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Final Informal Pathway and Implementation Plan, with Cost Modeling

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

DIVISION OF Early Learning
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This work results from the University of Florida (UF) Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies' Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG) in collaboration with Dr. Abby Pike.

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Executive Summary

Florida's Division of Early Learning (DEL) commissioned the Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG) at the University of Florida's Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies (AZCEECS) to develop recommendations for an informal pathway for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce. This initiative addresses critical challenges in Florida's early childhood education sector:

1. Workforce Retention: Early learning and before-and-after school providers face difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified staff.

2. Kindergarten Readiness: Only 51% of children (64% of children who complete Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK)) demonstrate kindergarten readiness[1], highlighting the need for a better-prepared workforce to support child development.

3. Educational Gaps: 57% of the early learning workforce lacks credentials beyond a high school diploma or GED, with an additional 11% not reporting their highest education level.[2]

4. Professional Learning: Despite professionals' commitment to improvement, there is a lack of standardized, quality-assured options for skill and competency development.

5. Program Quality: The understaffed and underprepared workforce undermines the effectiveness of early learning programs, creating gaps that the K-12 system must address.

6. Policy Opportunities: Existing workforce policies show promise but are hindered by inadequate training standards, outdated content, minimal requirements, and a lack of coherent workforce preparation systems.

To address these issues, the ECPRG conducted a comprehensive study involving:
- An extensive literature review
- Stakeholder engagement, including statewide focus groups
- Documentation of promising practices from Florida and other states
- Collaboration with a Statewide Advisory Committee

[1] Based on Fall 2023 data, Florida Department of Education, 2024
[2] Florida Department of Children and Families, 2024

The resulting recommendations and strategies aim to strengthen Florida's early learning workforce and improve educational outcomes for children.

Recommendation 1: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)*

- Strategy 1a: Create a cost effective, efficient system of training approval.
- Strategy 1b: Create a cost effective, efficient system of trainer approval.
- Strategy 1c: Authorize and implement a competency assessment for lead teachers, mentor teachers, and directors.
- Strategy 1d: Serve as a key thought partner to the DEL, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Early Learning Coalitions (ELCs), and other stakeholders to continue to support the evolution of the early childhood professional learning (PL) system.

Recommendation 2: Create a new, comprehensive professional learning Registry with an integrated learning management system (LMS) for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce

- Strategy 2a: Procure a new Registry for the Florida early learning and before-and-after school workforce.
- Strategy 2b: Require all professionals who work in licensed/regulated early learning and before-and-after school programs to utilize the new Registry.

Recommendation 3: Update currently required professional learning with more effective content and instructional design

- Strategy 3a: Rebuild the Introductory Training for all roles, including a 30-hour course for family child care (FCC), a 40-hour course for center-based staff and a 40-hour course for the before-and-after school workforce.
- Strategy 3b: Revise the Director Credential (all levels).

Recommendation 4: Codify Informal Pathway Framework

- Strategy 4a: Create an advisory body to actively support the implementation of the Informal Pathway.
- Strategy 4b: Codify the proposed designations that clearly communicate an educator’s level of expertise.
- Strategy 4c: Codify stackable structures of learning to include badges, micro-credentials and credentials that ensure professional learning experiences intentionally build upon each other.
- Strategy 4d: Update Professional Competencies to set objectives and align content for new training.
- Strategy 4e: Draft and finalize state agency rule(s) that will require implementation of the Informal Pathway within five years.

Introduction

In October 2023, the Florida Division of Early Learning (DEL) engaged the Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG) at the University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies (AZCEECS) to develop a framework and recommendations for an **informal pathway** for Florida's early learning workforce.

This informal pathway will provide meaningful opportunities for early childhood educators to build the skills and knowledge they need to effectively partner with families and support the growth and development of Florida's youngest children. Once established, this informal pathway will provide opportunities for career progression for the majority of the early learning workforce, which does not have degrees, and help build and retain a workforce prepared to meet the care and learning needs of young children.

Florida currently spends over one billion dollars of state and federal funds on early learning services.[3] While kindergarten readiness has been slowly but steadily increasing, only 51% of Florida's children enter kindergarten prepared for school[4], and only 64% of children completing the state's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program meet readiness standards.[1] Children who start behind too often stay behind, significantly burdening schools, teachers, families, and children. Professionals who are well-equipped to partner with families and have the knowledge and skills needed to deliver high-quality care and learning experiences are essential to strengthening school readiness, yet Florida currently does not have a systematic workforce preparation pathway that is reflective of and aligned with the current state of knowledge regarding core competencies and practices of quality early care and learning.

Recruiting and retaining a qualified early learning workforce depends on providing professional learning that facilitates the skill development of early childhood professionals while providing a pathway for career success.[5] To meet the complex needs of this workforce, the informal pathway needs to be accessible, reliable, and meaningful for early learning professionals, providers, employers, and the families they serve. To respond to Florida's needs, the primary considerations of this Informal Pathway project focused on:

1) Professional learning experiences that do not lead to an academic degree (Rule 6M-4.735, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.));

[3] Florida Department of Education Division of Early Learning, 2023
[4] Based on Fall 2023 data, FLHealthCHARTS, 2024
[5] Smith & Osborn, 2024

2) Professional learning that acknowledges competency attainment through a state-designated early childhood credential (Rule 6M-4.735, F.A.C.); and
3) Competency-based, stackable content to include onboarding, micro-credentials, summative credentials, and certificates.

While outside of the scope of this project, future work should leverage the structures recommended herein to inform meaningful compensation reform to further support the recruitment and retention of a qualified early care and education workforce. Wages, benefits, and working conditions connect directly to the quality, availability, and stability of early learning services for young children.

This report is the culmination of a year-long endeavor that sought input from community stakeholders, national experts, and empirical literature. The organizational structure of the report is outlined as follows:

- Information on early learning career pathways, Florida's current early learning career pathway and landscape, and rationale for creating Florida's Informal Career Pathway (p. 7-9)
- Guiding methodology, data collection, and findings that informed this proposed Pathway Framework and implementation process (p. 10-14)
- Recommendations and strategies for implementing the Informal Pathway (p. 15-32)
    - *Recommendation 1*: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)* (p. 18-21)
    - *Recommendation 2*: Create a new, comprehensive professional learning Registry with an integrated learning management system (LMS) for the early childhood and before-and-after school workforce (p. 21-23)
    - *Recommendation 3*: Update currently required professional learning with more effective content and instructional design (p. 23-26)
    - *Recommendation 4*: Codify Informal Pathway Framework (p. 26-32)
- A cost modeling analysis of estimated costs of the recommendations and strategies (p. 33-35)
- A detailed timeline of the proposed implementation plan with steps for each recommendation and strategy (p. 36-41)
- Long-term next steps for Pathway implementation, connections and conclusion (p. 42-43)

Overview

The last twenty years have yielded groundbreaking new insights into the profound development that takes place in the first five years of life. Young children's brains

develop more quickly than at any other period of development, forming the foundation for learning, relationships, and lifelong success. Quality early learning programs should have teachers who are prepared to deliver care and education experiences that integrate the latest findings on early brain development to effectively partner with families and deliver learning experiences that support school readiness and success. While early learning professionals serve this vital role, the systems supporting their growth and development are fragmented, underfunded, and insufficient to systematically develop the necessary knowledge and skills.[6] Given the wide range of backgrounds of professionals in the early learning field – ranging from those with high school diplomas (or GEDs) to people with college degrees – both informal and formal career pathways are needed to meet the state's demand for qualified professionals who are prepared to help children get ready for success in school.

In Florida, over half (57%) of the early learning workforce did not report professional learning achievement beyond a high school diploma or GED.[2] These professionals often have years of experience in teaching and supporting young children, and due to age, cost, life circumstances, or other variables, they do not pursue and complete a path to a formal credential or degree. Further, while every early learning professional in the state has to complete ten annual in-service training hours (including licensed facilities, family child care homes, and license-exempt providers) whether they have a credential or degree or not, the requirements around the content and the quality of these ten hours is minimal, which limits the likelihood that these activities support professional progression.

To retain and build the skills of these essential professionals, Florida must create an informal pathway that honors their crucial role and contribution to the children and families they serve; provides up-to-date quality learning experiences based on relevant research and practice; and facilitates professional growth via common-sense steps and requirements that ease the navigation process while ensuring competency acquisition.

Florida's Career Pathway Landscape

Florida's Early Learning and After-School Career Pathway was designed as an initial step to codify a career pathway. This resource delineates the key requirements for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce – including the Introductory Training requirement for all professionals, credentialing requirements for all VPK lead teachers (and at least one professional with a Staff Credential for

[6] Smith et al., 2024

every 20 children in licensed child care), and degree options. As a result of the VPK legislation passed in 2005[7], these credentials articulate into at least nine college credit hours at all state colleges throughout Florida, guaranteeing a pathway into college for early childhood and before-and-after school professionals.

Additionally, state colleges in Florida have a common course numbering system, which makes transferring credits between institutions of higher education more consistent and seamless. Many Florida state colleges offer early childhood certificates on a variety of topics, including early childhood development, infant/toddler, preschool, special needs, and management; the certificates are typically ~15 college credits and count toward the Associate in Science (A.S.) degree.

This combination of policies helps facilitate progress on a *formal* pathway – toward college credits or degrees – that is unique in the U.S. and a testament to Florida's commitment to its early learning and before-and-after school workforce. However, the formal pathway still leaves an unsustainable gap in the number and quality of professionals Florida needs. Creating an *informal* career pathway will enable the state to intentionally develop the most important practice-based knowledge and skills, and provide opportunities for meaningful career advancement, to the thousands of dedicated professionals who lack a credential or degree but educate children well and support the state's workforce and economic development goals.

Florida has promising state structures and practices that provide a foundation upon which a meaningful informal pathway can be built, which include:

- *Florida Introductory Child Care Training*: Family child care providers must complete 30 hours of mandated content before they open a family child care home, center-based staff working with young children and staff working with school-age children must complete 40 hours and pass the exams within the first 15 months of employment. This content covers key topics related to health and safety, licensing requirements, and basic information on child development and early literacy.
- *Emergent Literacy Micro-Credential*: The University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center for Learning (Lastinger Center) offers a 60-hour micro-credential for early childhood professionals that includes three 20-hour modules and participants receive a stipend for completion.
- *Florida Staff Credential*: Different credentials fulfill the Staff Credential requirement for professionals providing care for children birth through age 12, including the national Child Development Associate (CDA) and similar state-based credentials for either early learning or school age professionals.

[7] Florida Department of Education Office of Early Learning, 2007

The Staff Credential and the completion of three 5-hour emergent literacy courses are required for Lead Teachers in VPK.

- *Florida Director Credential*: Program directors must hold a Director Credential, which is available at three levels and reliant on work experience and applicable coursework. Directors of VPK programs are required to have the VPK Endorsement or hold a valid certificate in educational leadership issued by the FDOE.
- *Certificates*: State colleges in Florida can offer early childhood certificates on different specialized topics, such as infants and toddlers or serving young children with special needs. These certificates are comprised of five college classes (15 college credits).
- *Coaching Certification*: There are a number of models of early learning coaching certification in Florida including the Early Learning Coaching Certification through the Lastinger Center, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Coaching Certification through Teachstone (both widely implemented through the early learning coalitions (ELCs), and the Practice Based Coaching Certification through the UF AZCEECS and implemented widely through Head Start and some ELCs.

Two guiding documents will be essential to inform the content of any informal pathway professional learning content, structure or delivery:

- *Florida Early Learning Developmental Standards (FELDS)*: Florida has comprehensive standards for children birth through five years of age that reflect the knowledge and skills a child should know and be able to do. The FELDS align to Florida's K-12 standards to ensure children's knowledge and skills transition successfully from early learning to kindergarten and beyond. Aligning these developmental expectations to professional learning requirements will help the workforce attain the knowledge and skills needed to meet the learning and development needs of young children.
- *Florida Early Learning Professional Competencies*: Florida has core competencies for early learning teachers, before-and-after school educators, program directors, early learning coaches, career advisors, and specialists supporting early childhood inclusion. While some areas of these competencies need to be updated, they provide important benchmarks to assess teachers' skills, knowledge and dispositions in early learning programs.

Recommendations are outlined (see page 17) to strengthen the implementation of some of these elements, but these structures provide critical anchors upon which a meaningful informal pathway can be constructed.

Guiding Methodology, Data Collection, and Findings

This report and the recommendations are informed by an extensive review of research, current practice, and stakeholder engagement. The key activities that have informed the development of the Informal Pathway Framework and recommendations included the following, which are elaborated upon in Appendix A:

- Completing a comprehensive **literature review** and extensive interviews with leaders from Florida and other states to identify current workforce and professional learning trends, outcomes, approaches and structures;
- Documenting **promising practices and initiatives** identified from the literature review and focus groups that are being implemented in local Florida communities or statewide or in other states;
- Engaging in **continuous stakeholder participation** to solicit feedback including extensive input from Florida teachers, directors, owners/employers, administrators, early learning coalition and Children's Services Councils (CSCs) and Trusts leaders through focus groups, interviews, and surveys;
- Closely partnering with a **Statewide Advisory Committee** that helped guide this project and develop and refine the recommendations through reviewing research and stakeholder data; listening and discussing blind spots and bright spots; creating workgroups to develop the Pathway Framework and recommendations; and refining drafts informed by stakeholder input.
- Calibrating recommendations with **cost modeling** to ensure financially feasible structures and recommendations; and
- **Meeting with DEL** at least monthly to share progress, challenges, initial drafts, and key questions to ensure the recommendations were responsive to DEL expectations.

These activities were outlined in detail in the multiple interim resources, which iteratively evolved throughout the project to reflect the needs and priorities of Florida's early childhood workforce:

- Stakeholder Engagement Plan: October 2023
- Summary of Literature Review and Promising Practices: December 2023
- Stakeholder Engagement Report of Findings: January 2024
- Draft Informal Pathway Framework: February 2024

The Statewide Advisory Committee was instrumental in the development of the aforementioned resources, the proposed Informal Pathway Framework, and the recommendations outlined in this report. The Committee provided essential, varied perspectives drawn from their experiences in different roles within Florida's early

learning system. Committee meeting agendas and member organizations, names, and roles can be found in Appendix B.

Key findings from each of these resources are summarized below.

Literature Review Findings

In December 2023, the ECPRG completed *The Informal Pathway: Summary of Literature Review and Promising Practices*[8] report that included a review of research on:

- Elements of career pathways
- Florida's current professional learning systems and structures
- Promising elements of local Florida initiatives; and
- Promising elements of other state models

This scan indicated that there are several gaps in early learning systems related to the quality of professional learning and career pathway progression that have been acknowledged nationally and are similarly present in Florida. In the most recent independent evaluation of Florida's early learning professional learning opportunities, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) evaluators analyzed a sample of 1,700 publicly funded early learning courses to identify their alignment to topics, standards, elements of quality, and best practices in adult learning. Key findings from the SREB report (2021) included:

- A need for alignment to quality drivers (e.g., less than half of the courses evaluated addressed the seven core knowledge areas of the 2020 Florida Standards and Key Competencies for Early Childhood Educators)
- A need for authentic assessments and clear assessment criteria (less than half of the courses evaluated contained assessments that could be considered authentic, and only one-third of courses identified readings and resources that fit the subject and course learning outcomes); and
- Insufficient data collection for many learning opportunities (including course title, description, time commitment, cost, enrollment, completion, evaluation and feedback data) that would enable an analysis of learning quality and impact.

The detailed analysis of career pathways and professional learning systems from other states also revealed many career pathways and professional learning programs across the nation with promising elements, particularly from Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, New York, Ohio and South Carolina. The following are noteworthy practices highlighted for consideration in Florida's Informal Pathway:

[8] Knopf et al., 2023

- A user-friendly data system, that includes the entire workforce, can be used to streamline recordkeeping, reduce administrative burden, and inform individual and system workforce investments (South Carolina, Ohio, Kansas, Illinois)
- Pathway designations align with staff titles (Illinois, New York, Kansas, Ohio, South Carolina)
- Pathway designations/levels consider work and practice experience toward competency attainment (Illinois, Kansas, Ohio)
- Pathway provides supplemental support for educators to progress successfully (Delaware, New York, Kansas, South Carolina)
- Pathway aims to bridge gap of compensation with educational and competency attainment (South Carolina, Ohio, Delaware, Illinois)

The key findings of the literature review revealed that:

- An effective informal pathway must:
    - Clearly define requirements for meeting quality standards
    - Develop measurable competencies for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce
    - Delineate educator designations to signify professional expertise reliably
    - Align with policy and regulatory requirements, which includes the Florida Early Learning Developmental Standards and Professional Competencies, and program assessment requirements (e.g., CLASS)
    - Support advancement on the informal pathway
- Florida has many elements present in effective workforce pathways, but essential elements are missing that undermine the effectiveness and impact of the state's early learning workforce investments.
- Support for educators (such as career counseling, coaching, and financial scholarships) facilitates advancement on the Informal Pathway.
- Compensation and benefits are a challenge throughout the field with some innovative approaches in both Florida and other states but currently there are no approaches that have solved this challenge at scale.

Stakeholder Engagement Findings

In January 2024, the ECPRG submitted *Informal Pathway: Stakeholder Engagement Report of Findings*. The stakeholder report was informed by interviews with national and state early learning experts, two rounds of comprehensive Florida stakeholder focus groups, experience surveys of Florida educators, meetings with Florida's early childhood education (ECE) organizations, and input and feedback from the Statewide Advisory Committee. The focus was to analyze national and state system trends and bright spots and use those findings to build on the current system to address Florida's workforce needs and challenges. The stakeholder engagement

process also helped identify promising local initiatives from which to learn and inform the Informal Pathway Framework. Florida stakeholders identified the following needs:

- Clear, incremental steps – outlined in an easy-to-understand visual – for professionals to move from onboarding through credentials in ways that systematically build competencies;
- Sequential, incentivized steps through tools like stackable structures that acknowledge competency to make the leap from introductory training to a Staff Credential more feasible;
- Rebuild the Introductory Training required for new professionals (30 hours for family child care (FCC) providers and 40 hours for center-based staff) and Director Credential content to reflect best practices in early learning as well as adult and online learning;
- Integrate requirements of key policy drivers – such as the focus on teacher-child interactions (CLASS) – so professionals build the skills the state has prioritized;
- Encourage local innovation within Pathway structures to meet unique needs;
- Strengthen data systems to reduce the administrative burden on providers, professionals, and monitoring systems;
- Integrate the Informal Pathway into policy to provide clear expectations for providers and professionals; and
- Design the Informal Pathway in a manner that could offer additional supports (e.g., career advising, expanded scholarships), as well as compensation and benefit reform in the future.

Findings from Promising Practices and Initiatives in Florida

In addition to statewide requirements (see page 7-9), Florida has multiple initiatives that support educator recruitment, retention, wage incentives and professional learning. Four initiatives, including the *A$CEND* program by Thrive by 5 in Miami-Dade, the Early Childhood Educator INCENTIVE$ program by Children's Forum, the *ELEVATE* program in Pinellas County, and The Palm Beach State College *Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education (IEECE) Micro-Credential Programs*, highlight examples of innovation among Florida's early learning coalitions (ELCs), Children's Services Councils and Trusts, and other partners. Please see Appendix C for an overview of these initiatives.

Suggestions from administrators of these local initiatives include:

Design Suggestions

- Focus on the workforce and drive as much money directly to them as possible – do not invest so much in systems and oversight that the point of the work is lost.

- Incentivize the prioritized behavior to be strengthened, specifically CLASS scores.
- Design an approach with providers to ensure benefits will incentivize hard work and lead to better program quality and child outcomes; build systems that require accountability but are not burdensome or overly bureaucratic; use data to iteratively inform continuous improvement of approaches and programs so the investment is increasingly effective and efficient over time.
- Create a program blueprint or logic model that makes the goals clear and design any approach to align to these goals; assure that all stakeholders are held accountable and have ownership of these goals and use data to inform decision making; be willing to pivot quickly if the approaches are not accomplishing the desired goals.
- When designing instructional content, creators should work to meet the community needs (such as incorporating local quality measures) while also ensuring that educators and local providers do not lose individuality based on their workplace demands.

Implementation Suggestions

- Help directors understand and invest in their staff and support workforce development. Increasing wages and investing in professional learning requires tremendous effort, leadership skills and business/operational knowledge, and additional financial resources to sustain this commitment.
- Data is critical to understand the impacts of these investments. All ELCs struggled with the state's antiquated data systems that were limited in both their data quality and database functionality. Many program coordinators had to match data manually, which is cumbersome and unnecessarily costly given the staff requirements to complete this analysis.
- Offer professional learning options to be accessible to all, including sessions at the most convenient times for educators (evenings and weekends), in several languages (or with interpreters), and at no cost.

These findings informed the recommendations, as outlined in Appendix D.

Proposed Informal Pathway

The recommendations and strategies will provide new opportunities for professionals to build key knowledge and skills, develop essential competencies to support the growth and learning of young children, and advance the careers of the early childhood workforce. With a keen understanding of the early childhood field's challenges and the difficulties many Florida providers face attracting and retaining a qualified workforce, the recommendations and strategies focus on streamlined, effective, and meaningful actions to support providers and cultivate more effective early learning professionals. The recommendations endeavor to maximize the dollars spent each year on professional learning by improving the quality of learning content, aligning content with a meaningful scope and sequence, and address the needs of early learning professionals during each of their career stages – from onboarding through credentials – that can articulate into college credit and formal education.

Key Considerations of the Informal Pathway Recommendations and Framework

The proposed Informal Pathway Framework aligns with current Florida statute and includes stackable micro-credentials, certificates, and four designations which clearly communicate an educator's level of expertise and skill. The following assumptions are embedded within this proposed Framework:

- ***Applies across all settings***: Unless otherwise noted, the recommendations are meant to apply across all settings, including centers, family child care homes, school-based programs, and other settings that serve young children or provide before and after school programming. There may be details that would differ by setting or age group, such as the content and scope of the Introductory Training, but wherever possible the Framework is meant to reflect the needs of all settings. When "teacher" and "classroom" are used these terms refer to all settings.
- ***Applies across all age groups***: This includes infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children accessing before and after-school child care.
- ***Alignment to key policy and system drivers***: The recommendations integrate the FELDS, professional core competencies, and program quality assessments (e.g., CLASS) to ensure the knowledge and skills developed reinforce Florida's goals for children's learning and development and facilitate professional growth.
- ***Interconnected recommendations:*** These recommendations are highly interconnected and designed to reinforce each other. The recommendations, therefore, cannot be siloed or occur independent from each other. Using these recommendations to promote positive change and capacity building *as*

a whole will provide the best opportunity to positively impact the workforce in ways that will improve early learning quality and impact.

- ***Articulation***: The proposed Framework is designed to articulate into Florida's formal pathway, ensuring continued career advancement opportunities for the workforce. As outlined on pages 7 and 8, early childhood staff credentials articulate into at least nine credit hours at all state colleges and policies like a common course numbering system facilitate easier transfer of credits between institutions. This ensures that the stackable model outlined in the Framework section can ultimately lead to college credits if professionals would like to pursue formal learning options.
- ***Compensation***: While the topic of improving compensation and benefits was elevated repeatedly to address Florida's early learning and before-and-after school workforce challenges, this issue was outside of this project's scope. The first step is to codify an informal pathway and then use this Framework to inform additional workforce reforms. The recommendations have been designed to serve as an immediate and significant step forward as well as provide an investable Framework that could inform future incentives, retention bonuses, and compensation and benefits increases.

Informal Pathway Recommendations and Strategies

The four implementation recommendations and thirteen strategies are designed to ensure the success of the proposed Informal Pathway. The recommendations are based on findings and are each justified with a rationale. A high-level summary of the Informal Pathway recommendations is provided below:

Recommendation 1: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)*

- Strategy 1a: Create a cost effective, efficient system of training approval.
- Strategy 1b: Create a cost effective, efficient system of trainer approval.
- Strategy 1c: Authorize and implement a competency assessment for lead teachers, mentor teachers and directors.
- Strategy 1d: Serve as a key thought partner to the DEL, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), ELCs, and other stakeholders to continue to support the evolution of the early childhood professional learning (PL) system.

Recommendation 2: Create a new, comprehensive professional learning Registry with an integrated learning management system (LMS) for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce

- Strategy 2a: Procure a new Registry for the Florida early learning and before-and-after school workforce.
- Strategy 2b: Require all professionals who work in licensed/regulated early learning and before-and-after school programs to utilize the new Registry.

Recommendation 3: Update currently required professional learning with more effective content and instructional design

- Strategy 3a: Rebuild the Introductory Training for all roles, including a 30-hour course for family child care (FCC), a 40-hour course for center-based staff and a 40-hour course for the before-and-after school workforce.
- Strategy 3b: Revise the Director Credential (all levels).

Recommendation 4: Codify Informal Pathway Framework

- Strategy 4a: Create an advisory body to actively support the implementation of the Informal Pathway.

- Strategy 4b: Codify the proposed designations that clearly communicate an educator's level of expertise.
- Strategy 4c: Codify stackable structures of learning to include badges, micro-credentials and credentials that ensure professional learning experiences intentionally build upon each other.
- Strategy 4d: Update Professional Competencies to set objectives and align content for new training.
- Strategy 4e: Draft and finalize state agency rule(s) that will require implementation of the Informal Pathway within five years.

The section below provides an in-depth description of each of the recommendations, the implementation strategies, a rationale to provide the necessary justification to support state action and intended outcomes of each recommendation.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION 1: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)*. There is a suite of professional learning responsibilities that are not, at present, held by any entity now. This lack of organizational capacity is compromising the quality and effectiveness of Florida's early learning system. The proposed Center would:

- Provide quality assurance through design and implementation of a cost effective and efficient system of training and trainer approval.
- Serve as a think tank for the state to inform ongoing improvements to the state's professional learning system.

This could be done through a sole source to an existing partner or institute for higher education, competitive procurement, or implemented in-house by the Florida Department of Education Division of Early Learning (DEL). Please see Appendix E for a first draft of key activities that should be implemented by the Center.

Rationale: The Center will address the major liability in Florida's professional learning investments by ensuring the quality of the training content and trainers and supporting the implementation of many aspects of the Informal Pathway.

Intended Outcomes: When established as outlined, the Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition will:

- Increase knowledge and skills of early learning professionals to improve early learning quality and kindergarten readiness.
- Improve trainer quality through validation of competency, experience and knowledge assessment.

- Improve training quality, including aligning content with the FELDS, the state's Professional Competencies for professionals, and quality assessments (e.g., CLASS tool) to promote integrated performance improvement.
- More effectively invest the millions that are spent annually on supporting the early learning workforce.
- Improve satisfaction and create positive professional learning experiences for educators by improving the quality and effectiveness of content and delivery of learning.
- Increase teacher retention and career progression on the Pathway.

The four strategies below would be developed and implemented by the Center on the timeline outlined on pages 37 and 38.

Strategy 1a: Create a cost effective, efficient system of training approval. The quality of training available to early learning professionals varies widely and is having variable impact on teacher knowledge and skills. Public funding should only be invested in experiences that meet quality assurance standards, including those that align with the FELDS and the Professional Competencies, and program quality measures (e.g., CLASS); build capacity and knowledge; and assess skills through intentional activities. The content and delivery of approved trainings should incorporate adult learning strategies, be comprehensive in scope and sequence, require participants to display their newly learned competency, and provide tangible skills and insights for early learning professionals. While highly effective training exists in pockets throughout Florida, the goal of this strategy is to provide consistency in quality, scope, and outcomes for all participants.

Rationale: A system of training approval will ensure publicly funded training is of high quality, aligned to the state's key quality and policy drivers, and intentionally supports the skill and career development of the early childhood workforce.

Strategy 1b: Create a cost effective, efficient system of trainer approval. Quality training depends on instructors who are knowledgeable and employ effective adult learning practice. Public funding should only be invested in experiences that meet quality assurance standards, including the qualifications, skills, and experience of trainers. The trainer approval requirements should reflect best practices related to the skills, dispositions and experiences for trainers and be based on the most current research and practice.

Rationale: A system of trainer approval will ensure publicly funded training is delivered by qualified professionals who have subject matter expertise on the content they are delivering and adult learning expertise to make the content relevant and applicable to the early learning and before-and-after school workforce.

Strategy 1c: Authorize and implement a competency assessment for lead teachers, mentor teachers and directors. In the interest of recognizing competencies as well as preparation, the Informal Pathway Framework should require demonstration of skills (such as observations or the completion of a portfolio or other authentic assessments), not just written tests. Any competency assessment should align to the FELDS and the Professional Competencies, and program quality assessments (e.g., CLASS).

A competency assessment measures the ability to apply knowledge, demonstrate skills, and implement practices. Competency assessments are recommended at key points on the Informal Pathway to assess teacher competency to ensure Pathway designations are meaningful and provided to individuals with measurable skills. Florida already has many of the pieces necessary to check competencies as teachers progress along the Career Pathway:

- Recognized Staff Credentials require teachers to display competencies through observations, portfolios, and/or other means.
- Coaching Certifications (see page 9) require professionals to demonstrate coaching expertise to receive any of these certifications.

As part of the work recommended for the Center, the ECPRG recommends the development of new competency assessments to measure application of skills for all micro-credentials, certifications, and for teachers with formal degrees outside of the field – allowing them the ability to qualify for Lead Teacher without necessarily requiring additional coursework.

Additionally, the ECPRG recommends developing a competency assessment to allow teachers to be assessed (through exam, observation, portfolio, or a combination) and thus exempt from certain required hours of training to acknowledge previous learning and accelerate teachers with displayed competencies along the pathway.

Rationale: A reliable competency assessment will provide a mechanism to move beyond mere compliance (collecting hours of in-service) to documenting and rewarding competence and expertise. Ensuring professionals have demonstrable skills will facilitate more effective hiring for employers and enable professionals with strong skills to be recognized without requiring PL experiences to build skills they already have. This will also help employers with hiring and meeting staffing requirements, easing workforce shortages.

Strategy 1d: Serve as a key thought partner to the DEL, DCF, ELCs, and other stakeholders to continue to support the evolution of the early childhood PL system. To continue to develop the informal pathway and ensure it

evolves to meet the needs of providers and the workforce, annual priorities should be developed in partnership with the advisory body (see Strategy 4a on page 27).

Rationale: To create a dynamic and responsive professional learning system and Informal Pathway there must be ongoing creativity and energy invested. The Center can serve as a vital partner in the development of this system and bring focused expertise and leadership to this ongoing growth and evolution.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION 2: Create a new, comprehensive professional learning Registry with an integrated learning management system (LMS) for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce. Florida does not have a truly comprehensive professional learning Registry for the early learning workforce, which creates costly and frustrating inefficiencies. Creating a new Registry and requiring all professionals in the workforce to maintain an active profile will address multiple gaps in the state and:

- Provide a one-stop hub for all professional learning experiences and supports, easing access challenges and increasing participation in meaningful professional learning.
- Facilitate access to available professional learning experiences in communities or online options available throughout the state.
- Connect professionals with resources like scholarships to facilitate their career advancement.
- Provide real time data on the early childhood workforce including training, credentials and education; experience; wages and benefits; turnover; and other data.
- Enable a unified transcript that can be used to simplify licensing visits and program monitoring.
- Ease the burden on providers to meet program and funding monitoring requirements with a unified system across all funding streams.
- Facilitate the efficient analysis of real-time data to identify workforce strengths and needs, measure the impact of investments, and understand emerging trends.

The current Registry at the DCF is designed primarily to document compliance for some (but not all) early learning and before-and-after school programs and therefore, only includes a portion of the workforce. Additionally, the existing registry is on an outdated platform that does not support system integration and connection with other professional learning initiatives such as the T.E.A.C.H. program, state funded online learning management systems, and other DEL and local initiatives. These limitations, that are described more completely in the Summary of Literature Review and Promising Practices and the Stakeholder Engagement Report of Findings, have also limited the extent to which the state has been able to effectively evaluate the state of the early care and learning workforce

and the impact of prior professional learning initiatives. Creating a new Registry will be more effective and efficient than trying to improve the current Registry.

Rationale: Florida does not have a unified data system that accurately describes the entirety of the early learning workforce, which puts a costly burden on individuals and providers. With limited reliable data about the early childhood workforce, the state currently commissions costly workforce studies to understand the background, preparation, and turnover in the field; when these studies are complete, they are already out of date given the dynamic nature of this workforce and the pace of data collection and analysis. The status quo both takes extensive funding and time and means that any workforce solutions cannot be informed by real-time data.

Intended Outcomes: This recommendation will create:

- A unified professional learning data and training system that provides a deeper understanding of the entire early learning workforce to inform funding decisions and policy priorities.
- More teachers engaging in professional learning due to ease and clarity of training and data systems.
- Cost efficient and effective statewide, regional and local workforce studies that can be accessed.
- Real-time data on workforce that can inform local and state investments.
- Support for employers to identify and hire qualified personnel and ensure training competency.

Strategy 2a: Procure a new Registry for the Florida early learning and before-and-after school workforce. The state should procure a new Registry modeled after those utilized in other states like South Carolina and Ohio to support critical activities for teachers, employers, state personnel, and other ECE stakeholders like ELCs and Children's Services Councils and Trusts. The Registry will serve the following key functions, none of which are currently possible for the early learning workforce. For more details on the Registry key functionality, please see Appendix F.

- Track professional learning for all educators in the state, including the DCF introductory training and annual in-service training.
- Track formal education degrees, child care credentials, Staff Credentials, director credentials, micro-credentials, and badges.
- Provide clear guidance on professional learning requirements.
- Provide the opportunity to trainers, not participants, to upload evidence of completed training and meeting competency expectations resulting from PL engagement.

- Allow teachers to easily download transcripts that will be accepted by credentialing agencies.
- Include different levels of authorization to access data, differentiating what data individuals, providers, local administrators (ELCs) and state administrators (DEL, leaders of statewide initiatives like T.E.A.C.H.) can access to support licensing, teacher professional learning, hiring practices, and ongoing training expectations.

Rationale: The current Registry is very labor intensive to extract data and is built in outdated technology. Current data in the Registry is neither consistent, reliable, nor complete and does not integrate seamlessly with other agency systems. Further, the current Registry only includes a fraction of the workforce. Given significant challenges with data quality, starting over with a new Registry is the most time- and cost-efficient strategy.

Strategy 2b: Require all professionals who work in licensed/regulated early learning and before-and-after school programs to utilize the new Registry. Over the course of five years, participants should be intentionally and systematically onboarded, starting with staff who work in programs funded with School Readiness (SR) and VPK funding and eventually including staff in all licensed centers, family child care homes, and school-based early learning programs.

Rationale: A new Registry will help streamline record keeping for professionals, providers (employers), licensing surveyors, and the DEL to inform more effective workforce investments. Requiring all professionals in all settings to participate in the Registry and update their profiles at least annually will enable the DEL and other stakeholders to have a comprehensive understanding of the early learning workforce.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION 3: Update currently required professional learning with more effective content and instructional design. Florida is fortunate to have Early Learning Developmental Standards, Professional Competencies and onboarding procedures for:

- New family child care providers (30 hours before opening a home).
- New early childhood professionals (40 hours within the first year of starting employment).
- New school-age providers (40 hours within the first year of starting employment).
- Director Credential that includes completion of a staff credential and additional learning and experience requirements.

Rationale: The requirement for the Introductory Training provides a tremendous opportunity to intentionally onboard and develop the skills of Florida's early childhood educators and school age workforce, but the current content and delivery falls far short of this possibility. By upgrading the content and delivery, Florida can maximize an underutilized opportunity and better meet the needs of the workforce, better prepare new professionals in the field so they are more likely to stay, help develop key skills, so the workforce is more effective in early learning programs and cultivate the desire for meaningful professional learning and career advancement opportunities. Delivery of this required content should be engaging and incorporate the most current research and adult learning principles.

Intended Outcomes: This recommendation will create:

- Improved teacher competency.
- Improved retention of first year teachers as well as support for ongoing learning in the field.
- Improved managerial, operational and pedagogical competencies for Directors.
- Improved program quality by integrating key policy drivers (e.g., CLASS) into the Introductory Training.
- Directors that are more skilled, professional, and create better organizational culture will be able to attract and retain teachers more effectively.

Strategy 3a: Rebuild the Introductory Training for all roles, including a 30-hour course for family child care (FCC), a 40-hour course for center-based staff and a 40-hour course for the before-and-after school workforce. These courses should be transformed to more intentionally onboard professionals and meet federal mandates (covering the 12 health and safety topics required through the Child Care and Development Block Grant), Florida requirements including the age-applicable FELDS training, three 5-hour courses of emergent literacy content, and key priorities identified by stakeholders. Prioritized topics that stakeholders felt needed more focus included: family engagement, child behavior and classroom management, orientation to the early childhood profession, and professionalism.

Rationale: Intentional, high quality, and engaging onboarding training for new early learning professionals provides a unique opportunity to welcome professionals to the field, help them see the impact they have on Florida's future, learn the importance of working closely with families, and understand how to best nurture the development and learning of young children. With this foundation, professionals will be better equipped in their daily work and aware of the many resources available through ELCs and other partners.

Strategy 3b: Revise the Director Credential (all levels).
In all reviewed research and stakeholder data, directors were considered the "gateway to quality".[5] Directors with business competency can build and maintain fiscal health, increase organizational capacity, improve job quality, deepen community engagement, lower teacher turnover, and promote investments in long-term sustainability. Directors who are instructional leaders promote positive teacher-child interactions and quality learning environments and mentor and coach teachers in their classrooms.

In Florida, all directors must complete a Florida Director Credential. Strong feedback was provided that the current Director Credential model and the required college classes[9] are not building the administrative and instructional leadership competencies program leaders need. Directors need better preparation to serve as both effective business managers and pedagogical leaders and should have access to new content and experiences that:

- Develop administrative competencies, including strategic planning, leadership development, operational oversight, and community collaboration.
- Develop instructional leadership competencies, including understanding child development, best practices in teaching, classroom management and child assessments, and mentoring.
- Develop coaching competencies to positively impact and guide teachers on the Informal Pathway through strong staff support, instructional leadership, and a focus on continuous quality improvement.

To address gaps in content and performance criteria, the advisory body (see strategy 4a) should:

- Develop a workgroup that includes directors from a variety of settings, faculty who teach the required Director Credential courses at Florida's state

[9] Director Credential requirements:

- *Core requirements for all levels*: Active Staff Credential, high school diploma or GED, 30 hours (Part 1) of the Introductory Training, eight hours of in-service on serving children with disabilities.
- *Level I*: Core requirements **AND** completion of an approved Overview of Child Care Management Course **OR** a Director Credential issued by another state.
- *Level II*: All Level I requirements + at least one year of experience as an on-site child care director.
- *Advanced*: Core requirements **AND** Level I requirements **but** minimum of two years' experience as ab on-site child care director **AND** complete one of the following:
    - Associates degree or higher, **OR**
    - At least two, three college credit courses in one of the following areas: Child Care and Education Organizational Leadership, Child Care Educational Financial and Legal Issues, or Child Care Education Programming.

colleges, and local leaders who have developed and implemented approaches to address the needs of program directors to identify strengths and challenges with the current credential system (Y1).
- Develop recommendations and a timeline to modify the requirements for Director Credentials, which may include other options to meet the requirements for Level I, Level II, and/or the Advanced Director Credentials. These may include recommendations surfaced during the stakeholder engagement process, such as requiring coaching certification for directors to expand their pedagogical leadership expertise, developing competency assessment opportunities to provide options other than college courses, creating more Director-specific content and making it widely available throughout the state, and offering opportunities like communities of practice to support peer learning and mentorship (Y1-2).

Rationale: Directors serve an essential role in setting program vision, supporting and managing staff, leading pedagogical implementation, and creating the organizational culture. Effectively managing these complex roles requires knowledge and support. The impact of director training is lessened when the content is outdated and not delivered in engaging ways designed to build knowledge and improve support to teachers in their practice. The existing credential does not properly leverage the opportunity to provide directors with the information necessary for successful leadership.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION 4: Codify Informal Pathway Framework.

For the Informal Pathway to have impact, it must be codified in rule or law and integrated into the early childhood system in Florida. The strategies below are designed to ensure the Informal Pathway is integrated fully into the current system and streamlines and clarifies expectations for providers, professionals, and partners like ELCs and Children's Services Councils and Trusts. By implementing these strategies there will be immediate workforce benefits through improved onboarding and higher quality professional learning experiences. The stage will also be set for more effective policy and investments long term in compensation and benefits.

Rationale: By providing an easily understandable system that ensures all approved content (see 2a) is designed to count toward the credentials that qualify professionals to become lead teachers and can articulate into college credits, the state's professional learning investments will be designed to facilitate career advancement and skill development.

Intended Outcomes: This recommendation will create:
- More educators on the Informal Pathway.

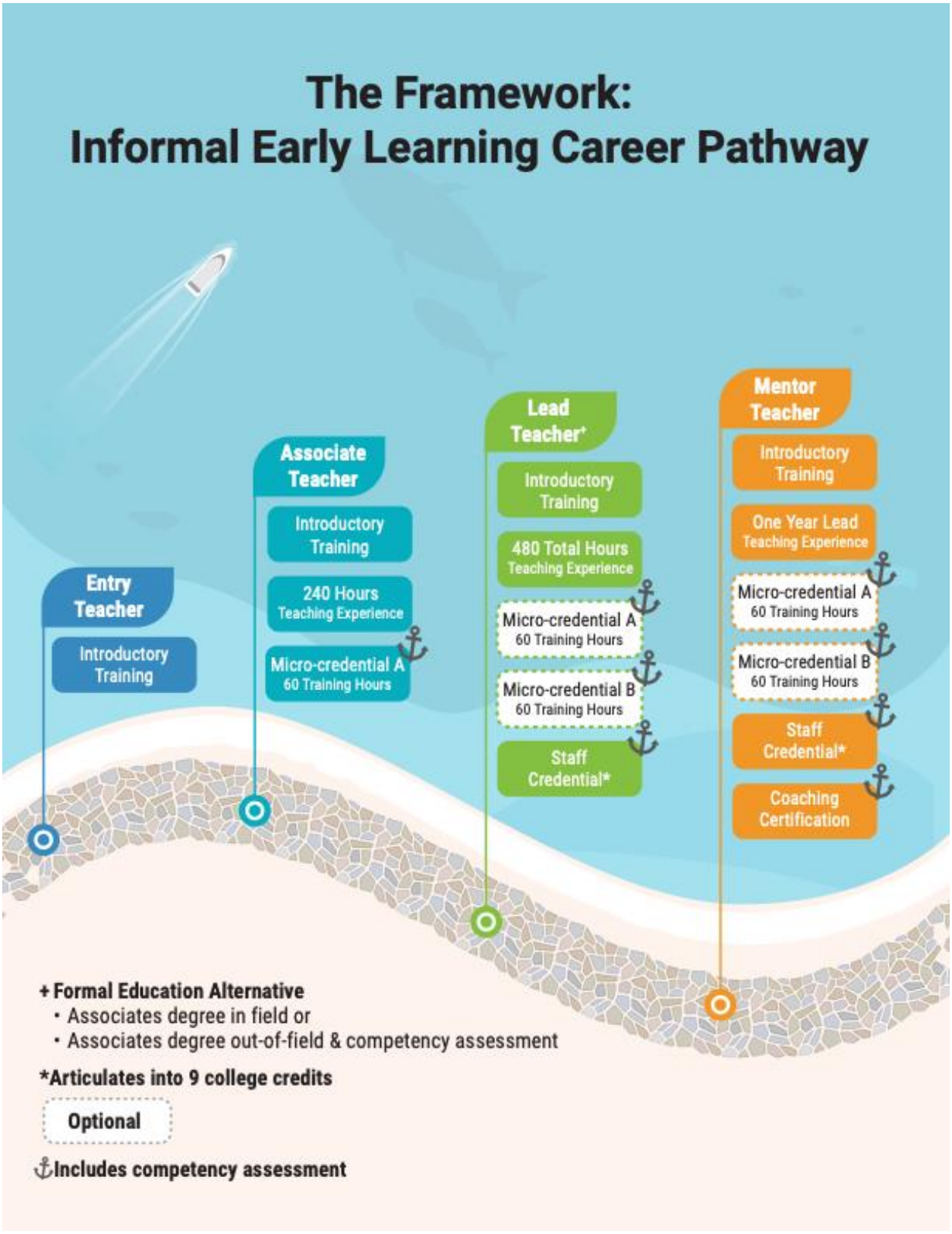
- Increased completion of badges, micro-credentials and credentials.
- More and better professional learning options (badges, micro-credentials, credentials).
- Improved progress for educators on the Informal Pathway.
- Designation cadres for future implementation quality (Associate Teacher, Lead Teacher, Mentor Teacher).
- More teachers who transition to formal pathway for degree completion (based on articulation agreements).
- Broader input and ownership of the Informal Pathway system for key stakeholders.
- Improved quality in classrooms (CLASS scores, kindergarten readiness).
- Improved teacher retention and career progression.

Strategy 4a: Create an advisory body to actively support the implementation of the Informal Pathway.
An interagency advisory body should support the further design and implementation of the Informal Pathway to bring expertise on the many elements of the state's professional learning system. Key participants should include the DEL, DCF, ELCs, CSCs, organization and provider associations, and other stakeholders. The advisory body responsibilities should include:

- Advise on all aspects of the Informal Pathway implementation including the Center procurement, design, timeline, implementation, and priorities, particularly after the initial few years of start-up and workforce onboarding.
- Monitor all aspects of Pathway implementation including Center and Registry implementation, systems level capacity-building and development, marketing and communications strategy, and external evaluation.
- Identify external evaluator and review stakeholder feedback on Pathway implementation.
- Support accountability.
- Maximize system and policy opportunities.
- Develop ad hoc sub-committees as needed with additional expertise to support specific aspects of implementation (e.g., develop a short-term group to inform the selection of a new Registry with professionals who have expertise with technology and Registries).

Rationale: An advisory body to oversee the implementation of the Informal Pathway will increase stakeholder input, feedback, and buy-in.

Strategy 4b: Codify the proposed designations that clearly communicate an educator's level of expertise measured by professional learning completion: Entry Teacher, Associate Teacher, Lead Teacher, and Mentor Teacher.


The Framework:
Informal Early Learning Career Pathway
Entry Teacher
Introductory Training
Associate Teacher
Introductory Training
240 Hours
Teaching Experience
Micro-credential A
60 Training Hours
Lead Teacher+
Introductory Training
480 Total Hours
Teaching Experience
Micro-credential A
60 Training Hours
Micro-credential B
60 Training Hours
Staff Credential*
Mentor Teacher
Introductory Training
One Year Lead
Teaching Experience
Micro-credential A
60 Training Hours
Micro-credential B
60 Training Hours
Staff Credential*
Coaching Certification
+ Formal Education Alternative
• Associates degree in field or
• Associates degree out-of-field & competency assessment
*Articulates into 9 college credits
Optional
⚓Includes competency assessment

Teacher Designations

The proposed Informal Pathway Framework includes four designations – two of which are new – to communicate teachers' preparation and experience to facilitate hiring and career advancement.

1. *Entry Teachers* are teachers new to the workforce who have not previously worked in an early learning setting. Currently, new early learning or before-and-after school staff must complete all DCF required Early Learning Introductory Training (centers) within 15 months of employment or the Family Day Care Home Training before opening a family child care home. While changes are recommended to the content of these trainings (see page 24), the requirement to complete the Introductory Training should not change. With this designation, all educators across the state would enter the Informal Pathway as they enter the field.

2. *Associate Teachers* is a new designation. Associate Teachers would be teachers who have completed 240 hours of early childhood classroom teaching experience, completed the Introductory Training noted above for Entry Teachers, and Micro-credential A (60 hours). These requirements are *half* of the requirements necessary to receive a Florida Staff Credential and meant to serve as a stepping stone toward becoming a lead teacher.

3. *Lead Teachers* should be required to complete a Florida Staff Credential[10], which is currently required for one professional for every 20 children in licensed child care programs and for Lead Teachers in VPK settings. With this proposed Framework **all** Lead Teachers across all age groups should have a Staff Credential within five years.

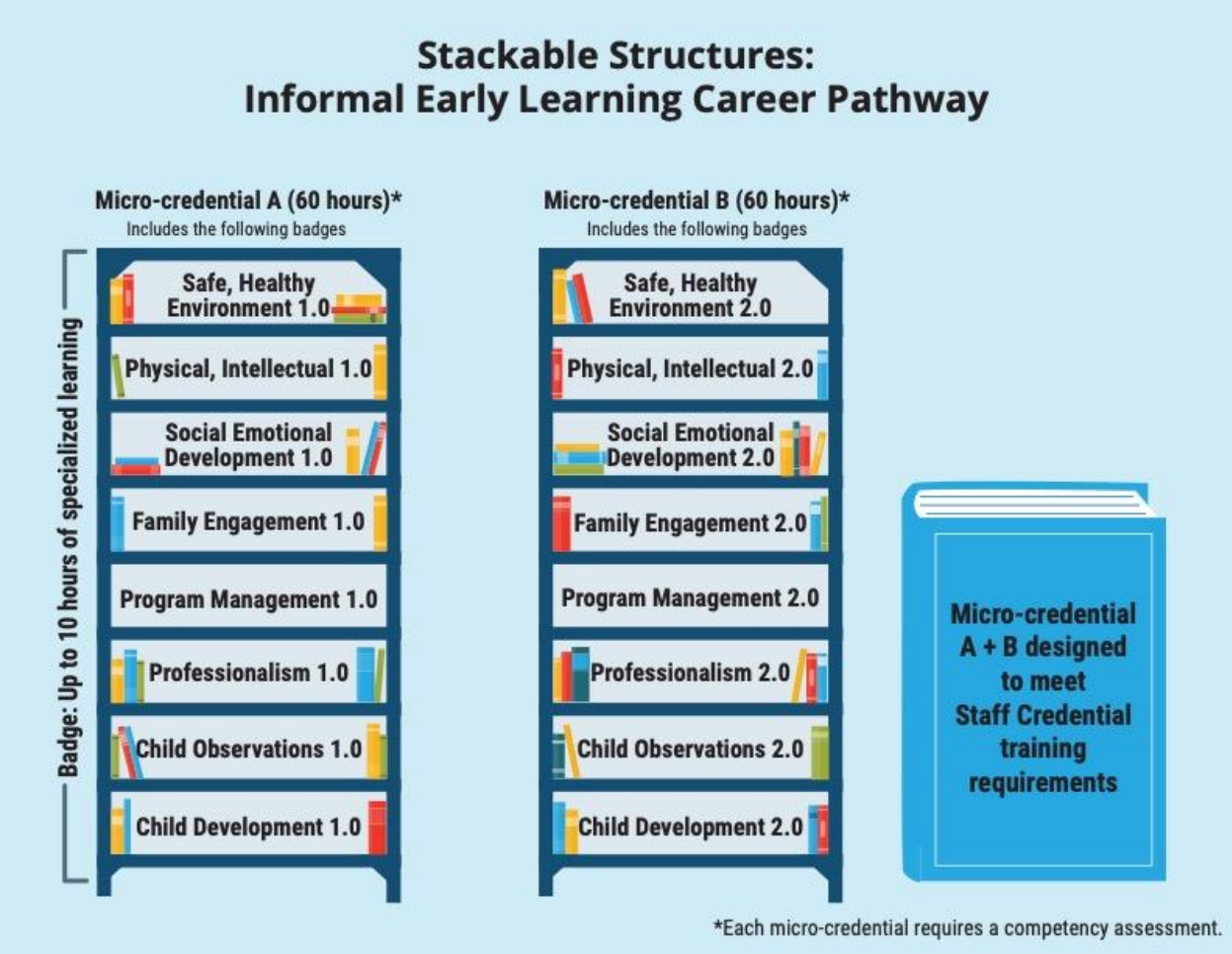
4. *Mentor Teachers* is a new designation. Mentor Teachers would be experienced teachers who have been Lead Teachers or family child care providers for at least 12 months, met the Staff Credential or education experience above, and completed a Coaching Certification to provide mentorship and instructional leadership.

Rationale: Designations for educators are designed to:

[10] An educator can also receive a Staff Credential by completing an Associates degree or higher in early childhood education (with at least 21 credits in identified early childhood-related coursework) or a related field. A teacher with an Associates degree that is outside of the field should complete a competency assessment to become a Lead Teacher; competency assessments are explained in further detail on pages 30-32.

- Recognize the professionalism that is emerging as individuals progress by formalizing titles that are understandable across the field. The current structure of ECE I, II, III is not recognizable and feels impersonal to stakeholders.
- Provide meaningful distinctions for employers to inform their hiring decisions. While employers can provide titles within their organizational structure, having consistent titles and expectations throughout the state can help make the vetting process for new employees easier and more efficient.
- Create a consistent set of designations and expectations that could inform a structure for compensation and/or benefit increases in future.

Strategy 4c: Codify stackable structures of learning to include badges, micro-credentials and credentials that ensure professional learning experiences intentionally build upon each other.



The proposed Informal Pathway has multiple stackable elements that denote incremental increases in hours of learning and competency attainment:

- *Badges*: ~Ten hours of approved content/courses on specific topics delivered by approved trainers that align and feed into micro-credential requirements. The requirements and approval processes for badges will be finalized by the Center as part of the training approval work.
- *Micro-credentials*: Informed by the Emergent Literacy Micro-Credential structure, micro-credentials will include no more than 60 hours of approved content delivered by approved trainers and include a competency assessment (see page 8). The micro-credential could be achieved through completing specific badges or could be completed independently.
    - As noted on the visual on page 28, Micro-Credential A is recommended for Associate Teachers, would require a competency assessment, and represents approximately 50% of the requirements to achieve the Staff Credential.
    - Together Micro-Credential A and Micro-Credential B fulfill the clock hour requirements for the Staff Credential.
    - Additional micro-credentials on key topics should be developed over time, such as infant and toddler, serving children with special needs, and other priorities.

The requirements and approval processes for new micro-credentials will be finalized by the Center as part of the training approval work.

- *Staff Credentials:* Staff Credentials are already required for VPK Lead Teachers and for one professional for every 20 children in licensed facilities. Given the strong history and widespread understanding of these credentials in Florida, the stackable structure will lead to Staff Credentials, which can articulate into at least nine hours of college credit and the formal pathway.

Rationale: The stackable elements will:

- Provide incremental (and potentially incentivized) stairsteps between designations so professionals can make measurable progress toward the Staff Credential.
- Deepen professional expertise and strengthen teaching practice.
- Enable professionals and programs to denote specialized expertise and help inform parental choice as they select the best early learning program for their child.

Strategy 4d: Update Professional Competencies to set objectives and align content for new training. In an effort to streamline these designations further, reviewing and revising/simplifying Florida's Professional Competencies for early learning educators, after-school educators, directors and administrators, career advisors, specialists supporting early childhood inclusion, and early learning coaches, to align with pathway designations and credentials would create seamless

navigation of this pathway and allow employers to understand any gaps of learning potential teaching candidates might need to complete.

Rationale: By integrating the latest science into updated core competencies, including teacher-child interactions, this new Informal Pathway will help ensure professional learning investments build the essential knowledge and skills needed for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce.

Strategy 4e: Draft and finalize state agency rule(s) that will require implementation of the Informal Pathway within five years. The DEL will need to update rule to implement the informal pathway, to include:

- Require all professionals to set up a Registry profile and update the profile annually.
- Require all publicly funded training – through the DEL, DCF, ELCs, and contracts for professional learning – to:
    - Be approved through the training approval process and align to the FELDS, the updated professional core competencies, and key program assessment tools (e.g., CLASS).
    - Be delivered by an approved trainer.
    - Meet the requirements for the micro-credentials and count toward the Staff Credential, ensuring all content contributes to career advancement.
- Identify and address related rule(s) that require changes with the new Informal Pathway (e.g., Gold Seal, licensing requirements).

Cost Model

The ECPRG worked with Brodsky Research and Consulting (BRC) to complete initial cost estimates for the first three recommendations in this report. This team identified states with the system elements that Florida prioritized and reviewed documents and research of state efforts, start-up and ongoing costs, timelines, and impacts. In addition, BRC conducted interviews and collected information about implementation and system costs with agencies and partners from FL, DE, GA, MS, NE, OH, SC, and TX.

The table below summarizes the estimated initial and ongoing implementation costs. These are presented as annual ranges, based on the recommendations and experience in other states and considering Florida's 67 counties and ~12,000 providers in the state (per 6/5/24 DOE report).

Table 1: Estimated Initial and Ongoing Implementation Costs

Recommendation	**Estimated Annual Technology Costs**	**Estimated Annual Labor Costs**	**Estimated Annual Costs**
Recommendation 1	$1.3M - $3.0M*	$.7M - $1.2M	$2.0M - $4.2M
Recommendation 2	$1.2M - $2.5M*	$.4M - $.7M	$1.6M - $3.2M
Recommendation 3	N/A	$.3M - $1.3M (one time cost)	N/A
Total Estimate	**$2.5M - $5.5M**	**$1.4M - $3.2M**	**$3.6M - $7.4M**

** Note: The estimated cost is presented as a range. The low end of the range provided considers significant cost avoidance achieved by combining the registry and training portals for a fully integrated system. A comprehensive technology implementation of all recommendations leverages cross-system capabilities and interoperability. Costs will be adjusted upward if old and new systems or different portals are combined to achieve a similar result due to increased labor and system costs and a protracted implementation timeline. A patchwork approach will require multiple logins for users and customer service for each system, increase staff requirements, and compromise efficiency and overall data quality.*

Considerations for Recommendation #1: To estimate the cost of the Center implementation, the following essential functions were considered. Estimates were based on staffing needs associated with specified tasks:

- 3-6 staff dedicated to writing policy and requirements for training, establishing credentials for training organizations and individuals, then reviewing applications and enforcing adherence to policies and requirements (validation, verification staff). The range of staff depends on the training approach the state pursues. In collaboration with the technology partner, these staff will support customer (trainer and educator) service needs.
- 1-2 Directors, supervisors, and/or coordinators for Quality Assurance (QA) and staff management.
- Data analyst/evaluation specialist to monitor data, trends, and identify areas of need and build evidence to support ongoing system investment and enhancement.
- Collaboration with department communications office for outreach efforts to support clear messaging, timelines, and participation benefits.

Additional staff (not budgeted) may include:

- Evaluation manager
- Career counseling, training, funding specialists (for scholarships, T.E.A.C.H.)

For Technology the following was included:

- Training and curricula approval templates, certificate templates
- Applications, checklists, approval workflows
- Training sessions and calendars/registrations
- Data system integration/APIs, including connection to data systems like the Enhanced Field System Modernization (EFS Mod), Sunshine Portal, and other appropriate data warehouse and management/LMS integration
- Custom and stock reports
- Dashboard access
- Interoperability across systems* and user(s) based on roles
- Zoom and Microsoft Teams integration
- Customer service and technical support by vendor
- Ensure new system features are responsive and effectively function on multiple devices, including phones, tablets, laptops and desktops and are made available in appropriate languages

*Assumes an integrated portal for the registry and training center.

Considerations for Recommendation #2:

For Staffing, the following was included:

- 3-5 staff to project liaise with technology partner to ensure API alignment and manage data verification process and queue. The number of staff required depends on the volume of data verification needs as providers and professionals augment profiles, submit updates for reporting qualifications, and increase credentialing in the system. In collaboration with the technology

partner, these staff will support customer (provider and educator) service needs.

For Technology the following was included, which costed out a new Registry that offered:

- Differentiated access for educators, providers, state agency staff, ELC, Center staff, other approved users
- Data verification workflows
- Data storage and management
- Custom and standardized reports
- Dashboards
- Interoperability across systems and users based on roles
- Analysis tools
- Enable tracking of content completion, career lattice/Pathway progression, achievement of key benchmarks including micro-credentials and credentials and certifications, and meeting requirements for different roles
- Support documentation of competency assessment that ensures comprehension and appropriate skills
- Customer service and technical support by vendor
- Ensure new system features are responsive and effectively function on multiple devices, including phones, tablets, laptops and desktops and are made available in appropriate languages

Considerations for Recommendation #3:

The cost of developing new content for the Introductory Training for all roles and for the Director Credential assumes expertise in ECE content development, best practices in online and adult learning, and experience implementing approaches to measure competency and ensure effectiveness. The costs for Recommendation #3 assume a significant cost to reimagine the training content and delivery. The range of costs depends on the scope and volume of new content to be developed. This includes costs to ensure trainings are made available in the appropriate languages for the system users. The duration of ongoing costs will depend on the timeline determined for new content development and updates required by changes in regulations or rules. These ongoing costs could be included in the Center, DEL, or DCF budgets.

Recommended Implementation Plan & Timeline

The ECPRG recommends implementing these strategies over the course of six years to ensure there is time to design, test, refine, and then systematically scale the implementation in ways that are supportive of providers, professionals, and partners. The following table provides details about each of the key activities, lead agencies, and implementation models. In addition, suggestions for Pathway responsibility and support mechanisms are described.

Table 2. Timeline Summary

INFORMAL CAREER PATHWAY IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The assumption is that the advisory body (Strategy 4a) will be formed in the second quarter of year 1 and support the overall design and implementation of the recommendations and strategies

Recommendation #1: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)*																	
Activity	**Lead**	**Year 1**				**Year 2**				**Year 3**				**Years 4-6**			
		Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Y 4	Y 5	Y6	
Develop scope of work for the Center	DEL																
Secure funding and procure for Center	DEL																
Launch Center *(TBD based on procurement, which could accelerate or delay timeline)*	DEL																
Strategy 1a: Create a cost effective, efficient system of training approval																	
Design training approval system with stakeholder, advisory body input (Strategy 4a)	Center																
Pilot test training approval system	Center																
Refine training approval system based on user feedback	Center																
Implement training approval statewide per staged implementation plan that systematically integrates ELCs and other partners	Center																
Training approval system implemented statewide: required for all publicly funded training and to meet licensing, Staff Credential, other requirements	Center																
Strategy 1b: Create a cost effective, efficient system of trainer approval																	
Design trainer approval system with stakeholder and advisory body input (see Strategy 4a)	Center																
Pilot test trainer approval system	Center																
Refine trainer approval system based on user feedback	Center																

Recommendation #1: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)*																	
Activity	**Lead**	**Year 1**				**Year 2**				**Year 3**				**Years 4-6**			
		Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Y 4	Y 5	Y6	
Implement trainer approval statewide per staged implementation plan that systematically integrates ELCs and other partners	Center																
Trainer approval system implemented statewide: required for all publicly funded training and to meet licensing, Staff Credential, other requirements	Center																
Strategy 1c: Authorize and implement a competency assessment for lead teachers, mentor teachers and directors																	
Design competency assessment framework and requirements for micro-credentials, other credentials	Center																
Pilot competency assessments as part of micro-credential, gather pilot user feedback	Center																
Refine competency assessments based on feedback	Center																
Integrate competency assessments into micro-credentials and other designations	Center																
Implement competency assessments statewide	Center																
Strategy 1d: Serve as a key thought partner to the DEL, DCF, ELCs, and other stakeholders to continue to support the evolution of the early childhood PL system																	
Through user testing and work with stakeholders and the advisory body, identify needs and develop recommendations to continuously improve the workforce structures and supports in Florida	Center																
Inform the DEL and other efforts to revise rule, pass legislation, and/or secure funding by providing data, draft legislation, and other support	Center																

Recommendation 2: Create a new, comprehensive professional learning Registry with an integrated learning management system (LMS) for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce																	
Activity	**Lead**	**Year 1**				**Year 2**				**Year 3**				**Years 4-6**			
		Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Y 4	Y 5	Y6	
Strategy 2a: Procure a new Registry for the Florida early learning and before-and-after school workforce.																	
Develop the scope of work for the Registry	DEL, DCF																
Secure necessary funding to precure new Registry	DEL, DCF																
Procure new Registry	DEL, DCF																
Strategy 2b: Require all professionals who work in licensed/regulated early learning and before-and-after school programs to utilize the new Registry																	
Develop plan to intentionally onboard professionals into the new Registry	DEL, DCF																
Implement plan to intentionally onboard professionals into new Registry as part of licensing visits, SR and VPK monitoring, and ELC interactions with providers and professionals	DEL, DCF																
All early learning and before-and-after school program staff are enrolled in the Registry and update profiles annually	DCF, DEL																

Recommendation 3: Update currently required professional learning with more effective content and instructional design																	
Activity	**Lead**	**Year 1**				**Year 2**				**Year 3**				**Years 4-6**			
		Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Y 4	Y 5	Y6	
Strategy 3a: Rebuild the Introductory Training for all roles, including a 30-hour course for family child care (FCC), a 40-hour course for center-based staff and a 40-hour course for the before-and-after school workforce.																	
Develop the scope of work for the professional learning option(s) that need to be updated	DEL, DCF																
Secure necessary funding to update the professional learning option(s)	DEL, DCF																
Procure learning designer to update the content	DEL, DCF																
Vendor develops updated learning content, with the DEL and other input as appropriate, aligned to new training and trainer standards	Vendor (TBD)																
Pilot updated content with users	DEL,DCF																
Refine content based on user feedback	Vendor (TBD)																
Implement new content statewide	DEL, DCF																
Strategy 3b: Revise the Director Credential (all levels)																	
Develop a workgroup to identify strengths and challenges with the current credential system, including institutes of higher education	DEL, w/ advisory body																
Develop recommendations and a timeline to modify the requirements for Director Credentials	DEL, w/ advisory body																
Implement recommendations to strengthen the Director Credentials	DEL																

Recommendation 4: Codify Informal Pathway Framework																
Activity	**Lead**	**Year 1**				**Year 2**				**Year 3**				**Years 4-6**		
		Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Y 4	Y 5	Y6
Strategy 4a: Create an advisory body (AB) to actively support the implementation of the Informal Pathway	DEL															
Strategy 4b: Codify the proposed designations that clearly communicate an educator's level of expertise	DEL															
Strategy 4c: Codify stackable structures of learning to include badges, micro-credentials and credentials that ensure professional learning experiences intentionally build upon each other	DEL															
Strategy 4d: Update Professional Competencies to set objectives and align content for new training	DEL															
Strategy 4e: Draft and finalize state agency rule(s) that will require implementation of the Informal Pathway within five years	DEL															

Additional Considerations

Important issues were repeatedly identified by stakeholders that were outside of the scope of this project but worthy of consideration by the DEL for the long-term implementation and success of the Informal Pathway. The ECPRG recommends the DEL consider the following as it begins implementation of the Informal Pathway:

- **Establish compensation and incentive structure:** Stakeholders continued to elevate the importance of providing incentives for providers and teachers to progress along the Career Pathway. Frequently identified incentives include increased compensation, benefits (i.e., health insurance, life insurance, disability, paid release time, vacation time, and sick leave), and financial support in professional learning and educational attainment. Current incentive structures, such as T.E.A.C.H. scholarship should be aligned to the Informal Pathway when formally adopted.
- **Create a "fast track" training option for competency attainment:** As modeled by the A$CEND program in Miami (Thrive By 5, 2024), CLASS scores could be used as a Pathway on-ramp or alternative for levels of education and professional learning.
- **Simplify and consolidate Staff Credentials:** Teachers can receive a Staff Credential if they hold a CDA, Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC), Early Childhood Professional Certificate (ECPC), Florida Department of Education Child Care Apprenticeship Certificate (FCCAC) and/or a formal degree within the field. Many of these credentials are highly similar in content, but only the CDA is consistently recognized by other states. The ECPRG recommends simplifying eligibility criteria to align with nationally recognized credentials which will increase their inherent value due to the portability across states.
- **Establish "Lead Teacher" requirement for School Readiness providers:** The VPK program requires at least one Lead Teacher in each classroom. Currently, lead teachers in SR programs are required to have a staff credential if the group size doubles (or triples for infants) the ratio. Stakeholders and the DEL expressed interest in establishing a lead teacher requirement for all classrooms in SR programs regardless of ratio. Once the Informal Pathway is implemented, this will better support more teachers in achieving this designation.
- **Improve other publicly funded content:** Once the Introductory Training is rebuilt, other publicly funded content should also be upgraded to reflect best practices in providing high quality programs, build the Professional Competencies that have been updated, and include measures of quality.

Connections and Conclusion

The quality of early learning and before-and-after school programs is paramount to children's developmental outcomes. A critical determinant of this quality is the competency and stability of the workforce. However, inadequate initial preparation and insufficient ongoing professional learning opportunities compromise the current workforce. Moreover, the lack of robust quality assurance mechanisms for training programs and trainers, coupled with minimal incentives for educators to enhance their competencies and remain in the field, contribute to high attrition rates and professional stagnation.

In response to these systemic issues, the proposed Informal Pathway aims to provide substantive opportunities for early childhood and before-and-after school professionals to develop essential skills and knowledge. This Framework is designed to facilitate effective partnerships with families and support the optimal growth and development of Florida's young children, while simultaneously building and retaining a workforce equipped to address these multifaceted challenges.

The development of the Informal Pathway Framework, along with its associated recommendations and strategies, represents a significant collaborative effort. This initiative involved key stakeholders including Florida's Department of Education Division of Early Learning, Department of Children and Families, early learning coalitions, Children's Services Councils and Trusts, higher education institutions, the Informal Pathway Statewide Advisory Committee, program leaders, subject matter experts, organizations, employers, educators, and various other stakeholders.

The collective aspiration of these diverse stakeholders is that this Framework and its recommendations will serve as foundational pillars for enhancing professional competency, facilitating career progression, and improving workforce retention. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this initiative will act as a catalyst for the professional success of these dedicated educators and serve as a gateway to further educational advancement.

This comprehensive approach addresses the complex interplay of factors affecting early childhood education workforce development. By focusing on evidence-based practices and systemic solutions, the Framework aims to elevate the quality of early childhood education and, by extension, improve long-term outcomes for children in Florida.

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Appendix A: Data Collection and Stakeholder Engagement Effort Overview

Strategy	Date(s)	Overview
Literature Review	October - December 2023	Conducted a robust review of literature on local, state, and national systems and research relevant to this work.
National and State Expert Interviews	October 2023 - January 2024	Conducted 34 interviews with state and national ECE experts.
Focus Groups: Round 1	October 2023	Conducted 10 focus groups (in-person) with educators, providers and leaders across Florida to identify strengths, needs, and challenges.
Florida Educator Professional Learning Survey	October - December, 2023	100 respondents provided information about professional learning opportunities and advancement in Florida's current PL system (results can be found in Stakeholder Report).
Focus Groups: Round 2	April 2024	Conducted 13 focus groups (virtually and in-person) with educators, providers and leaders across Florida to provide feedback on Pathway drafts.
Statewide Advisory Committee Meetings	December 2023 - July 2024	Provide information, guidance, feedback, and recommendations using an iterative process of working during meetings. • *Meeting 1 (December 2023):* Introduction, goals of Informal Pathway (IFP) Project, brainstorming elements of first draft • *Meeting 2 (February 2024):* Literature Review and Stakeholder Report presentation, analysis, and input • *Meeting 3 (May 2024):* Review and revision of IFP first draft, initial recommendations • *Meeting 4 (July 2024):* Review of updated IFP Framework, recommendations, implementation plan and next steps

Presentations to share project and solicit feedback	October 2023 - July 2024	Presentations were made to ELC leaders and staff at an October AELC meeting and at the One Goal conference to a wide range of leaders to share the draft Framework and recommendations for feedback.
DEL Partnership Meetings	October 2023 - July 2024	Monthly meetings to review project goals and documents and determine needed steps with state and local agencies and providers.

Appendix B: Statewide Advisory Committee

Name	Organization	Title
Cindy Campbell	Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning	Early Learning Program Specialist
Raquel Diaz	Florida Association for the Education of Young Children	President
Suzan Gage	Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida, Inc.	Executive Director
Aruna Gilbert	Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County, Inc.	Chief Program Officer
Molly Grant	The Association of Early Learning Coalitions	Executive Director
Pamela Hollingsworth	Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe	Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Program Development
Marc Hutek	Early Learning Coalition of Polk County	Chief Executive Officer
Roy Keister	Scottsdale Academy Representative from FACCM	Business Owner
Katerina Maroney	Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning	Deputy Director of Programs and Policy
Marsha Powers	Early Learning Coalition of Indian River, Martin & Okeechobee Counties, Inc.	Chief Executive Officer
Kimberly Singer	Florida Department of Education, Division of Early Learning	Head Start Collaboration Director
Erin Smeltzer	Children's Forum, Inc.	President & Chief Executive Officer
Courtney Smith	Florida Department of Children and Families	Interim Director
Rachel Spector	The Children's Trust *(Miami)*	Director of Programs
Tammy Tener	Florida Family Child Care Home Association	Executive Director
Kenedria (Keke) Thurman	Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University's Educational Research Center for Child Development	Director
Venita Treadwell	Capital Area Community Action Agency Head Start	Early Childhood Development Program Manager
Angela Tufts	Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County, Inc.	Provider Services Manager

Monica Walley	Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education (IEECE) at Palm Beach State College	Early Childhood Education Director
Michele Watson	Florida Alliance of Children's Councils & Trusts	Chief Executive Officer

Florida's Informal Pathway Project
Advisory Committee Meeting
December 7, 2023, 9:00am-12:00pm
FDOE

Intended Outcomes

Participants will bring essential knowledge, experience and understanding of Florida's existing early learning systems of professional learning and career support to effectively take stock in our current strengths and past successes, and identify opportunities for improvement to redesign Florida's Informal Pathway for early learning educators.

Goals:

Participants will:

- Understand the purpose, goals and outcomes of Florida's Informal Pathway Project and the role of Advisory Committee members.
- Review relevant national research, systems, and Florida stakeholder information to identify areas of investigation for literature review and future meetings.
- Identify and examine current informal pathway structures, and determine areas of improvement and needs-based solutions to create recommendations.

Introductions (Mary Kay)

9:00-9:15am

- **Agenda Review, Committee Agreements**

Florida's Informal Pathway Project (Abby and Herman)

9:15-10:15am

- **Overview of IFP project parameters, goals, process and timeline**
- **Background research, terms and definitions**
- **Data Review: What are states and systems doing?**
  1. Build's PDG Report
  2. Florida's Early Learning Educator Survey
  3. Florida Administrative Workforce Data

Human-Centered Design: Designing the Ideal Pathway (Mary Kay and Abby)

10:15-11:45am

- **Mapping out the System by Making Toast**
  Watch "Making Toast" Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vS_b7cJn2A

Using this idea of "making toast", we will examine the systems map of Florida's pathway by answering these guiding questions:

Round 1: What are non-negotiables for our ideal pathway?
Round 2: Where are the gaps and areas for improvement in the current Florida informal pathway?
Round 3: What would need to happen to address these gaps/areas of improvement?

- **Making Toast Process:**
  - ✓ Participants reflect on guiding questions and systems map individually first, and create their own version of the pathway.
  - ✓ Next, participants will combine as a group, and first discuss and come to consensus on non-negotiables. Then groups will create a collaborative visual on chart paper with system elements identified (in writing) and then identify gaps.
  - ✓ Each group's visual will be reviewed in a gallery walk to see group system interpretations and identified areas of improvement.
  - ✓ Debrief as a group to identify common elements and outliers.

Closing Moves: Next Steps

11:45-12:00pm

- **Identification of future meeting dates, locations and committee needs**
- **Reflective Survey**

1. What are my hopes and fears about this work?
2. Where do I think we should go next based on today's work?

Thank You For Your Collaboration and Trust Today!
Happy Holidays to All!
Herman, Mary Kay, and Abby

Florida's Informal Pathway Project
Advisory Committee Meeting 2
Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 9:00am-4:00pm
FDOE

Intended Outcomes

Participants will bring essential knowledge, experience and understanding of Florida's existing early learning systems of professional learning and career support to effectively take stock in our current strengths and past successes, and identify opportunities for improvement to redesign Florida's Informal Pathway for early learning educators.

Goals:

Participants will:

- Review Committee's previous ideas, work and overarching goals
- Review the results and recommendations of the Literature Review
- Review the results and recommendations of the Stakeholder Report
- Identify any gaps or key issues that have not been raised
- Prioritize key themes and ideas that are most critical to develop
- Use these priorities to develop initial recommendations related to:
  - Informal Pathway design overall
  - Existing elements that should be updated or modified
  - New elements that should be developed
  - Policies that should be reviewed or developed to support the Informal Pathway Design
  - Questions that need additional exploration (second focus groups, additional data collection)

Welcome Back!

- Agenda Review, Committee Agreements

Data Review I. Previous Committee Work and Goals (Abby)

- Committee Purpose and Goals
- Meeting 1 and Group Pathways Review

Data Review II. Literature Review Brief (MK)

Together, we will review the Literature Review Brief, and identify pertinent take-aways for discussion.

- Presentation of Research Findings and Analysis of Literature
- Individually review Lit Review Brief with 4A's protocol
- Split into groups of 2/3, discuss thoughts and most important understandings, share with entire group.
- Chalk Talk

Data Review III. Stakeholder Report Brief (MK , Herman and Abby)

Together, we will review the Stakeholder Report Executive Summary, and identify pertinent take-aways for discussion.

- Presentation of Stakeholder Report findings
- Individually review Stakeholder Executive Summary, and highlight 5 most important take-aways that resonated with you.
- Break up into groups of 4, discuss questions/ideas/comments, share commonalities on chart paper
- Florida Snapshots: briefly review specific local initiatives/programs from reports, open to group to identify common local challenges and solutions
- Gallery Walk

LUNCH (12:00pm-1:10pm)

Consensus Making: What's First? What's Next?

- Determine the gaps from the morning- What are we missing? Where will the barriers be?
- Determine the bright spots- What would we like to keep and use? Scale?
- Create a framework/crosswalk of data review/outcomes desired using:
    1. 5 lit review findings, form and function (pillars of our design)
    2. Stakeholder Findings (challenges/issues from stakeholders)
    3. Identified ideas/solutions from Committee

Committee Punchlist: Identify Work Groups (pick your groups!)

Topics :

- **PATHWAY EXISTING STRUCTURES/ELEMENTS**:
    1. DCF Training
    2. PL Quality Assurance
        - ELC contract requirements
        - IACET accreditation
        - Trainer application, competency assessments
        - Alignment with CDA competencies
    3. Staff Credential

- **PATHWAY NEW STRUCTURES**:
    3. Middle layer of competency- Lead/Mentors
    4. Badges/Micro-credentials

Creating the Framework: Florida's Informal Pathway (pick your groups!)

- Break up into groups of 5, and create a **NEW PATHWAY VISUAL** based on all of our work today
- Share your pathway visual with large group and answer:
    - What are similarities from your first model?
    - What are the changes? Why?

- What are your biggest challenges and questions?

Closing Moves: Next Steps

- Second Round of Focus Groups and other data collection needs
- Cost Modeling
- April Meeting Date and Group Needs

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INCREDIBLE WORK TODAY!

NOTES FROM TODAY'S MEETING:

Florida's Informal Pathway Project
Advisory Committee Meeting 3
May 9, 2024, 9:00am-4:00pm
FDOE

Intended Outcomes

Participants will bring essential knowledge, experience and understanding of Florida's existing early learning systems of professional learning and career support to effectively take stock in our current strengths and past successes, and identify opportunities for improvement to redesign Florida's Informal Pathway for early learning educators.

Goals:

Participants will:

- Review first draft of Informal Pathway with focus group feedback and recommendations
- Discuss questions, suggestions, and recommendations for second draft
- Discuss proposed Florida Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (FCECPR)
- Determine considerations for final Informal Pathway draft, deliverables, and cost modeling

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Introductions (Mary Kay)

9:00-9:15am

- Agenda Review, Committee Agreements

Part 1: Review First Draft of Informal Pathway (Herman and Mary Kay)

9:15-10:30am

- Background of first draft and focus group research
- Pathway Review: As you are presented with first draft of pathway framework and structures, reflect on the following questions:
    - What excites you about these structures?
    - What stood out to you the most?
    - What's missing?
    - What are your considerations around implementing these structures?
    - What specific policies and levers would need to be considered?

Break:

10:30-10:45am

- Review Framework and write notes/questions

Structure Review: The Florida Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (Abby and Tara)

10:45-11:00am

- Mission and recommendations for quality assurance with FCECPR
- Focus Group Overall Feedback and Recommendations

Committee Feedback and Suggestions for Second Draft of Informal Pathway (Mary Kay)

11:00-12:00pm

- Review your notes on pathway designations and structures

- Write your top 2-3 suggestions and/or questions for designation or structure on post-its, and put those on posters for each designation and structure (Overall pathway, Badges/Micro-credentials, Entry Teacher, Teacher, Lead Teacher, Mentor Teacher, Director, FCECPR)
- Gallery Walk: Read each structure's poster and comments
- Group Discussion

  What excites you about these structures?
  What stood out to you the most?
  What's missing?
  What are your considerations around implementing these structures?
  What specific policies and levers would need to be considered?

Lunch (on your own)
12:00-1:15pm

Part 2: Preparing for our Final Pathway Draft (Abby and Mary Kay)
1:15-3:00pm

- Review of Final Informal Pathway Deliverable and Cost Modeling
- Workgroups for Pathway Revisions and Cost Modeling Recommendations:
  1. **FCECPR:** Map out tasks, deliverables, timeline
  2. **Capacity Building**: Clarify roles and capacity building needed to support new Informal Pathway structures (all levels)
  3. **Registry:** Draft recommendations regarding functionality and implementation
  4. **Communication Plan:** Generate Informal Pathway key questions and answers for stakeholders (all levels)
  5. **Trainer and Training Certification:** Draft considerations and requirements

- Directions for Work Groups:
  - Break up into work groups (even distribution if possible). Each group will receive associated resources/research, and draft specific items (key considerations, needs, timelines, roles, recommendations) as well as identify high level cost modeling considerations for estimates.
  - Work groups will create 2 (or more) posters to share out:

  (1) Necessary items identified for your group for final pathway draft; and
  (2) Cost modeling considerations for your group.

- Whole group discussion to determine our blind spots, what's needed, and what's next.

Closing and Next Steps
3:00-3:30pm

Thank You For Your Collaboration and Trust Today!

Florida's Informal Pathway Project
Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting 4
July 17, 2024, 9:00am-12:00pm
One Goal, Tampa

Intended Outcomes

Participants will bring essential knowledge, experience, and understanding of Florida's existing early learning systems of professional learning and career support to effectively take stock in our current strengths and past successes and identify opportunities for improvement to redesign Florida's Informal Pathway for early learning educators.

Goals:

Participants will:

- Review presentation of final Informal Pathway framework draft, recommendations, cost modeling additions and timeline for implementation
- Review and tune Center Key Activities, Registry Key Functionality

Introductions (Mary Kay)

9:00-9:15am

- Agenda Review, Committee Agreements

Part 1: Review and Scoring of Informal Pathway Framework, Recommendations, Cost Modeling and Timeline(s)

9:15-11:00am

- Review Four Recommendations and Strategies
    - Stackable Structures, Hours and Requirements
      Changes: Teaching Assistant, Specialization vs. Certificate
- Implementation Plan Timeline
- Review of Feedback/Scoring
- Chalk Talk and Group Discussion

Part 2: Tuning Protocol for Informal Pathway Framework Recommendations, Structures, SOWs

11:00-11:45am (rolling break)

Workgroups:

1. Center Key Activities
2. Registry Functionality

Using the following Tuning protocol, examine your handout:

- For 10 minutes, examine the handout for your group individually, taking notes and writing down specific points or questions
- Once finished, think about these clarifying questions:
    1. Are these concepts/elements aligned with our goals for the Informal Pathway?

2. Does this scope represent all recommendations and needed capacity-building strategies?
3. What's missing? Is there anything you can add?

- Write a **self-reflection statement** based on this review and our overall work, about the things you are wondering, worried about, and excited about, and include anything you feel is important for us to know moving forward with our final report.

Closing and Final Steps

11:45am-12:00pm

Thank You For Your Incredible Collaboration and Work!

Appendix C: Promising Local Initiatives

A$CEND, Thrive By 5 (Miami-Dade): A$CEND was designed to improve the quality of early learning programs in the highest poverty zip codes and improve workforce retention, practice and compensation. By providing salary supplements to early learning professionals employed at Thrive by 5 (TB5) programs, the A$CEND program rewards early childhood educators by recognizing education, ongoing professional learning, teacher-child interactions and longevity. A$CEND awards are granted based on a combination of coursework/training, CLASS observation composite scores and years working within the early childhood field as outlined in the A$CEND Knowledge, Training and Practice Scale. The comprehensive pathway provides a variety of award options based on the type of professional development completed, including Continuous Education Units (CEUs) and/or college credit coursework.[11]

The A$CEND program has already shown positive benefits for educators in its two-year existence:

- In 2022-23, teacher turnover rates were 5% for A$CEND participants compared to 19% for all other Thrive By 5 sites.
- In an internal evaluation (Thrive by 5, 2023), the majority of A$CEND applicants in Fall of 2024 had a *higher* CLASS composite score, which is correlated with positive child outcomes. Because A$CEND is directly benefiting the educator based on their CLASS composite score, educators report being more motivated to engage in professional learning and create more intentionality in their practice.

INCENTIVE$, Children's Forum. Early Childhood Educator INCENTIVE$ Florida, an affiliate of Child Care WAGE$®, rewards early childhood teachers with financial incentives based on their education and continuity of employment. INCENTIVE$ aims to improve quality in child care programs by retaining the early childhood workforce, which provides children with more stable relationships and better-educated teachers.[12]

ELEVATE (ELC of Pinellas County): The *ELEVATE* program was created to help providers increase compensation so they can attract and retain more qualified professionals. The ELC of Pinellas County requires eligible providers to adopt a minimum compensation plan that must be above minimum wage. In return, the coalition provides semi-annual wage supplements that align with staff education levels. Providers who are eligible include licensed child care centers, family child

[11] Thrive By 5 A$CEND, 2022
[12] Children's Forum, 2024

care homes, large family child care homes, or license-exempt Faith-based providers who have an active School Readiness (SR) contract, participate in SR Program assessments, are located in Pinellas County, and adopt a compensation plan that includes minimum hourly rates. While evaluation metrics are still being collected for the *ELEVATE* program, positive anecdotal outcomes include evidence that participating providers have been able to expand operations with this pay structure as well as retain and promote their staff.[13]

The Palm Beach College Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education (IEECE) Micro-Credential Programs:
The IEECE's micro-credential program has been intentionally organized in pathways that differ from publicly certified educational achievement (i.e., teacher preparation courses). This micro-credentialing system is supportive of credit coursework for degree-seeking students by offering skill-based professional development, but also functions as an alternative means of gaining specific skills for those who already hold a degree or for those who choose not to be degree seeking. Anecdotal evidence and participant surveys suggest that teachers enrolled in the IEECE micro-credential program have been promoted (most often assistant to lead teachers). Of the micro-credentials offered, the Adapt Lessons, Lesson Planning, Problem-Solving, Child Care Center Leadership and Management, and Self-Regulation pathways have been the most popular, almost doubling enrollment in two years.[14]

[13] Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County, Inc., 2024
[14] Palm Beach State College, 2024

Appendix D: Florida's Informal Pathway Framework Findings and Recommendations Crosswalk

Literature Review Findings	**Stakeholder Report Findings/Desired Outcomes**	**Useful Insights and Practices from FL Local Initiatives and Other State Systems**	**Final Informal Pathway Implementation Recommendations**
Florida has many elements for an effective workforce pathway, but essential elements are missing that undermine the effectiveness and impact of the state's early learning and workforce investments. Florida's professional learning system needs: • Quality assurance • Alignment to standards and competencies • Authentic assessments and clear assessment criteria Support for educators (e.g., career counseling, coaching, scholarships) to facilitate advancement on the informal pathway.	Stakeholders desire: Designing the Informal Pathway in ways that could support additional supports (e.g., career advising, expanded scholarships), compensation and benefit reform in the future.	Focus on the workforce and drive as much money directly to providers and professionals as possible. Don't invest so much in systems and oversight that the goal gets lost. Provides support for educators to progress. Build the skills that have been prioritized, such as teacher-child interactions. Design the approach with providers to ensure benefits will incentivize hard work and lead to better program quality and child outcomes; build lead systems that require accountability but are not burdensome or overly bureaucratic.	**Recommendation 1: Create a new *Center for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (The Center)*** **Strategy 1a**: Create a cost effective, efficient system of training approval. **Strategy 1b:** Create a cost effective, efficient system of trainer approval. **Strategy 1c:** Authorize and implement a competency assessment for lead teachers, mentor teachers and directors. **Strategy 1d:** Serve as a key thought partner to the DEL, DCF, ELCs, and other stakeholders to continue to support the evolution of the early childhood PL system.

		Offer professional learning options to be accessible to all, including sessions at the most convenient times for educators (evenings and weekends), in several languages (or with interpreters), and at no cost.	
Florida's current professional learning system has insufficient data collection for many learning opportunities.	Stakeholders desire: Strengthening data systems to reduce the administrative burden on providers, professionals, and monitoring systems.	Florida's professional learning system has an insufficient data system that is creating costly inefficiencies. A user-friendly data system that includes the entire workforce can reduce administrative burden, streamline recordkeeping, better inform individual and workforce investments, and iteratively inform continuous improvement so investment can become increasingly effective and efficient over time. Data is critical to understand workforce needs and the impacts of investments. ELCs, providers, and professionals struggled with the state's antiquated data systems that were limited in	**Recommendation 2: Create a new, comprehensive professional learning Registry with an integrated learning management system (LMS) for the early learning and before-and-after school workforce.** **Strategy 2a:** Procure a new Registry for the Florida early childhood and before-and-after school workforce. **Strategy 2b:** Require all professionals who work in licensed/regulated early learning and before-and-after school programs to utilize the new Registry.

		both their data quality and database functionality.	
The early years form the foundation for lifelong success and professionals need a deep understanding of how to best partner with families and together nurture the development and learning of young children.	Stakeholders desire: • Rebuild the Introductory Training required for new professionals: 30 hours for family child care (FCC) providers, 40 hours for early learning center-based staff, and 40 hours for before-and-after school staff. • Rebuild Director Credential to reflect best practices in early learning management and instructional leadership as well as adult and online learning.	• When designing instructional content, creators should work to both meet the needs of the community (such as incorporating local measures of quality), while also making sure educators and local providers don't lose individuality based on their workplace needs. • Help directors understand and invest in their staff and support workforce development. • Increasing wages and investing in professional learning requires tremendous effort, leadership skills and business, operational knowledge, and additional financial resources to sustain this commitment. • Offer professional learning options to be accessible to all, including sessions at the most convenient times for educators (evenings and weekends), in several languages (or	**RECOMMENDATION 3: Update currently required professional learning with more effective content and instructional design** **Strategy 3a:** Rebuild the Introductory Training for all roles, including a 30-hour course for family child care (FCC), a 40-hour course for center-based staff and a 40-hour course for the before-and-after school workforce. **Strategy 3b:** Revise the Director Credential (all levels).

		with interpreters), and at no cost.	
An effective informal pathway must: • Clearly define requirements. • Have staff titles that align with clear expectations. • Develop and measure competencies. • Delineate educator designations to reliably signify professional expertise. • Align with policy and regulatory requirements, including the early learning and developmental standards (FELDS), professional core competencies, and program assessments (e.g., CLASS). • Support advancement. Compensation and benefits are a challenge nationally with some innovative approaches in both Florida and other states. No approaches have solved this at scale. Pathway levels should consider work and practice experience towards competency attainment.	Stakeholders desire: • Clear, incremental steps outlined in an understandable visual for professionals to move from onboarding through credentials to systematically build competencies. • Sequential, incentivized steps through stackable structures that acknowledge competency and make growth from the Introductory Training to a Staff Credential more feasible. • Integrated requirements of key policy drivers – such as the focus on teacher-child interactions (CLASS) – so professionals build the skills the state has prioritized. • The Informal Pathway to be integrated into policy to provide clear expectations for providers and professionals.	• Pathway designations align with staff titles (Illinois, New York, Kansas, Ohio, South Carolina). • Pathway designations/levels consider work and practice experience towards competency attainment (Illinois, Kansas, Ohio). • Create a program blueprint or logic model that makes the goals clear and design any approach to align to these goals; assure that all stakeholders are held accountable and have ownership of these goals and use data to inform decision making; be willing to pivot quickly if the approaches are not accomplishing the desired goals.	**RECOMMENDATION 4: Codify Informal Pathway Framework** **Strategy 4a:** Create an advisory body to actively support the implementation of the Informal Pathway. **Strategy 4b:** Codify the proposed designations that clearly communicate an educator's level of expertise. **Strategy 4c:** Codify stackable structures of learning to include badges, micro-credentials and credentials that ensure professional learning experiences intentionally build upon each other. **Strategy 4d:** Update Professional Competencies to set objectives and align content for new training. **Strategy 4e:** Draft and finalize state agency rule(s) that will require implementation of the Informal Pathway within five years.

Appendix E: Initial Scope of Work (SOW) for Center

This SOW represents key priorities heard throughout the stakeholder engagement process. The draft is designed as a starting point for the key functions that should be fulfilled by the Center. The advisory body should review and strengthen these ideas to inform the procurement for these services.

The Center Responsibilities

The Center will be responsible for a majority of the day-to-day implementation of the Career Pathway Framework and support structures for teachers. At a minimum, the Center will:

- Design a trainer certification and training approval process. The process should include:
    - Quality standard for review and approval of trainings that aligns to key policy drivers including the FELDS and Professional Competencies, and program quality standards (e.g., CLASS)
    - Review and approval of trainings provided from out of state
    - Determination of how training meets Pathway requirements (i.e., how the content fulfills badge, micro-credential, or other requirements)
    - Process for professional learning organizations and teachers to submit training for review and approval
- Pilot training review and approval process; refine trainings based on user feedback.
- Monitor Pathway implementation and identify additional roles that would benefit from Pathway support to increase alignment across the early learning field; work with advisory body to prioritize strategies as appropriate.
- Develop a system of providing feedback on training and trainers to inform continuous quality improvement of both content and delivery.
- Maintain an online Training Calendar to help professionals locate Registry-approved training (in-person, virtual and online courses) to meet their professional learning needs, including the annual training requirements of Child Care Licensing.
- Develop recommendations for competency assessment requirements for the DEL to refine and write into rule ~year 3.
- Develop and implement an incremental onboarding plan for ELCs and training organizations to complete training and trainer certification.
- Develop and implement a communications plan that makes the goals and new processes clear to different types of users (individuals, trainers, training

organizations, ELCs, other stakeholders), aligned to the onboarding plan above.
- Informed designs for teacher support structures including career coaching, call centers, and educational materials, pending funding. Career coaching should include support in identifying non-teaching career pathways accessible to individuals who would like to articulate their teaching experience into a new career.
- Engage an external, independent evaluator to assess Pathway implementation and inform continuous improvement for the overall system. The evaluation should:
    - Measure fidelity of Pathway implementation
    - Examine user experience
    - Outline recommendations
    - Propose a plan to implement recommendations
- Report to the advisory body on key metrics, implement recommendations, and report on progress.

Based on stakeholder input and the experiences of other states, the ECPRG recommends the following eligibility criteria to lead the Center. The organization:

- Must have previous experience in supporting the early childhood workforce.
- Should not administer any professional learning services. This could create either a perceived or real conflict of interest as the Center is responsible for reviewing and vetting all professional learning that will be recognized by the state of Florida.
- Cannot re-design the DCF introductory training or Director Credential. The Center will be responsible for the quality review of the newly designed trainings and therefore should not be the body to design these essential learning experiences.

Appendix F: Registry Key Functionality

The stakeholder engagement and cost modeling process identified essential functions for the new Registry. These functions are listed here to serve as a starting point for the scope that would be included in a procurement document.

The new Registry should support the following activities:

- Provide a demographic profile[15] that each professional would complete which includes necessary identifiers to enable real-time workforce studies more efficiently and effectively
- Track professional learning for all educators in the state, including the Introductory Training, annual in-service training, credentials, and educational attainment
- Provide career development planning tools for multiple early learning roles to help professionals see current accomplishments and identify next steps on their professional learning journey
- Streamline applications for scholarships, incentives, stipends, grants and credentials
- Track all professional learning: formal education degrees, child care credentials, Staff Credentials, micro-credentials, badges, certificates, and in-service hours
- Provide an online training calendar to help professionals access approved trainings (in-person, virtual and online courses)
- Provide job boards to help professionals find employment and help employers find staff, with a recruitment module to facilitate teacher recruitment
- Provide clear guidance on professional learning requirements for different roles
- Create trainer/training portal that provides opportunity for trainers to upload evidence of completed training and competency assessments
- Allow teachers to easily download transcripts and all learning certificates that will be accepted by monitoring and credentialing agencies
- Enable licensing surveyors to complete desk audits to ensure individuals meet licensing requirements (instead of needing to see paper copies during on-site licensing visits)
- Be easy-to-use for individuals, providers/employers, and ELCs/DEL

[15] Demographic profile should include age of educator, age of children served, employment status (full vs. part time), gender, race, ethnicity, home language, highest level of education, credentials and certifications, years of experience, role, compensation level, program benefits, and whether they are primary/sole source of income for their household.

- Enable standardized reports based on Florida’s funding and learning priorities and integrated customized data analysis to better understand the workforce and support local and state decision-making and investments