

## Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative

### Examining and Supporting Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field

Between 2012 and 2022 there is a projected 30 percent increase in job openings for early educators (USDOL, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). That means 184,100 job openings for qualified child care teachers and 76,400 for preschool teachers. But who will fill these critical roles?

Spearheaded by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, the Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative examines the current state of career pathways systems in the early childhood education (ECE) field. Career pathways, defined as comprehensive education and training systems that provide a sequence of coursework and credentials aligned with employer and industry needs, offer a much-needed solution to fostering the educational and workforce training needs of adult learners while meeting national and regional workforce demands.

The *Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Examining and Supporting Credentialing in the the Early Care and Education Field* report describes the Six Key Elements of Career Pathways (CP) Framework which outlines the foundational components in building a career pathway system: Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles; Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers; Design Education and Training Programs; Identify Funding Needs and Sources; Align Policies and Programs; and, Measure System Change and Performance. These six elements were then cross-referenced with two leading frameworks in use in the early learning sector: the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and the National Association for the Education of Young People (NAEYC) Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems.

The report provides a national landscape of states' requirements for ECE staff related to credentialing, as credentials are a foundational component of a successful career pathway. The data gathered from the states were organized into two categories: (1) early learning standards and systems support and (2) workforce competencies and early learning staff degree and training requirements. In short, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have many foundational pieces in place that can build upon and further develop career pathways in the early learning sector, despite an evolving and complex system that is unique to each state.

### State of the States – Credentialing in the ECE Field

The report notes, “Given the widespread use of state early learning standards, QRIS and registries, states appear to be primed for developing robust early learning career pathway systems.”

- All 50 states, the District of Columbia (DC), and Puerto Rico have early learning standards and guidelines in place for at least some part of the birth through age five continuum.
- The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) provides a common lens for comparing early learning programs within a state. Of the 50 states, including DC, and Puerto Rico, 98 percent have a QRIS in some stage of development.

- The vast majority of states have implemented registries of child care providers.
- Nearly half of the states offer T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood programs, an initiative that provides assistance and support services to individuals in the ECE workforce who are completing coursework leading to credentials, degrees, and teacher licensure.
- 94 percent of states have ECE workforce core knowledge and competencies in place.
- 39 percent of the 50 states exceed the minimum requirements of a high school diploma or equivalent credential and a specific infant/toddler credential or certificate for staff working with infants and toddlers in publicly-funded programs.

## A Guide for State Leadership and Stakeholders

The report offers those in the early learning sector a better understanding of the models and progress being made in the development of early learning career pathways. In addition, it offers 14 recommendations illuminated with state examples and appendices with extensive resources. The full report can be read [here](#).

The Early Learning Career Pathways Report is part of the Moving Pathways Forward Initiative. [Moving Pathways Forward: Supporting Career Pathways Integration Project](#). The three-year effort supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education assists states in advancing career pathways systems to transition low-skilled adults to postsecondary education and employment. By building upon the successes and lessons learned from earlier federal and state investments in career pathways, the project seeks to further integrate adult education into career pathways system development at the state and local levels.

The second report, to be released in summer 2016, will focus on issues of access to jobs and advancement in the ECE field.

## A Snapshot of Five States

The report details the work of five states – California, Connecticut, New Mexico, North Carolina, and West Virginia – to show how certain aspects of their existing credentialing systems could be used to support career pathways efforts. Researchers specifically examined state efforts through the lens of the career pathways framework element, Design Education and Training Programs. This included a close look at target populations and their points of entry, systems and services offered, the review or development of competency models, the development of career ladders, and whether or not the programs lead to industry recognized and/or post secondary credentials. These states offer a variety of examples of infrastructure at varying stages of development that speak to the diversity of other states' efforts and much can be learned from their work.