

# The Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Strengthening the ECE Workforce Through Career Pathways

Findings from two reports that examine the current state of credentialing, training, advancement, and access to jobs in the early care and education field

## THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE



Providing positive development and educational experiences delivered by high quality educators for children under the age of five has spurred a national dialogue on the pivotal role of the early care and education (ECE) sector and the professionals working with our country's youngest learners.

There are nearly  
**20 million children**  
under the age of five, nationally.<sup>1</sup>

A growing body of research supports that high-quality educators are imperative for the development of young children, particularly those between the ages of birth to three.<sup>2</sup> While there is increasing consensus regarding the competencies needed for ECE professionals, a large disparity exists between the policies set for minimum qualifications; wages earned; and supports available among professional roles and settings in the ECE field.

In 2012, the National Survey of Early Care and Education confirmed that the ECE workforce was comprised of approximately:

**3.8 million**  
home-based  
providers

**1 million**  
center-based  
teachers

Currently, a host of contributing factors greatly impact the growth and sustainability of a strong and qualified ECE workforce:

- insufficient staffing
- high levels of attrition
- poor compensation
- inadequate access to high quality and connected professional development and training
- limited career advancement opportunities
- inaccessible and/or unaffordable higher education degree programs

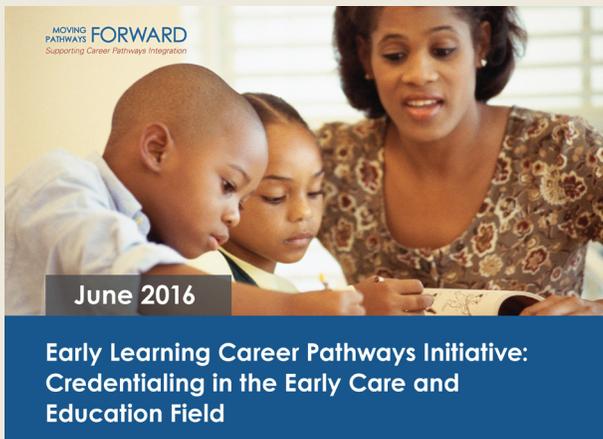
Strengthening the workforce will require systemic changes to provide the social and workforce supports needed for ECE professionals to overcome these challenges. Comprehensive career pathways systems and programs are a broad strategy to meet the educational and training needs of the ECE workforce.

**ECE POSITIONS OPEN DUE TO  
GROWTH AND REPLACEMENT,  
2014-2024<sup>3</sup>**

**600,000**

Career pathways offer a clear sequence or pathway of education and training requirements that align with employer competencies and provide comprehensive support services to assist people in acquiring those skills.

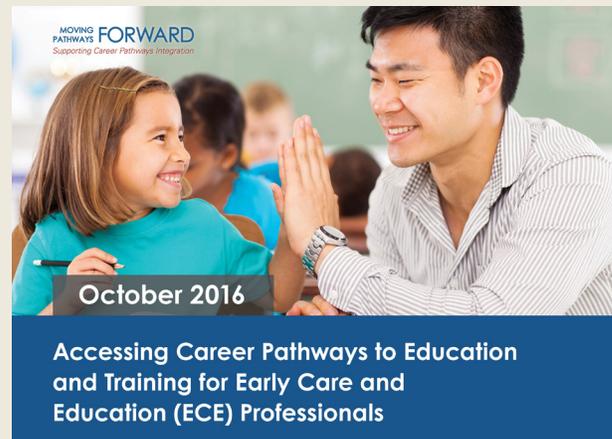
Spearheaded by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, the Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative examined the current state of career pathways in the ECE field. Two reports were produced to support state and program staff in developing and expanding the implementation of ECE career pathways systems and programs.



The [Early Learning Career Pathways Initiative: Credentialing in the Early Care and Education Field](#) report introduces potential intersections between the federally recognized elements of an effective career pathways system<sup>4</sup> and ECE frameworks used in the field to include the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems. Credential requirements were examined for all 50 states to draw a national landscape of the minimum qualifications currently required for the ECE workforce.

### Features to Explore:

- **Guiding questions** for state and program staff to use to reflect on their individual progress towards developing and bolstering the key elements of their pathways systems and programs.
- Extensive **resources** on ECE career pathways systems and supports to include **workforce competencies, program standards, and staff requirements.**



The [Accessing Career Pathways to Education and Training for Early Care and Education Professionals](#) report explores the major challenges experienced by ECE professionals, particularly those who have barriers to accessing education and advancement opportunities. Strategies and highlights of promising practices are showcased, exemplifying effective ways to use career pathways to support the current and evolving landscape of the ECE sector.

### Features to Explore:

- **Profiles of career pathways approaches and strategies** at the federal, state, and program levels that provide examples of promising practices that can be applied in serving the ECE workforce.
- Federal resources that can assist states and programs in developing and implementing career pathways systems.

## The reports highlight:

- Alignments between the leading career pathway systems framework and current efforts in state ECE systems;
- Examples of promising practices and strategies for career pathways implementation efforts that can support the evolving landscape of the ECE sector and its most disadvantaged professionals; and
- An examination of the ECE credential requirements for all states, to draw a national landscape of state ECE systems and gauge readiness for developing career pathways.

# EXAMINING MAJOR OBSTACLES FOR ADVANCING ECE EDUCATORS



The [Credentialed in the Early Care and Education Field](#) report provides data supporting that the majority of U.S. states have created minimum diploma or degree and certificate/licensure requirements. However, as these requirements evolve, potential challenges emerge for the workforce, particularly for those that face significant barriers to accessing employment and family-sustaining wages. While there are many contributing factors that can impact the advancement of ECE professionals, the [Accessing Career Pathways to Education and Training for ECE Professionals](#) report dives deeper into the challenges facing the ECE workforce, specifically examining three key issues:

- Disparate educational attainment and opportunities
- Available social services and financial supports
- Resources for those with limited English proficiency

Comprehensive supports for ECE professionals to access education, training, and sustainable wages are critical, particularly for low-skilled adults, ELLS, and other disadvantaged populations that comprise a significant portion of the ECE workforce. Low wages are a fundamental challenge to the workforce, exacerbating the issues highlighted and creating insurmountable barriers for those most in need of support to advance in the field.

Approximately **46%** of ECE professionals participate in a public support program.<sup>5</sup>

Wages for childcare professionals are far below the median hourly wage for all occupations (\$17.40) and even further below other teaching positions, such as kindergarten teachers (\$24.83) and elementary teachers (\$26.39).<sup>6</sup>

**\$11.56**

Poverty for a family of four

**\$9.77**

Avg. hourly salary, childcare workers (in all settings)

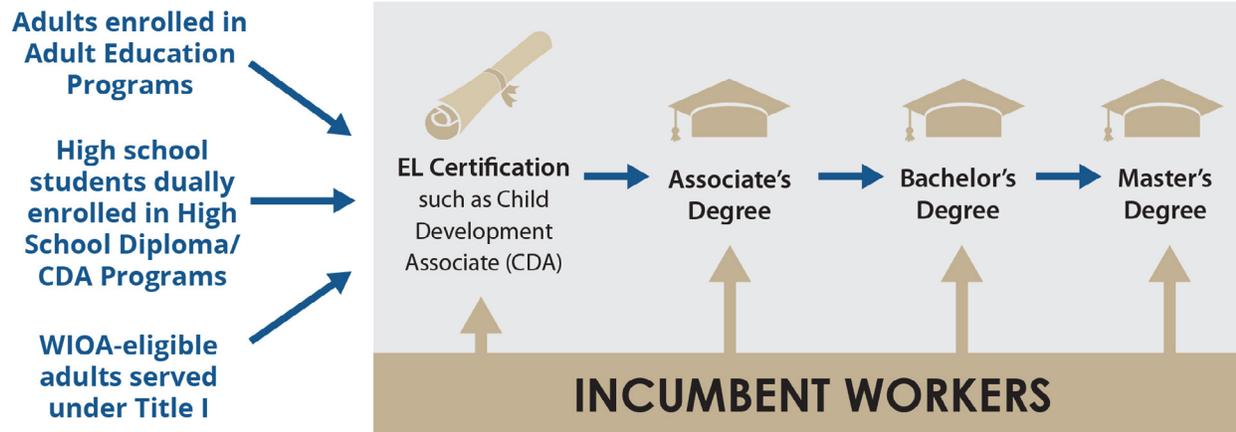
# THE POTENTIAL OF CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE ECE FIELD



Career pathways programs offer a solution to fostering the educational and workforce training necessary to meet the demands of the ECE field. These programs typically offer multiple entry and

exit points, allow for flexibility, and are effective in “upskilling” individuals with significant barriers to employment, improving their career outcomes.

## Upskilling the Early Learning (EL) Workforce Through Career Pathways



Note: A HSE equivalency is required for a CDA (except in dual enrollment program).

The [Credentiaing in the Early Care and Education Field](#) report examines the Six Key Elements of Career Pathways Framework, which outlines the foundational components in building an effective career pathway system.<sup>7</sup>

### The Six Key Elements of an Effective Career Pathway System

1. Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
2. Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers
3. Design Education and Training Programs
4. Identify Funding Needs and Sources
5. Align Policies and Programs
6. Measure System Change and Performance

The [Accessing Career Pathways to Education and Training for ECE Professionals report](#) explores specific strategies that should be considered in creating pathways to support the ECE workforce, including:

- the provision of financial supports and paid release time;
- comprehensive support services;
- technology to increase access;
- accelerated and blended programs;
- stackable and portable credentials; and
- on-the-job training through apprenticeships.

Each strategy is illuminated with examples of current career pathways efforts underway in ECE field.

# RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FIELD



A holistic approach must be taken to further elevate and sustain a high-quality ECE workforce that can meet the challenge of educating our nation's youngest learners. Career pathways is an effective strategy for creating opportunities for ECE professionals and strengthening the pipeline of a qualified workforce, but the field must better align compensation, training, and advancement opportunities to create the foundation necessary for successful career pathway systems.

## A snapshot of suggested recommendations:

- Ensure that the education and training credential requirements are included in state standards and are widely available within the state.
- Develop linkages between the ECE workforce, postsecondary institutions, ongoing professional learning institutions, and employers.
- Ensure that comprehensive data collection systems are in place to collect information on the ECE workforce system.
- Create career pathways with comprehensive support services and multiple entry and exit points.
- Expand stackable, portable credentials, and credit transfer.
- Ensure that all training and professional learning is high quality and integrated with a career pathway to support career advancement.
- Increase wages and education incentives.

## End Notes

1 "Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for the United States."

2 Institute of Medicine, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*.

3 "Employment Projections." Bureau of Labor Statistics.

4 "[Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development](#)," U.S. Department of Labor, 2015.

5 Whitebook, McLean, and Austin, "[Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016](#)."

6 Ibid.

7 "[Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development](#)," U.S. Department of Labor, 2015.