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HOURS	EXPERIENCE	PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS
7	Bachelor's Degree or higher in any area (30 ECCE college credits) or KS EC Director Credential	Bachelor's Degree or higher in any area (30 ECCE college credits)	N/A	Supervised practicum + 1 year and currently in professional leadership	30 weeks supervised practicum and mentoring
6	Bachelor's Degree or higher in any area (30 ECCE college credits)	Bachelor's Degree or higher in any area (30 ECCE college credits)	N/A	Practicum (2 semesters or 1 year)	30 weeks supervised practicum
5	Advanced Professional	Provisional KS EC Director Credential	200	2 years	15 weeks of job-embedded coaching/mentoring
	Associate Degree with emphasis in ECCE	Associate degree (~60 college credits) emphasis in ECCE (24 ECCE credits)	N/A	6-month practicum	15 weeks practicum or 15 weeks job-embedded coaching/mentoring
4	Experienced Professional	CDA Credential™ or NAFCC Accreditation	120 (CDA Credential™) and 20	1 year	12 hours of job-embedded coaching and small group
	15 ECCE college credits	15 ECCE college credits	30	1 year	Job-embedded coaching/mentoring
3	Credentialed Professional	Child Development Associate (CDA Credential™)	120 required for CDA	3 months required for CDA and 3 months for Career Pathway	Job-embedded coaching/mentoring
	9 ECCE college credits	9 ECCE college credits	30	1 year	Job-embedded coaching/mentoring
2	Growing Professional	N/A	60	2 years	Job-embedded coaching/mentoring
	6 ECCE college credits	6 ECCE college credits	30	6 months	Job-embedded coaching/mentoring
1	Early Learner	N/A	45	6 months	Job-embedded coaching/mentoring
	3 ECCE college credits	3 ECCE college credits	6	None	N/A
P	Career and Technical Education (CTE) participant	Career and Technical Education (CTE) participant	6	None	N/A
	HS Diploma or GED	HS Diploma or GED	None	6 months	N/A

Get support with navigating the Career Pathway, connect at kccto.org/career-pathway-interest.

| Professional Learning Focus Path | Higher Education Focus Path |

Illinois

High-Level Summary:
- Gateways Career Lattice:
  - Organized in five levels: teaching assistant, lead teacher, master teacher.
  - Progression from entry-level (Level 1) through assistant teacher (Level 2), teacher (Level 3), lead teacher (Level 4), to master teacher (Level 5).
- Training Tiers Overview:
  - Divided into three tiers covering modules like child development, health, safety, and nutrition.
  - Completion of all three tiers awards the Gateways ECE Credential Level 1, emphasizing quality improvement for license-exempt family child care providers.
- Program is voluntary, with potential compensation add-ons for exceeding state standards. Administered by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the McCormick Foundation.
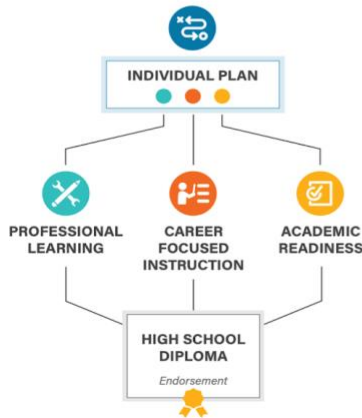
Detailed Findings:
- The Illinois Gateways Credentials are organized in the Gateways Career Lattice. The Gateways Career Lattice shows credential levels and how each level combines education, work, and practical experience in early care and education.
- Use titles like teaching assistant, lead teacher, master teacher
  - Level 1 is considered entry-level and commonly attained through high schools and/or training. From Level 1, the ECE Credential proceeds as follows (note that the progression is the same across each credential area; however, the knowledge and skills needed are unique):
  - Level 2 represents the knowledge and skills needed to be an assistant teacher
  - Level 3 represents the knowledge and skills needed to be a teacher
  - Level 4 represents the knowledge and skills needed to be a lead teacher
  - Level 5 represents the knowledge and skills needed to be a master teacher
- Training Tiers Overview

- ○ Divided into three tiers covering various modules, including child development, health, safety, and nutrition.
  - ○ Completing all three tiers awards the Gateways ECE Credential Level 1.
- ● Target Audience
  - ○ Open to all Illinois child care practitioners but specifically emphasizes quality improvement for license exempt family child care providers.
  - ○ Completion of tiers beyond state standards can lead to additional compensation for caring for children eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program.
- ● Process for License Exempt Providers
  - ○ Upon completing Tier 1 and the orientation, providers can apply through the INCCRRA.
  - ○ Completion of all three tiers earns the Gateways ECE Credential Level 1 and potential add-on compensation for CCAP-eligible children.
- ● Voluntary Participation
  - ○ Involvement in the training tiers is optional, and the compensation add-ons are not cumulative.
  - ○ Free orientation sessions can be located through local CCR&R agencies.
- ● Administration and Funding
  - ○ Administered by the INCCRRA and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Early Childhood and the McCormick Foundation.
  - ○ Gateways to Opportunity is a registered trademark of INCCRRA, emphasizing professional development in the state's child care sector.

College and Career Pathway Endorsement Framework

INDIVIDUAL PLAN
- PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
- CAREER FOCUSED INSTRUCTION
- ACADEMIC READINESS

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
Endorsement

INDIVIDUAL PLAN

Each student completing an endorsement must have an individualized plan, which includes college planning linked to early understanding of career goals, financial aid, resume, and personal statement.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Awareness, exploration, and preparation activities that provide opportunities for students to interact with adults in their workplace

9th	10th	11th	12th
At least 2 career exploration activities or 1 intensive experience		60 cumulative hours of paid or credit supervised career development experience with a professional skills assessment	
At least 2 team-based challenges with adult mentoring			

Through these experiences, a student gains essential employability and technical competencies in their identified sector.

CAREER-FOCUSED INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

Two years of secondary coursework, or equivalent competencies, that articulate to a postsecondary credential with labor market value. Must include at least 6 hours of early college credit.

9th	10th	11th	12th
Orientation / Introduction			
	Skill Development		
			Capstone / Advanced Courses

ACADEMIC READINESS

Ready for non-remedial coursework in reading and math by high school graduation through criteria defined by district and local community college

Sources:
- https://www.ilgateways.com/docman-docs/professional-development/higher-education-programs/ece-toolbox/2076-illinois-competencies-for-early-care-and-education-professionals/file
- https://www.ilgateways.com/credentials/gateways-training-tiers

New York

Work Readiness Program Overview:
- Objective: Prepare young adults for roles in early childhood programs in New York State as lead teachers or assistant teachers.
  - Participant Cohorts:
  - Assistant Teacher Cohort: For high school graduates aiming for assistant teacher roles.
  - Lead Teacher Cohort: Open to rising college seniors in early childhood studies or graduates pursuing assistant teacher or early childhood teaching certification.

Program Benefits:
- Offers insights into early childhood education systems and regulations.
- Supports participants in pursuing assistant teacher or lead teacher certification.

- Covers expenses such as certification application fees, test preparation, exam fees, and required workshop fees for participants.

Eligibility Requirements:
- Age Limit: Under 25 years old.
- Employability: Residency or employability in New York State.
- Commitment: Attend a 15-week program one evening per week.
- Background Check: Willingness to undergo fingerprinting and a background check.
- Further Education: Preparedness to apply to college within three months after program completion.
- Long-term Commitment: Commitment to working with children in childcare settings throughout a two-year project duration.

Early Career Initiative Program:
Overview: The Early Career Initiative by the Early Childhood Career Development Center assists individuals interested in early childhood careers, offering guidance and support.

Benefits:
- Explore career options and associated educational pathways.
- Access advocates supporting educational and career objectives.
- Connect with employers through dedicated career advisors.
- Develop a network with fellow early childhood educators at no cost.

Membership Entails:
- Monthly skill-building workshops.
- One-on-one sessions with experienced career advisors for resume work and exploring options.
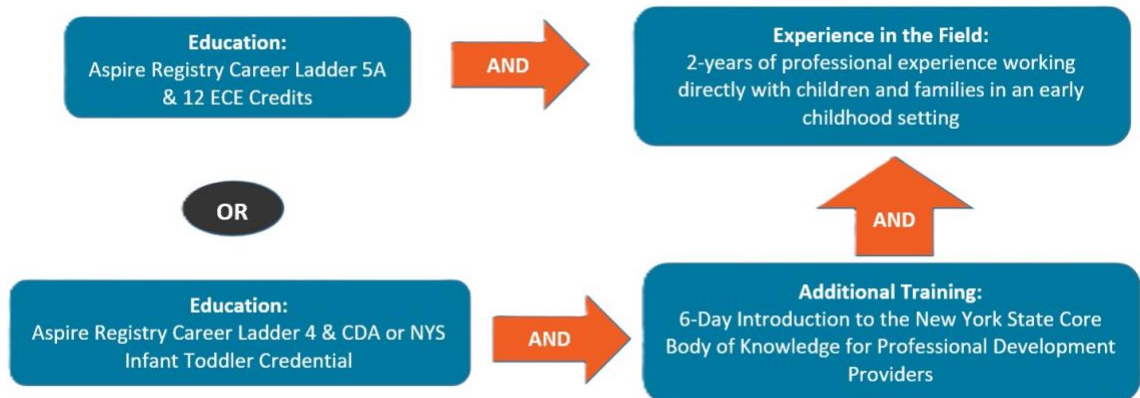
Eligibility Criteria:
- New to the field of early childhood education.
- High school graduates or GED recipients.
- Willing and capable of working in New York City.
- Committed to monthly meetings with peers and advisors.

3-K for All and Pre-K for All:
- Lead Teacher (Certified):
  - Certified in New York State Early Childhood Education.
  - Eligible to teach in 3-K and Pre-K settings: District Schools, Pre-K Centers, or NYC Early Education Centers (NYCEECs).

- ○ Requires New York State teaching certificates like Early Childhood (Birth–Grade 2), Nursery–Grade 6, Pre-K–Grade 6, or Students with Disabilities (Birth–Grade 2).

- Study Plan Lead Teacher (Not-Yet-Certified) – Pre-K for All Classrooms:
  - ○ Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood or related field needed.
  - ○ Completion of early childhood education coursework or significant experience with children under 6.
  - ○ Commitment to obtaining New York State Early Childhood teacher certification within three to seven years of employment.

- Assistant Teacher (Certified):
  - ○ Level 1 or higher NY State Teaching Assistant certification or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential required.
  - ○ At least eighteen years old with a high school diploma or equivalent (GED).

- Teacher's Aide (Not Certified):
  - ○ Minimum eighteen years old with a high school diploma or equivalent (GED).

- Education Director (Certified):
  - ○ Requires Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education or related field.
  - ○ Teaching license or certificate valid for services in early childhood or childhood grades.
  - ○ 2+ years of Lead Teacher experience for Child Care (Article 47) Providers.

- The New York City Department of Education is offering diverse employment opportunities in early childhood education through the 3-K for All and Pre-K for All initiatives, catering to candidates with different certification levels and backgrounds.
- They have a good registry website!
  - ○ Offers a free online professional portfolio
  - ○ Records your education, work history, and professional growth together
  - ○ Assists in finding and enrolling in training sessions and career development opportunities

- For Early Childhood Field:
  - ○ Elevates recognition, professionalism, and pay within the sector

○ Gathers crucial data to impact policymaking decisions

Sources:
- https://nyaeyc.org/credentials/
- https://www.nyworksforchildren.org/the-aspire-registry/benefits/
- https://www.earlychildhoodny.org/

Delaware

Assessing Career Pathways:
- ○ Barriers to ECE Career Advancement (from IOM 2015):
    - ■ Lack of time, funds, professional community, and resources.
    - ■ Staff turnover and limited access to training, especially in rural areas.
- ○ Career Pathways' Role:
    - ■ Financial Support & Time Off:
    - ■ Offer financial aid, salary incentives, and paid time for development.
    - ■ Bridge salary gaps between ECE professionals and K-12 educators.
- ○ Supportive Measures:
    - ■ Advocate for federally funded programs to enhance benefits for ECE professionals.
    - ■ Encourage long-term financial policies instead of short-lived strategies like bonuses.
- ○ Integrated Skills in ECE Education:
    - ■ Low-skilled adults fare better in ECE programs blending basic skills with occupational content for credentials.
    - ■ Contrasts with programs demanding high school credentials or remedial courses beforehand.

- - ■ Accelerated models feature dual enrollment in basic skills alongside specialized coursework.

- Integration Models:
  - ○ I-Best Model
    - ■ Collaborative teaching merges work-based content with basic skills.
  - ○ Other Approaches:
    - ■ Vestibule and Academic Bootcamp programs front-load skills before coursework.
    - ■ Include intensive pre-entry programs covering study skills, workplace readiness, and reading strategies.
- Supports Offered:
  - ○ Supplementary support like tutoring, English language instruction, and academic/career counseling is provided in integrated programs.

Programs:
- Delaware's Micro-Credentials Initiative
  - ○ Offered in collaboration with the State Literacy Plan to validate educators' expertise in early literacy skills.
  - ○ Aimed at personalizing professional learning and enhancing teaching practices.
  - ○ Developed with Digital Promise to recognize educators' competency through specialized credentials.
  - ○ Part of Delaware's commitment to addressing literacy challenges and fostering student success.
- Early Childhood Teacher Academy:
  - ○ Engages students in understanding the significance and influence of early childhood education.
  - ○ Equips students with the essential knowledge and skills for success in the field.
  - ○ Provides hands-on experiences in classrooms and practical settings.
  - ○ Prepares students for diverse career paths in early childhood, including roles as teachers, curriculum directors, and administrators.

Sources:
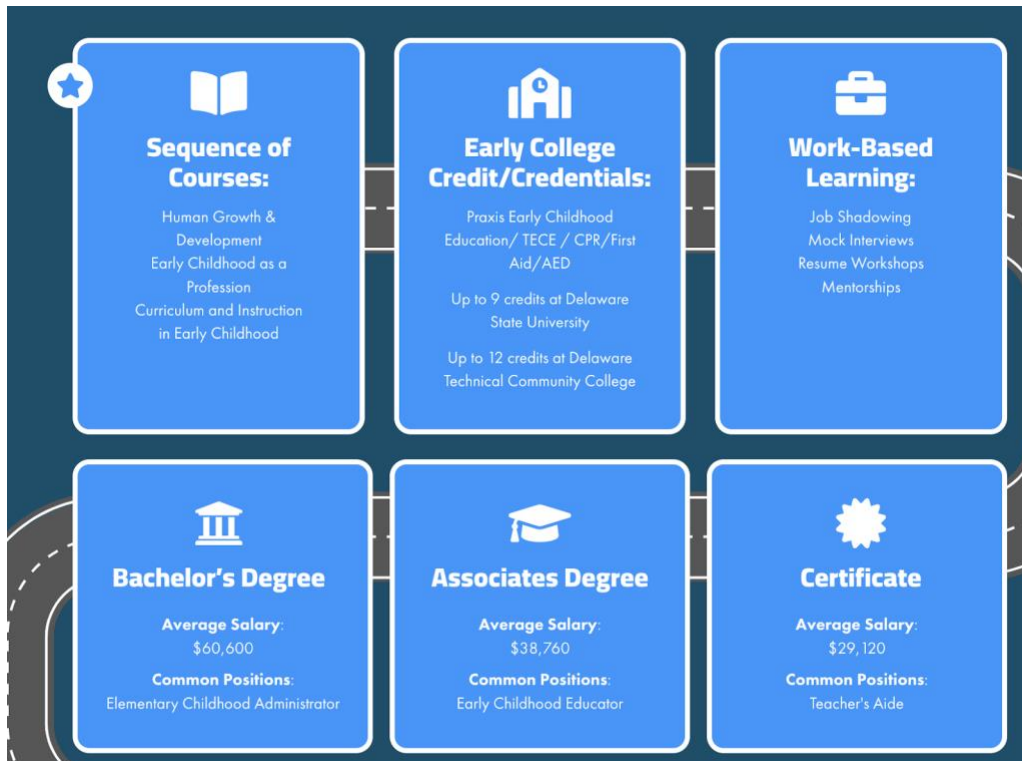
- https://delawarepathways.org/pathways/early-childhood-teacher-academy/
- https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/elcpi_accessibility_10_28_ada.pdf