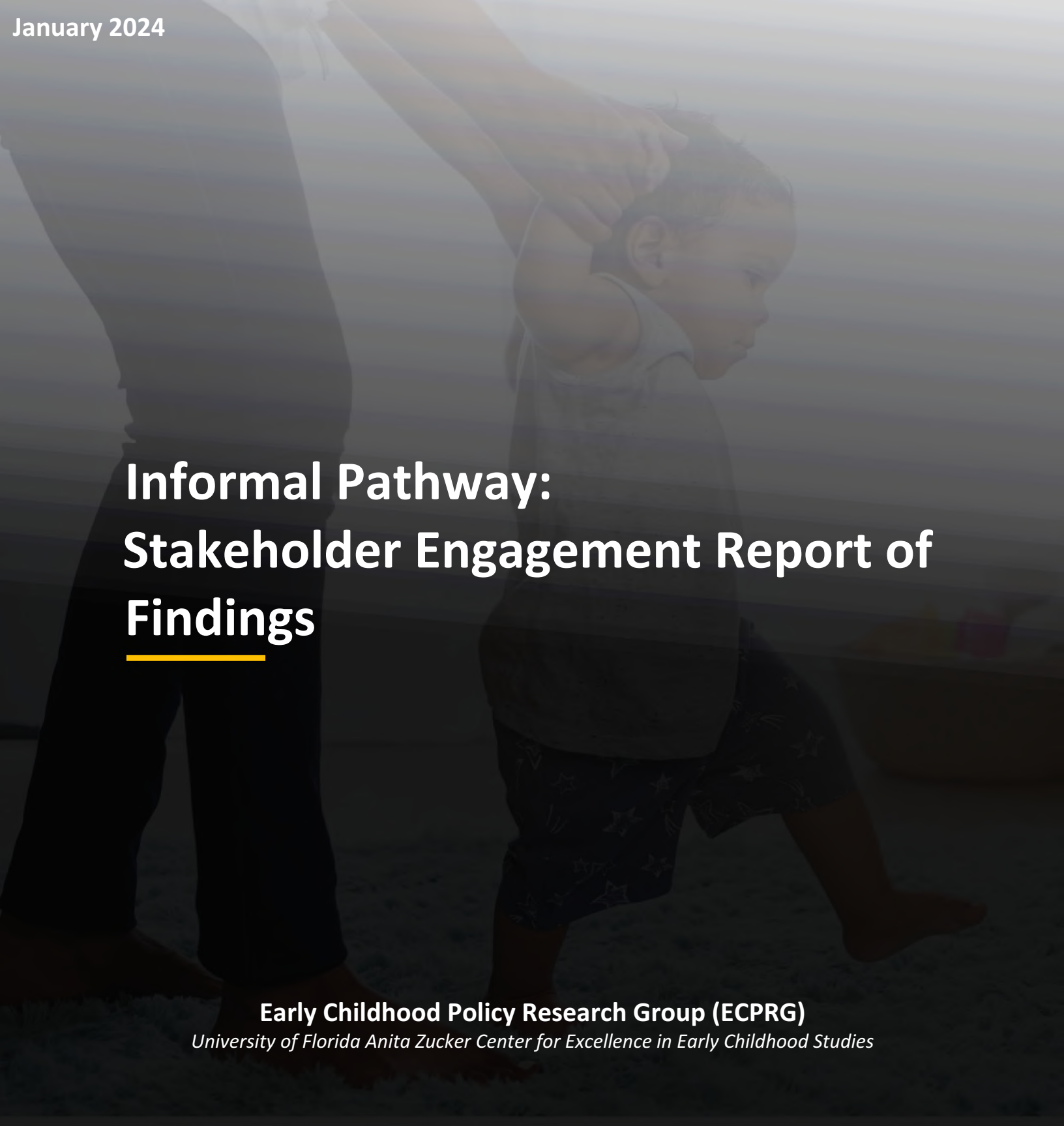




Informal Pathway: Stakeholder Engagement Report of Findings

Early Childhood Policy Research Group (ECPRG)

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



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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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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	4
METHODOLOGY	6
DATA COLLECTION	6
DATA ANALYSIS	11
IMPORTANT ISSUES AND DESIGN SUGGESTIONS FROM THE FIELD: KEY CONSIDERATIONS ACCORDING TO STAKEHOLDERS	12
CLARIFYING REQUIRES AND STRUCTURES OF THE INFORMAL PATHWAY	14
QUALITY CONTROL AND ACCESSIBILITY OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	17
LEVERAGING AND IMPROVING EXISTING ELEMENTS OF THE INFORMAL PATHWAY.....	21
DATA SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS	25
ATTRACTING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE.....	27
FLORIDA PROGRAM SNAPSHOTS	31
A COHESIVE FRAMEWORK THE EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF PINELLAS COUNTY.....	32
INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIPS: PALM BEACH EARLY LEARNING COALITION, CHILDREN’S SERVICES COUNCIL, AND STATE COLLEGE	37
ENSURING HIGH QUALITY CARE, LEARNING AND ACCESSIBILITY: THE EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF MIAMI-DADE/MONROE AND THE CHILDREN’S TRUST OF MIAMI	42
DESIRED OUTCOMES, FORM AND FUNCTION OF A REDESIGNED INFORMAL PATHWAY.....	46
NEXT STEPS.....	49
GLOSSARY	50
REFERENCES.....	52
APPENDICES.....	53

Executive Summary

Overview and Purpose

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 recommendations for an informal career pathway for early childhood professionals. This stakeholder engagement report (Deliverable 4) supplements findings from a Literature Review (Deliverable 3) with feedback from early childhood education (ECE) stakeholders. The ECPRG engaged key local, state, and national experts through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. These conversations helped to develop a comprehensive understanding of desired outcomes, preferred form and function, and key considerations for the creation of the informal pathway.

Methodology

The ECPRG used four data collection strategies to represent the perspectives of stakeholders: (1) Florida ECE educator focus groups, interviews, and surveys of center-based teachers and family child care providers; (2) Florida ECE administrator and leader interviews; (3) nationally recognized ECE experts and researcher interviews; and (4) Florida Statewide Informal Pathway Advisory Committee interviews and group artifacts. Each of these activities was carefully planned and executed to:

- Solicit input and gather best practices through the entire state as well as systems and approaches in other states;
- Identify best practices from within Florida and from other states to identify how they might inform recommendations that would be appropriate in Florida;
- Inform potential draft pathway elements and models for the Advisory Group to refine.

The different data collection efforts were designed to engage a representative sample of different stakeholder groups – within Florida and nationally – to provide complementary perspectives that would delve into and build on the lessons learned from the Literature Review.

Key Findings

Based on this comprehensive data collection and analysis process, this report contains the most prominent stakeholder issues, suggestions, and design constraints for redesigning Florida's ECE Informal Pathway. In addition, stakeholders also provided valuable insights and suggestions regarding how to create an effective Informal Pathway.

The most important issues stakeholders voiced were:

1. Clarifying requirements and structures of the Informal Pathway

- Confusion about requirements across agencies and initiatives;
- A lack of alignment between policy drivers and professional learning requirements; and
- Dissonance of local initiatives and investments and standardization of pathway structures for a statewide pathway.

2. Quality control and accessibility of professional learning

- Lack of quality assurance for learning events and trainers
- The professional learning educators most value is inconsistently available

3. Leveraging and improving existing elements of the Informal Pathway

- Current onboarding needs improvement
- Pathway to a Staff Credential unclear and stackable steps may help
- Strengthen Director Credential and leadership opportunities

4. Data system improvements

- There are multiple data and reporting systems, and they are not integrated

5. Attracting and supporting the workforce

- Professional learning supports are desired
- Compensation and benefits need to be improved and tied to increased competency
- Portability and usability of credentials would better support educators
- Pathway recruitment and acknowledgement will help bolster workforce retention

Stakeholder desired outcomes for a redesigned Informal Pathway include:

- Provide clear, incremental steps for professionals to move from onboarding through credentials in ways that systematically build the competencies of the early childhood workforce.
- Outline expectations for center-based educators and leaders and family child care providers so they can complete credentials and other professional learning experiences.
- Systematically build knowledge and skills so professionals can effectively support the growth, development and learning of young children.
- Ensure professional learning opportunities are consistent in quality and delivery that they build desired educator or leadership skills.
- Integrate requirements of key policy drivers - such as the focus on adult child interactions - so professionals build the skills the state has prioritized.

- Provide supports to facilitate the career advancement of early childhood professionals.
- Establish a stronger statewide framework and encourage local innovation beyond these expectations to meet unique needs.
- Integrate data at the state and local level to simplify paperwork requirements, more efficiently identify professional learning needs, and invest funding more effectively.
- Integrate the informal pathway into policy.

Recommendations for the redesign of the Informal Pathway based on stakeholder needs and pathway challenges:

1. Develop a clear framework/visual that shows the informal pathway and how to access professional learning that will help facilitate progress on the pathway.
2. Ensure local innovation can build on the foundation developed for statewide implementation.
3. Design logical progression for professional learning so everything stacks into micro-credentials and staff credentials.
4. Dramatically reduce sporadic trainings on random topics.
5. Promote continuous growth as a strong value.
6. Clearly identify titles and requirements for each role.
7. Develop stronger requirements for professional learning that is funded and that counts toward staff credentials and annual in-service requirements.
8. The new pathway and job titles/requirements should be embedded in policy and funding requirements, so expectations are clear across all programs.
9. Clear communication of the informal pathway should be available through one website.

When engaging in this work, researchers were encouraged to find that stakeholders from every level of this system were knowledgeable, earnest, eager to participate, spoke with confidence and conviction, and showed tremendous professionalism and pride about their work with the youngest children and the early childhood educators of our state. We hope that the collective wealth of ideas presented here – combined with the strong foundation of existing work on the ECE system in Florida – informs substantive efforts to improve the learning, competency, and career opportunities for ECE educators in Florida.

Introduction and Overview

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 recommendations for an informal career pathway for early childhood educators. The pathway must consist of stackable credentials and certifications that allow early childhood teachers to access specialized professional learning through competency-based, stackable content from onboarding to micro-credentials and summative credentials for professionals serving children birth through age five.

In December 2023, the ECPRG submitted a Literature Review (Deliverable 3) to DEL that summarized key findings to inform recommendations for Florida's informal pathway. This stakeholder engagement report serves to supplement these findings with feedback from early childhood education (ECE) stakeholders. Between October 2023 and January 2024, the ECPRG engaged key local, state, and national experts through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. These conversations helped to develop a comprehensive understanding of desired outcomes, preferred form and function, and key considerations for the creation of the informal pathway. The findings detailed throughout this report, in combination with those identified in the Literature Review, will be used to guide the first draft of Florida's informal pathway.

The ECPRG used the following guiding research questions, categorized by stakeholder positionality and experience, to direct research efforts:

Teacher Quality and Experience

- What teacher competencies are necessary for providing high quality ECE?
- How do teachers typically gain these competencies?
- How can we accurately measure these competencies?
- What is a reasonable expectation of teachers for how to improve their experience and skills?

Provider Perspective

- What qualifications in teachers do providers want that indicate teacher quality?
- What qualifications/credentials do providers consider that would result in higher compensation?
- What measurements of quality do providers trust?
- What are the credentials/certifications that providers use and trust? (e.g., Child Development Associate (CDA), Florida Early Childhood Professional Certificate (FLECPC), micro-credential)

ECE Systems and Structures

- What are the current challenges in the local, state, and national ECE landscape?

- What are other states doing regarding workforce recruitment, development, retention and advancement?
- What ECE policy levers, programs and investments already exist in Florida that can be leveraged?
- Where are there bright spots in Florida's ECE system that are pioneering programs, investments and pathways?
- What outcomes should we be considering when redesigning Florida's informal career pathway?

Methodology

Data Collection

The ECPRG used four data collection strategies to adequately represent the needs of stakeholders: (1) Florida ECE educator focus groups, interviews, and surveys; (2) Florida ECE administrator and leader interviews; (3) nationally recognized ECE experts and researcher interviews; and (4) Florida Statewide Informal Pathway Advisory Committee interviews and group artifacts. Each of these activities was carefully planned and executed to:

- Solicit input and gather best practices through the entire state as well as systems and approaches in other states;
- Identify best practices from within Florida and from other states to identify how they might inform recommendations that would be appropriate in Florida;
- Inform potential draft pathway elements and models for the Advisory Group to refine.

The different data collection efforts were designed to engage a representative sample of different stakeholder groups – within Florida and nationally – to provide complementary perspectives that would delve into and build on the lessons learned from the Literature Review.

Stakeholders were identified and selected for focus groups, surveys and individual interviews in October 2023. Criterion sampling (Glesne, 2005) was used to ensure that various perspectives were included in the sample, using the following educator characteristics:

- Florida geographic location: Southwest, Southeast, Northwest, Panhandle, Central, Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) (Urban, Suburban, Rural locations)

- Level of formal education: High School Diploma, CDA, Associate's Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree
- Age
- Tenure in ECE field (years)
- Current position: Teacher, Administrator, Owner, Regulatory Agency, Professional Learning Agency
- Employment setting: Home-based, Center-based, For-profit, Not-for-profit, Secular, Faith-based
- Participation in Florida School Readiness (SR) Program & Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK)
- Primary Child Age-Groups Served: Infant, Toddler, Preschool

Florida Stakeholder Focus Groups (October 2023)

The ECPRG attended two ECE conferences to conduct focus groups with educators, employers, and stakeholders. By capitalizing on existing convenings, the ECPRG was able to recruit a more varied group of stakeholders from across the state than otherwise would have been possible on the constrained time frame. Both conferences occurred in October 2023: the Florida Association for Educators of Young Children (FLAEYC) and the Florida Association of Early Learning Coalitions (AELC) Annual Training Boot-Camp. Across both convenings, the research team engaged 26 participants. For more information on the focus group protocol, questions, and subjects of focus, please see Appendix A.

Table 1. Focus Group Participants

Focus Group Date/Time (EST)	Number of Participants	Roles (locations represented)
10/11/23 2pm	1	Coach (Orange County)
10/11/23 3pm	1	FCCH Provider (Citrus County)
10/11/23 4pm	3	Teachers/Directors (Central FL, Orange County, Broward County)
10/12/23 9am	1	Director (Manatee County)
10/12/23 1pm	1	ECE Consultant (Central Florida)
10/12/23 4pm	3	Coach, Higher Ed ECE, Owner/Provider (Miami/Dade County, Clay County)
10/13/23 12pm	6	ELC Staff, Teachers, Directors, Coach (Indian River County, Alachua County, Dixie County)
10/13/23 1pm	6	Directors, ELC Staff, Provider/Owner, Teachers (Orange County, IRMO, Palm Beach County, Marion County, Miami/Dade County, Pinellas County)
10/13/23 2pm	3	Head Start Staff, Teacher, Director (Statewide (FL), Brevard County, Clay County)
10/14/23 10am	1	Teacher (Alachua County)

ECE Educator Surveys

Invitations to participate in surveys were provided to focus group participants while researchers attended the FLAEYC and AELC conferences in October 2023 in order to solicit additional feedback. The ECPRG also provided survey links to conference attendees to solicit feedback from those educators who did not participate in focus groups. Survey questions focused on participants' current role in ECE; years of experience; motivations for learning and improving professionally; preferred modalities, incentives and motivations for professional learning; and other insights participants would like to offer regarding the informal career pathway. In addition, ECE field surveys were disseminated by the Early Learning Coalitions (ELCs) to ECE

teachers, family child care providers, directors, owners, coaches, early learning coalition staff, and early learning organizational staff. Overall, 105 participants began the survey, and 100 participants completed the survey. Please see Appendix B for survey questions, statistics, and analysis.

Florida Stakeholder and ECE Expert Interviews

The ECPRG conducted 34 interviews with local, state, and national ECE stakeholders between November 2023 - January 2024. Interview participants were identified through a preliminary literature review to determine experts in the field of career pathways and professional learning and credentialing; from consultation with Florida's early learning leaders; and in consultation with the Division of Early Learning Leadership team. Interviews were designed to solicit feedback on existing Florida systems, identify promising practices, and describe key considerations for the creation of the informal pathway. The research team tailored interview questions to the specific expertise of stakeholders. For example, state expert interviews included discussions of existing Florida systems while national experts focused on promising practices from around the country. For more information on interview protocols, questions, and subjects of focus, please see Appendix C.

Table 2. Stakeholders for Expert Interviews

Organizations	
<i>National & Research</i>	
Bipartisan Policy Center BUILD Initiative The City University of New York Council for Professional Recognition Massachusetts Department of Early Education & Care Teachstone, Inc. University of California, Berkeley - Center for the Study of Child Care Employment University of Washington	
<i>State</i>	
Children's Forum, Inc. Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County The Children's Trust (<i>Miami</i>) Early Learning Coalitions Florida Association for the Education of Young Children Florida Association for Child Care Management Florida Department of Children and Families Palm Beach State College University of Florida - Lastinger Center for Learning (<i>Flamingo Learning</i>)	
Titles	
Chief Executive Officer Chief Program Officer Co-Director/Director Credential Specialist Early Learning Projects Coordinator Implementation Support Coordinator Literacy Officer Research Professor Senior Management Analyst Supervisor System Performance Lead Workforce Development Specialist	
Focus Areas	
Alternative State Model Apprenticeships Child Care Associations Department of Defense Childcare Model Literacy Coaching Micro-credentials/Badges National Child Development Associate Professional Learning Technical Assistance Workforce, Implementation Technology Initiatives	

Informal Pathway Advisory Committee

Finally, the ECPRG convened the Florida Informal Career Pathway (FICP) Advisory Committee (Appendix D) to support the ECPRG in the development of pathway recommendations. Members were chosen to provide a range of expertise and perspectives on existing early learning workforce development models, program and professional needs related to teacher competency, recruitment and retention, informal and formal career pathways, professional learning opportunities, and examples of pathways in Florida and nationally. During the first in-person meeting of the FICP in December 2023, members collaborated on several data collection activities, including drafting initial versions of an informal pathway, potential non-negotiables, and identifying specific questions for consideration. These group artifacts were considered during this data analysis.

Data Analysis

The ECPRG utilized quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze data from the survey, focus groups, interviews, and the advisory committee. For the survey, the team used descriptive statistics (frequency of choice for each response category and the associated percentage) and the associated graphic visualization was produced for each survey question. In addition, content analysis was performed on open-ended questions to compare findings with qualitative data sets.

The qualitative analysis used for focus groups, interviews, and advisory board data occurred in five phases using an inductive interpretive analysis approach (Hatch, 2007; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013):

- **Phase One:** Researchers divided data into specific categories (e.g., Florida Stakeholders, ECE Experts), and individually reviewed all data for initial themes.
- **Phase Two:** Researchers reviewed Phase One results to reach initial consensus.
- **Phase Three:** Researchers exchanged data sets and aligned codes/themes and identified data outliers and potential areas for future data collection.
- **Phase Four:** Researchers retrieved direct quotes to bolster themes/categories, and then confirmed data consensus on themes, outliers, and future needs for data collection.
- **Phase Five:** An independent validity check was completed by an external researcher who analyzed ten random data sets using this same process to ensure validity and reliability of this analysis.

In order for readers to have a consensus of understanding of stakeholders' perspectives, ideas and terms, there is a glossary at the end of this report with definitions and terms used.

Important Issues and Design Suggestions from the Field: Key Considerations According to Stakeholders

This section of the report presents the key issues of developing an informal professional learning pathway and suggestions as described by stakeholders. A sample of direct quotes related to each of these issues is included to provide additional context and texture. Broad stakeholder titles were provided to give context and were identified as the following: Florida ECE expert or researcher, Florida ELC leader, Florida ELC program coordinator/coach/data manager; ECE expert, researcher or leader; and ECE educator. The key issues, considerations, and design constraints that were identified by stakeholders are sorted into five (5) categories identified by the ECPRG as frequently discussed by stakeholders.

- 1. Clarifying requirements and structures of the informal pathway:**

Educators reported that they were confused about what is required, and much of what is currently available is not meeting their needs, not improving their practice, and not supporting career advancement. Additionally, they indicated that regardless of *what* is required, *how* requirements are delivered and communicated to the workforce must be improved. A consensus among stakeholders was that the informal pathway requirements must both provide a stronger structure that is embedded into policy and must ensure that professional learning meets those requirements. This would better facilitate the pathway improving skills and facilitating career advancement.

- 2. Quality control and accessibility of professional learning:**

The biggest challenges identified by stakeholders were a lack of quality content and a misalignment between the content and professional learning needs. Without clear requirements, Florida educators described the wide range of professional learning experiences and their frustrations finding quality professional learning due to lack of vetting and alignment to educator key competencies. Educators also desired specific methods of professional learning (e.g. coaching, Communities of Practice, mentorship) that were inconsistent in terms of access and availability due to high costs of implementation.

- 3. Leveraging and improving existing elements of the Informal**

Pathway: In current practice and policy, the Florida early childhood career

pathway has many elements necessary for a supportive informal career pathway. On paper, Florida has a solid framework to build on to create a responsive and effective informal pathway. Many of the ingredients are already in place: over 45 hours of onboarding, a suite of staff/director credentials, and articulation of credentials into college credit. However, to be more meaningful and effective, specific existing elements must be improved to make Florida's informal pathway successful. Stakeholders' experience of these structures, however, are that they have not evolved to remain relevant to the educator workforce they are meant to support. Educators want more engaging and helpful onboarding, directors seek professionals with credentials with more consistent skills and knowledge, and the leap between the 45-hour course and the staff credential is too big for many professionals to manage independently.

4. **Data system improvements:** Across all stakeholder groups greater data integration and ease of use is desired. The existing legacy data systems are not integrated with other important information systems and are difficult for users to navigate resulting in inefficiency for providers, ELCs, and other stakeholders to manage and use to inform policy and practice. Interaction with the data systems is only required for some professionals, limiting the utility of the data, and ELCs and others cannot easily look at workforce, program quality, and other data to inform their investments. Stakeholders also reported that they did not understand the importance and utility of the different professional learning documentation systems with which they have interacted. Having to navigate a local system to report on some experiences, and other state training registries for other forms of PD have resulted in incomplete training records and waning interest in maintaining their personal training record across all systems.
5. **Attracting and supporting the workforce in an Informal Pathway:** Stakeholders consistently identified the desire for support to increase their levels of professional learning and to advance their careers. In addition to clearer pathway structures and more robust elements mentioned above, stakeholders also want improvements regarding pathway infrastructure, compensation, recruitment and communication systems. Additional ideas for an effective informal pathway are also outlined.

Note: The ideas presented in this section are not formal recommendations of the research team but are ideas shared by stakeholders for consideration and refinement by the Florida Informal Career Pathway Advisory Committee.

One of the objectives of this report was to identify elements of a pathway that educators and leaders feel are valuable, and then determine specific changes or improvements that can be made based on stakeholder preference and need. This data is presented according to how stakeholders interpreted pathway structures, needs for improvement, and innovative ideas for future use. Embedded throughout this summary is the idea that an informal career pathway cannot function independently of other professional learning, support, and data systems.

As one ECE leader stated, “This isn’t about not wanting a pathway, this is about a system that doesn’t invite, doesn’t provide support, and people don’t come. To change that, we have to improve all of it, not just specific pieces” (9B). A national ECE expert further illuminated this idea of connected systems based on research in other states:

To create these systems, they have to be standardized across the state...you must require standardization of PD, of the pathway, you have to have flexibility, standards for course design, and have an entity, someone that is laying eyes on all of this to determine good training. You then provide the HOW, the support system, like mentoring or a coaching program. Support is necessary and helps implementation a lot. And finally, you have to have platforms that are usable, collect data, and function properly with your intended goals (1B).

Clarifying Requirements and Structures of the Informal Pathway

Stakeholders discussed various elements of a redesigned career pathway including training content, alignment, design and assessment; trainer qualifications; professional learning modalities; and most important, quality assurance across all of these topics. These concerns are more fully unpacked through the issue statements in this section. As stated by a Florida professional learning provider and researcher,

This is a huge issue, and the most important, to resolve... it’s the road to nowhere....PD that doesn’t count for anything, courses that don’t articulate to college credit, disincentives in the system, lost tuition dollars... there needs to be a broader pipeline, there needs to be work both inside and outside the system to make teacher learning useful, relevant, and accessible (16A).

Issue #1: Confusion about requirements across agencies and initiatives

In Florida, ECE educator professional learning is required and monitored by two state agencies, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Division of Early Learning (DEL); specific agency requirements and mandates can be reviewed in the informal pathway literature review. This system of dual agencies was mentioned by all Florida stakeholders when voicing their concerns about professional learning requirements and accessibility. According to a Florida ECE organizational leader,

We have dueling leaky buckets, DCF (Department of Child and Families) and DEL (Division of Early Learning)... the intent was great, but as it has shifted from access to education, it has created blurred lines between regulation and accountability. DCF in-service training bleeds over to the PD side at DEL. There is a lack of coexisting lanes that work well together in our system. We need to determine and define what's regulatory, what's nice to have, and what's incentivized (5A).

Further, local early learning coalitions or Children's Services Councils may have additional requirements for specific initiatives. Many ECE educators discussed the "labyrinth" of learning and licensing requirements they were supposed to have, both from state agencies and local early learning coalitions. "I can't figure out where to look, or what to do. And it changes every year. It's so hard to keep up with" (FG2).

Ideas to simplify confusing requirements

An ECE educator in one focus group maintained that a simpler system is needed:

Single entry point and unified system would be so helpful. We need one system, less bureaucracy and less agencies. If all the systems were talking, and everything is simplified and streamlined, teachers would be able to learn more... (FG4).

Other ideas presented by Florida stakeholders include:

- Design a clear structure for the informal pathway and integrate this into policy so it is much more than just a new version of previous visuals.
- Create a single website that reflects this structure and organizes all things professional learning, including licensing/funding stream requirements, different levels and how to achieve them, options to access professional learning, and opportunities to access professional support.
- Ensure the web pages of DCF, DEL, Coalitions and other key partners like the Children's Forum have the same messages, link to the same places, and have updated correct information. There are multiple websites with unclear or incorrect information that are adding to the confusion in the field.

- Simplify record keeping so there is one user-friendly Registry.
- Ensure all state-funded professional learning automatically updates Registry profiles (i.e., all ELC-funded or delivered professional learning automatically updates in the Registry profile).
- Require large contractors (e.g., Teachstone) to regularly update Registry profiles with data so this can count toward licensing or staff credential requirements.
- Require all professionals to update their profiles at least annually.
- Enable DCF Licensing to check Registry profiles for staff at each program to simplify record-keeping burdens on providers.
- Ensure any local systems can link to the statewide Registry so professionals will have a comprehensive record that reflects state and local requirements.
- Strengthen data integration so Registry data can link to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and other data and inform local and statewide professional learning investments.

Issue #2: Lack of alignment between policy drivers and professional learning requirements

The lack of alignment between professional learning requirements and policy drivers is also a challenge. Educators discussed Florida's changing requirements for School Readiness (SR) and the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) and the lack of connection between professional learning offered and provider expectations and assessments. "If we are measured and funded by CLASS scores, why isn't every educator in this state mandated to take Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI)?" (FG6). As stated in the informal pathway literature review, the majority of Florida's professional learning providers do not align professional learning to Florida's standards, requirements, CLASS or the state's core competencies (ECPRG, 2023). One Florida ECE organizational leader stated, "We wrote those [Florida competencies] when people were getting bachelor's degrees, but now we focus on interactions. The content isn't aligned." (15A).

Issue #3: Dissonance of local initiatives and investments and standardization of pathway structures

Many national ECE experts warned that creating a statewide standardized program often comes with a one-size-fits-all mentality, and that cannot happen with a successful informal pathway. One ECE researcher stated:

You have to look for and find the least efficient and worst quality in places... the places getting least benefit, least credentialing, and listen to them about why and what for. You must have applicability. You can't trample over local

investments and programs that make sense, but you also have to make sure these programs fit the areas with the most need (8B).

Another Florida stakeholder also had this concern: “How do we massage this with local partnerships? You need to make sure everyone benefits from this. What about local instructors, local connections? If you have a unified statewide provider that’s delivered locally, that would be best fit, but you can’t forget about local flavor, needs, and policies” (17A).

Quality Control and Accessibility of Professional Learning

Outside of any specific structure, the challenges around the design and delivery of professional learning dominated our conversations. Many ECE experts discussed the lack of quality and alignment of professional learning in systems across the U.S. and emphasized this is not just a Florida challenge.

Issue #4: Lack of quality assurance for learning events and trainers

The lack of quality control for learning events was cited repeatedly as the biggest challenge within our state. “Training is the wild west here...there is no rhyme or reason to it, anyone can do it, and there are no repercussions if it's bad or useless” (9B). An ECE regional leader discussed their challenges with local training opportunities, stating lack of relevance and differentiation, and outdated resources as a significant challenge for their ECE educators:

Training design is really important...One of the reasons we stopped sending people to our local apprenticeships program is they were still using the same handouts from 1994. That’s a problem. There was no differentiation of instruction... Infant/Toddler (I/T) teachers being enrolled and not taught anything about infants...those are the things that are really important. There has to be differentiation by age group: Infant/Toddler track, Pre-K track is so important. Relevancy is so key, and we must infuse CLASS in everything that we do because that’s how teachers are measured now. And we need trauma-informed care...we do have theory, but it’s critical to be more concentrated on practice and translating practice in the classroom to produce child outcomes (1A).

Many ECE professional development facilitators (coaches, program coordinators) discussed not only the lack of quality around training, but also a lack of oversight around those trainers who deliver professional learning. One ECE program coordinator stated,

Looking at all the training, we need to measure those characteristics...and look at having comprehensive PD for teachers. There is no current standard that measures the quality. We also need to assess PD facilitators, and those who create PD. We should mirror the K-12 system that requires a state day of subsidized PD by age level. A lot of work needs to happen around standards. Gamify the standards...so they are more appealing, and then continue that through badges and skills (2A).

When asked specifically about informal pathway training needs, several ECE survey participants echoed these ideas in open-ended statements:

- "There has to be a focus on implementation of the information acquired, so many trainings are not great."
- "Make learning easy by offering online professional development courses that are relevant and easy to understand. The last training I had, I knew more than the trainer did, it was a waste of time."
- "I hope this new career path will show other methods of how educators could become better professionals besides taking college classes."
- "We need the ability to be able to access the training whether ELC provider or not. Providers need good training to ensure that the children they care for are prepared and school readiness ready."
- "We need courses that give you more time to implement the subject at hand before expecting assignments to be completed, there has to be that connection."
- "Teaching is intentional and updates in content are made to meet the current needs of our professionals, children and families. Homework and extra work is meaningful in content and student receives feedback that is useful. So much of what we get now means nothing in the classroom."
- "There is a lot of expectation and long hours and required trainings but there aren't a lot of pay incentives. Early education is not regarded the same way elementary and up are. They get paid PD time, and release time."
- "You MUST make the learning in childcare more personal to the individual need of each person/teacher, administrator, director, substitute teacher, etc. No more one-and-dones and one size fits all."
- "Have very clear guidelines and expectations of the position, I know when I started the expectations of the education required was very confusing. Fortunately I had some people willing to help and guide me through the process. And make the training work towards those expectations. Make it work together."
- "There is a need for a combination of professional development, coaching and peer mentorship."
- "We need more training dealing with autism and special needs for children and families, the challenges we are actually dealing with in our classrooms."

Ideas for quality control

Multiple ECE experts discussed possible solutions to issues of quality control of professional learning, including “shrinking the training universe” by requiring higher standards to consolidate and improve both training and trainer quality (9B). When discussing other state systems, a state professional learning coordinator from Massachusetts described their process to improve training:

We went from training all over the state to six regional structures, we called them HUBS, for PD. Then we had HUBS submit a catalog to show what courses were and created a rubric and crosswalk to them and competencies and quality assurance. Then I overlaid that with a map with where there were learning deserts, and we actually made people change their venues to offer PD in those areas. So it was a matter of consolidating, improving, and changing locations to meet the learning needs of our providers (8B).

Another example of implementing quality control of professional learning came from stakeholders working in Louisiana. According to these ECE leaders, Louisiana’s Department of Education and State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) created the Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate to improve early childhood programs statewide and attempt to have a certification for all early childhood teachers in the state. In order to improve quality assurance of the professional learning programs providing the CDA credential, BESE required all organizations to apply and be reviewed based on program criteria. As one Louisiana ECE professional stated,

In order for professional learning organizations to qualify for facilitating this credential program, they had to complete an extensive application approved by BESE, and we were also audited yearly to make quality assurance, similar to our IACET [International Association of Continuing Education and Training] accreditation. They basically created their own accreditation and compliance process. The state was mandating that everyone have a CDA, an early childhood certificate (4B).

The compensation increase or incentive for teachers to complete this program was a yearly tax credit, and the program was at no cost to teachers:

The CDA scholarship is covered by Louisiana Pathways, covered entirely by the state, and the training organizations had to facilitate that process and advise participants throughout that process. We had to fill out the program application and scholarship applications for them. So training and courses are

free, and then they get a tax credit every year which doesn't push them over thresholds with stipends for qualifying for subsidies/programs (4B).

Additional ideas to improve quality control:

- Learn from other states and from Florida's early work on Outcomes Driven Training (ODT) to develop a cost-effective and efficient model of training approval and/or trainer approval.
- Outline clearer and more consistent requirements for professional learning that are consistent across all state contracts that fund professional learning, such as alignment to the most recent core competencies, alignment to CLASS and child assessment tools (e.g. Teaching Strategies), IACET approval to ensure continuing education units (CEUs) are delivered as the norm.

Issue #5: The professional learning educators most value is inconsistently available

When asked what was working in the current ECE professional learning system, several educators responded that they received great benefit from professional learning that provided peer connection and one-on-one support to help implement practices in their classroom. In educator surveys, online learning opportunities and in-person training were highly valued. In addition, respondents indicated that mentoring, coaching and opportunities to learn from colleagues were important for their professional learning. According to an ELC program coordinator,

Coaching makes the most difference in a classroom. Teachers are saying we are going through DCF hours, which is supposed to help us with the classroom... it doesn't help us at all. Please meet us where we are. I need a mentor in the classroom. I can sit through a training, but if I can't practice or be successful, it does me no good. They need modeling and support. We saw coaching was most effective in terms of classroom outcomes (7A).

One focus group participant described her experience with an online Community of Practice:

We are so isolated as teachers and constantly have shifting kids in our classrooms because of ratio and requirements. COVID added such a layer of stress with kids needing so many things. It's really helpful to just talk about that with other teachers and get ideas. My Community of Practice (CoP) was online and even though we weren't in the same room, it really helped me understand how I can use things I learn in my course (FG5).

Leveraging and Improving Existing Elements of the Informal Pathway

Florida has many essential elements of an informal pathway: onboarding requirements, a suite of staff/director credentials, and articulation of credentials into college credit. However, the current implementation of these elements is compromising the effectiveness of our workforce and must be improved for an informal pathway to accomplish the goals of supporting the workforce and ensuring professionals have the knowledge and skills needed to support the growth, learning and development of young children.

Issue #6: Current onboarding needs improvement

The majority of stakeholders agreed that onboarding and orientation training is an essential and valuable first step on an informal pathway to create a positive and effective foundation from which educators can build competency and career progression. As noted in the literature review, Florida requires foundational onboarding through a 45-hour course provided by the Department of Children and Families (ECPRG, 2023). However, many educators and leaders felt this required course does not meet the needs of new professionals and is problematic in its current implementation. One ELC leader stated:

If we have the DCF hours, why is that not the baseline for quality? If those hours aren't good enough anymore, can we change and make it so? Make it doable for a private business to continue to serve its community? I think we need to concentrate on the floor, not the ceiling...why can't we make the DCF hours better and mean something towards a credential? (18A).

Ideas to improve onboarding training

Many educators had recommendations for how to make the initial onboarding useful and effective for new teachers in the field. "The 45 hours from DCF are useful, but desperately need to be overhauled and updated, almost game-ified...these hours need to be targeted to research-based practices" (7A). Another ELC program coordinator agreed, saying "In theory, the 45 hours is great, but it's not effective. And, we see that there are more and more CLASS 1 violations in DCF...they aren't getting it" (8A). Other educators discussed the structure of the onboarding experience, and stated that support needed to be provided at the onset of this process:

We need to provide cohorts for any new hires. Onboarding to this pathway is critical and that's where you lose most of them. You don't have to start with a degree. You need to have open conversations with people...about what the

field is, and what you can do within the field. They need to see the big picture (3A).

One ELC Coach suggested a pre-service onboarding course be available while educators engage in health and safety required courses:

It should be like freshman orientation. You don't know what you don't know. They need to understand the field. Here's what you need to know, here's where you can go, and then show the different age levels and experience necessary to be successful. It could explain the TEACH scholarship and Florida pathways... they need a roadmap and expectations (7A).

A leader of a Florida ECE professional organization also recommended more time for educators to navigate this process, stating:

We need some onboarding time in the industry. We are not looking to decrease training, just looking for some time to get them there. School operators would like all their teachers to have CDAs, in a perfect world...but they need time and money to work towards CDA, and then an AA- I would love to see that accumulate and matriculate. There should be refreshers, there should be reliability testing. But onboarding is non-negotiable and should be done with intent and be worth something (9A).

Other suggestions that stakeholders recommended for onboarding was:

- All onboarding and orientation training modules should have online assessments (currently must be completed in-person).
- All onboarding modules and assessments be aligned with necessary competencies towards achieving a CDA or state credential; and
- ELCs should have the ability to facilitate onboarding in-person or online and include additional training necessary for local requirements at the beginning of an educator's career.
- Offer continuing education units (CEUs) for all onboarding experiences
- Design onboarding to stack with prior learning and experience toward a staff credential/CDA aligned with required state and CDA competencies.

An example of what these improvements could look like in practice was provided by an ELC leader who suggested an orientation program in which new educators start first at the early learning coalition, and then transfer to the provider:

Our coalition developed a program to do pre-hours (health and safety) so they are hired at the child care center, then come to the coalition and do the training, and get the health and safety requirements completed. Then they

are able to go into a classroom. We also provide a mentor where they are hired. And this also eliminates the financial responsibility of providers to carry them. New teachers are with us for the first two weeks, and we stipend the child care center the cost of that teachers' salary, so she gets her training, then transitions into the job, and the child care center has that base. It's an easy on-ramp (18A).

Issue #7: Pathway to a Staff Credential unclear and stackable steps may help

After onboarding, many educators shared that the next steps on the pathway towards a credential were not logical, were hard to navigate, and easy to forgo. One focus group participant said, "Why should I go farther than the DCF hours? It would take me forever, it's expensive, and there isn't any incentive to improve because I don't get paid more. Plus, I am not a good student" (FG10).

In addition to educators feeling a lack of motivation and support towards career progression, there is also little incentive because of a lack of value put on experience in the classroom. According to an ELC leader,

The teacher that has 10 years of experience and knows so much on-the-job knowledge about kids and curriculum is often stronger than the brand-new teacher with an AA or BA, but they don't get recognized. We need to figure out those competencies accurately and how to measure them. (17A).

Veteran educators voiced their motivation for continuing in the field and on the pathway, which included pride, respect, professionalism, integrity, and love for children:

You can have experience of being a teacher but not the education. I would be denying myself the greatness I could bring to the kids if I didn't continue my education. That should not be an option...I have learned different languages and different techniques since I moved to the child center. In the last five years, I have learned more developmental language and strategies than I have in 32 years...this process should push us to want more. Don't water down the learning, make it hard, but make it accessible. There is so much fear driving teachers who don't want to push forward. They don't like school for different reasons. Educators should be able to choose what is best for them, but they should be challenged and never stop learning. Not everyone can do this job (FG9).

This perspective was also echoed in survey responses, in which most participants had over 10 years of experience and expressed their primary motivation for

learning as “I want to be better at my job and responsibilities”. Stakeholders consistently reinforced that educators who are new to ECE classroom teaching need different and more structured and supported learning pathways, while veteran teachers need pathways that appeal to their motivation, levels of experience, and need for more targeted and specific learning.

Several Florida ECE leaders stated that micro-credentials would be a valuable part of the pathway as long as they were designed to “stack” towards the CDA or staff credential. The concept of badges, micro-credentials and specializations are included in various forms on Florida’s current career pathway but beyond the idea and the early learning literacy credential ([Emergent Literacy Microcredential](#)), these structures are not clearly defined (i.e., there are not consistent standards or requirements of what constitutes a badge or micro-credential), are not widely available, and they are not aligned to the staff credential/CDA requirements. According to one focus group participant, “I really enjoyed that literacy micro-credential but it was hard and I’m not sure where it fits with this process. I really appreciated the stipend” (FG4).

Ideas to improve progression to a staff credential/CDA

- Expand access to badges/micro-credentials that stack to the staff credential/CDA
- Incentivize completion of the badges/micro-credentials through scholarships and/or add the badges/micro-credentials to stipend schedules such as WAGE\$.
- Require completion of the badges/micro-credentials as part of the requirements to be licensed and/or provide SR and VPK to further professional growth for professionals.

Issue #8: Strengthen Director Credential and leadership opportunities

While the purpose of this project was to develop recommendations for an informal career pathway for teachers in centers and family child care homes (FCCH), the need for a tangential and comprehensive overhaul of the director credential and leadership pathway was also voiced by many experts and stakeholders. Research also provides support for leadership and teacher learning simultaneously with specific support structures for capacity and competency attainment (ECPRG, 2023). A Florida ECE expert stated,

Where we are struggling is helping [directors] and owners understand that this is a long-term investment. The savvy business owner/operators, they get it. They realize they need to provide this to keep talent, and it’s an investment (9A).

Many ECE experts in other states also discussed similar challenges, and suggested a leadership track on the pathway that mirrors educators but also provides business and instructional leadership learning. According to a national ECE leadership expert:

Leadership is critical. The pathway needs to be incorporated with directors as well. It's all about leadership. There needs to be a specific track: this has to run in tandem with teacher tracks. It has to be floor and ceiling, bottom and top...and looking at what you expect of leadership. How do you get into programs to lead this kind of change? Directors must have a degree requirement, but it can be attainable, not overwhelming (5B).

Several ECE experts agreed that the main reason teachers leave the profession is not requirements or compensation challenges, but a lack of leadership. One Florida ECE organizational leader stated:

In order of challenges in our system, it starts with leadership, then morale, then compensation. The number one reason a teacher leaves is because of a bad boss. And the reason a teacher stays is a good boss; they feel protected and valued. There is a lack of directors that understand the day to day, they don't know how to do the day-to-day interactions, deal with special needs. Director courses are not great, the director credential is vastly lacking in required competency for business operations and educator management, they have overworked staff, are underpaid, exhausted, along with parents. It's the hardest job I've ever had (5A).

Data System Improvements

Both Florida and national stakeholders consistently identified the need for robust, easily accessible, streamlined data systems for professional learning and Florida educators to both understand the current state of Florida educators' professional learning and use this data to guide future improvements for professional learning systems. When discussing the elements of an informal career pathway with both educators and experts, many attributed Florida's antiquated data systems, structures and lack of alignment with a lack of positive outcomes related to program improvement. Many ELC leaders agreed that there are great things happening within Florida's current ECE system, but because of lack of data and research, they cannot pinpoint what to scale and invest in for the future. These Florida ECE leaders stated,

How do we know it's working? How do we know, evaluate, monitor progress, link to measurements, link to CLASS scores, child assessments, everything?

Ideally, we are trying to figure out desired outcomes, that secret sauce, and be strategic about what we are investing in...but the Registry and multiple systems of collection are not updated...how are we supposed to measure if what we are doing is working? (18A).

Our biggest frustrations are we are working with dinosaur systems...we desperately need modernization (4A).

Issue #9: There are multiple data and reporting systems and they are not integrated

Currently, Florida has the DCF Training Registry, DEL's Career Pathways systems, individual early learning coalition registries and data assessment systems. One of the most frequently discussed challenges was the existence of multiple data systems within Florida that are not linked together to provide a comprehensive picture of Florida ECE teachers. In addition, at present, there is not adequate incentive for educators or their employers to consistently document professional learning progress beyond basic programmatic requirements (e.g., licensing, VPK, and SR requirements). Many Florida ECE experts shared that the "bones" of a data system and a pathway exist, but these structures are not aligned, connected, or useful to each other to track educators and measure progress or growth.

As one Florida data coordinator stated, "We have multiple systems, multiple agencies. You are only as good as your data" (18A). Numerous Florida ECE experts stated that the foundation of a data system and a pathway exist, but these structures are not aligned, connected, or useful to each other to track educators and measure progress or growth. Two ECE organizational leaders stated,

We aren't doing anything with data, not doing enough with data we have or determining the data we need. We should be looking at the (CLASS) 4.5 and 5s. The bones of the system exist. Can we get away from DCF doing one piece, DOE doing another, and have one happy box with a bow? (15A).

[DCF] is a great place to pull the data from Registry, I just wish it connected with everything else we have. Ideally, we should be tracking credentials with CLASS scores, but the data systems aren't friendly, so that is a manual process. We need a system that intersects all of our different programs, CLASS scores, quality programs, ties to teachers at schools (10A).

These complex systems make it challenging for educators to navigate their own records. One ECE educator explained her challenges accessing her own training data from the DCF Training Registry to determine how to continue with earning her credential. "It's so confusing, and I couldn't find any of my training certificates or

anything. I tried to find my Flamingo certificates in the Registry, and nothing was coming up. I was so frustrated” (FG3).

Antiquated data systems create more work for agencies. “I have reviewed 20 applications, paper applications take five times as long, Directors credential as well. No more paper credentials should be accepted” (6A). The lack of integration also creates additional work for ELCs. Many ELC staff discussed the challenges of integrating local and state data requirements and systems and lack of staffing to keep data updated and useful for assessing outcomes and investments. “We are very short staffed, and have to analyze data, like CLASS scores, manually with registry data” (1A).

Data Integration Ideas

An ECE leader suggested creating a system with one entry point that combined data systems for users:

We need a single point of entry and a single pathway to measure educational attainment of our instructors... I would like to have levels where we have, as a state, we can look at a dashboard and see percentages of teachers that have each educational level or certificates or credentials, then break that down by ELCs, to compare each other. Then we need to start taking that data of communities that have more qualified teachers, then look at child outcomes and K-readiness. Child outcome data is critical, and everything should feed into that. Then you add compensation data. That’s the ballgame (10A).

Attracting and Supporting the Workforce

Stakeholders were clear that more support is needed for the workforce. To recruit, retain, and support the workforce in growth on an informal pathway, stakeholders recommended improvements regarding pathway infrastructure, compensation, recruitment and communication systems. While some of these approaches may be outside of the scope of this project, the feedback from stakeholders was strong to elevate these issues - either as part of this project or as future related work.

Issue #10: Professional learning supports are desired

Stakeholders voiced the need for support in every level and with every structure of the pathway, from navigation to financial assistance, to peer support such as Communities of Practice, to mentorship and apprenticeship models of learning that have built-in support. One Florida ECE researcher provided an apt metaphor:

If the pathway is the tree, pipelines of support are the branches. Educators need support continuously, from communities of practice, to peer support to leadership support...talking about the practice you have in your classroom, professional learning communities, parallel practice where you are learning how to teach by how you are taught. We really need to support the whole ecosystem, staff at ELC, coaches, building level, program level, owners, providers, teachers, paraprofessionals, parents. Everyone that touches that child, we need to address all those levels. In order for me to teach as a teacher, I need to know how to support my children, and my coach and my director need to know that (14A).

An ELC coach mentioned adding a specific layer of support for educators and directors:

I think the thing that's most important is there needs to be a layer of support between directors and teachers, and someone in that layer needs to have best practices in mind and can coach towards best practices. There has to be a coaching certification targeted for teachers. It can be Lastinger or PBC¹, doesn't matter, has to be targeted towards real life expectations. It can't be too wimpy, can't be too costly, and on the level that practitioner can understand and can be utilized (7A).

A Florida ECE organizational leader stated:

There is not a lot in our state that supports the teacher. We keep raising the bar for our teachers. I think about CLASS, I think about mandates. Those that can afford it offer coaching, but many can't and it's such an expensive model. What's the best way? A cohort model? Communities of practice? A mentor? There has to be something embedded in this process (15A).

In educator surveys, online learning opportunities and in-person training were highly valued. In addition, respondents indicated that mentoring, coaching and opportunities to learn from colleagues were important for their professional learning (Appendix B). While many educators agree that multiple layers of support are needed, they also voiced that supports must be individually guided, and a choice should be provided, not forced upon them as they enter the pathway. "I really liked how Flamingo offered us a coach or a CoP (Community of Practice), or nothing, and you could do what worked best for you" (FG2).

¹ Note: Stakeholders referred to both the UF Lastinger ECE Coaching Model and Practice Based Coaching (PBC) when discussing coaching in ECE settings. Information about each model can be found at [UF Lastinger ECE Coaching Certification](#) and [UF AZCEECS Practice Based Coaching](#).

Issue #11: Compensation and benefits need to be improved and tied to increased competency

Some ECE regional leaders also discussed connecting quality professional learning outcomes to compensation increases and incentives: “We should be figuring out what are the essential competencies that a teacher needs, and then tying that incentives, compensation increase, stature and respect...it should be this is who I am and why I’m learning” (2A). The method of compensation and wage increases was vastly debated within our stakeholder group, with some advocating for stipends, some advocating for mandated wage increases, and some preferring benefits such as paid leave (vacation or sick pay), health insurance benefits, and covered child care costs for educators. According to one ECE leaders

Stipends are motivating, but I would rather see that investment in benefits and working wage versus a one-time payment. All of this workforce and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars, I would love to see return on investment (7A).

Another ECE expert and researcher stated:

At the individual level, getting a higher degree doesn’t mean anything for a paycheck...program level funding needs to be subsidized, raised and supported. Reimbursements, tiered QRIS, programs don’t get anything. If you are encouraging or requiring release time, pay them more. If it’s not any benefit to program or individual, why would they do it? You are spending money to make product better, not increase revenue...that means finding ways to reward and compensate, make it useful and meaningful (1B).

Issue #12: Portability and usability of credentials provide stature for educators

Many ECE stakeholders commented on the fact that several Florida staff credentials (i.e., Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC), Early Childhood Professional Certificate (ECPC), Florida Department of Education Child Care Apprenticeship Certificate (FCCAC)) do not transfer outside the state of Florida should educators need to move out of state. One interview participant said, “You have to make these credentials portable... and make sure they are stackable and aligned. Mobility is such an issue, moving from state to state” (8B). Some educators felt that the Florida credentials didn’t demand the respect or stature of a national CDA, which many ELC leaders agreed with. One ELC leader stated simply, “The FCCPC needs to go away. We need one national credential. Florida doesn’t think that way. I would love to see the CDA, it’s accepted everywhere, it requires assessment of competency, and would be so much easier (9A).

Issue #13: Pathway recruitment and acknowledgement will help bolster workforce retention

Almost all Florida ECE leaders and experts discussed not only the creation of the pathway, but the intentional recruitment of an ECE workforce combined with proper messaging and acknowledgement of the commitment and difficulty of working in the field. Florida ECE leaders discussed high school pipelines through trade programs that work towards achieving a CDA upon high school graduation as an untapped potential with this young population. A Florida ECE leader stated,

There are too many people that think this job is easy, there is a stigma that EC is no money, you are overworked, parents are terrible...we must change that landscape and stigma. We need to get young people that are ambassadors, and talk positively about the field (17A).

Many educators discussed the lack of transparency and vision for working in the ECE field, especially for new educators. "What we don't have is any roadmaps for anyone...there needs to be a guide, as a teacher, and provide the major ranges of education and landscape in a way that is enticing" (15A). When asked for specific solutions, several educators gave suggestions on how to recruit and retain young teachers into the field. One ELC leader suggested:

We need to create an onboarding video/message, showing them the entire pathway, start to finish, so they know what they are into. Like a freshman orientation, and they need get paid as part of that process. Create a system across the state, and then create blank spots for local flavor and flare. Let's harness the power of social media and innovative marketing to entice younger professionals. Let's be savvy (18A).

A national ECE expert discussed how other states approached this process:

You need to find a narrative that really supports an effective mixed delivery system and makes this job appealing, and then you need to make the job appealing. Build it as you fly it, as we always say. It's about neighborhood support and communities taking advantage. It's good for families. Licensing needs to ride as side cars...this needs to be an integrated idea, a quilt of competency and skills (8B).

Florida Program Snapshots

Based on the issues of the Florida ECE informal pathway stakeholders discussed in previous sections, this section provides potential solutions through snapshots of innovative, research-based educator development approaches currently being implemented in Florida. Each snapshot provides an overview of the program(s) and stakeholder discussion around benefits, challenges and lessons learned from implementation. Analysis of these programs sheds light on a range of universally important factors including training format, funding structure, alignment with current credentialing systems, and approaches to implementation. The majority of this information was provided by ELC stakeholder interviews and documentation, and previous research of local initiatives.

A Cohesive Framework: The Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County

The Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County supports early learning providers through a set of programs that are cohesive and address the quality of professional learning, pathway options, workforce recruitment and retention, wage incentives and educator support through scholarships, coaching, and advising. These programs provide the following integrated supports:

Engage (New Hire Supports)

- \$250 sign-on bonus to \$500 sign-on bonus
- \$500 Director staff retention bonus
- LMS to support individualized computer-based onboarding training for providers
- Technology stipend to providers

Quest (National CDA)

- Training, implementation and coaching to meet National CDA (NCDA) requirements
- Addition of a credential transfer track (Staff Credential to NCDA)
- \$750 technology stipend
- Training completion (\$200 per subject area) and CDA acquisition (\$1500) bonuses

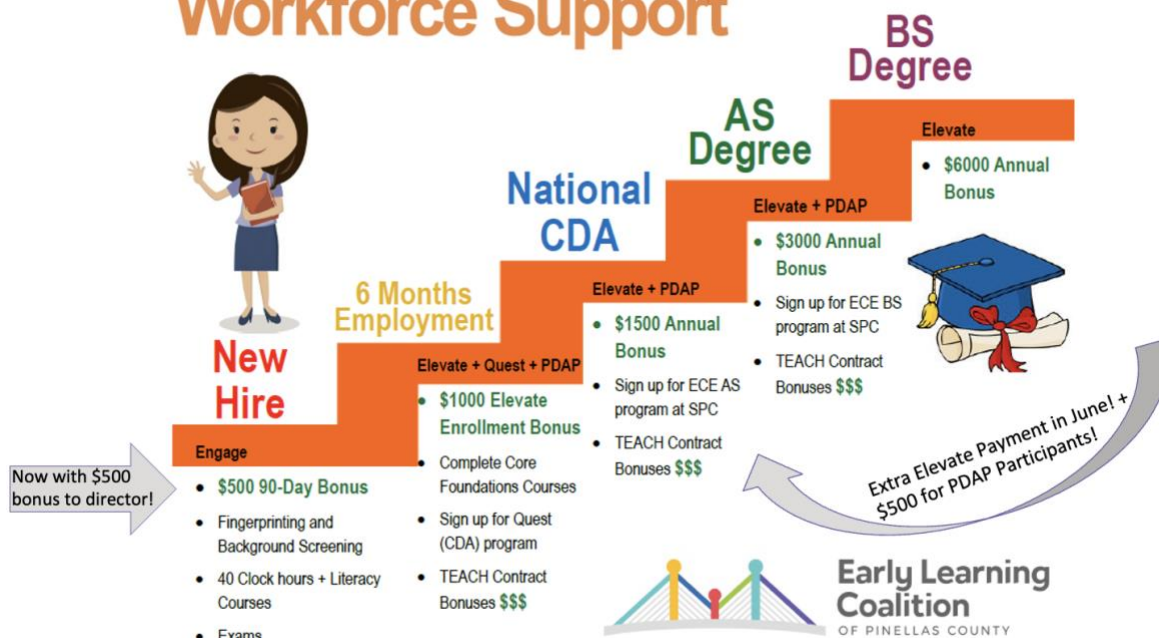
Elevate (Wage Supplements)

- \$300 foundations bonus (\$1,000 foundations bonus with ARPA supplement)
- Provider enrollment bonus \$2,500 to offset minimum wage requirements
- Additional Elevate payment (ARPA)

Workforce Coaches (Provider Supports)

- 6 temporary positions
- Provide technical assistance in navigating the workforce program offerings
- Coaching for recruitment, onboarding, and retention strategies
- Coaching for new staff, introduction to CLASS

Workforce Support



Source: NAEYC PLI Workforce Presentation, ELC of Pinellas County, 2022

Recruitment: The Engage Program

Engage is an introductory program that was designed to offset the cost of hiring new staff for providers and incentivize educators to begin a career in early learning. The ELC of Pinellas County provides a stipend to the child care center or teacher for the cost of: Level 2 Background Screening, 40-Clock Hour Training, Introductory Competency Exams, First Aid/CPR training and sign-on bonuses paid to the employee. Upon successful completion of introductory training & three months employment, employees receive a sign-on bonus. After three months, employees are then encouraged to advance through one of the ELC's professional learning programs.

An Informal Pathway: The Quest Program

Quest was created by the ELC in an effort to provide a quality professional development for educators seeking a National CDA. The QUEST program is an in-house CDA credential prep program facilitated by ELC staff, which takes approximately 6 months to complete. Educators attend class twice a month, submit implementation plans in which they transfer skills from courses into the classroom. Program specifics include:

- 120 Hours of Targeted Instruction
- On-the-Job Training (OJT) via coaching and mentorship,
- Implementation Materials & Training Stipends

- Blended face-to-face (synchronous) or online (asynchronous) format
- Two age-appropriate tracks: Infant/Toddler or Preschool CDA endorsement.
- Technical support - certification processes
- Leveraging of TEACH dollars to cover all fees + \$1500 completion bonus

According to ELC staff,

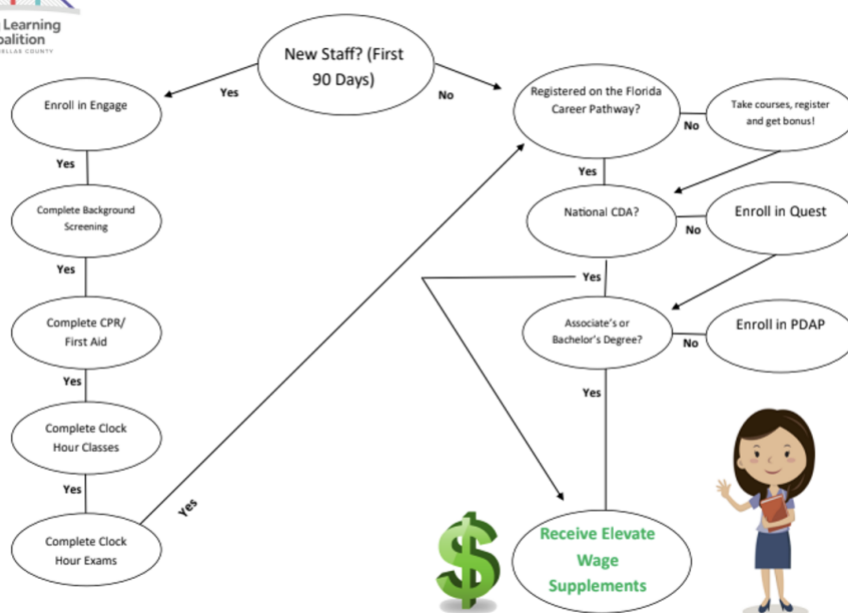
We created the Quest program as a complete national CDA program, recognized by the Council as a gold standard. If providers have some of the course work, we leverage what they already have. Educators who go through the program also get support towards the credential, and we know they are receiving quality learning in a supported environment (ELC staff).

Wage Supplements: The Elevate Program

The *Elevate* program was created "...To work with providers to invest in their staff. We require the provider to adopt a minimum compensation plan that has to be above minimum wage. In return, the Coalition provides semi-annual wage supplements that align with staff education levels" (ELC staff). Providers who are eligible include licensed child care centers, family child 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. According to ELC staff, "We are trying to change the pay structure of the field in our community. Our hope is to increase salary parity between private providers and public school teachers" (ELC staff).



Workforce Programs Flow Chart



Source: NAEYC PLI Workforce Presentation, ELC of Pinellas County, 2022

ELC Pinellas lessons learned from program implementation (from stakeholders):

- By far, the biggest challenge for ELC staff in program implementation was to convince directors to invest in their staff as a long term investment. Increasing wages and investing in professional learning requires tremendous effort, leadership skills and business and operational knowledge. ELC staff are currently evaluating providers within all these programs to determine effectiveness and sustainability.
- With Elevate, the ELC did not distinguish between lead or assistant teachers with pay scale, it was based purely on their credentials. With different expectations for these roles, the ELC is exploring differentiation of pay scales with these roles in upcoming program implementation.
- Data was critical with these programs to track credentials with CLASS scores, and understand levels of improvement. The ELC struggled with several data systems. Program coordinators currently match data manually, and that process "has no chance for scalability...it would be helpful to have this come from the state registry to determine "causation versus correlation" (ELC staff).
- The ELC also wants to improve all of these programs regarding the percentage of School Readiness children being served. "Our long term goal is to get these programs implemented all over Pinellas and serve the most educators and children" (ELC staff).

For more information on these programs, visit [ELC Pinellas Provider Programs](#).

Integrated Partnerships: Palm Beach Early Learning Coalition, Children's Services Council, and State College

As an example of local programs and systems working cohesively, The Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County, the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County, and Palm Beach State College have created partnerships that work in harmony towards workforce recruitment and pathway progression. According to a CSC staff member,

When we think about systems, we are all working together at the table, creating a mindset. We do not have collective impact opportunities in early learning. Health and wellness has this, but it's never the focus in EL. It's a competitive space, you have to have trust, safety, shared vision. We are working towards that. CSCs don't have the same limitations; we aren't implementing legislation. Like State, DCF, DEL, Palm Beach College, DCF training...we recognized there is a barrier of multiple places of access, and sharing of power, towards implementing what's best for the practitioner. We wanted to break down those barriers and have everyone at the table (CSC staff).

The Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach: ASPIRE program

The Aspire program was created post-COVID to improve recruitment and training in specific areas within Palm Beach County. This program hires parents who weren't previously working and thus couldn't qualify for child care subsidies from within the community where designated centers or family child care homes are struggling with staffing. According to an ELC staff member, "We saw an opportunity to provide two services at once" (ELC staff). This program provides incentives including:

- Providing child care for parents who become staff members at a subsidized rate
- Support for cost of initial background screening
- Support for completing the initial 45-hour child care training
- Support for the costs of the first month of employment
- Support for the completion of the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)
- Support and connection to resources to complete an Associates or Bachelors level degree in Early Childhood Training pipeline for individuals new to child care through accessing the SEEK scholarship from the CSC
- Professional development opportunities
- Technical assistance and coaching for new staff and the program

Educator Funding Towards a Pathway: SEEK Scholarships and the ACHIEVE Program

The Children's Services Council also provides SEEK scholarships for any teacher that is working in any early childhood program in Palm Beach County that receives some form of public funding, including but not limited to school readiness, VPK and Head Start (20 hours or more per week). In addition, those providers that are part of the QRIS are eligible for ACHIEVE, which is a salary supplement award program for practitioners employed at In-Network and promising sites that are part of the *Strong Minds Network*. ACHIEVE awards are intended to encourage practitioners' ongoing professional development and to reduce turnover at their current center by providing monetary awards for completion of specific college credit coursework and/or non-college credit Registry-approved training. The program is funded by Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County and administered by Palm Beach State College's (PBSC) Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education (IEECE). According to a CSC staff member,

We fund PB State College, Institute of Excellence, a cadre of trainers with micro credentialing, specifically around really learning, learning English, how to communicate lesson plans. That's the most successful piece (CSC staff).

An Informal Pathway: The Palm Beach College Institute of Excellence in Early Care and Education (IEECE) Micro Credential Programs.

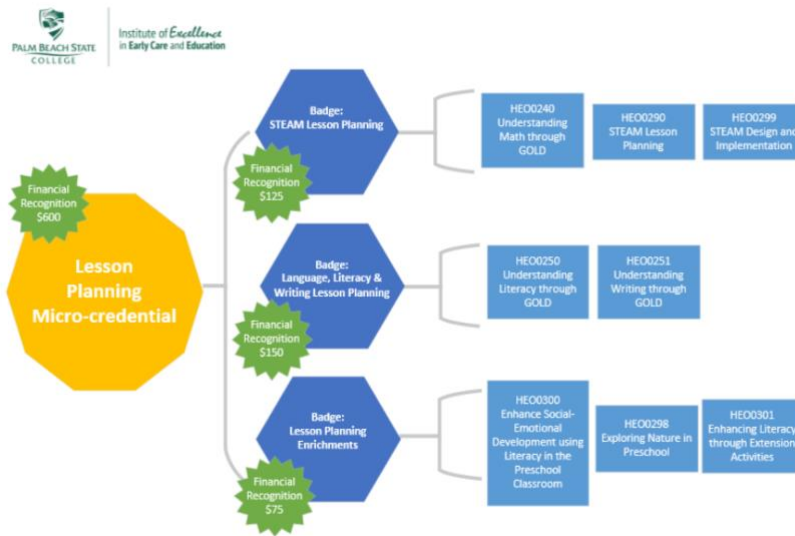
The IEECE's training program was created in 2021 and has been nationally and state recognized. According to IEECE staff, this program has been intentionally organized in pathways that differ from publicly certified educational achievement (i.e. teacher preparation courses). This micro credentialing system 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.

According to CSC and IEECE staff:

We did research on what the county needed. We realized we needed to create pathways, we interviewed directors and staff, we asked directors when they were hiring someone, what they were looking for, what they were needing in the classroom. What were the employability skills they were needing? We developed our pathways based on directors' feedback of needed soft skills: communication skills, time management skills, etc., and aligned them to the state competencies (IEECE staff, CSC staff).

Program components include:

- The teaching of overarching employability skills: (1) Communication, (2) Adaptability, (3) Teamwork, (4) Leadership, (5) Management, (6) Social, (7) Work Ethics, (8) Critical Thinking, (9) Teaching and Learning, (10) Managing Emotion, (11) Creating a Quality Classroom Environment, and (12) Supporting Wellness.
- Several ECE micro-credential options: (1) Awareness and Balance; (2) Creativity; (3) Equity; (4) English Language Acquisition for Adults; (5) Leadership (6) Reflection; (7) Lesson Planning; (8) Problem Solving; and (9) Developing Self-Regulation (Lesson Planning framework is shown below).
- Badges are awarded upon successful completion of trainings within a specific pathway; micro-credentials are awarded following the accumulation of badges and the completion of a portfolio associated with the specified micro-credential pathway.
- Badges and the micro-credentials that they lead to are stored in a student's personal digital backpack, within a national database, where students are able to demonstrate proficiency in select areas, no matter where life takes them (*Note: these courses are not currently recognized to stack towards a National CDA*).
- Digital badging system (BADGR) visually shows identified education pathways that move students forward to achieving proficiency in employability skills (IEECE Micro-Credential Handbook, 2021).
- Badges and micro-credentials provide an opportunity to recognize specific skills and knowledge that the early childhood professional has mastered, demonstrating credibility, and assists them in remaining current in the field by encouraging lifelong learning.



Source: IEECE Micro-credential Handbook, 2022.

According to IEECE staff,

I think with our teachers, a lot of them enjoy subsets of knowledge. The formal credit pathway doesn't always align with what they are doing. Theorists are hard to grasp. Trainings are chunked together. Add on to that knowledge. This program helps them come back. It provides a connection to the credit pathway, some want to continue a formal pathway but also provides an informal way to gain that knowledge and those employability skills. Teachers get stuck with Math and English. 60% of our teachers speak Spanish, and all of our credentials are available in Spanish or are Bilingual (IEECE staff).

According to IEECE staff, lessons learned from implementation include:

- When designing the micro-credential programs, creators felt the challenge of both trying to meet the needs of the community, while making sure educators and local providers didn't lose individuality. Program requirements tended to focus on schools that did well versus programs that were struggling on different fronts. Future implementation will focus more on educators and schools that have specific needs related to state requirements.
- Family child care homes need to be more included and incorporated in the micro-credential program. "We don't have as many family child care providers as we wanted to, and the curriculum has a pervasive center-based

mindset. Small homes need a different skill set and respond better to one on one support like coaching” (IEECE staff).

- For the English Language Acquisition Micro-Credential, program coordinators admit that while Spanish speaking providers have been thought of, there is an increase from a large Haitian population in Palm Beach, and Creole and other languages need to be incorporated on the pathway as a language alternative.

For more information, visit [Palm Beach State College IEECE Micro-credential Programs](#). For more information on the ELC of Palm Beach County, visit [ELC of Palm Beach Provider Supports](#). For more information on Palm Beach County’s Children’s Services Council programs, visit [Children's Services Council Palm Beach County Provider Programs](#).

Ensuring High Quality Care, Learning and Accessibility: The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe and The Children's Trust of Miami

Early learning programs need financial assistance to deliver high quality care (Thrive by 5, 2018). In the Miami area (and across the state of Florida), child care capacity (i.e., the number of providers and slots), exceeds the demand for services, which has resulted in an overly competitive market. This is particularly problematic in high poverty, high risk neighborhoods. Thus, to attract families, child care providers lower their payment rates to levels well below what is sufficient for providing basic care. Adding to the challenge of low payment rates, many providers are below capacity, meaning they are serving fewer children than needed to generate sufficient funding to meet quality standards (Florida Children's Council, 2018). In addition, low school-readiness payments, under enrollment due to oversaturated markets, and parents not demanding or understanding higher-quality programs act as major barriers (The Children's Trust, 2018).

In Florida, programs receive a quality payment differential on all children ages birth through 5 years old attending their program (including both subsidized School Readiness (SR) program and private pay children). The Florida Department of Education's Division of Early Learning uses rates for children receiving a SR subsidy (based on the implementation of Florida's House Bill 1091), and in Miami, The Children's Trust adds to the state rates to meet the total tiered payment rates allocated to Thrive by 5 early learning programs.

The Thrive by 5 Early Learning Quality Improvement System

The Thrive by 5 Early Learning Quality Improvement System (QIS) promotes children's school readiness through a continuum of support for early learning programs, educators and the children they serve. Thrive by 5 QIS is a voluntary program that aims to drive access to higher quality services for children living in high-poverty neighborhoods throughout Miami-Dade County. Thrive by 5 emphasizes the achievement of child outcomes through innovative and strategic investments.

Incorporating Quality Professional Learning, Experience, and Competency: The A\$CEND Program and Registry

A\$CEND is a salary supplement award program for early childhood educators employed at participating Thrive by 5 programs. A\$CEND awards are intended to increase retention, educator practice and compensation. The A\$CEND program rewards early childhood educators by collectively recognizing education, ongoing professional development, teacher-child interactions and longevity as demonstrated

pathways of competency in their roles. 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. All coursework/training and CEUs must be documented in the educator's Professional Development Registry record. Educators may be eligible for one or more components of the Scale at each award point (A\$CEND Manual, 2023-2024).

According to a Children's Trust staff member,

We are so excited to build out A\$CEND with our latest iteration of the scale. We moved away from our previous model for salary supplements that focused solely on formal education and designed our own pathway. There are so many barriers to higher ed for Miami-Dade educators, and they voiced through our Thrive by 5 Provider Advisory Committee that they wanted an informal pathway. What we have built are steps, CEUs, credentials that can get you there. We wanted a pathway leading to stackable credentials. We heard from many educators that the courses that people are taking are one-offs, not a clear path, and we also built into our Sunscale that's unique...trying to measure competency through use of CLASS. Individuals are getting CLASS scores, PD related to the CLASS framework, better teaching practices, and that's the missing link (CT staff).

Specific A\$CEND Program Components Include:

- Awards are available for all educators working in early learning programs participating in the Thrive by 5 Early Learning Quality Improvement System.
- A\$CEND participants are responsible to ensure that their Professional Development **Registry Record is current and accurate.**
- A\$CEND awards are paid via direct deposit **directly to the early childhood educator** within 90 days (pending each step within application is submitted correctly), and with at least six months between payments.
- **Eligible educators can be both center educators and family child care home educators/owners,** and must work with children ages birth-5 years, in an instructional capacity, for at least 20 hours per week during the previous six months. Eligible Positions include: Director, Assistant Director, Curriculum Specialist, Lead Teacher, Associate Teacher, Floater, Family Child Care Home Provider, and Large Family Child Care Home Employee.

A\$CEND Knowledge Training & Practice Scale				
Award Amount	Level	Knowledge/Training	EDUCATOR CLASS COMPOSITE SCORE	
\$750	11	Bachelor's degree in ECE and higher	Level	Award Amount
\$700	10	Associates degree in ECE with an additional 24 credit hours in ECE	CLASS I: 4.00—4.99 (Pre-K & Toddler) 4.5—5.59 (Infant)	\$500
\$650	9	Associates degree in ECE and higher	CLASS II: 5.00—5.99 (Pre-K & Toddler) 5.6—6.59 (Infant)	\$1,200
\$600	8	45 credits in ECE or Potential certificate/ badge option (TBD)	CLASS III: 6.00—7.00 (Pre-K & Toddler) 6.6—7.00 (Infant)	\$1,500
\$550	7	30 credits in ECE or Potential certificate/ badge option (TBD)	LONGEVITY	
\$500	6	15 credits in ECE or National CDA/FCCPC or Potential certificate/ badge option (TBD)		
\$450	5	9 credits in ECE or Advanced Director's credential or Potential certificate/ badge option (TBD)	Level	Award Amount
\$400	4	36 CEUs in ECE competency area	Longevity I 3-6 Years in ECE Field	\$250
\$350	3	3 credits in ECE or Director's Credential or 27 CEUs in ECE competency area	Longevity II 7-9 Years in ECE Field	\$500
\$300	2	18 CEUs in ECE competency area	Longevity III 10+ Years in ECE Field	\$750
\$250	1	9 CEUs in ECE competency area	*Longevity will be confirmed through information recorded in the educator's Professional Development Registry account	
\$200	Required	45 DCF hours and HS/GED (35 DCF hours for Family Childcare Home Providers)		

Source: Thrive by 5, A\$CEND Manual, 2023-2024

According to The Children's Trust and ELC staff,

We collectively envision that now educators can actually build their expertise, and see evidence of that, in badges and micro credentials. Our longer-term goal, over time, is that badges would feed into obtaining CDA, feed in to those 120 hours, open to broadening and more innovation (ELC, CT staff).

Based on recent evaluation research, here are some lessons learned from ELC and CT Staff:

- Training must be responsive to the needs of the beneficiary.
- Training must be provided at the most convenient times for educators. The ELCMDM provides training at no charge to early educators on most evenings and weekends.
- Language accessibility is a cornerstone of the ELCMDM approach to training. Benchmarks are set to guide the percentage of classes offered in Spanish

and data on enrollment and attendance is consistently reviewed to ensure the need of all users is being met.

- Training must be inclusive. Interpreters are available for events such as in-service days, educational meetings, and conferences to ensure full accessibility. With this, presentations and training sessions are available to both English and Spanish speakers.
- Collaboration and partnerships are essential to grow a responsive and comprehensive early learning professional development system. The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe released an RFP in January of 2024 as part of an effort to create a multi-use Learning Management System (LMS) that models and rivals existing state-based systems. In collaboration and partnership with The Children's Trust, the system will house learner records, track learner progress and ultimately link with multiple data systems to serve as a one-stop shop for early educators as they advance through professional pathways.

For more information about The Children's Trust, at <https://www.thechildrenstrust.org/content/thrive-5-0> For more information about the ELC Miami-Dade/Monroe, visit [ELC Miami-Dade/Monroe](#).

Desired Outcomes, Form and Function of a Redesigned Informal Pathway

While raising several issues around the design of an Informal Pathway, stakeholders also consistently identified their vision and desired outcomes for a pathway that was connected to competency, value, effectiveness, and usability. Many of these identified outcomes align with the five critical elements of an informal pathway identified in the Literature Review (Deliverable 3). Others serve to provide further direction and clarification on the literature. The ECPRG will use these ideal outcomes to inform the first draft of Florida's redesigned informal pathway to ensure the pathway is responsive to and supports Florida's early childhood workforce.

Stakeholder desired outcomes include:

- Provide clear, incremental steps for professionals to move from onboarding through credentials in ways that systematically build the competencies of the early childhood workforce.
- Outline expectations for center-based educators and leaders and family child care providers in an easily-readable graphic/visual so they can visualize, understand and complete credentials and other professional learning experiences.
- Systematically build knowledge and skills so professionals can effectively support the growth, development and learning of young children.
- Ensure professional learning opportunities are consistently of such quality and delivery that they build desired educator or leadership skills.
- Integrate requirements of key policy drivers - such as the focus on adult child interactions - so professionals build the skills the state has prioritized.
- Provide supports to facilitate the career advancement of early childhood professionals.
- Establish a stronger statewide framework *and* encourage local innovation beyond these expectations to meet unique needs.
- Integrate data at the state and local level to simplify paperwork requirements, more efficiently identify professional learning needs, and invest funding more effectively.
- Integrate the informal pathway into policy.

Initial recommendations for the Informal Pathway Statewide Advisory Committee to review and refine include:

1. **Develop a clear framework/visual** that shows the informal pathway and how to access professional learning that will help facilitate progress on the pathway.

The bullets below strengthen the existing structure but do not modify it significantly. It is important to note that Florida has many elements of a strong structure already, but has limitations that undermine their effectiveness, which we cover in the other recommendations. The informal pathway should include:

- a. *Onboarding* that provides a strong foundation for working with young children, makes opportunities to grow in the field both clear and exciting, and helps new professionals understand this field and how to access support.
- b. *Micro-credentials* with clear requirements and competency assessment on key topics (TBD) to help professionals develop targeted expertise. All micro-credentials should align to staff credential requirements so they can be stairsteps toward the staff credential. *Note: right now, Florida has an early literacy micro-credential. Requirements for micro-credentials overall as well as additional topics need to be developed for consistent implementation.*
- c. *Staff credentials* that are easy to understand and have a strong competency assessment to ensure professionals have equivalent skills regardless of credential completed.
- d. *Specializations* to develop deeper and more extensive expertise on critical topics; these can be a part of working toward a degree or outside of formal education.

2. **Ensure local innovation** can build on the foundation developed for statewide implementation. We want to facilitate an environment of innovation that can build from the statewide system to customize opportunities to meet local needs.

3. **Design logical progression** for professional learning so everything stacks into micro-credentials and staff credentials. There should be a logical progression for educator growth and for leadership growth.

4. **Dramatically reduce sporadic trainings** on random topics. The DEL should not fund professional learning that is not: 1) building specific competencies and 2) aligned to staff credential requirements and state core competencies.

5. **Promote continuous growth** as a strong value. All roles should be required to complete an annual professional development plan and update registry data.

6. **Clearly identify titles and requirements** for each role. A general frame includes:

- a. *Entry Teacher*: Onboarding (45 hours)

- b. *Teacher*: Increased annual PD (~30-40 hours/year) that meets quality requirements, all aligned to and leading to CDA/staff credential
- c. *Lead Teacher*: CDA/staff credential
- d. *Mentor Teacher*: CDA + coaching specialization OR AA/BA + coaching specialization

7. Develop stronger requirements for the professional development that is funded and that counts toward staff credentials and annual in-service requirements. Right now, the lack of quality control is really compromising the effectiveness of in-service and credentialing that was designed to ensure more prepared professionals are working with our children, particularly as lead and mentor teachers.

- a. All professional learning funded by DEL and ELCs should meet consistent quality standards and requirements that results in growth in skills and competency.
- b. All professionals should be required to create a Registry profile within a specific period of employment and update it annually. This data can be used for licensing visits, as well as help inform a more detailed picture of the workforce.
- c. Registry profiles should be designed to reflect all training and mark progress along the career pathway.
- d. Data systems should be integrated so Registry data can be used to monitor progress, evaluate effectiveness, and inform practice and policy decisions.

8. The new pathway and job titles/requirements should be embedded in policy and funding requirements so expectations are clear across all programs.

9. Clearly outline expectations through one website. A single source of truth should clearly outline clarity of expectations and supports available. Older websites should be discontinued. Local websites should reflect the same message as the state website, along with any additional local details so consistent messages are shared throughout the state. There needs to be clear standards, expectations, language, and definitions for each level.

Next Steps

The Literature Review and the Stakeholder Report together provide a clear set of ideas that will be reviewed in detail at the February Advisory Committee meeting.

At the February meeting the Advisory Committee will systematically:

- Review the results of the literature review
- Review the results 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

The ECPRG will then refine these recommendations as appropriate and work with an entity that specializes in cost modeling to ensure the recommendations are fiscally feasible. An additional round of focus groups will take place in March – April 2024 to get stakeholder input on the draft recommendations. These results will be brought back to the Advisory Committee at the end of April for their review and further refinement of the recommendations; additional cost modeling will be completed if needed. The final recommendations will be reviewed by the Advisory Committee in June and submitted to the DEL in August.

Glossary

***Career Pathway:** A progression of professional development and training which may include non-credit and credit coursework. Career Pathways address professional educator standards and competencies.

***Credential:** An official designation that identifies an individual's professional education status or educational qualifications or competencies in a specific field or subject area.

Educator: For the purpose of this report, educator refers to those professionals that work directly in ECE facilities delivering education, including teachers, directors, provider/owners, and coaches.

***Informal Career Pathway:** A sequence of professional development coursework or in-service trainings taken through the Registry or Registry approved training entity. Coursework and training in the informal career pathway does not lead to an academic degree from an accredited college or university.

***Micro-credential:** A short sequence of training or professional development that leads to mastery in a certain topic, subject or competency, and may stack onto other credentials.

Professional Development and Professional Learning: As stated in our Literature Review, professional development (PD) and professional learning (PL) are often used interchangeably when speaking about learning events for ECE educators. In this report, stakeholders often refer to "PD" to describe all learning events related to competency and skill attainment. However, in current ECE research, typically, professional development activities are often described as disjointed learning that don't align with goals, promote educator voice and agency, encourage learning in community, or respond effectively to teachers' needs. These are the "one-off" workshops or lunch-and-learns that educators commonly refer to. Professional learning requires a shift that will include moving from "delivering information" to intentionally co-designing, with educators, learning and growth opportunities that are grounded in the evidence about what is most needed and most effective.

Providers: For the purpose of this report, providers refer to both those entities that deliver ECE (e.g., ECE providers) as well as those organizations that deliver professional learning (e.g., professional learning providers).

***Specialization:** A sequence of coursework or training focused on specific topics such as infant-toddler, trauma informed care, inclusion, etc. Specializations can be formal or informal.

***Stackable Credential:** A credential that builds upon prior education or professional development to increase competencies for providers, teachers and directors.

**from FL 6M-4.735 Early Learning Professional Development Standards and Career Pathways*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

The purpose of the informal pathway project is to create an informal pathway and career advancement system that includes demonstrable competency-based, stackable content from onboarding to micro-credentials to credentials that can articulate into degrees or other formal pathways. With these clear pathways from credentials into college credits toward degrees, this project will develop recommendations so informal professional development experiences leading to these approved credentials are meaningful, build critical competencies, and contribute to stackable credentials and career advancement opportunities.

Part 1: Explanation of current EL pathway/system, definition of informal pathway

- What is the typical career trajectory for early learning teachers in FL?
- Where do you think most teachers get stuck on this pathway? Why?
- Tell us about some of the challenges you or teachers you know have experienced when trying to advance their career in this field.
- What motivates teachers to stay in this industry?
- Where are the bright spots in this process currently in FL?
- Is the order that's currently in place correct? How would you change it?

Part 2: Examining the mechanisms of Informal Career Pathway

Building skills and competencies: Professional learning and growth

- What kinds of learning activities/professional development have you found that help you most grow in skills, knowledge and competencies? What are teacher's favorites?
- What experiences/credentials do providers look for when hiring lead teachers?
- What experiences do teachers think they need to build to be competitive candidates?
- What is the state of Florida currently doing right about helping teachers build competencies and skills towards career advancement?
- A big part of engaging in professional learning is evaluating that learning to determine if teachers are building capacity. What is a good measure of skill level from a teacher's perspective?

- What measurements of quality do providers trust and use to understand teaching quality and areas for growth?

Providing incentives that motivate/compensate teachers

- What motivates you to improve your skills and teaching/learning practice?
- What are some ideas or good examples of ways to motivate teachers to work towards a credential? What examples from the field can you share?
- What are the best incentives for teachers to further their career in early learning? (provide list of possible incentives)

Creating tools, supports, and mechanisms to make this pathway easy, simple, valuable

- What kinds of tools and resources would most help teachers stay in the career pathway and advance?
- If you could build this pathway, what specific things would you most want included? (incentives, support, mechanisms, materials)

Appendix B: ECE Educator Survey Questions and Results

Florida's Informal Pathway Project Survey

Start of Block: Consent/Introduction

Florida's Informal Pathway Project Survey

The Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies at UF is leading a project for Florida's Division of Early Learning to design a new informal career pathway for early childhood teachers to support their professional learning and career advancement. We want to hear from YOU about what you most need to support your learning and career in the early learning field. This survey will ask for your insights and experiences related to early learning teaching, training and career advancement. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this survey which should take between 5 - 10 minutes. Your anonymous responses will be used to help provide valuable information, and guide future decisions towards this work.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time. If you agree to participate, please click the "I agree to participate" button below. If you do not wish to participate, please click the "I do not wish to participate" button below or exit the survey at this time.

If you have questions, please contact the Principal Investigator, Herman T. Knopf, at 352-273-4243, or the Institutional Review Board at 352-273-9600. If you would like a copy of this for your records, please contact Dr. Knopf at hknopf@ufl.edu.

☐ I agree to participate.

☐ I do not wish to participate.

Excellence in Early Childho... = I do not wish to participate.

End of Block: Consent/Introduction

Start of Block: Default Question Block

What is your current role? Please check the role that best applies to you.

Early learning classroom teacher

- ☐ Family child care provider
 - ☐ Early learning director
 - ☐ Early learning provider/owner
 - ☐ Early learning coach/technical assistant
 - ☐ Early Learning Coalition/Children Services Council Staff
 - ☐ Other early learning organization staff
-

How long have you been in your current role?

- ☐ Less than one year
 - ☐ 1-3 years
 - ☐ 4-6 years
 - ☐ 7-10 years
 - ☐ 10+ years
-

How long have you been in the field of early education?

☐ Less than one year

☐ 1-3 years

☐ 4-6 years

☐ 7-10 years

☐ 10+ years

Page Break

What motivates you to improve your skills and teaching/learning practice?

Please rank the following options from items that MOST motivate you (1) to items that LEAST motivate you (6) by dragging and dropping the answer choices.

- _____ Mandates- requirements from my program, employer, ELC or state agency
- _____ Wage increase
- _____ Job security and retention
- _____ I want to enhance my teaching skills
- _____ I want to reach a higher level of leadership
- _____ I want to be better at my job and responsibilities

Page Break

What kinds of learning activities/professional development have you found that help you most grow in skills, knowledge and competencies? **Please check all options that apply to you as a learner.**

- ☐ Coaching/technical assistance
- ☐ Mentoring
- ☐ Communities of Practice/Professional Learning Communities
- ☐ Online learning modules/courses
- ☐ In-person workshops or trainings
- ☐ Sequence of courses on a specific topic (stackable content)
- ☐ Observing other classrooms and teachers

Page Break

What kinds of incentives are most effective in encouraging your participation in career advancement opportunities?

Please rank the following options from MOST effective (1) to LEAST effective (8) by dragging and dropping the answer choices.

- _____ Increased wage/salary
- _____ One-time bonus
- _____ Repeated bonus (e.g., every six months)
- _____ Scholarship for professional development opportunities
- _____ Improved employer benefits (e.g., health insurance, vacation pay)
- _____ Paid time to engage in learning opportunities
- _____ Access to additional learning opportunities
- _____ Learning opportunities that count toward college credit

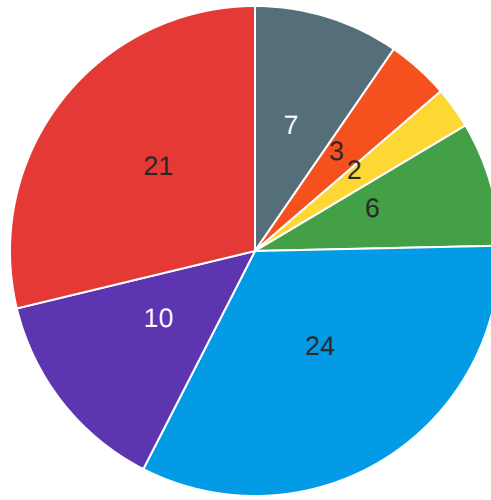
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What else would you like to tell us about the creation of a new informal career pathway, professional learning and/or career advancement that can help inform this process?

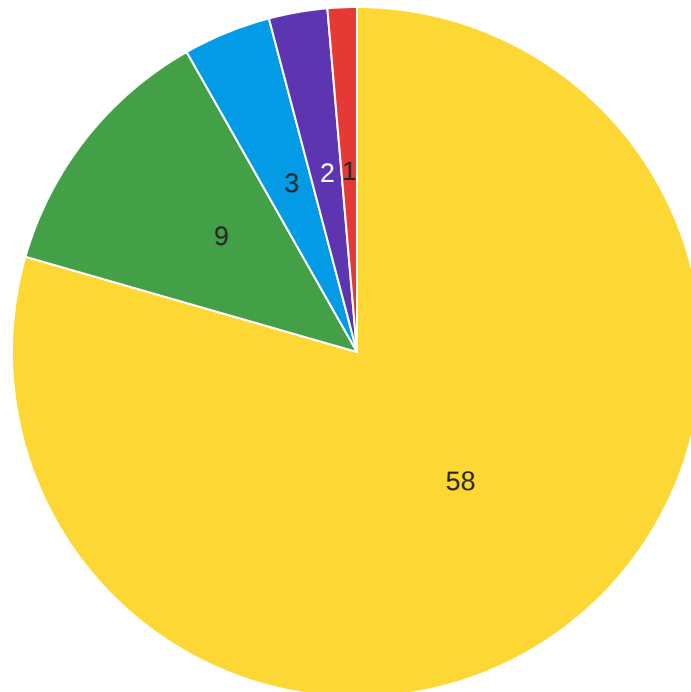
End of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 - What is your current role? Please check the role that best applies to you.



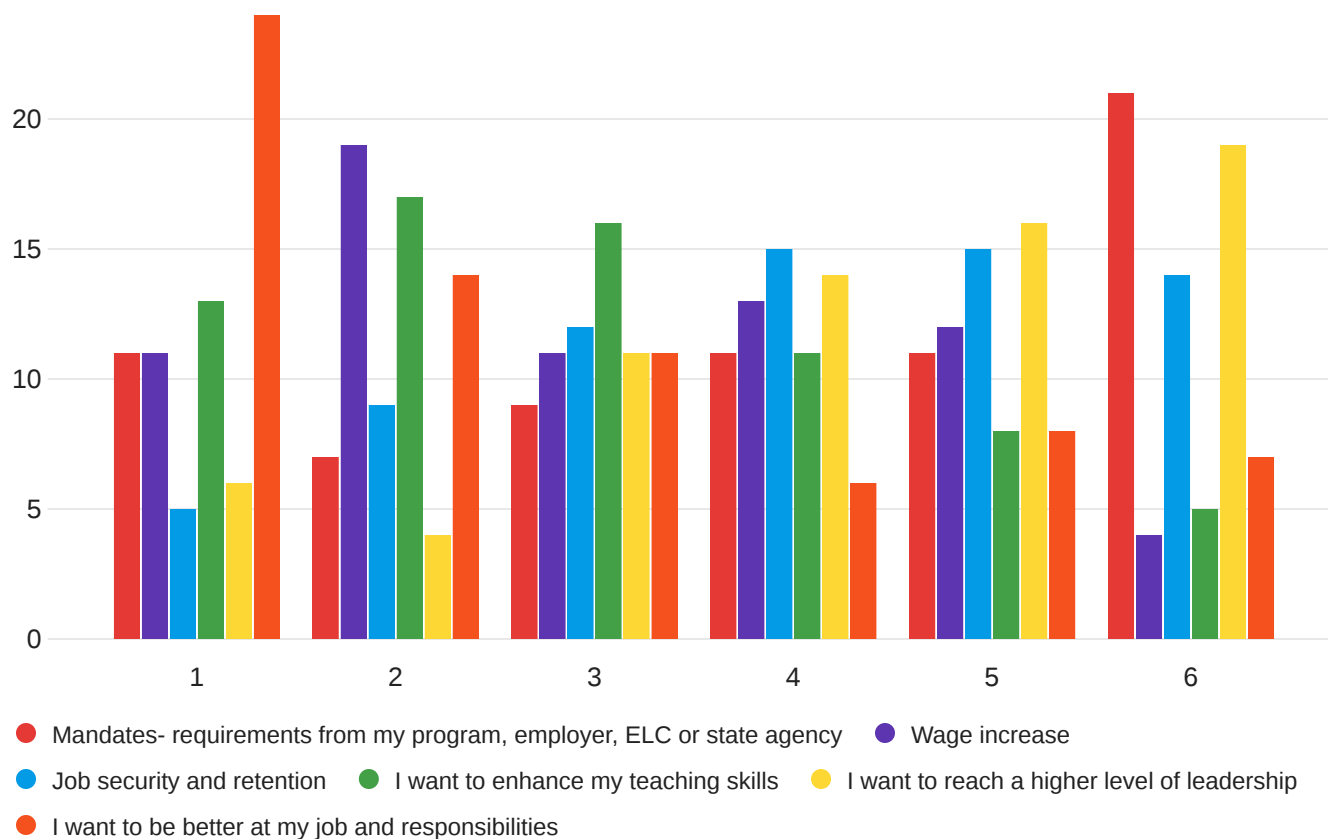
Other early learning organization staff Early Learning Coalition/Children Services Council Staff
Early learning coach/technical assistant Early learning provider/owner Early learning director
Family child care provider Early learning classroom teacher

Q3 - How long have you been in the field of early education?

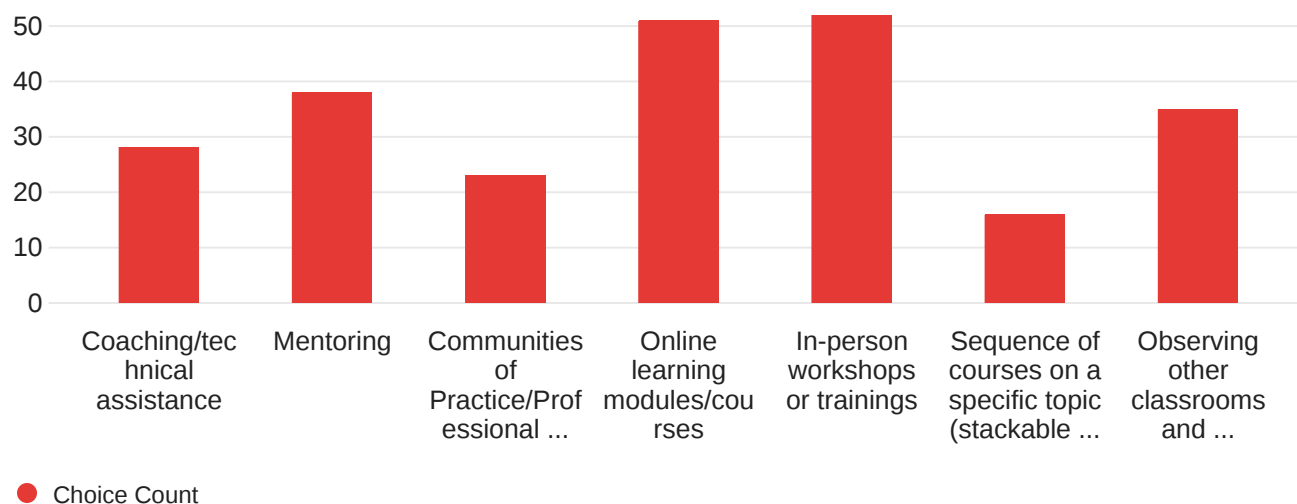


10+ years 7-10 years 4-6 years 1-3 years Less than one year

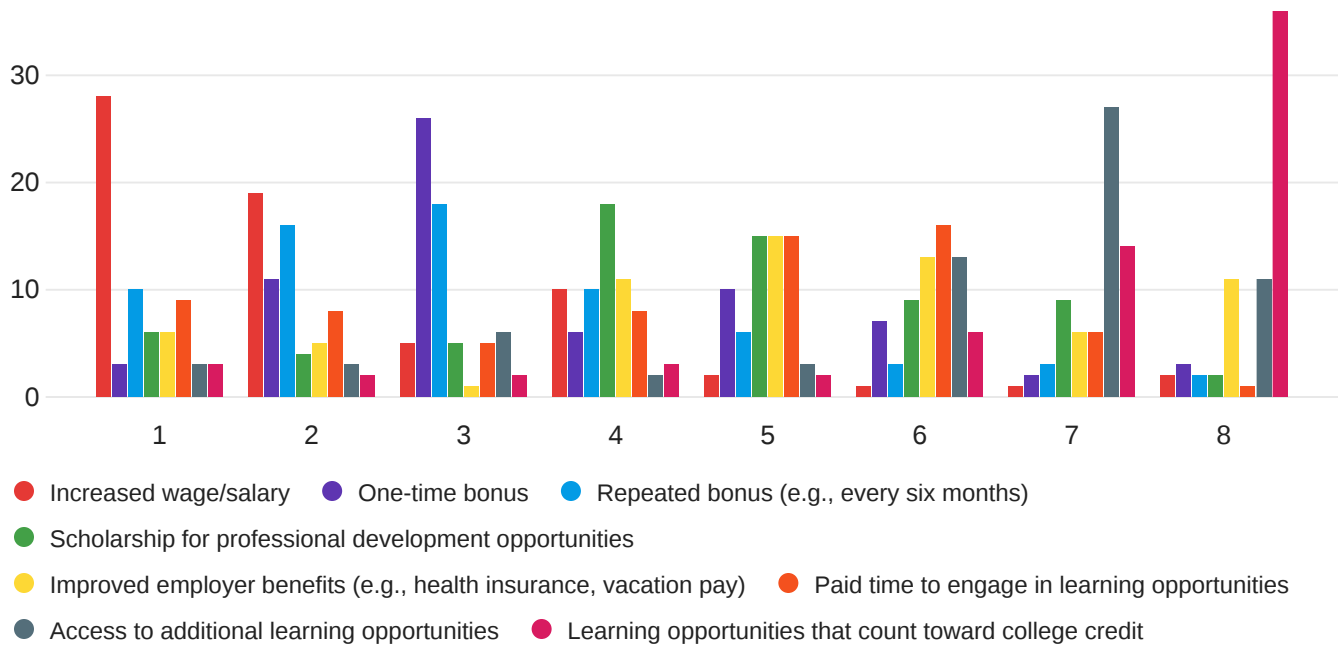
Q4 - What motivates you to improve your skills and teaching/learning practice?...



Q5 - What kinds of learning activities/professional development have you found that help you most grow in skills, knowledge and competencies? Please check all options that apply to you as a learner.



Q6 - What kinds of incentives are most effective in encouraging your participati...



Appendix C: Sample Interview Protocols

Interview Introduction

The purpose of the informal pathway project is to create an informal pathway and career advancement system that includes demonstrable competency-based, stackable content from onboarding to micro-credentials to credentials that can articulate into degrees or other formal pathways. With these clear pathways from credentials into college credits toward degrees, this project will develop recommendations so informal professional development experiences leading to these approved credentials are meaningful, build critical competencies, and contribute to stackable credentials and career advancement opportunities.

Our goals for this project are the following:

- Design an informal pathway and career advancement system that includes demonstrable competency-based, stackable content from onboarding to micro-credentials to credentials that can articulate into degrees or other formal pathways; and
- Synthesize effective practices from local informal pathways and career advancement systems across Florida and incorporate relevant effective practices from other states to inform this process.

Based on these goals, we would like to ask you some questions to inform the creation of Florida's informal career pathway, and understand your perspective and experiences related to Florida's ECE workforce, current career pathways and advancement, critical teacher competencies for producing positive child outcomes, professional development and learning opportunities, and your vision of best possible outcomes for this work.

Beginning Questions for All:

- Tell me about your current role in relation to this project.
- When designing an informal pathway, what outcomes should be our goal? (e.g., expedited teacher prep, wages, lower turnover, support in hiring practices)

Questions for Experts in Teacher Competencies:

- Thinking of the most successful/impactful teachers you know, what skills do they share? What has made them such great educators?
- What do you consider to be core teacher competencies that lead to positive child outcomes?
- What professional development, education, and experience do you feel helps to build these competencies?

- In your experience, what has motivated your teachers to improve their skills and teaching practices?

Questions for Experts in Systems:

- We have attempted to create informal pathways in the past. What do you believe have been some of their successes? What are some of their shortcomings?
- What ingredients do you think an informal career pathway needs to be successful and create immediate impact with ECE teachers and directors?
- Are there organizations who are piloting innovative ideas to support and improve the workforce? Tell me about them.
- Has there been high participation in these programs? If yes or if no, why do you think that is?
- What ingredients were key to the success of these programs?

Questions for Experts in Other ECE systems:

- Our field has been attempting to improve teacher professional development and career progress for years. What do you believe are some of the main pitfalls of our previous attempts?
- If you were creating this informal learning pathway, what would be your top priority for teachers? For program administrators?
- What specific areas/subjects of research do you think should inform this project?
- We are looking to create a hot list of successes/locations in ECE workforce growth/retention nationally, what examples do you think we should include?

Appendix D: Florida Informal Career Pathway Advisory Board Members

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
Rachel Spector	The Children's Trust (<i>Miami</i>)	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