



Responsible Transformation

of the Early Childhood Education Workforce

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION



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With generous support from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Black Child Development Institute launched the “Responsible Transformation of the Early Childhood Education Workforce” initiative with the following goals: 1) examine the impact new education requirements may have on Black early childhood educators; and 2) explore how to best implement a bachelor’s degree requirement for early childhood educators in communities that serve Black children by strengthening and not displacing the current workforce. Based on qualitative data collected from focus groups with early childhood educators, NBCDI provides recommendations to advance the early childhood education workforce and provide diverse, high-quality education for young children.

Decades of research provides substantial evidence that children who participate in high-**quality** early childhood education programs are more likely to develop strong academic and social competence and grow into adulthood with the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to the economic growth and wellbeing of their community. A growing base of knowledge describes the abilities and proficiencies required for early childhood educators to provide high-quality early learning. In April 2015, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine released the groundbreaking report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. A central recommendation from the study was to transition 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.”

While a bachelor’s degree has been a standard requirement for those teaching children ages six through eight for decades, early childhood education systems serving children zero to five are too fragmented to have consistent standards for educators of these children. Education requirements vary across early learning settings, including public preschools, charter schools,

Head Start, private programs and licensed home-based programs. Currently, 27 states require bachelor’s degrees for educators working in public preschool programs.ⁱ According to the 2018 Early Childhood Workforce Index from the Center for Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, 33 states are expected to gradually increase education requirements for early childhood educators in the coming years.ⁱⁱ Research and recommendations from the *Transforming the Workforce* report have reinforced the importance of these policy changes in early childhood education.

NBCDI supports policymakers who are implementing changes to advance the workforce with the ultimate goal of expanding access to high-quality early childhood education for *all* children. However, to support **equity** in access to high-quality early childhood education, reforms to advance the workforce must be implemented in a way that addresses, not exacerbates, current inequities. Research indicates that communities with the highest percentages of Black families have a lower supply of child-care programs as well as slightly lower availability of degree-holding workers.ⁱⁱⁱ Further research also demonstrates that due to inequities in our education system, children living in poverty and children of color are more likely to experience underprepared teachers/staff.^{iv}



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Additionally, early childhood educators that do not have adequate professional development and support are more likely to suspend and expel young children.^v

Diversity is an essential component of a well-qualified education workforce. Policymakers must commit to ensuring that the early childhood education workforce reflects the diversity of the children and families they educate and serve. Early childhood education systems will fail to address disparities for Black children if the field continues to undervalue diversity in the definition of quality. While estimates show that 40 percent of early childhood educators are people of color, a diverse workforce that is skilled in culturally responsive pedagogy is not recognized as essential to high-quality early childhood education.^{vi} Studies demonstrate that a diverse workforce is essential to child development because educators of color typically hold higher expectations of children of color and are less likely to misdiagnose them as special-needs.^{vii} To address racial disparities in academic outcomes, we must address inequities in access

to high-quality early childhood programs with a diverse, highly educated workforce. As the field implements reforms to improve quality and advance the workforce, NBCDI is emphasizing the importance of **diversity** in early childhood education systems and ensuring that Black educators are advancing with the field and are not left behind.

NBCDI's commitment to ensuring that Black educators are supported in achieving education requirements and not being displaced, is informed by disparities in access to higher education and the historical displacement of Black educators. A bachelor's degree requirement in early childhood education raises concern in Black communities in particular due to racial disparities in educational attainment, which stem from historical inequality in the U.S. education system. The national graduation rate for college students overall is 60 percent, while the graduation rate for Black students is only 40 percent.^{viii} These disparities make new education requirements more challenging for Black early childhood educators to attain and fuel concerns about the displacement of Black educators in early childhood education.



NBCDI supports policymakers who are implementing changes to advance the workforce with the ultimate goal of expanding access to high-quality early childhood education for *all* children. However, to support **equity** in access to high-quality early childhood education, reforms to advance the workforce must be implemented in a way that addresses, not exacerbates, current inequities.

In the public system, the displacement of Black educators has been an issue for decades as thousands of Black educators were fired during the integration of schools following the Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954. Due to institutional racism, Black educators were not valued and their employment was not protected during integration. This paper provides recommendations to ensure Black early childhood educators are protected and supported as early childhood education systems implement or change education requirements.

Elected officials and policymakers must implement reforms to advance the workforce that demonstrate an equal commitment to quality, equity and diversity. Recommendations in this paper were developed in partnership with Black early childhood educators and a variety of early childhood education stakeholders—from early childhood education professors to union representatives for early childhood educators, early childhood education center directors, professional development providers and representatives from higher education programs in early childhood education. NBCDI engaged with stakeholders through focus groups, community forums and town halls to gather expertise and feedback on how to ensure that advancements in early childhood education benefit all children across diverse communities.

NBCDI proposes the following recommendations for the consideration of elected officials, policymakers, state and federal agencies, governors and Head Start and public school administrators to implement a bachelor's degree requirement for all licensed early childhood education programs while advancing **equity, diversity and quality** in the early childhood education system.

- **Ensure that the diversity of the workforce reflects the diversity of the children. Monitor data and develop recruitment and retention initiatives to support this goal.**
 - Track annual data on diversity and equity in the early childhood education workforce, collecting comprehensive data on race/ethnicity, gender, compensation, access to professional development, technical assistance, and coaching and other indicators of equity.

- Set recruitment and retention goals designed to **maintain a workforce that reflects the diversity of the children served** and monitor data accordingly.
- Assemble state or local commissions or taskforces on an annual basis to review data, assess the diversity needs of the field, and develop recruitment and retention strategies.
- **Engage Black early childhood educators to inform development and implementation of policies related to bachelor's degree requirements.**
 - Engage educators in a comprehensive way to inform scholarship programs, compensation reforms, the length of time allotted to complete bachelor's degree programs, credit for experience and recruitment and retention.
 - Hear from Black educators about what attracts and retains them in the field and their reasons for leaving the field in order to develop effective recruitment and retention strategies.
- **Create clear salary bands that commensurate with a bachelor's degree and provide early childhood educators with resources to meet minimum salary requirements.**
 - Ensure educators required to meet the same education and licensing standards receive equitable salaries.
 - Provide all licensed centers whose staff meet the bachelor's degree requirement with funding to support minimum salary requirements. States must ensure that the financial burden of increased compensation is not passed on to families.
- **Ensure equitable access to funding and resources for Black early childhood education providers to improve quality and support retention of Black educators.**
 - Examine the distribution of quality improvement funding to ensure equitable access to those funds for Black early childhood education programs.
 - Provide all early childhood education programs with quality improvement funding. If we continue to allocate resources to high-quality



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centers without supporting all programs and educators in improving quality, we are perpetuating inequality by leaving those centers and the children that they serve behind.

- **Develop standards for allowing experience to count as credit.**
 - Encourage partnerships between federal and state education agencies, educators and institutions of higher education to develop standards for how the competencies developed by experienced early childhood educators will count as credit toward a bachelor's degree.
 - Implement comprehensive outreach and marketing campaigns to ensure all educators are aware of opportunities for waivers of degree requirements based on experience level or credits toward degree completion based on competencies developed through experience.

- **Allow ample time for educators to complete degree programs to support retention.**
 - Give educators at least twelve years to attain bachelor's degrees allowing time to apply for scholarships and take college preparatory classes for non-traditional and first-generation college students.
- **Provide scholarships and support comprehensive higher education reforms and training programs in early childhood education with comprehensive supports for educators.**
 - Ensure equity in access to degree programs by providing scholarships and comprehensive support (tuition, books, fees and stipends for expenses) to all educators majoring in early childhood education.
 - Work closely with educators and higher-educational institutions to support educators of color in attaining degrees and developing competencies by implementing evidenced-based strategies including cohort models, mentorship and coaching programs, affinity groups, college preparatory classes, flexible class schedules, online courses and apprenticeship programs.





- Foster partnerships between higher-education institutions and community-based professional development providers that will allow those organizations to develop and offer courses that will count as credit toward early childhood education degrees.
- **Ensure higher-education institutions and professional development programs prepare educators to teach diverse children.**
 - Give institutions and programs that provide teacher preparation a deadline to implement comprehensive reforms. As policymakers consider identifying a deadline or timeframe for educators to meet degree requirements, the more important deadline will be for institutions and programs to implement comprehensive reforms designed to ensure that they are preparing educators to effectively teach all children.
 - Ensure that educators receive education and training designed to help them be responsive to the needs of their communities. With coursework that clearly benefits the children and families they are serving, focus group participants suggested that educators from diverse communities may have stronger appreciation and motivation to attain bachelor's degrees.

Diversity is an essential component of a well-qualified education workforce. Policymakers must commit to ensuring that the early childhood education workforce reflects the diversity of the children and families they educate and serve.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR BLACK EDUCATORS



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America's public education system has not historically valued diversity among educators. This is evidenced by the mass disenfranchisement of Black educators as a result of desegregation. In the years prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, segregated Black schools had exemplary teachers and principals who were consistently remembered for their high expectations for student success, for their dedication and for their demanding teaching style.^{ix} Unfortunately, these dedicated educators were pushed out. The court-ordered integration of schools led to a dramatic decrease in the number of Black educators because many all-Black schools closed, and most Black teachers were not hired to teach in integrated schools. Estimates show that prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, there were 82,000 Black educators. Between 1954 and 1965, that number went down to 38,000.^x In the decades following the court decision, many K-12 education systems gradually accepted Black children in classrooms with white children but largely rejected the premise of Black educators teaching white children. Southern school districts intentionally increased recruitment of less experienced white teachers, specifically, white male teachers, and, in some cases, employed fewer total teachers to offset the displacement of Black educators.

Even in more recent history, education reform initiatives like No Child Left Behind have resulted in the disproportionate displacement of Black educators. The recession and the wave of school closings within urban districts in the past decade have been attributed to declining enrollment and sanctions targeting schools with low test scores under No Child Left Behind.^{xi} A study from the Learning Policy Institute shows that 2012 was the height of school closings and layoffs in many cities and the rate of involuntary turnover was much higher for Black teachers than for all other teachers. Black teachers, who made up a third of all educators, were displaced from the workforce. Among the nation's largest cities, the overall decline in the Black teacher workforce has been proportionally far greater than the decline in the overall teaching force. For example, in 2005, more than 7,000 teachers, most of whom were Black, were fired after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. These teachers were primarily replaced by young, white teachers who were recruited by the charter schools that ultimately replaced the public schools.^{xii}

Decades of research show that having a teacher that provides culturally-affirming, language-enriching and stimulating instruction is instrumental to the schooling success of Black children, especially Black males, and all children.^{xiii, xiv} However, most children have very few educators of color per the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. The data shows that about 80 percent of all public school teachers are white, 9 percent are Hispanic, 7 percent are Black and 2 percent are Asian.^{xv, xvi} Furthermore, research indicates that Black children excel when they have at least one Black teacher. A recent report shows that having just one Black teacher not only lowers the Black student high school dropout rate, increases their desire to go to college and can also make them more likely to enroll in college.^{xvii}

Studies demonstrate that a diverse workforce is essential to child development because educators of color typically hold higher expectations of children of



color and are less likely to misdiagnose them as having special needs. The lack of diversity in the K–12 public education system must not be replicated in early childhood education. In K–12, 53 percent of students are children of color, while only 20 percent are educators of color. Black students are 15 percent of the student population, while only 7 percent are Black educators.^{xviii, xix} To address disparities in academic outcomes, all children must be afforded access to high-quality early childhood programs with a diverse, highly-educated workforce.



CURRENT STATUS OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BLACK WORKFORCE



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The early childhood education workforce broadly consists of people who care for and educate children from birth to age 8.^{xx} Prior to elementary school, children receive care and education in a wide variety of settings with varying costs based on parental choice. The workforce varies by setting, including family members nannies, au pairs, neighbors, in-home providers and/or center-based teachers and preschools in public and charter school systems. These workforce variations present challenges in attempting to capture a complete picture of the workforce and leaves some data unknown.^{xxi} Most of the data come from publicly-funded programs, such as preschools in public schools or charter schools; federally-funded programs like Head Start; or center or home-based programs with mixed funding streams and those that serve children whose families participate in child care assistance programs (funded through the Child Care Development Fund). In addition, not all states report the same information. There is limited to no data on private preschools, such as Montessori, Waldorf schools and for-profit programs (e.g., Kindercare, Bright Horizons).^{xxii} These data limitations present a particular challenge when attempting to understand the state of the workforce, especially for Black early childhood education providers. The following section includes a summary of data that is available on the state of the Black early childhood education workforce.

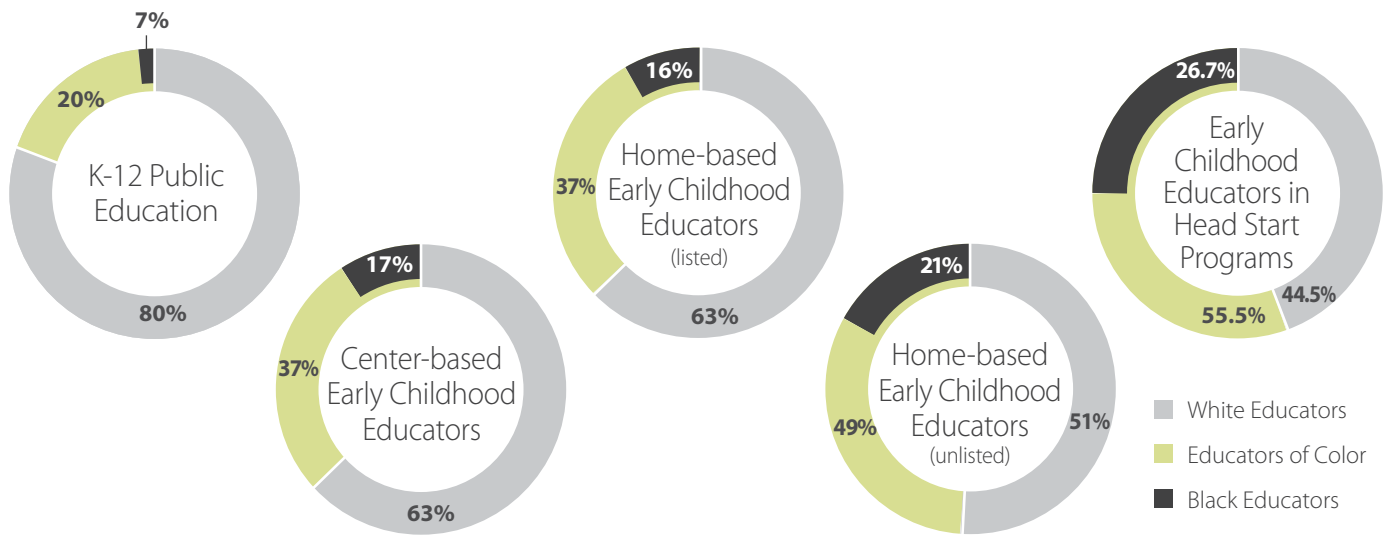
Early Childhood Education Workforce Overview

There are approximately two million adults across the nation who are paid to care for and educate young children in homes and centers.^{xxiii} The size of the childhood education workforce is formidable even when compared to the K-12 workforce, with approximately 3.6 million teachers.^{xxiv} About half of the early childhood education workforce (1,000,000) is in center-based programs. The other half provides care for children in either home-based listed (meaning licensed in-home care) or home-based unlisted (meaning providers that do not appear on state or national lists; such as friends, family, neighbors or nannies that are identified through household surveys; some of whom are paid and others unpaid). There are about 115,000 home-based listed small businesses and 919,000 home-based unlisted, typically with an educator serving an individual family.^{xxv}

Demographics of the Early Childhood Education Workforce

The majority of the workforce is white and female, but there is more diversity in the early childhood education workforce than there is in K-12. In K-12, 20 percent of the workforce is people of color, and in early childhood education, 40 percent of the workforce is people of color. According to the Early Childhood Workforce Index, white educators make up almost two-thirds (63 percent) of center- and home-based programs (see Figure 1). African Americans make up 17 percent, and 16 percent are in center- and home-based programs, respectively. Hispanics make up 14 percent and 16 percent of center- and home-based programs, respectively. The percentage of providers of color increases for unlisted programs, which are providers that do not appear on state or national lists (e.g., friend, family, neighbor, nanny), but were identified through household surveys: 21 percent African American, 23 percent Hispanic and 51 percent White. These numbers are similar for lead teachers in Head Start programs with 27 percent African American, 23 percent Hispanic and 45 percent White.^{xxvi}

FIGURE 1. RACE/ETHNICITY OF THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE – BIRTH TO 12TH GRADE



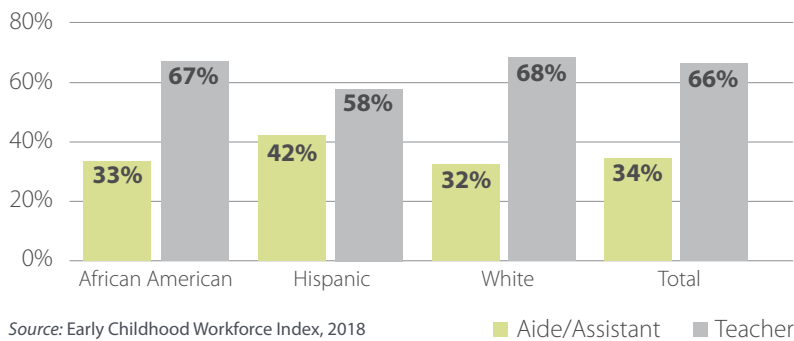
Sources:
 National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data State Dropout and Graduation Rate Data
 80 percent of all public school teachers were White, 9 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Black and 2 percent were Asian
 Early Childhood Workforce Index, 2018
 Spring 2015 FACES Teacher Survey. Statistics are weighted to represent all Head Start teachers, N=591



Black Educators in Early Childhood Education Settings

As we refer to the general early childhood education personnel, the workforce is stratified by directors, teachers, and assistants/aids. Pre-kindergarten programs in public schools or charter schools, early childhood education centers, and large home-based programs typically have center directors, lead teachers and assistant instructors. In many smaller programs, especially in home-based centers, educators serve multiple roles. Typically, lead teachers in centers are paid more than assistant teachers. Nationally, 67 percent of Black teachers are lead teachers, and 33 percent are assistants. Those statistics closely mirror the overall workforce. Examination by states shows varying trends. For example, in Illinois, Black educators were more likely to be lead teachers (83 percent) than aides/assistants (17 percent), compared to New York, where Black educators were overrepresented in the aide/assistant jobs (57 percent) rather than lead teacher roles (43 percent).^{xxvii} Data are not available on the percentage of Black educators in leadership roles, such as center directors.

FIGURE 2. JOB ROLE OF CENTER-BASED STAFF BY RACE/ETHNICITY: NATIONAL



Compensation for Black Educators

The early childhood education workforce is severely underpaid and undervalued, especially given its critical role in supporting families and educating children. Early childhood education is essential to the economy with educators providing child care for millions of working parents and caregivers. The persistent low compensation for the early childhood education workforce does not reflect the degree that this workforce educates young children in the most vital years of learning. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), child care workers earned a median annual wage of \$21,710 as of May 2016, while public transit bus drivers earned \$39,790 on average.

The early childhood education workforce is underpaid even when they have degrees. Head Start teachers, of whom 73 percent have bachelor's degrees, earn about \$24,000 less per year than public elementary teachers with bachelor's degrees.^{xxviii} This pay gap between early childhood educators and elementary school teachers sends the message that educators of older children are providing more valuable education, which

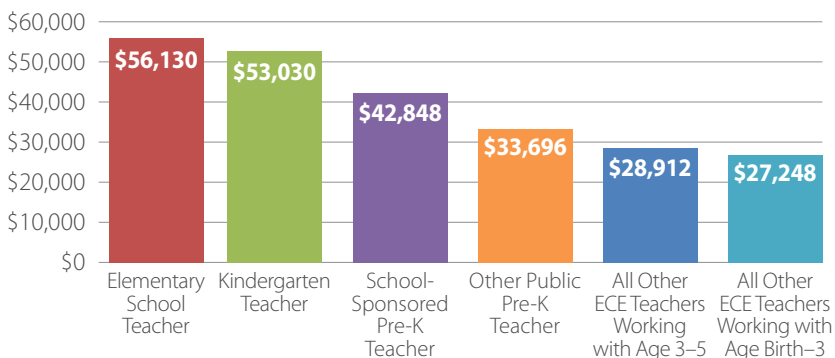


conflicts with decades of research indicating that early childhood is the most critical time of learning. Hourly wages depend more on where early educators live and work than on their qualifications. Teachers in school-based centers in state-funded pre-K earn about \$20/hour compared to about \$15 for those working in community-based programs.

Retaining highly qualified educators in early childhood education will require fair compensation to provide financial security to educators. Overall, 53 percent of child care workers are in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs, Medicaid or other forms of public support.^{xxix} The circumstances for Black educators, in particular, are bleaker. The Center for American Progress found that “On average, African American female teachers working full time make 84 cents for every \$1 earned by their white counterparts. This 16 percent wage gap means an African American teacher would make \$366 less per month and \$4,395 less per year, on average.”^{xxx} Black educators are paid less for the same work when they have the same qualifications and education levels. One factor that contributes to lower compensation for Black educators is that they are teaching infants and toddlers. Of Black center-based early childhood educators, 52 percent work with infant/ toddlers, compared to 43 percent of all center-based early educators.^{xxxi} The hourly wage range for infant/toddler teachers is \$9.68–\$13.83 compared to \$10.73–\$17.86 for pre-K teachers, dependent on college degree status.

FIGURE 3. ABSENCE OF RATIONAL WAGE STRUCTURE + LOW VALUE ACCORDED TO EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Average Annual Salaries for U.S. Teachers with Bachelor’s Degree or Higher, 2012



Source: Worthy Work, *STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study* (2014), CSCCE

Education Levels in the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Education requirements vary based on the setting where educators work, e.g., pre-kindergarten programs in public schools or charter schools, federally-funded programs like Head Start, center- or home-based programs with mixed funding streams, and those that serve children whose families participate in child care assistance programs (funded through the Child Care Development Fund). For preschools in public schools, 28 states require educators to have a bachelor’s degree, 25 states require a plus certification and 4 states require a bachelor’s and have parity in pay with public school teachers.^{xxxi} In addition, 73 percent of Head Start teachers have bachelor’s degrees due to the 2007 federal requirement that stipulates that more than half of all Head Start teachers must have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood, child development or equivalent coursework.^{xxxiii}

No state requires lead teachers to have bachelor’s degrees in center-based programs outside of public pre-K programs or home-based programs. The District of Columbia will require by December 2022 and New Jersey currently requires that early childhood education center directors have bachelor’s degrees. Even without requirements, nationally, more than half of all center-based teaching staff have already earned an associate degree or higher: 35 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 17 percent have an associate degree. Nearly one-third of regulated home-based providers are similarly educated: 15 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 16 percent have an associate degree.^{xxxiv}

More education consistently leads to higher income. For example, in Head Start, there is a difference of \$3.70 per hour between those with an associate degree compared to a bachelor’s degree or higher. This is about \$7,000 more annually for those working full time. In public school-based preschools, the difference is more significant: there is a difference of \$7.60 per hour (about \$14,500 more annually for those working full-time) between those with an associate degree compared to a bachelor’s degree or higher.^{xxxv}



VOICES FROM THE FIELD:

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS



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A guiding principle in NBCDI's approach to advocacy is to ensure that policy recommendations are informed by the families and communities that policy implementation will impact the most. In the process of developing policy recommendations that truly respond to the needs of Black educators, NBCDI has engaged with Black educators and diverse focus groups and community and stakeholder engagement meetings. Focus groups with 11–18 participants took place in seven cities, including Chicago, IL; Houston, TX; Augusta, GA; Washington, DC; Omaha, NE; Grand Rapids, MI; New York City, NY; and Compton, CA. NBCDI also hosted stakeholder engagement meetings or conference calls in four states: Illinois, Texas, Washington and New York.



METHODS

A variety of stakeholders—from early childhood education professors to union representatives for early childhood educators, early childhood education center directors, professional development providers and representatives from higher education programs in early childhood education—participated in community and stakeholder engagement meetings, as well as two town halls. NBCDI held two town halls, with over 250 educators and early childhood education stakeholders, designed to engage in open dialogue and hear from educators and community leaders who have diverse perspectives on advancing the early childhood education workforce. The first “Voices from the Field” Town Hall was held at NBCDI's 47th Annual Conference in September 2017 in Atlanta, GA; Georgia is one of the 27 states that require bachelor's degrees for early childhood educators in public preschool programs. The second town hall was held in Washington, DC. This town hall was particularly timely in the District of Columbia, as early childhood educators in center- and home-based programs will be required to attain associate degrees by December 2023, and early childhood center directors will be required to attain bachelor's degrees by December 2022.

Through focus groups and community engagement, NBCDI gathered qualitative data on: 1) how the requirement for a bachelor's degree for early childhood education professionals will impact Black educators and programs and 2) strategies to support Black educators in attaining a bachelor's degree. Overall, new education requirements should be designed to make the workforce more effective in educating young children. To this end, educators



and stakeholders provided us with their perspectives and expertise on effective methods for improving educational practices and preparing and supporting diverse educators to deliver high-quality early childhood education.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Early Childhood Educators Are not Viewed as Professionals. There is a general lack of understanding by the public about the critical role of early childhood educators, even among the families that are directly served. Educators observed that more information needs to be shared with families and others about the value and importance of early childhood education and their value as educators, even if they don't teach in a school building. All the participants saw themselves as educators and early learning professionals; however, they overwhelmingly felt that parents and community members merely saw them as babysitters. Parents do not perceive them as having any impact on children beyond keeping them

safe, fed and clean. Many of them shared that they had to intentionally teach parents and families that they are doing professional work. Many said they had to present their credentials always to families and community members to affirm their value in supporting children's development and learning.

High-Level Skills, Capacities and Knowledge Needed to Be an Early Childhood Education Professional. Participants shared the skillsets needed to be an early childhood educator. They emphasized that the first few years of life are critical for children's development and learning and sets children's foundations for learning and social skills. They noted that early childhood education professionals need to have a high level of skill, knowledge and capacity to work and thrive in the profession. Primarily, participants identified passion and love for the children and families as the undercurrent, encouraging these professionals to remain in the field. They emphasized the competency required to



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be **agile enough to support children's learning** through play and make learning fun and stimulating for children. They noted the importance of a strong child-development background connected with discernment in order to individualize instruction and interaction for each child. Educators are engaging children who need specialized support for their cognitive and social-emotional development as well as children whose cognitive development is advanced for their age. That is, early childhood education professionals have to be able to observe nonverbal and verbal cues to support children—skills built through experience and careful attention. Participants observed from their experience that every educator does not have this skill. Numerous participants recognized the importance of communicating and partnering with families, especially young or first-time parents, who were also learning about what it takes to engage with and support their child's learning and development.

Finally, educators identified overall support for families as a core component of their work and essential to their profession, and discussed specialized support to Black families. Many participants recognized that early childhood education professionals have to be holistic in supporting families while educating children, which includes being culturally competent and being able

to truly support children of color. Black children and families are often confronted with many social challenges, such as higher rates of unemployment due to racial discrimination, dilapidated housing due to redlining and other unjust housing practices and disproportionately high incarceration rates due to discrimination in policing practice and the criminal justice system overall. These professionals saw themselves as role models in supporting families to overcome these challenges for their children and communities.

Educators support the bachelor's degree requirement but caution about mitigating negative consequences. The general consensus across focus group participants was that the bachelor's degree requirement should be supported for lead teachers. Participants generally agreed that a bachelor's degree would support or ensure that all educators have the same knowledge base. They predicted that the field would be more competitive and attract people with more career options, which will result in increased compensation and better job quality. They also noted that it is important that children are provided with the best educators during these foundational years, and if a bachelor's degree will improve quality, then they are in agreement.

While they recognize and support the benefits, participants noted many challenges with this requirement, especially without adequate supports and compensation. Without addressing the following challenges, the bachelor's degree requirement could be a detriment to the field, especially to Black early childhood education programs and educators serving Black children:

- **Educators must be adequately compensated.**
- **Educators will need scholarships and comprehensive wraparound support while pursuing degrees. Many will be non-traditional college students and first-generation college students.**
- **Experience is critical. Policymakers must recognize the importance of experience and hands-on learning.**
- **Degrees and programs must give educators the knowledge to be successful in educating diverse young children.**
- **Improving job quality will be critical to retaining qualified, diverse educators.**
- **Bachelor's degree requirement may perpetuate institutional racism.**



Educators must be adequately compensated.

Participants stressed that the requirement for a bachelor's degree for early childhood education professionals must be coupled with increased and adequate pay. The time and resources invested must result in compensation that makes the investment a sound financial decision. A couple of participants noted that after they received their bachelor's degree, they received an increase of \$1 per hour, which seemed a paltry compensation in light of the cost and sacrifice. A \$1 increase in salary is equivalent to a \$1,920 increase in annual salary. It would take at least 19 years in the field for that salary increase to match the average cost of state residents' tuition at a public college. Educators are making the investment in spite of challenges because they want to increase their knowledge, improve classroom practices, and enrich their career opportunities. There were many shared stories of colleagues who took on debt to attain degrees and were not adequately compensated to pay off loans, potentially jeopardizing their families' future and placing them in financial and legal ruin.

Educators will need scholarships and comprehensive wraparound supports while pursuing degrees.

Participants suggest that multi-systemic support must be in place to support this requirement, especially for Black educators and programs serving Black children and families. Policymakers, higher-educational institutions, employers and professional development providers must all support educators. Scholarships would help with financial costs, child care, transportation, books and materials. For educators who are currently not earning a living wage, all upfront costs should be addressed. Educators suggested that these scholarship and support programs be provided to teachers under the condition that they contractually commit to staying in the field for a minimum amount of time. This would be the cost paid by educators themselves, an unacceptable demand when many of them are living below the poverty line. In addition to the funding for scholarships, participants also recommended culturally-tailored supports, such as Black early childhood education affinity groups as



well as individualized coaching and mentoring. These supports are especially important for first-generation college students. Supports should also be tailored to non-traditional college students working full-time. Focus group participants also insisted that degree programs must make class schedules flexible for the benefit of working students. Employers must also have the capacity to give educators leave to travel to and attend classes.

Experience is critical. Recognize the importance of experience and ongoing professional learning.

Experience must count as credits in college degree programs, and degree programs must recognize that competencies are developed through hands-on experience. While there was support for required degree, participants emphasize that the bachelor's degree is not sufficient to be an effective educator without hands-on training, continued professional development and coaching (e.g. mental health or infant-toddler specialists). They did not want to discount those who have been in the field for decades without a college degree and have a high level of skills, knowledge and experience critical for supporting diverse children and their needs.

Degrees and programs must give educators the knowledge to be successful in educating diverse young children.

Institutions must be responsive to the particular needs of early childhood educators. As the demographics of young children are becoming more diverse, participants highlighted the importance of courses and credentialing programs that are designed to provide them with the skills to engage with families and communities of color. Further, educators in focus groups stressed that the course curriculum and in-service training must prepare them to support children *and* families. The higher-educational institutions must be held accountable to provide courses and credentialing that aligns with the early childhood education environment, the needs of Black educators, and the children they serve. Some educators recommended intentionally engaging Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to ensure course curricula are responsive to Black children and families. Similarly, organizations providing professional development must also be held accountable to provide culturally-relevant and meaningful support. A focus group participant shared that higher-educational institutions and professional development providers must go beyond offering foundational knowledge in child development and provide professional coaching and training that enhances culturally-responsive practices in the workforce and is tailored to meet the needs of individual educators, programs *and* children.



Improving job quality will be critical to retaining qualified, diverse educators.

Focus group participants stressed that implementing the bachelor's degree requirement will exacerbate educator turnover if early childhood education programs do not have resources to both support educators in attaining degrees and adequately compensate educators as they earn additional credentials. Programs must have resources to grant leave requests from staff to attend classes as they earn their degrees.

A participant warned that the cost to centers that will have to compensate educators with degrees might be prohibitive. Many observed that programs serving Black families and those in Black communities are already struggling financially and most likely will not be able to increase salaries without financial support. Participants cautioned that demands for higher pay might result in the closing of many programs serving Black communities and families. Programs will demand higher fees from families as they pass on costs in order to compensate staff. These fees will have a detrimental effect on families that are struggling financially. Programs may be forced to stop serving families who cannot afford to pay. Educators also cautioned that retention of educators will suffer unless drastic changes are made to improve job quality.

High turnover rates destabilize programs, negatively impacting children and families.

Bachelor's degree requirement may perpetuate institutional racism. Several educators in our focus groups made a strong statement that they believed the bachelor's degree requirement would result in displacement and exclusion of people of color from early childhood education, perpetuating institutional racism. They pointed to the practices in the public school system for grades K-12 that have resulted in decades of maintaining a predominantly white female workforce and a less paid paraprofessional segment of people of color; several focus-group participants anticipate this outcome in the early childhood education field.

Degrees and programs must give educators the knowledge to be successful in educating diverse young children.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTING A BACHELOR'S DEGREE REQUIREMENT FOR ALL LICENSED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

NBCDI recommends implementing a bachelor's degree requirement for all licensed early childhood education programs through a process designed to advance equity, diversity and quality. All reform initiatives in early childhood education must be designed to advance equity with the core goal that all children succeed. Policymakers can demonstrate their commitment to the success of Black children by guaranteeing equal access to high-quality early childhood education with a well-trained, professional workforce that reflects the diversity of our children. From birth, Black children face the most barriers to success, according to the Race for Results report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.^{xxxvi} On the other hand, the report showed that Black children ages three to five are enrolled in early childhood education settings—nursery school, preschool or kindergarten—at a higher rate than the national average. Enrollment in early childhood education is not enough to address racial disparities for Black children if they do not receive a high-quality education from well-qualified professionals.

A true commitment to equity requires recognition that quality and diversity are of equal importance in the early childhood education workforce. A diverse workforce that is skilled in culturally responsive pedagogy is not currently recognized as essential to high-quality early childhood education. As the field implements reforms to improve quality and advance the workforce, NBCDI is calling policymakers and advocates to recognize the importance of diversity in early childhood education systems and ensure that educators of color are advancing with the field and are not left behind. The lack of diversity among educators in the K-12 public education system emphasizes the importance of protecting Black educators in early childhood education.

**Estimates show that 40%
of early childhood
educators are
people of color, and 50.2%
of children under 5 are of color**

(based on the most recent estimate from Census Bureau).

Implementation of a bachelor's degree requirement in all licensed centers will be a long-term, resource-intensive process. This recommendation will require long-term planning and a drastically different approach to licensing in early childhood education systems. Licensing standards vary widely by state and are not typically designed to guarantee high-quality education for children. They are designed to set the minimum acceptable health, safety and program standards for the legal operation of child care programs, not to ensure all children have access to high-quality early childhood education.^{xxxvii} As stated above, no states currently require lead teachers to have bachelor's degrees in center-based programs outside of public pre-K programs or home-based programs. Advancing the workforce only in public preschool programs perpetuates inequities in advancements to improve quality instead of benefiting all children and educators. Education requirements should reach all early learning settings that are funded or licensed by government agencies.



The following recommendations are designed to ensure the bachelor's degree are implemented in a way that advances equity, diversity and quality.

1. Ensure the diversity of the workforce reflects the diversity of children. Monitor data and develop recruitment and retention initiatives to support this goal.

- ***Track annual data on diversity and equity in the early childhood education workforce.***

Policymakers must commit to advancing diversity as an essential attribute of a high-quality early childhood education workforce by collecting and monitoring data on educator diversity. Early childhood education systems are fragmented, with different standards and practices across settings. Therefore, data collection is also inconsistent and inadequate. Furthermore, much of the data about the workforce is not available by race/ethnicity, income level, gender or other indicators required to monitor equity. Having comprehensive, annual data about the early childhood education workforce, similar to the National Teacher and Principal Survey from the National Center for

Education Statistics, would ensure that early childhood education workforce reforms, including a bachelor's degree mandate, can be tracked to ensure progress toward equity and diversity goals. These data sets should also include compensation data and other indicators of job quality, including access to professional development, technical assistance and coaching.

Requiring licensed early childhood education programs to provide annual workforce data will be transformational for the field. In some states, developing the systems to track this data may require legislation. While the budget implications will be significant in all states, research has shown that benefits of high-quality early childhood education exceed the cost.^{xxxviii} This process must be informed by the educators and program administrators who will be tasked with tracking the data.

- ***Data should inform the recruitment and retention of Black educators.***

Implementation of the bachelor's degree requirement must include intentional recruitment and retention initiatives with the goal of maintaining a workforce that reflects the diversity of children served. Any state considering or implementing new education

requirements should assemble a commission or task force on an annual basis to review data, assess the diversity needs of the field and develop recruitment and retention strategies accordingly. To appropriately mirror diversity among educators and children, commissions or task forces should examine diversity within a community, not just with national data. For example, while nationally, 14% of children are Black, 29% of children in Alabama are Black and 20% of children in Florida are Black.^{xxxix} In the long term, these commissions will be tasked with ensuring that the early childhood education workforce retains and advances in diversity as well as quality. In particular, retention strategies should include examining data on the racial wage gap and identifying strategies to address the racial wage gap. Data and recommendations from these commissions should be shared publicly and educators and advocates should be encouraged to provide feedback and input.

2. Engage Black early childhood educators to inform the development and implementation of policies related to bachelor's degree requirements.

The most effective method of mitigating and preventing unintended negative consequences for the workforce is to ensure that the workforce is engaged in the development and implementation of new requirements. Educators should be engaged comprehensively: identifying opportunities to

improve scholarship programs, an implementation process for credentials that includes the length of time allotted to complete bachelor's degree programs, the recruitment and retention of educators, credits or waivers based on experience in the field of early childhood education, compensation reform and pay scales. The design of degree programs should also be informed by early childhood educators of color. Educators will be balancing work and school and will require a course curriculum that has a clear and positive impact on their pedagogy and encourages engagement with diverse families.

Recruiting and retaining highly qualified professionals has been a longstanding challenge in early childhood education. In order to understand why and how to address that challenge, policymakers need to engage with educators. In order to advance a diverse and well-qualified workforce, policymakers must understand what has attracted Black educators to the field and what causes them to remain committed to roles that are often undervalued and are consistently underpaid. More importantly, the field must also hear and address the circumstances that cause Black educators to leave the field. In the K-12 public education system, the retention of Black educators is increasingly becoming an issue.^{xl} Because more data and research on the recruitment and the retention of Black early childhood educators is needed, policymakers must engage educators directly to ensure the retention of diverse educators.



Some elected officials and policymakers frequently engage with early childhood education advocates and rely on their guidance about the benefits or unintended consequences policy changes will have on educators. Those advocates are not always informed by the voices of Black educators. Therefore, NBCDI recommends that elected officials proactively engage with diverse educators by creating advisory councils that include educators from different roles (from lead teachers to assistant teachers) and setting (centers and home-based programs). Most teachers believe their voices are not often factored into the decision-making process at the district (76 percent), state (94 percent) or national (94 percent) levels according to the Center on Education Policy.^{xii} NBCDI recommends that, as policymakers and elected officials commission task forces to recommend reforms to degree programs or to write reports on the diversity in the workforce, diverse educators serve alongside researchers and advocates as equal partners and be compensated for their time.

3. Create clear salary bands commensurate with a bachelor's degree and provide early childhood educators with the resources to meet minimum salary requirements.

When implementing the bachelor's degree requirement across licensed early childhood education programs, educators must be compensated adequately and equitably. To deliver on a true commitment to equity, educators required to meet the same education and licensing standards should receive equitable salaries. Implementing policies that support salary parity across education settings has been a best practice. Two types of parity have been implemented: (1) parity between the salaries in public preschool programs and community-based programs, and (2) parity between the salaries of preschool teachers and kindergarten to third-grade teachers in public schools. In May 2019, New York City passed parity between the salaries in public preschool programs and community-based programs for programs that implement the city's universal preschool program. Community-based programs make up 60 percent of all New York City universal pre-K programs. Certified early childhood educators make \$17,168 less in community-based settings than in New York City public schools, but every one of these educators is required to have a master's

degree and state certification.^{xliii} Parity is critical to equity since children and educators of color are in community-based settings. Parity also improves quality and retention in community-based programs because educators with degrees are not compelled to seek a position in the public preschool programs for higher salaries.

While parity has spurred promising progress in fair pay for early childhood educators, educators of infants and toddlers are often excluded. If parity for early childhood educators only applies to "preschool age" children, this will mean that only educators for 3 and 4 years are included. Since Black educators are more likely to teach infants and toddlers, parity may exacerbate racial disparities in salaries.

A transition to providing all licensed centers with funding to support minimum salary requirements will require an overhaul of the overall financing structure for the early childhood education system.^{xliiii} The overall cost of providing early childhood education will increase, and states must ensure that the financial burden is not passed on to families. Currently, the average American family spends approximately 10 percent of their income on child care, which is 40 percent higher than the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' definition of affordability.^{xliv, xlv} In New York City alone, the cost of providing pay parity to lead teachers in the Universal Preschool Program is estimated to be \$62,000,000 for 3,000 teachers. Along with a salary requirement for lead teachers, salary scales must be considered for support roles and at multiple education levels.^{xlvi}

4. Ensure equitable access to funding and resources for Black early childhood education providers to improve quality and support retention of Black educators.

In our 2017 Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Racial Equity report, NBCDI recommended that all state policymakers examine their quality improvement initiatives, such as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), to ensure that early childhood education providers in all communities have access to resources for quality improvement. These recommendations were developed as a result of a 2016 report from the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S.

Commission on Civil Rights based on their investigation of the federal low-income child-care assistance program in Mississippi. Testimony provided indicated that federally-required spending on the quality improvement for child-care services has been less accessible to Black early childhood education providers in Mississippi.^{xlvii} The report highlights the need for all states to examine supports for Black early childhood education programs and whether their policies and practices are exacerbating racial disparities.^{xlviii}

In many states, early childhood education programs must meet minimum program standards to be eligible for quality improvement funds. Centers in Black communities may need an initial investment to meet minimum quality standards. If we continue to allocate resources to high-quality centers without supporting all programs and educators in improving quality, we are perpetuating inequality by leaving those centers and the children that they serve behind. For example, Colorado, Louisiana and Nebraska offer tax credits to support high-quality early childhood education. Early childhood educators are eligible for a tax credit when they earn a certification or a college degree. Educators must have the resources to attain a college degree to access these tax credits. These incentives are important to supporting educators who have earned their degrees but must be balanced with support and resources to help educators who cannot afford the cost of tuition. Educators need support to attain degrees regardless of their ability to pay and centers need support to provide quality work environments and retain well-qualified educators.

5. Develop standards for allowing experience to count as credit.

Policymakers and administrators from education agencies should encourage higher education institutions to set standards for how the competencies of experienced early childhood educators will count as credit. If degree programs set these standards, they will vary by program, and whether and how educators’ experience will count as credit will depend on the programs they have access to. Representatives from philanthropy, research, education agencies and accrediting

bodies must partner with educators and institutions of higher education to develop standards based on experience and demonstrated competencies. NBCDI recommends that policymakers consider using assessments of educators’ classroom practices to determine the level of college credit they are entitled to.

Policymakers should consider that most assessments do not measure or examine cultural competence; these assessments can be subjective, and Black educators have complained of bias from assessors.^{xlix} As policymakers, educators and institutions of higher education collaborate to determine how competencies developed through experience can count as credit, NBCDI calls for the development of culturally-responsive assessment instruments. Policymakers must hear from educators to determine an equitable way to measure competency and the equivalent credits.

As mentioned previously, Washington, D.C., will require lead teachers in centers and expanded home-based programs to have associate degrees by 2023. In addition, directors will be required to earn a bachelor’s degree by 2022. Policymakers at the District of Columbia’s state education agency are waiving the degree requirement for center directors and lead teachers who have ten years of continuous experience.^l As policymakers across the country consider allowing waivers or credits toward degree completion, they must ensure that they include intentional, comprehensive communications campaigns in their implementation approach to ensure all educators are aware of these opportunities.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR WORKFORCE REQUIREMENT WASHINGTON, D.C.

TABLE 1. REQUIREMENT FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT FACILITY STAFF

	Position	Degree/Credential	Effective Date
Center-Based	Director	Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education or a bachelor’s with at least 15 semester credit hours in early childhood	Dec. 2022
	Teacher	Associate degree in early childhood education or an associate with at least 24 semester credit hours in early childhood	Dec. 2023
	Assistant Teacher	Child Development Associate (CDA)	Dec. 2019
Home-Based	Home Caregiver and Associate Caregiver	Child Development Associate (CDA)	Dec. 2019
	Expanded Home Caregiver	Associate degree in early childhood education or an associate with at least 24 semester credit hours in early childhood	Dec. 2023

6. Allow ample time for educators to complete degree programs to support retention.

Educators who have been dedicated to serving families and educating children will need support to attain degrees. Current educators must be given ample time to complete degrees to prevent mass displacement of educators, which would disrupt education for many children. NBCDI recommends policymakers give educators a minimum of ten years from the announcement of new requirements to attain bachelor's degrees. Data from 14,704 educators that participated in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood^{®1} scholarship program in fiscal year 2018 demonstrate that educators balancing teaching and pursuing a degree will require nine years on average to complete 120 credit hours.ⁱⁱ A twelve-year timeline would give educators the time to apply for scholarships and to take college preparatory classes. This timeline will be responsive to the needs of first-generation college students and educators who are entering college many years after completing high school. For example, the District of Columbia's state education agency chose to extend the timeline to give lead teachers in centers and expanded home-based programs seven years to obtain an associate degree. As stressed previously, all policies should be informed and developed in partnership with educators and early childhood education stakeholders, taking into account the number of credit hours feasible for an educator with a family and factoring in class time, study time and travel to classes.

7. Provide scholarships and comprehensive supports for educators.

Financial burden should be completely removed for educators who commit to teaching for a standard amount of time after attaining their degree. To ensure equity in access to degree programs, comprehensive scholarship programs should be available to all educators committed to the early childhood education field. Comprehensive scholarships cover tuition, fees and books and provide stipends for other expenses such as travel to class and child care.

¹ The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood[®] (T.E.A.C.H.) Initiative is a national, evidence-based strategy that creates access to higher education for teachers, directors and family child care providers working with young children in out-of-home settings. T.E.A.C.H. provides comprehensive scholarships to enable these early educators to take coursework leading to credentials and degrees by making it possible for them to afford both the time and expense of going to school. At the same time, T.E.A.C.H. helps states leverage the financial resources necessary to provide access to higher education and support for the early care and education (ECE) workforce, and it creates new and diverse teacher and program leaders. From building capacity in higher education to helping individuals attain their educational and career goals, T.E.A.C.H. is a change agent for the ECE workforce and system. (https://teachecnationalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TEACH_overview_FactSh1_11_6_19-WEB.pdf)



While nearly every state offers scholarships in early childhood education, a lack of workforce data in early childhood education also means there is little to no data on the availability of scholarships versus the need for scholarships. This data will be essential to project the potential cost of expanding scholarship programs to support the workforce in attaining bachelor's degrees.

A core component of scholarship programs that focus group participants emphasized was requiring educators to commit to remaining in early childhood education as a condition of scholarship receipt. For example, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship program supports retention by establishing a contract between the scholarship recipient, their programs and T.E.A.C.H., requiring each educator to remain in their program for a specified period of time (generally one year). T.E.A.C.H. reduces staff turnover and supports the retention of diverse educators; 50% of recipients are people of color. Data indicates that the required commitment to their positions improve retention, with only **11%** of scholarship recipients changing employment during the program, even though the average ranges from **30 to 40%**.^{lii}

Policymakers should invest in evidence-based programs to support nontraditional and first-generation college students. People of color are more likely to be first-generation college students and less likely to reach graduation.^{liii} State agency administrators should work closely with educators and higher-education institutions to support educators of color in attaining degrees, including cohort models, mentorship programs or affinity groups, college preparatory classes, flexible class schedules, online courses and apprenticeship programs. These support services have been shown to be important in supporting successful degree completion among Black and Latinx early childhood educators who participate in college as working adults and have helped them to do so in shorter timeframes.^{liiv}

- **Cohorts Programs:** Cohort programs allow educators from one center or group of centers to matriculate through their required or foundational courses as a group. In the cohort model implemented by the T.E.A.C.H. program in the District of Columbia, half of the courses are offered at the primary early childhood education center for the cohort. A critical component of

a successful cohort model is offering courses in community-based settings that reduce travel and are held in locations accessible to educators balancing teaching and college. For early childhood educators, cohort programs provide an active, interactive, and dynamic setting for students to grow their knowledge and skills with the same colleagues that they work with daily.^{liv} Data from a study of a bachelor's degree cohort completion program in California shows promising results, with a graduation rate of 81 percent—a rate more than double that of similar students.^{lvi}

- **Mentorship Programs:** Mentorship programs and affinity groups will provide educators with the support and guidance from experienced educators, especially for first-generation college students. Faculty mentor programs and student support groups at higher-education institutions are models that have been identified as best practices for Black early childhood educators.^{lvii} Experienced educators and directors often serve as formal and informal mentors as well. The California Early Childhood Mentor Program provides resources and support to aspiring and experienced teachers and administrators in programs serving children from birth to age five. Through federal and local funding, the Mentor Program provides stipends and professional development support to “mentor teachers” who guide college students in early childhood education and “director mentors” who provide resources and expertise to new directors and administrators facing new challenges.^{lviii}
- **College Preparation Curriculum:** Higher education institutions should offer specialized orientation and college preparatory classes for early childhood education. Research supports the need to focus on study skills and time management for adult learners and non-traditional college students balancing commitments to family, degree programs and their careers as educators. Support for improving study skills can also help adult learners leverage their prior knowledge and life experiences in their college coursework.^{lix}
- **Online Courses and Flexible Class Schedules for Working Students:** Programs should be responsive to the needs of working students by offering evening and weekend classes outside of traditional class schedules. Early childhood educators also benefit

from hybrid courses.² Hybrid courses offer regularly scheduled face-to-face classes as well as online components for assignments and readings. While educators appreciate the flexibility of online coursework, which gives them the flexibility to complete assignments at a self-guided pace, college administrators should be aware that these students do not regularly use computers in their professions and might need computer literacy support.

- **Apprenticeship and Career Pathway Programs:** While apprenticeship models vary in early childhood education, most participants in formal apprenticeships work in early childhood education programs while receiving hands-on training and classroom-based coaching with formal instruction

² Since 2010, NBCEI has administered the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program in the District of Columbia.

that can count toward college credits.³ For example, a nine-month work-study program in California supports Head Start parents who are working toward earning California Child Development Associate³ Teacher permits. Earning these permits gives Head Start parents the opportunity to transition to full-time Head Start assistant teacher positions. The program also provides career pathways with tracks for participants to earn associate and bachelor's degrees in child development, thus offering parents a path to becoming lead Head Start teachers.

³ The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ is the most widely recognized credential in early childhood education (ECE) and is a key stepping stone on the path of career advancement in ECE. The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ is based on a core set of competency standards, which guide early care professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children. The Council works to ensure that the nationally-transferable CDA is a credible and valid credential, recognized by the profession as a vital part of professional development. (<https://www.cdacouncil.org/about/cda-credential>)





NBCDI

National Black Child
Development Institute

Apprenticeship programs with career pathways are promising models to improve retention rates of early childhood educators.^{lxi}

In order to retain and support the current workforce in attaining college degrees, policymakers must allow early childhood educators to have the option of accessing education outside of the formal structure of college courses in traditional degree programs. Educators in rural areas, especially, may have limited access to degree programs in early childhood education. This issue is further complicated by some colleges that refuse to offer degrees in early childhood education because the compensation for early education is too low to be considered a viable career option. In addition, early childhood education must also be cognizant of the historical challenges that Black students have faced in pursuing higher education. Despite gains in access to higher education for Black students, studies have well-documented the racial alienation that Black students face while attending predominately White institutions.^{lxii} The need for education pathways for Black educators is evidenced by poor graduation rates. A study by the Education Trust shows the graduation rate for Black students at 45.4 percent, which is 19.3 points lower than the 64.7 percent graduation rate for white students.^{lxiii}

Colleges, universities and state agencies must develop programs and pathways designed to support Black early childhood educators in advancing in higher education while addressing their unique needs. In addition to allowing previous professional development to count as credit, as NBCDI proposes above, policymakers should also foster partnerships between higher education institutions (colleges, universities and community colleges) and community-based professional development providers that will allow those providers to develop and offer high-quality practice-based courses that will count as credit toward early childhood education degrees. Community-based organizations that provide professional development have experience supporting educators in improving their classroom practices and are often deeply connected with the roles that educators serve in communities. Focus

group participants stressed the importance of allowing Black educators to earn college credit from community-based professional development programs and formal degree programs. In developing partnerships for community-based organizations to offer college credit courses, policymakers must be vigilant about protecting educators from predatory private companies that will charge high prices for classes without delivering high-quality education.

8. Ensure higher-education institutions and professional development programs prepare educators to teach diverse children and families.

Policymakers should ensure that educators receive education and training designed to be responsive to the needs of their communities. Institutions and programs that engage in teacher preparation must develop and use a consistent, research-based set of competencies to guide their programs. This will require the comprehensive reform of higher education and training programs in early childhood education. Too many educators have paid for programs that do not result in mastery of the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to support the learning and development of a diverse population of young children. As focus group participants emphasized, teacher preparation programs must be held accountable to provide courses and credentialing that aligns with the early childhood education environment, the needs of Black educators and the children they serve. As policymakers consider identifying a deadline or time frame for educators to meet degree requirements, the more important deadline will be for institutions and programs that provide teacher preparation to implement comprehensive reforms designed to ensure that they are preparing educators to effectively teach all children.

Educators must be prepared to teach children of color and effectively engage families of color. One study reported that only 7% of college administrators believe their teacher education programs adequately prepare their graduates to engage effectively with families or communities.^{lxiv} The field may have many

well-educated early childhood educators who were not prepared by their college programs for family engagement or how to effectively engage diverse families. Research demonstrates that when families and schools cooperate, children have better educational outcomes.^{lxv} In *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* report, the ability to develop partnerships with parents was identified as a core competency.

Degree programs should provide educators with the “ability to communicate and connect with families in a mutually respectful, reciprocal way, and to set goals with families and prepare them to engage in complementary behaviors and activities

that enhance development and early learning.”^{lxvi} Strong relationships with parents are also essential as teachers strive to create high-quality, culturally-responsive learning environments. Courses should build educators’ competence in developing culturally-responsive practices and creating affirming learning environments for all children. The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential can be a model for providing knowledge and skills required to engage with diverse children and families.^{lxvii} With coursework and professional development that clearly benefit the children and families they are serving, educators from diverse communities will have stronger motivation to attain bachelor’s degrees.

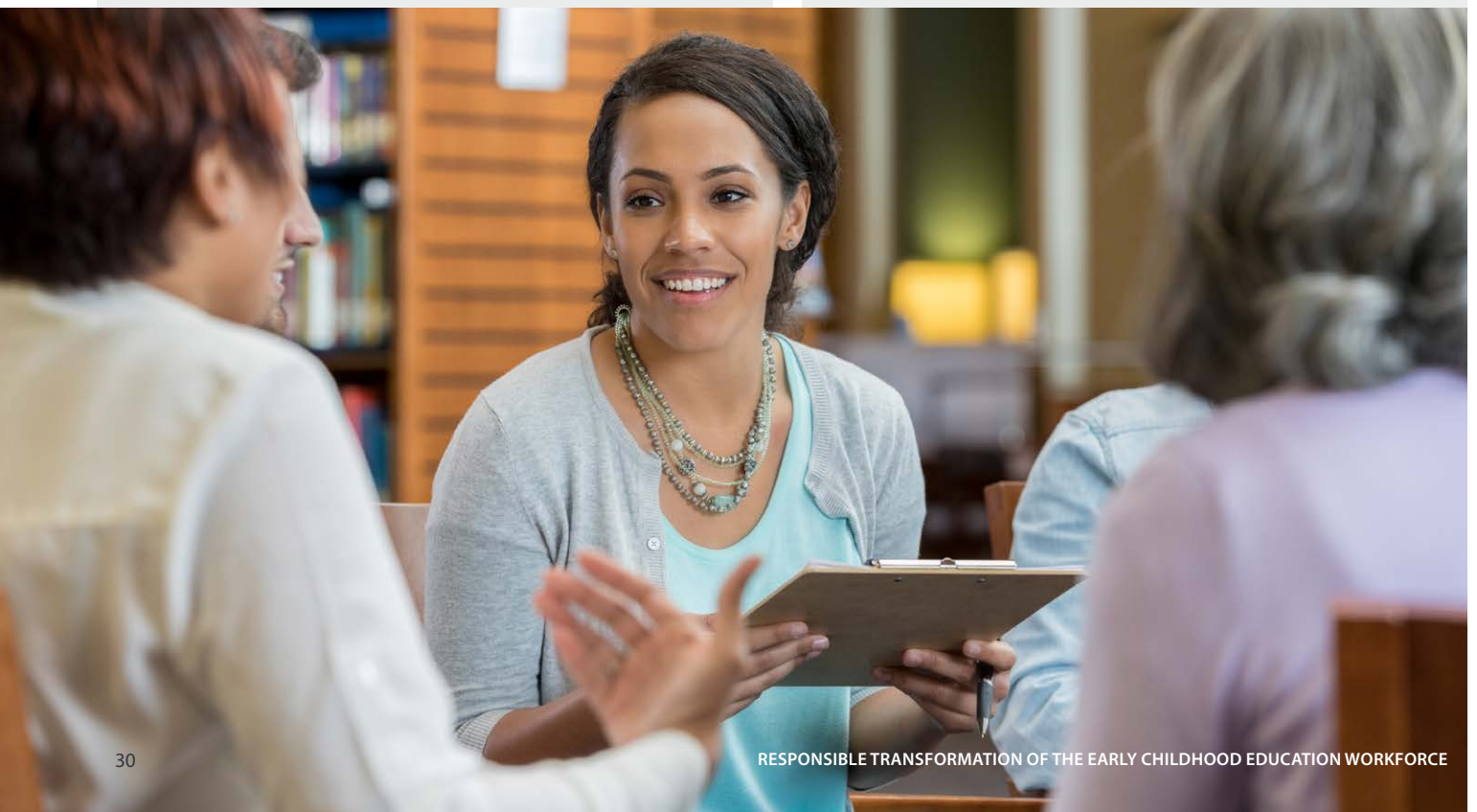


ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES

- **Advocate for equity, diversity and quality, as a single concept.** Advocates recognize all opportunities to reform the early childhood education field and opportunities to advance racial equity. Policies designed to benefit all children with no attention given to addressing institutional racism in our field will inherently perpetuate inequities. Policies designed to benefit all children will continue to benefit Black children and families the least if we, as advocates, do not truly commit to support and hold policymakers accountable for advancing racial equity in policies and program standards. Many advocates create separate initiatives to advance equity instead of using racial equity tools to embed it into every aspect of their organizations. Reforms to the early childhood education workforce are creating an unprecedented opportunity to advance equity by giving equal value to diversity and quality in the workforce and holding policymakers accountable for supporting educators of color.
- **Promote the value of early childhood educators and demand adequate funding for early childhood education.** The recommendations in this paper will require significant investments in early childhood

education systems. Updating licensing standards, tracking comprehensive data, providing scholarships and increasing compensation will each require significant funding and many years (and budget cycles) to implement. With estimates showing nearly one third of families already paying over 20% of their income for child care, the cost of advances to the early childhood education workforce should not be passed to parents and caregivers. Advocates must take a strengths-based approach, unapologetically acknowledging the cost of reforms while promoting the value of all early childhood educators across all communities and settings.

- **Intentionally engage Black educators to inform advocacy strategies.** As with program and policy development, the voices of Black educators rarely inform advocacy strategies or campaigns in early childhood education. Advocates who are truly committed to equity will commit to hearing and responding to the voices of Black early childhood educators. Many advocacy organizations in early childhood education also engage the workforce as professional development or technical assistance providers. This gives early childhood education



advocates a unique opportunity to engage with diverse educators meaningfully.

- **Demand data and engage in independent data collection** and advocate for comprehensive publicly-available data on diversity and equity in the early childhood workforce. If your city or state has not put data systems in place, implement independent data collection through focus groups and surveys to assess workforce diversity, equity in compensation and quality of work environments. In New York City, a study by the Day Care Council of New York showed that certified early childhood educators were earning \$17,168 less in community-based settings than those working in New York City public schools with the same credentials, making a strong case for salary parity. This report was published in May 2019, and, by November 2019, the Mayor and City Council passed the budget to support salary parity.^{lxviii lxxix}
- **Raise public awareness about the value of early childhood educators in the community.** For early childhood educators to be fully recognized as educators who are essential to children's development, our communities must recognize

the skills required to effectively educate children under age five to ensure they meet developmental milestones and are ready for kindergarten. Many focus group participants raised the point that early childhood educators who do not teach in school buildings are seen and treated as “babysitters” instead of skilled professionals. Advocates should engage educators and the families they serve in public awareness campaigns and target respected community members to encourage their involvement. Advocates should engage core stakeholders, including community leaders, activists, clergy and child advocacy organizations while also focusing on innovative partners like judges, pediatricians, business leaders and civic organizations. Finally, it can not be emphasized enough that transforming the qualifications of the workforce will require long-term planning and careful implementation. Advocates must highlight incremental progress at the city and state levels and keep momentum and engagement going over the long-term. Advocates must show the same dedication and support to the early childhood education workforce that they demonstrate in educating children and supporting families every day.



FUTURE WORK

- **Transforming Teacher Preparation**

Programs: NBCDI calls for comprehensive reforms, including identifying a research-based set of competencies that guide teacher preparation programs and ensuring those competencies prepare educators to effectively educate diverse children. Future work must delve deeper into the reforms needed in preparation programs, including the lack of diversity in faculty. For example, the inequities created by a lack of diverse educators in early childhood and K–12 education systems are exacerbated by a lack of diversity among faculty in teacher preparation. Based on findings from the *Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory*, there is a need for more diverse full-time faculty to meet the needs of the early childhood education workforce.

- **Culturally-Responsive Assessments of Educators' Competencies:**

As policymakers consider how competencies developed through early childhood educators' experiences can count as college credit, NBCDI calls for the development of culturally-responsive assessment instruments as an essential next step. Due to cultural bias, assessments of educators seldom recognize the competencies required to effectively engage Black children and families.

- **Engaging More Voices from the Field:** The majority of participants in our focus groups work in the center- or school-based programs and settings. An important next step in this work will be to intentionally engage with Black home-based providers; nannies; au pairs; those who participate in Family, Friend and Neighbor care; and male educators.

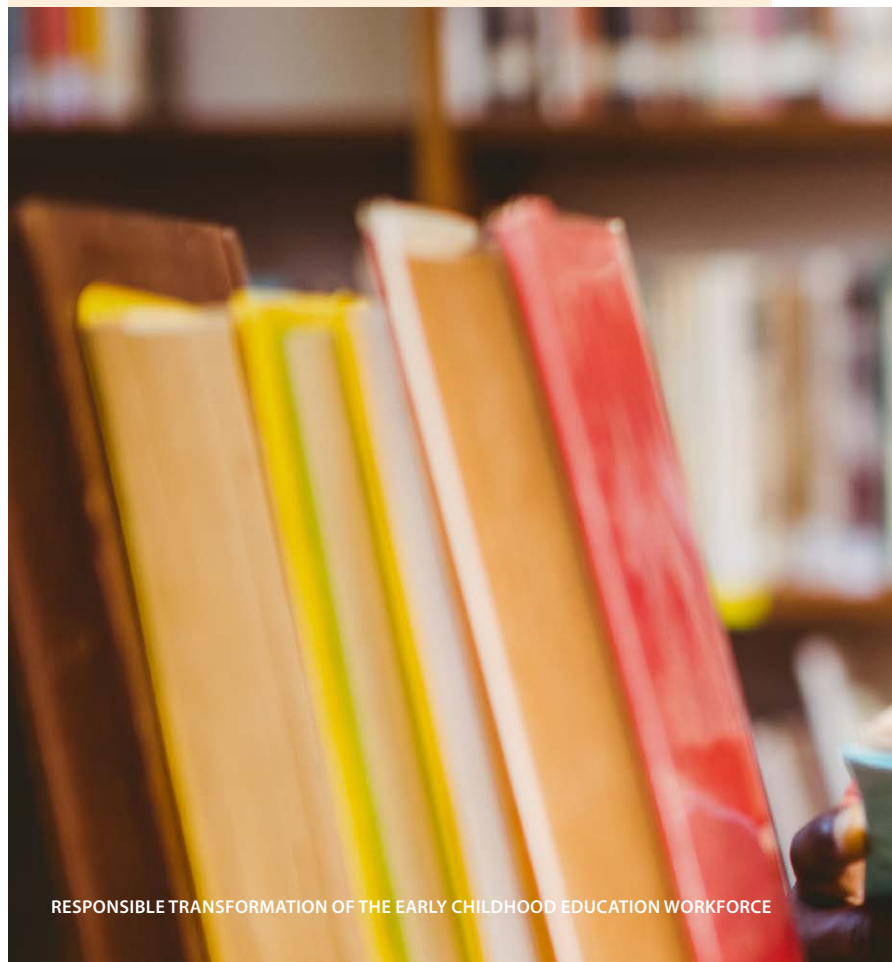
- **Home-based Early Childhood Educators:** NBCDI recognizes that the bachelor's degree requirement is especially concerning for educators of home-based programs who have limited infrastructure and support staff (if any) to help alleviate some of the burdens while lead teachers attend classes. While the recommendations in this report were written to ensure equitable support for

educators in home-based programs, NBCDI proposes further engagement and deeper exploration to identify specialized support for these educators.

- **Family, Friend and Neighbor Care:** NBCDI is committed to examining opportunities for policymakers and administrators to support Family, Friend and Neighbor providers in improving quality. While the process of writing this paper provided some insight on potential strategies to engage Family, Friend and Neighbor providers, NBCDI will not formally propose recommendations without engaging directly with Family, Friend and Neighbor providers. Recommendations to support quality among Family, Friend and Neighbor providers will be a critical next step to advancing equity, as families of color or immigrant families highly utilize Family, Friend and Neighbor care.

- **Expanding Research:** NBCDI also identified a dearth of critical research related to Black educators in early childhood education.

- NBCDI proposes additional research on the impact of Black early childhood educators on child development. For example, in the K–12 education



CONCLUSION

system, research indicates that Black children excel when they have at least one Black teacher. A recent report shows that having just one Black teacher not only lowers the Black student high school dropout rate and increases their desire to go to college but can also make them more likely to enroll in college.^{lx} Advocates informing workforce reform initiatives in early childhood education have reached out to NBCDI to request research on the importance of diversity and its impact on child outcomes.

- There is limited research and data on effective strategies to recruit and retain Black early childhood educators. Again, in the K–12 education system, retention of Black educators has been identified and well-documented as a critical issue. Turnover data on Black educators and research on best practices to retain Black educators are critical next steps in this work.

The ultimate goals of the NBCDI's Responsible Transformation of Early Childhood Education Workforce Initiative is expanding access to high-quality early childhood education for all children and supporting equitable access to bachelor's degrees from high-quality preparation programs for Black early childhood educators. NBCDI recognizes diversity as an essential component of a well-qualified early childhood education workforce. Therefore, we advocate to ensure that the early childhood education workforce reflects the diversity of the children and families they educate and serve. If implemented with a commitment to equity and diversity, policies designed to reform the early childhood education workforce will strengthen and not displace Black educators. While the field is focused on reforming and advancing the early childhood education workforce, this is an unprecedented opportunity to recognize, respect and support the existing diversity of the workforce as an inherent strength.



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About NBCDI

For 50 years, the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) has been committed to our mission to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy. With our National Affiliate Network, we develop and deliver strengths-based, culturally relevant, evidence-based, and trauma informed curricula and programs that focus on health and wellness, family engagement and literacy. We support increased access to effective education by providing professional development scholarships for early childhood educators. NBCDI, the National Affiliate Network and our members advocate and inform education policies at the federal, state and local levels to ensure standards, regulations and resource allocations support equitable systems for Black children and families.



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