

BUILDING A HIGH QUALITY PRESCHOOL WORKFORCE

Well-trained teachers are a key component to preschool programs that adequately prepare children for school. Educational attainment levels, specialized training, and ongoing professional development opportunities can impact a state's ability to build and sustain a workforce of highly-qualified preschool teachers. Several themes emerge from the research when considering policies that support the development of a high-quality preschool workforce.

What makes an effective preschool teacher?

Higher educational attainment. Research has established that when pre-kindergarten children are taught by a teacher with higher education experience—especially a bachelor's degree—they do better in pre-kindergarten and beyond. Well-educated teachers who themselves have strong literacy skills, rich vocabularies and employ complex speech patterns, provide stronger early literacy experiences to children than do teachers with lower levels of education.¹ Children taught by well-educated teachers learn literacy and language skills that lay the foundation for reading and concepts fundamental to mathematical and scientific thinking.² They also learn to pay attention, to listen, to ask questions and to follow classroom instructions. All of these cognitive and social skills provide the foundation for success in K-12 and beyond. Further, teachers with more formal education construct learning activities and lesson plans that are individualized to student needs.³ In short, well-educated teachers, especially those with bachelor's degrees, create higher quality classrooms than teachers without degrees.⁴

Specialized training in early childhood education. Successful preschool programs rely, in part, on teachers that exhibit appropriate caregiving behaviors, interact positively with children, and provide appropriate activities. These aspects of quality occur most often when teachers have received education and training specific to early childhood.⁵ Teachers with more formal education that includes specialized training in early learning have been taught what young children need to learn and how to teach them.⁶ They have been given the tools to solve problems in the classroom that arise when teaching students with different needs, learning abilities, and backgrounds.

Ongoing training and professional development opportunities. Ongoing technical assistance, training, and professional development opportunities ensure that teachers receive regular support even after their formal education and training is complete. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future calls for ongoing professional development that is linked to activities in their classrooms, research-based, and allows for continued learning.⁷ Reflecting this support, a recent study of **Georgia's** Pre-K program showed that investments in classroom monitoring, technical assistance, and training for teachers contributed to higher-quality classroom settings for four-year olds.⁸ Teachers who were furthest away

¹ Trust for Early Education (2003). *Teacher Education: One Strong Step to Ensuring High Quality*. Washington, DC: Trust for Early Education.

² National Institute for Early Education Research (2003). Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications. New Jersey: National Institute for Early Education Research, Preschool Policy Matters, Policy Brief Series.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Whitebook, M. (2003). *Bachelor's Degrees are Best: Higher Qualifications for Pre-kindergarten Teachers Lead to Better Learning Environments for Children*. Washington, DC: Trust for Early Education.

⁵ Ackerman, D. (2003). States' Efforts in Improving the Qualifications of Early Care and Education Teachers. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Available www.nieer.org

⁶ National Institute for Early Education Research (2003). Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications. New Jersey: National Institute for Early Education Research, Preschool Policy Matters, Policy Brief Series.

⁷ National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (1996). *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. New York: Author. Available www.nctaf.org

⁸ Henry, G.T. (2003). Report of the Findings from the Early Childhood Study: 2001-02. Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University. Available <http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwsps/publications/2003/earlychildhood.pdf>

from their own educational experiences led classrooms that were lower in overall quality, pointing to the need for additional training support.

What influences a state's ability to build a high-quality preschool workforce?

Preschool teachers face challenges in pursuing additional education. For preschool teachers without a bachelor's degree the cost of additional education—both in tuition and potential loss of earnings—can be daunting. To meet high education requirements many preschool teachers will return to school while still working. At the same time, college costs are rising. The average tuition (without room and board) at a state college/university is \$8,900 (the range is \$6,700 to \$14,300).⁹ Financial aid packages supplement these costs, but tend to be less generous for students taking one or two classes at a time than those for half-time and full-time students. In addition to cost, teachers with two-year degrees may face challenges transferring credits. Each semester, millions of students transfer from two- to four-year colleges and find that a significant percentage of their existing credits will not be counted toward their degree. Common course numbering systems, which allows for transferability between two- and four-year colleges, can ensure credits will transfer. At present, eight states (**Alaska, Florida, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas, Wyoming, and Mississippi**) have a system of common course numbering.¹⁰

Higher compensation levels attract higher-educated preschool teachers. Lower pay scales, typical in early childhood programs, make it difficult to recruit and retain the best and most qualified teachers. In particular, individuals with bachelor's degrees, who enjoy a wider range of employment options than do individuals with less formal education, may choose not to work in preschool programs unless they are paid at higher levels. For example, many with the specialized education and training desired for preschool are also qualified to teach kindergarten in public school systems. Nationally, teachers in preschool programs make an average salary of \$20,940, compared with \$41,100 for their peers teaching in kindergarten.¹¹ Thus, given similar educational background, a preschool teacher with a bachelor's degree could nearly double his income by teaching at a public school kindergarten.

What Governors Can Do

Depending on the specific needs in each state, governors may choose from a number of policy approaches when considering ways to build and retain a high-quality preschool workforce. Some options may require interim or incremental changes that can lead to longer-term change down the road, depending on state needs and priorities. All options require close partnership and communication between state government, institutions of higher education, preschool teachers, and professional organizations.

Require minimum education and training levels for preschool teachers. While ideal, it may not be possible for states to immediately require a bachelor's degree of all preschool teachers. Yet states can work toward increasing the formal education of preschool teachers. Through program accreditation and licensing policies, states can set minimum standards for those who teach young children in public preschool as well as other child care settings. Increasing the percentage of preschool teachers with higher education levels requires strong partnerships between state government, two- and four- year institutions of higher education and the teachers themselves. Currently, twenty-one states require that teachers in their preschool programs have a bachelor's degree.¹² Seventeen states require that preschool teachers have a Child Development Associates Credential (CDA) or associates degree.¹³ Thirty-two states require specialized training or credit hours in early childhood, often on top of as part of associates or bachelor's

⁹ The Education Trust. Web site, October 2003. Retrieved from the internet, October 2003, at <http://www.edtrust.org>.

¹⁰ Education Commission of the States (2001). Transfer and Articulation Policies. Retrieved from the internet at <http://www.ecs.org>.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2002) *Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, 2001*. Retrieved from the internet at http://www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oes_25Ed.htm

¹² Barnett, W.S. (2003). "Better Teachers, Better Preschools: Student Achievement Linked to Teacher Qualifications," in *Preschool Policy Matters* Issue 2. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

¹³ Ibid.

degrees.¹⁴ Nationwide, approximately 50 percent of lead teachers of three- and four-year-olds in center-based programs have a four-year college degree.¹⁵ States implementing additional education or certification requirements may decide to designate a phase-in period. For example, **New Jersey** requires that preschool teachers hold a bachelor's degree as well as P-3 certification. Existing state preschool teachers were given four years, in conjunction with other incentives and supports, to attain required qualifications.¹⁶ When establishing minimum educational requirements, state leaders should also bear in mind the role that compensation level plays in attracting and retaining highly-qualified preschool teachers.

Develop strategies to increase educational opportunities among current and future preschool teachers.

States may work with state colleges and universities to design policies that expand the availability, improve the quality, and provide incentives to complete specialized, B.A.-level early childhood education programs. To increase student access to programs, states may also design policies, in partnership with two- and four-year public colleges and universities, that create pathways between two-year degrees, preschool teaching experience, and a bachelor's degree. States may consider how financial aid and compensation levels impact the ability of preschool teachers and others to leave or limit their time working. For example, communities in 23 states participate in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps Early Childhood), which gives scholarships to child care workers to complete course work in early childhood education and to increase their compensation.¹⁷ Leaders may also choose to create or strengthen policies that facilitate the transfer of credits of from two- to four-year institutions, bearing in mind some programs may also require enhancements in program quality.

Develop alternative routes to preschool certification. States may also consider establishing high quality alternative routes to pre-kindergarten certification for individuals with bachelor's degrees in other subject areas. For example, states have created a number of alternative certification routes for K-12 teachers. States should consider whether such a model could be employed in building a better educated preschool teaching force. Such routes must have high standards for entry and must provide prospective teachers with a firm grounding in early childhood development and early childhood pedagogy.

Strengthen ongoing professional development and training system for preschool teachers. In addition to seeking ways to encourage additional educational attainment, states may also design policies that improve and expand ongoing training and support for current preschool teachers. For example, many states dedicate federal child care funds to ongoing professional development and training for child care providers. States may look at current training opportunities available to preschool teachers, child care providers, and others, to determine whether there might be ways to coordinate or combine existing funds and activities into a strengthened professional development system for early childhood professionals. Further, states may also consider the role and potential impact of professional licensing, apprenticeship programs, or career ladders.¹⁸

A variety of strategies will help ensure that all preschool children are taught by well-trained teachers. Governors and other state leaders, in conjunction with colleges and universities, may pursue a number of education and workforce policy strategies to work towards a sustained, high-quality preschool workforce.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cited in Early, D.M. and Winton, P.J. "Preparing the workforce: early childhood teacher preparation at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education" in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 16 (2001) 285-306.

¹⁶ Coffman, J. and Lopez, M.E. (2003). *Raising Preschool Teacher Qualifications*. Washington, DC: Trust for Early Education. Available <http://www.trustforearlyed.org/docs/NJAbbotBrief.pdf>

¹⁷ For more information visit the TEACH web site at <http://www.childcareservices.org/TEACH/T.E.A.C.H.%20Project.htm>.

¹⁸ See National Association for the Education of Young Children (1999). *Position Statement: Developing and Implementing Effective Public Policies to Promote Early Childhood and School-age Program Accreditation*. Available www.naeyc.org