



Why Teacher Quality Matters and How We Can Improve It

Decades of research have proven it's important to capitalize on the small window of time when young children learn to talk, learn through play, and begin to develop social skills need to get along with their peers. During these critical early learning years, qualified early childhood professionals accelerate how our children learn, develop, and build the skills necessary to get along with others and succeed in school and life.

The early childhood education workforce in the United States is comprised of 2.1 million¹ teachers, teacher's aides, and staff in child care centers, schools, and home-based care, and child care center managers. These individuals work in private childcare centers, public schools, or in home settings. They are in cities, suburbs and rural areas.

A highly-qualified early childhood educator--one who knows how to create a dynamic, accountable learning environment-- is at the center of a high-quality early learning experience. Research has shown that children who attend high-quality preschool are better prepared to be successful in school and in their future careers. The economic and community benefits of high-quality early learning and development experiences for all young children cannot be understated and include, increased graduation rates, increased economic wellbeing for all communities, and the long-term development of a high-quality professional workforce.

Yet, despite the important role early childhood educators play, and despite increased public demand and incremental financing for high-quality early learning, it is difficult to earn a living wage being an early childhood educator.

- Their median hourly wages are \$10.60 per hour.
- Currently, at least 46% of the early childhood workforce receives public assistance.

It is not enough to demand high-quality education for young children; we also must ensure that educators are provided with affordable high-quality training and education opportunities. Early childhood educators dedicate their life's work to nurturing, educating and caring for young children. Only the most effective teachers and staff can ensure children in their care have the early experiences they need to be more likely to succeed in school, read on grade level and graduate on time.

That is why the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is dedicated to supporting the continuum of quality across all areas of learning, by increasing the quality of early childhood education programs and of the secondary education programs that educate our workforce.

NAEYC offers accreditation for early childhood centers and supports the most critical component of a high-quality program: early childhood teachers. The accreditation process is a commitment to quality

¹ According to 2004 numbers. View more here: <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/advocacy/ecworkforcefacts>

improvements, such as professional development, small group sizes, and lower teacher-child ratios, creating an environment supportive of teachers and one in which they want to work.

In addition to providing accreditation for early childhood learning programs, NAEYC works closely with educator preparation programs to ensure early childhood educators have access to the knowledge and skills needed to provide the highest quality of care and education in their future classrooms. Currently, NAEYC offers opportunities for Early Childhood Associate Degree programs to seek accreditation and is working to expand degree accreditation opportunities across all degree levels.

Strategic Vision

NAEYC works alongside more than 70,000 teachers, administrators, parents and educators that are committed to bringing high-quality care and education to all children, birth through age eight. NAEYC developed internationally recognized standards of excellence. These standards are raising the bar for all early childhood programs serving young children so that all children have a strong start in life.

NAEYC's Strategic Vision for the workforce is that the early childhood education profession exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society. Specifically, our desired results are:

- Professional preparation and development for birth through age 8 educators is aligned and grounded in NAEYC's standards and delivered in innovative ways.
- Skills, knowledge, competencies and qualifications are agreed upon and used to define the early care and education profession.
- Early childhood professionals are diverse, effective educators and leaders working within a compensation and recognition system that supports their excellence.
- Professional development and preparation systems support seamless progression for early care and education professionals to advance their education, professional learning and careers.

Recommendations

- Fund Title VIII Part I of the Higher Education Opportunity Act to accelerate states' implementation of cross-sector, integrated professional development systems that will have a significant impact on quality, and improve compensation.
- Encourage states to design and approve credentials for the early childhood workforce that include aligned training and coursework that is available and affordable throughout the state.
- Increase the accessibility of higher education to the early childhood workforce, including improved recognition of credit-bearing opportunities, alignment across two- and four-year institutions, and expansion of nontraditional courses to support those early childhood providers who are working during the day.
- Support grant programs to provide scholarships, increase compensation and improve retention of early childhood providers with credentials from accredited institutions.

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