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Contact: Barbara McKenna, 202-798-5595, bmckenna@learningpolicyinstitute.org

New Research Provides a Framework and Best Practices to Help Policymakers and Administrators Develop a Strong Early Childhood Workforce

Two studies create a through line from children to practitioners to policy, describing the essential skills required for young children to be kindergarten ready, the skills educators need to teach them, and effective policies and practices for early educator preparation.

[Preparing a Diverse, High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce: Promising Models](#)
[Early Childhood Essentials: A Framework for Aligning Child Skills and Educator Competencies](#)

Access to high-quality early childhood education is critical to children’s development and readiness for kindergarten, and this, in turn, requires a highly prepared and stable early childhood workforce. Yet, expectations for early childhood teachers are typically low, preparation quality varies greatly across the nation, and educators often struggle to attain credentials and degrees in a timely manner. Currently, there is insufficient focus on what’s being done well and how those practices can be replicated to strengthen the workforce pipeline.

Two new studies from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) help policymakers and practitioners understand what is needed to develop a diverse, high-quality early childhood workforce. The first provides a framework for thinking about the skills and competencies educators need to support young children. The second describes innovative and affordable higher education pathways that help educators build these competencies and suggests recommendations for policy.

To address the essential skills that children need to learn early in life and the core competencies educators must master to teach and care for them well LPI produced [Early Childhood Essentials: A Framework for Aligning Child Skills and Educator Competencies](#). The framework provides a baseline of knowledge to help decision-makers think critically about how to improve the early learning programs they oversee. It lays out the interrelated, essential skills children need to develop early in life to succeed in school—cognitive, social-emotional, physical, language and literacy, and mathematical and scientific reasoning—and the associated essential competencies and foundational conditions within and surrounding the classroom that early educators should have to help children develop these skills successfully.

[*Promising Models for Preparing a Diverse, High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce*](#) shines the spotlight on three model programs that recruit and prepare educators to teach in programs serving children birth to age 5 in California—a state that is actively considering investments to further develop its ECE workforce. Each offers its own distinct approach to preparing racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse cohorts of current and aspiring educators. But they all make preparation affordable and accessible for diverse students, offer foundational knowledge in child development, and provide sustained, mentored classroom experience. Early childhood educators graduate from these programs well-prepared to create engaging, inclusive, and developmentally grounded learning environments and effectively reach and teach diverse learners. The programs are:

- The Family Child Care Apprenticeship: An innovative pilot project designed to increase the qualifications of family childcare providers through coursework paired with on-the-job training and support.
- Skyline College’s Education/Child Development Program: A community college-based program with a focus on preparing a range of students working towards an associate degree or Child Development Permit through a supportive, hands-on learning community and early teaching experience in a campus lab school.
- EDvance at San Francisco State University: A pathway program supporting early educators earning a bachelor’s degree, especially those from groups historically underrepresented in higher education.

Researchers examine these successful approaches alongside insights gained from policies enacted at scale in New Jersey—which rapidly increased the number of credentialed early educators—to surface valuable guidance for policymakers and practitioners nationwide seeking to ensure that all children have teachers who meet high standards and who reflect the racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of young children and their families.

“High-quality early learning experiences build the foundation that sets children up for success in school and life, but currently few systems are designed to enable educators to achieve the competencies needed because of relatively low standards for preparation, poor compensation, and lack of investment in professional supports,” said LPI President and Stanford Professor Emeritus Linda Darling-Hammond. “Taken together, these reports draw a clear line from the needs of children in the learning setting to the necessary preparation and supports early childhood educators need to the state and local policies and practices that lay the groundwork for their development and implementation.”

Preparing a Diverse, High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce is authored by Madelyn Gardner, Hanna Melnick, Beth Meloy, and Jessica Barajas. Read the full report and brief [at this link](#).

Early Childhood Essentials is authored by Beth Meloy and Abby Schachner. To read the full report, fact sheet, and infographic [visit this link](#).

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About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.