



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: HIGHER EDUCATION AND PRESERVICE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council's (NRC) 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Eight*, offers recommendations to build a high quality early childhood workforce with the preparation, knowledge, and skills to promote children's development and learning in the early years. One of the recommendations in this report is to develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8. This brief summarizes the report's what the report says about higher education and preservice professional preparation and ways to support this recommendation.

## **OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PRESERVICE PREPARATION**

The report focuses on higher education institutions that offer coursework that can lead to bachelor degrees in early childhood education and state teacher licensure. While teachers often pursue licensure before entering practice in K-12 environments, early childhood teachers and caregivers tend to seek degrees, licensure, or certification after they have entered the field. Requiring certification or licensure prior to teaching is one area where teachers of children younger than kindergarten in community-based programs differ from teachers of older children.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.

(IOM & NRC, 2015)

- Teachers working in kindergarten to third grade (and some teachers in public school prekindergarten) typically receive a preservice education from a four-year degree-granting institution. These programs include coursework and student teaching experiences. Degree programs are often followed by a period of induction and mentoring for new teachers. However, teacher licensure requirements and degree-granting programs lack standardization and consistency of quality from state to state and institution to institution.
- States set the standards for preservice training and professional development of educators in early care and education programs. Some states do not require any postsecondary education aside from the professional preparation and licensure, making the educational and professional standards for this part of the workforce even more inconsistent than those for teachers in K-12, state-funded prekindergarten, and Head Start. Since 2007, the Head Start Act requires at least fifty percent of the teachers nationwide to hold a BA degree, and by 2016, seventy-three percent achieved that benchmark.
- Because the standards for community-based teachers are low, many of these early educators do not receive preservice professional education before they work with children. Instead, they pursue training and higher levels of professional education while working in the field. Often these teachers receive training unconnected to a degree or credential.

As the report points out, these two approaches to preservice preparation are rooted in historical traditions that artificially distinguished child care from education. As a result, preparation of teachers of young children and teachers of children in elementary school (including kindergarten to third grade) have been kept separate with only minor

integration. Preparation for kindergarten teachers has begun to be included in elementary teacher preparation, with less coursework addressing the developmental needs of younger children. Teachers' training has historically had differing aims—early education professionals learn broadly about child development, while elementary education professional preparation focuses on academic content areas. Finally, the educational expectations and professional prestige of teachers in early care and education programs and in elementary schools differ in the history of the field. Historically “nursery school teachers” were expected to hold degrees and viewed as professionals. Over time, expectations for preschool teachers decreased while expectations for teachers in public schools increased. The report demonstrates that the science of child development and learning in the early years requires teachers, regardless of setting, to have the sophisticated and specialized knowledge and competencies to support each child’s optimal readiness for school and life success.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Higher education institutions and programs that prepare educators vary greatly in a number of ways. The report highlights several key areas where high education programs are different.

## **INSTITUTIONAL FRAGMENTATION**

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Many early childhood degree programs serve specific purposes. For instance, preparing educators to meet teacher licensure requirements, offering degrees for professionals who work in settings that don't require teacher licensure, or to prepare professionals for other roles like home visitors or family service workers. In general, programs that prepare elementary school teachers have some commonalities. Every state has 4-year universities with the mission to prepare teachers, offers alternative preparation pathways for these teachers, and include teacher preparation programs with some clinical or student teaching experience. For professionals getting ready for teaching positions in early care and education settings, the majority of programs focused on early childhood education lie in 2-year institutions, though relevant degree programs can be found in

**Recommendation 5: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals.**

(IOM & NRC, 2015)

4-year institutions. Some institutions have different programs for preparing teachers, in different academic departments, based on the role, setting, or age of the children.

### **Content of coursework**

The goal of coursework is to offer educators the knowledge and competencies they will need to provide high quality practice. However, unless those programs have aligned degree content with national early childhood professional preparation standards, not all institutions agree on what these areas of knowledge and competence are. As a result, the content of coursework varies across degree programs. Elementary school teachers typically have coursework that aligns with state teacher licensure requirements, although they still vary in content. Early educators' coursework includes even greater inconsistency in subject matter. In addition, because teachers enter the field with a wide range of educational backgrounds, it is difficult to ensure uniformity in their educational preparation.

Formal coursework for teachers can fall into three broad categories—foundational theories of development and learning, subject matter content, and methods of teaching and pedagogy. While curricula may include some courses in these areas, they do not do so universally or deeply. For example, courses on the science of early development are important, but they may only be offered at a general level. Likewise, few courses connect child development to effective and developmentally appropriate teaching practice, address the needs of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or focus on infant toddler development and teaching practices.

### **Field-based learning experience**

Field-based experience, including student teaching and practica, is generally required for teachers. In 38 states, these experiences are required for public elementary school teachers. They are common in early educator preparation programs, with 96% of

2-year and 4-year programs requiring classroom experience. Yet, there are few standards for the content, setting, duration, and supervision in these experiences. As a result, programs focus on meeting the required number of hours, rather than on the quality of the training experience. Although most acknowledge the importance of field experiences for preparing teachers, these experiences vary greatly. Few student teachers learn from effective teachers while they complete coursework. Better experiences allow students to work in groups, observe ongoing instruction, and work to engage families. It's challenging to provide such experiences with limited high quality placements and increasing numbers of students who have already entered the workforce.

### **Faculty characteristics**

Preparation program quality is a reflection of its faculty. However, there have been concerns about the composition of early childhood education faculty, particularly at programs that prepare early



educators. One challenge early childhood preparation programs face is an insufficient number of faculty, particularly in small programs or institutions. This often limits the breadth and depth of academic preparation students receive. Many early education preparation programs also rely on part-time faculty. This can increase inconsistency across courses within a program and also limits faculty office hours. The required background and training for faculty teaching early educators varies greatly. Often a faculty member's background does not focus on early childhood content and pedagogy. Varying expectations for faculty qualifications and inconsistencies in their expertise and experience may lead to variations in program quality.

### Diversity of faculty and students

Faculty in teacher preparation programs also tend to be less racially and ethnically diverse than the students they teach or the children those students see in the field. This is because diversity of children in public school and in early education programs has dramatically increased. Teachers in early care and education settings also tend to be more diverse than teachers in elementary schools. However, this diversity among early educators is not reflected in the role of lead teacher. Recruiting and preparing a diverse teacher workforce continues to be a challenge.

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### Access to higher education

Early childhood teachers and caregivers who receive their degree while in the field need to have access to higher education programs to do so. Cost, duration, flexibility, and geographic availability are all barriers that influence educators access to degrees. Some programs such as the Pell grants and Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®) scholarships can help increase access.

### Relationship between 2- and 4-year institutions

Many educators receive 2-year degrees or certificates at community colleges. Some community colleges offer baccalaureate programs. In other cases, students attend 2-year institutions and then transfer to 4-year school to complete a bachelor's degree. This transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions is often controlled by an articulation agreement, a formal agreement between the two institutions. This agreement provides for continuity in preparation programs at 2-year and 4-year institutions and may include joint-admissions programs. However, without articulation agreements between institutions, educators are often do not receive credit for coursework in a 2-year degree program and must spend additional time and money to repeat coursework in a 4-year program.



## ALTERNATIVE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Alternative teaching programs provide education, support, and mentoring for teachers who do not have education degrees. These programs arose as one means of meeting severe teacher shortages in K-12. The most common of these, Teach for America, launched an early childhood education initiative in 2006—placing teachers in prekindergarten classrooms. The U.S. Department of Education identified several elements of effective alternative teaching programs, including quality recruitment processes, flexible programs to meet the need of applicants, and supervision on the job—mentoring and support, for example.

## GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Governance and oversight for high education programs typically comes from state agencies, state teacher licensing requirements, higher education funding sources, and accrediting bodies. Such accrediting bodies include the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), now the Council for the Accreditation or Educator Preparation (CAEP), which sets expectations for admissions and training, including a focus on

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the science of child development. States work to connect their teacher licensure requirements with these expectations to ensure the best prepared teachers enter the public school workforce.

Accrediting bodies, including the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Interim Standards, Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), and the NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) present expectations for

preparation programs and the resources and content they provide. In 2016 CAEP accreditation standards were fully implemented; NCATE and TEACH legacy standards are no longer used for accreditation. These expectations include a clear, logical course progression and the combination of coursework and practicum experience. Field experiences require close supervision of students while they apply their coursework to practice. These bodies also call for high quality, effective faculty, that includes mentors with experience and degrees in the education field. However, these standards and the incentives for institutions to follow them need to be stronger to make sure educators are well prepared.

## CONCLUSION

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council's (NRC) report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Eight* lays out expectations for what teachers of young children should know and be able to do to effectively support all children's learning and development. These expectations are based upon a wealth of research on preservice teacher preparation. This brief provides only a summary of chapter 9 of the report. Readers are encouraged to continue learning from this chapter in full.

## REFERENCE

Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). 2015. *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2015/Birth-To-Eight.aspx>.

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