



New York
Early
Childhood
Professional
Development
Institute

Building the Pipeline for a Successful Early Childhood Workforce in New York

A NEW POLICY AGENDA

The President of the United States addressed the critical value of early childhood education in his 2013 State of the Union address, marking the start of his second term in office. Shortly after, President Obama put forth a comprehensive proposal to strengthen early childhood education, emphasizing access to excellence for all young children in the country, with an innovative eye to funding and implementation of his ideas. The Administration has followed this proposal with several events to explain the components and the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI) has analyzed the implications of the President's proposal, especially as it relates to the workforce needed to realize the vision.

New York's vision of providing ALL children with access to high quality early education challenges the field and existing workforce to step up and make significant change in the way we prepare and support the next generation of teachers and leaders. The PDI is prepared to embark on this challenge with a statewide group of partners within public and private agencies and institutions of higher education. This publication is the first of a series of policy briefs that inspire a deep conversation and a comprehensive set of actions to strengthen the early childhood workforce and position New York to ensure each and every child has access to excellent early childhood education.

Sherry M. Cleary, Executive Director of New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute

When it comes to early childhood quality, two facts guide our work. First, young children exposed to quality early learning experiences are more likely to succeed in school and in life than their peers without these experiences.¹ Second, teachers are at the fulcrum of successful early learning.²

Our children, especially those who are most disadvantaged, need teachers who actively support their development through stimulating teacher child interactions. All too often, however, teachers do not provide young children with the quality early learning they need in order to thrive. In New York, we must do more to engage and promote a diverse and dynamic early childhood workforce.

To build a robust pipeline for early childhood professionals, the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute is launching an effort to address three pressing issues.

Recruitment: Attract and cultivate culturally competent, bright, dedicated, and passionate early childhood teacher candidates

Teacher Preparation: Equip teachers with robust knowledge of early childhood development, practical skills, rich and varied field experiences and the ability to integrate theory and practice to meet the needs of all young children

Induction: Support teachers to practice intentional early childhood teaching, navigate expectations of new jobs, and maintain their commitment to professional growth

STRENGTHENING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Teachers are the lynchpin of quality. For young children to thrive in today's world, they need teachers who support their innate creativity and curiosity. In doing so, teachers create a fertile environment for children to learn the host of foundational skills that are needed for success in school and life.

Despite the importance of quality teachers, several conditions undermine New York's early childhood workforce. The requirements to become a certified early childhood teacher are uneven and unenforced. Unlike other professions, early childhood teachers who have not met minimum job requirements are able to work with children: scores of uncertified early childhood teachers with a study plan are responsible for children's safety, health, and development. Teachers may stay on their study plan for years with little imperative to continue their professional growth. The lack of enforcement of the requirements undermines their intent and impact.

Second, due to the relatively inadequate work requirements, early childhood education attracts individuals who may lack the academic skills, dispositions, and life experience needed to become successful teachers. The caliber of early childhood teacher candidates is also questionable because research indicates that many early childhood teacher preparation programs have weak admissions requirements and fairly simple requirements for graduation and certification.¹

Finally, a degree is a marker of teacher competence but more needs to be known about the substance of teacher preparation programs. Studies show that credentials are necessary but insufficient to assure teachers have the skills and knowledge to be effective once they are hired and bear responsibility for a classroom.² Little is known about the quality of New York's early childhood teacher preparation programs and how these programs can enrich their work to better equip their graduates to succeed when they assume responsibility for a classroom.

In short, New York's early childhood workforce pipeline needs attention. Effective quality improvement efforts for aspiring and new early childhood teachers are vital to improve early childhood program quality and enhance the development of New York's youngest children.

THE AGENDA

We must reinvigorate New York's early childhood workforce by starting right: with highly motivated, qualified, diverse, and prepared early childhood teachers. PDI is launching a three point policy agenda: 1) activate recruitment efforts; 2) improve teacher preparation; and 3) establish teacher induction programs. Forthcoming briefs will examine each issue in detail.

1 *Activate Recruitment Efforts*

The most expedient strategy for assuring workforce quality is to attract culturally competent, bright, dedicated, and passionate early childhood teachers to the field. The caliber of early childhood teacher candidates needs to be improved.

Teacher education programs have been criticized for their weak admissions criteria. Furthermore, early childhood teacher educators express concern about the basic reading, writing, and math skills of their teacher candidates. In early childhood, little is being done to recruit and cultivate promising teachers.

New York cannot and need not settle for a minimally qualified early childhood workforce. Early childhood is an attractive field. Data from PDI's 2007 workforce study indicate that almost two-thirds of teachers and assistant teachers claim to be very satisfied in their positions. In a national study of child care workers' job satisfaction, researchers found that "fully 85% stated that they would choose a career in early childhood education again."

In addition to being a fulfilling profession, New York has a vast pool of potential early childhood educators. For example, the NYC DOE generally receives at least six applications for every open position. There is a broad population of promising early childhood candidates.

To activate early childhood teacher recruitment, preliminary strategies include:

- Evaluate, improve, and expand admissions requirements for early childhood teacher preparation programs to identify candidates with rich life experience and promise in meeting the needs of young children
- Establish selective honors programs for early childhood candidates that provide financial support to qualified applicants
- Conduct an outreach campaign to teacher education faculty and admissions staff at 2- and 4- year institutions of higher education so they may steer potential candidates toward early childhood education
- Explore financial incentives such as sign-up bonuses, forgivable loans, and other strategies to help recruit highly qualified promising individuals who pursue a career in early education
- Initiate a large scale early childhood educator recruitment campaign
- Enforce and expand parity in qualifications for early childhood teachers and K-12 teachers

2 Improve Teacher Preparation

Families, community members, and policymakers rely on early childhood teacher preparation programs to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to successfully engage children and support their families. Many teachers, however, feel unprepared to fully meet their responsibilities. A 2007 study of New York City's workforce indicates that three quarters of directors, 70% of community-based teachers, and almost half of school-based teachers reported the need for additional professional development. Critically, those who felt well prepared also felt that they were more likely to stay in the field.³ New York has a diverse array of teacher preparation programs. These institutions have a tremendous impact on the early childhood field yet little is known about their programs with respect to the four key variables that can impact a teachers' performance: (1) program content; (2) field experiences; (3) faculty characteristics; and (4) institutional support.⁴ The few existing national exploratory studies of early childhood teacher education suggest that many preparation programs offer uneven coursework and insufficient clinical opportunities. Early childhood education departments typically suffer from insufficient resources, resulting in high faculty student ratios and faculty without both classroom and theoretical experience.⁵

To improve teacher education, preliminary strategies include:

- Conduct an inventory of New York's early childhood teacher preparation programs in which we examine program content, clinical experience, faculty characteristics, and institutional support
- Establish requirements for teachers to engage in rich and varied field experiences during their preparation programs that involve comprehensive supervision from faculty.
- Create a work group of faculty from New York's doctoral level programs who prepare the majority of early childhood teacher educators and supervisors to critically examine their programs in light of their tremendous influence on the early childhood workforce
- Engage faculty from New York's institutions of higher education in a best practices collaborative working group and establish periodic conferences and an online community in which faculty can share effective teacher education strategies
- Examine and improve articulation agreements between 2- to 4-year teacher preparation programs to support diversity and excellence in the early childhood workforce
- Review and revise coursework and field experience requirements to strengthen New York early childhood teacher certification
- Develop training, technical assistance, and incentives for cooperating teachers who play a significant role in teacher preparation

3 Establish Teacher Induction Programs

Even the most well-prepared early childhood teachers face challenges in navigating the day-to-day demands of teaching young children and the pressures they receive from parents and program administrators with little social and emotional support. Indeed, early childhood teachers whose preparation emphasizes developmentally appropriate practice may find themselves directly at odds with stakeholders who expect a teacher-directed and standardized approach to teaching young children. For those who are minimally prepared, entering the profession presents even more challenges.

A teacher's first few years on the job present a unique window of opportunity. During these foundational years, teachers establish the professional norms and attitudes that will guide their career. Unfortunately, few early childhood teachers learn how to integrate academic learning with the realities of teaching. Rather, during this period most early childhood teachers are left to "sink or swim in the isolation of their own classroom."⁶

When faced with this context, early childhood teachers need support and strategies to hold true to their beliefs and knowledge. Even more, veteran teachers faced with a new work environment or challenging context stand to benefit from the comprehensive mentorship and professional development associated with induction programs. Induction programs offer much needed assistance to teachers as they continue their professional growth and solidify their commitment to the field.

To establish early childhood teacher induction, preliminary strategies include:

- Pilot a voluntary early childhood best practice induction program in New York City to support teachers across different types of early childhood programs (e.g., EarlyLearn, UPK, special education, private early childhood centers) and provide data to scale up implementation throughout New York.
- Establish a new teacher resource center staffed with pedagogical experts who can provide regular support to new teachers through face-to-face meetings, coaching, mentoring and consultation, email support, and phone consultation
- Establish a work group with the DOE to examine its mentor system for new early childhood teachers
- Develop an online community in which beginning teachers can share their experiences and support one another
- Build a partnership between 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education, the Department of Education, the Administration for Children's Services, and other entities that prepare and then hire novice early childhood teachers



CONCLUSION

The early childhood landscape is undergoing tremendous changes as the nation launches new expectations of its early childhood professionals and seeks to raise the bar for the quality of its early childhood programs. Early childhood teachers are at the front line in this reform effort and they need support to implement developmentally appropriate practices. A new commitment to early childhood recruitment, teacher preparation, and induction strategies is essential to realize the vision of a high quality early care and education system for our young children.

ENDNOTES

¹For example, Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikert, D. P. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

²Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers. Washington, DC: National Research Council

³Bornfreund, L. (2011). Getting in sync: Revamping the preparation of teachers in preK, kindergarten, and the early grades. Washington, DC: New America Foundation.

⁴Early, D. M., Maxwell, K. L., Burchinal, M., Alva, S., Bender, R. H., Bryant, D., et al. (2007). Teachers' education, classroom quality, and young children's academic skills: Results from seven studies of preschool programs. *Child Development*, 78(2), 558-580.

⁵NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (2007). New York City's Early Childhood Workforce: The Foundation for Quality. CUNY: New York.

⁶Whitebook, M., Austin, L.J., Ryan, S., Kipnis, F., Almaraz, M., & Sakai, L. (2012). By default or by design? Variations in higher education programs for early care and education teachers and their implications for research methodology, policy, and practice. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment: Berkeley, CA.

⁷Bornfreund, L. (2011); Maxwell, K. L., Lim, C. I., & Early, D. M. (2006). Early childhood teacher preparation programs in the United States: National report. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute; Hyson, M., Tomlinson, H.B., & Morris, C.A.S. (2009). Quality improvement in early childhood teacher education: Faculty perspectives and recommendations for the future. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*. 11(1)

⁸Goldrick, L. (2009). A teacher development continuum: The role of policy in creating a supportive pathway into the profession (policy brief). New Teacher Center: Santa Cruz, CA.

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