

Caring for Our Children

Recommendations for Professionalizing and Strengthening Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Education Workforce

Fall 2022



 **First Up**

Champions for Early Education

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Preface

In the Spring of 2022, First Up received funding from the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation and partnered with Dr. Jennifer Pyles to conduct stakeholder engagement sessions of higher education partners (IHEs) across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Between May 2022 and August 2022, over 15 higher education participants engaged in conversations related to the 2021 report from NAEYC, *Preparing a Profession: Perspectives of Higher Education Leaders on the future of the Early Childhood Education Workforce*, which highlights the key themes, challenges, and recommendations from IHEs across the nation in their effort to respond to the expanded and urgent need of the early childhood education (ECE) sector to grow an educated, degreed workforce.

During that same period, individual interviews were held with IHE administrators and community organization leaders to gain further insight on the context of the early childhood ecosystem in the state. Six interviews were conducted.

The stakeholder engagement sessions and interviews started with focused questions and engaged open-ended conversations pertaining to the NAEYC *Preparing a Profession* report and its context in Pennsylvania. Discussion was free-flowing, leading to rich discourse about the challenges and opportunities for the field of ECE and for the future of higher education in relation to the ECE workforce within the state. Recommendations and next steps were outlined.



“The goal is to promote tangible change for this high skilled but undercompensated field.”

The partners hope that this report contributes to the ongoing discussion that is occurring in all sectors of Pennsylvania around early childhood education. The goal is to promote tangible change for this highly skilled but undercompensated field. From business, philanthropy, education, and government, communities are processing ideas about what can be done to strengthen the field of ECE so that 1) its workforce becomes stable and secure; 2) ECE is a viable career pathway for a diverse group of educators; 3) those in the field earn a comparable wage to other educators with equal experiences, credentials/degrees. In doing so, the state will ensure that high quality early childhood education and child care is equitable, accessible, and affordable for all families.

Introduction

When it comes to child care and early childhood education, there is usually bipartisan support for quality experiences and care that foster brain development and positive school/life results. Research consistently exhibits that high quality early childhood education (ECE), with a highly trained early childhood educator, impacts the quality of the experience children receive within the ECE environment and improves outcomes for children; however, increasing the quality of ECE programs is hindered by low compensation rates, high turnover statistics, and inadequate

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professional development systems for the ECE field. The lack of stability in the workforce combined with the lack of education and training for the ECE educators leads to low quality experiences for children and families.

In Pennsylvania and across the nation, child care is near a breaking point. Families suffer from an unstable system, with a transient early childhood workforce, the high cost of quality care, and inadequate child care arrangements.¹ Many families simply cannot afford quality care. Child care providers suffer as they are not able to support themselves or their families on the low compensation. Child care programs suffer as they continuously lose productivity and quality with high turnover rates. These programs are unable to support their businesses with fluctuating reimbursement rates and challenging enrollment trends. The issues are not new to the field.

Recently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, child care and early childhood education (ECE) were placed in the spotlight of political



discourse and economic recovery plans. The pandemic illustrated how indispensable child care is for the economic wellbeing of families and communities in Pennsylvania. As the lockdowns began and families stayed home, child care centers were forced to close. When centers re-opened, the cost of providing the necessary health requirements to mitigate COVID-19 was too high for small centers, forcing many out of business, leaving even more holes in quality care across the Commonwealth. As the nation realized that child care is essential to the re-opening of the economy, the need focused for communities to decisively resolve the fundamental challenges that have consistently and historically confronted the early childhood education eco-system; compensation rates, quality experiences, teacher preparation, and workforce stability. As Pennsylvania continues to move through the reengagement of the economy, the Commonwealth is sitting on an opportunity. If the challenges of the child care system can be resolved, it could result in building a robust Pennsylvania workforce and economy with stronger communities for children, families, and businesses alike. Pennsylvania could potentially provide high-quality child care to more children and families, and ensure that the status of early childhood educators is permanently reflected by investments in their compensation and education.

1. Child Care Services Association. (2021, July 6). *Policy Brief: Retaining Educated Early Childhood Educators*. <https://www.childcareservices.org/2021/07/06/retaining-educated-early-childhood-educators-a-policy-brief/>.

Early childhood teacher preparation is part of the answer; yet higher education programs and the field of ECE struggle to find common ground. In Pennsylvania, the system of higher education is the primary pipeline of effective teacher preparation where there are more than 100 colleges and universities that are approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to offer teacher education programs. Of those, 89 colleges and universities hold certification programs in pre-K–4th grade teaching.² Community colleges are major partners and channels for ECE professionals to begin their credential/degree journey. In addition, the National Council for Professional Recognition awards the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and many community colleges and professional learning organizations (PLOs) in the state offer programs for the CDA. In Pennsylvania, an ECE educator can find over 20 CDA programs regionally placed.³ According to Foley et.al. (2020), community colleges play a critical role in these ECE degree programs as more than 50% of bachelor’s degree graduates attended community colleges and then transferred to a 4-year institution to complete their degree.⁴ But even with so many pathways of educational experiences available, the field is not compensated adequately to pay for their training and degrees, and, for many, a degree is not required.

In addition, as degree programs are examined in the state, the elementary pathway in the pre-K–4 model in Pennsylvania is not as relative to the work of early childhood. Much of the coursework built into the typical degree program leaves little room for content related to young children, especially content around infants and toddlers. This leaves a “relevancy

gap” for the ECE field with higher education. Also, those who enter the CDA pathway find the process intimidating and difficult to complete. The number of CDAs awarded in Pennsylvania by the Council since its inception has not even approached the investments made by the state.⁵

Given this information, it was critical to convene PA IHE stakeholders, administrators, and community organization leaders to examine and consider the PAP report through the PA lens and develop recommendations for communities to consider as the state enters a new academic year and a new administration cycle. From these conversations, the stakeholders created a list of the current

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strengths and weaknesses within the current ECE ecosystem in Pennsylvania. The stakeholders also detailed the opportunities and risks that are also present in the system and potentially impacted as the economy re-engages and struggles through high inflation, low unemployment, and economic uncertainty. The group developed this report for leaders to consider if Pennsylvania is committed to tackling this challenge, taking advantage of this opportunity, and making meaningful change across the state for children, families, and communities.

2. The number of colleges and university programs (100+) includes all certification areas. This data was retrieved from the PDE website <https://www.education.pa.gov/Educators/Certification/BecomeAnEducator/Pages/Approved-Certification-Programs.aspx>.

3. CDA program information gained from the ECE PDO websites: www.ecepdo.org and www.phmc.org. Additional CDA information found at the PA Key website <https://www.pakeys.org/get-professional-development/credentials-degrees/child-development-associate-cda/>.

4. Daniel Foley, Lynn Milan, and Karen Hamrick, *The Increasing Role of Community Colleges among Bachelor's Degree Recipients: Findings from the 2019 National Survey of College Graduates* (Alexandria, VA: National Science Foundation, 2020), <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf21309>.

5. Report forthcoming from Northwest Institute for Research on the CDA in PA.



Pennsylvania's Current Landscape; A Challenging Context

Challenges

- More of the same – too much change asked of the field with no real change for them
- Compensation – relying on parent pay/fees; no living wage for the workforce
- Confusing systems
- Higher education buy-in and capacity

More Of the Same – Not Getting Anywhere

For those in early childhood education, there is an element of spinning in circles involving conversations around child care and early learning. The stakeholders reported that the origins of childcare as a political issue can be traced back to the 1970's pushback President Nixon faced with the Comprehensive Child Development Act (CDA). Over fifty years ago, President Nixon vetoed a landmark bill, the CDA, which would have created a comprehensive system of federally-funded public child care centers across the U.S. The CDA was thought to be "one of the most significant social legislations" of the congressional session.⁶ Initially, like the bipartisan support heard today around children and their development, Nixon favored child care as part of his legislative agenda. In a speech to Congress, he stated the following:

"So crucial is the matter of early growth that we must make a national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life."⁷

Even though the bill had bipartisan support and passed the House and the Senate, Nixon vetoed the CDA and later that month, signed the 1971 Revenue Act, establishing what is now the current system of private child care, with tax deductions for the wealthy and middle class. The current system is often inadequately funded leaving quality gaps for many families.⁸

Compensation

The dependence on parent fees was cited by the stakeholder group as one of the main weaknesses for the professionalization of the

6. "The Nation: Child Care Veto." *TIME*, 20 December, 1971, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,878957,00.html>.

7. Nixon, Richard. "Special Message to the Congress on the Nation's Antipoverty Programs." *The American Presidency Project*, [Special Message to the Congress on the Nation's Antipoverty Programs](https://www.americanpresidencyproject.org/special-message-to-the-congress-on-the-nations-antipoverty-programs/). | [The American Presidency Project](https://www.americanpresidencyproject.org/) (ucsb.edu). Accessed 1-6-2022.

8. Waxman, Olivia. "The U.S. Almost had Universal Childcare 50 Years Ago. The Same Attacks Might Kill it Today." *TIME*, 9 December, 2021, <https://time.com/6125667/universal-childcare-history-nixon-veto/>.

profession. Without consistency in funding, early childhood educators will not be able to earn a family supportive living wage, and/or see the value of the ECE degree. Compensation is the heart of the issue and is linked to continuous staff shortages. In Pennsylvania those who earn a degree or credential in ECE pay a penalty when it comes to their earnings. An early childhood educator with a bachelor's degree will earn 22% less than those in the K–8 system. The poverty rate for those who work in ECE in PA is 17.6%, much higher than for other Pennsylvania workers (9.2%) and 13.6 times as high as for K–8 teachers (1.3%).⁹

The stakeholders point out the ongoing and historically grounded research around early childhood education and the need for high quality care givers and teachers. The state invested in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in the early and school age care and education programs.¹⁰ The stakeholders cited that this system helped to increase expectations of quality in the field including education and training. With the changes the state also made to the career pathway¹¹ and with the introduction of the Professional Development Organizations (PDOs),¹² stakeholders stated that perhaps the field needs to find themselves as willing participants in the system with some power over their educational advancement.

Confusing Systems

Stakeholders discussed that in Pennsylvania, there are too many confusing systems to navigate. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), which oversees much of the child care and early learning profession in Pennsylvania, is a shared office between two branches of the state government; the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). This structure sets up misunderstandings regarding the service or educational aspect of early childhood. In fact, the stakeholders mentioned that a clear vision from the state around the work of early childhood would be beneficial to the entire ecosystem. The stakeholders mentioned the consistent and ongoing communications from the PA Key and the ELRCs, which are both business partners of OCDEL. While communication is important, too much from multiple organizations and business partners is confusing to a stressed system. The voluntary PA Registry, where the PA Key tracks professional development growth of those who are in the system also seems to be a point of confusion for both the workforce and higher education.

Higher Education Buy-In and Capacity

With confusion in and about the field and such low compensation for those with degrees, the investment from higher education institutions is dependent on state and federal funding. The stakeholders themselves often have the pressure for

9. "Early Childhood Workforce Index; State Profiles 2020." *The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment*, 2020, <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/>.

10. Keystone STARS is PA's QRIS and is based around Standards, Training and education, Assistance, Resources, and Support. Licensed centers move up to a STAR 4 rating – highest in quality by QRIS.

11. Pennsylvania's ECE Career Pathway can be found on the PA Keys' website <https://www.pakeys.org/career-pathway/>. It was formerly the Career Lattice with different notations and levels: https://www.pakeys.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Career-Lattice-and-Roles_9.2014.pdf.

12. Pennsylvania's Professional Development Organizations (PDOs) can be found on the PA Keys' website <https://www.pakeys.org/professional-development-organizations-pdos/>.

completion of grant applications for funding of tuition and supports to help those in the field gain access to the education they need to be a more engaged and competent teachers for young children. There is a consistent lack of capacity at the IHE level in early childhood with an immense amount of work added to the traditional faculty role. This also impacts the programs' ability to

apply for and complete NAEYC accreditation processes. IHE administrators state that while they are committed to and supportive of early childhood, those alumni don't typically help to support the colleges and universities once they graduate due to their low-income level. Early childhood programs are not seen as "market driven" in a competitive higher education market.

Strengths

- Funding
- Collaboration
- Quality rating system and innovation

Funding

The stakeholders were clear that the funding provided by the state for both tuition and support of ECE workforce students was one of the biggest strengths in the ecosystem of Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth provides three funding avenues for those in the field; T.E.A.C.H, Rising Stars Tuition Assistance (RSTA), and the Professional Development Organizations (PDOs).¹³ Each funding mechanism has its own application process, funding requirements, and student supports; however, these systems can also become a source of confusion for the ECE workforce. Through the state's funding, higher education institutions also received support to create programs for those in the field working with children ages 0-5 and to spur accreditation processes. The funding from the Commonwealth was viewed as a significant strength for the field.

Collaboration

Across Pennsylvania in higher education, there are committed faculty in early childhood education who collaborate with each other to improve the work for the field. Their efforts at their own institutions and collaboratively through the Higher Education Consortium for Early Childhood Education helped to implement innovative programs and ideas, including apprenticeship. These faculty supported each other in grant applications and received multiple awards for program design and student support. They possess a wealth of knowledge of the field as many were former practitioners now researchers. They also hold the historical context that helps to situate the work in today's perspective.

13. T.E.A.C.H. A Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant is different from other federal student grants because it requires a teaching service obligation as a condition for receiving the grant. <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/teach#eligibility> RSTA The Rising STARS Tuition Assistance (RSTA) program pays 95% of tuition costs for eligible college coursework taken by ECE professionals. The RSTA Program is administered by the Pennsylvania Key on behalf of OCDEL.

Quality Rating System and Innovation

Keystone STARS is the long-standing Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS).¹⁴ It is an approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school age care and education programs. It recognizes continuous quality improvement efforts from the ECE community. The stakeholders labeled this effort as a strength for Pennsylvania noting, however, that participation in the QRIS is not mandatory for licensure or certification.

In response to the National context, the state recently adopted the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE).¹⁵ The stakeholders group expressed that this was a well-defined action taken by the state that clearly aligned the PA ECE workforce as one unit with the entire field – thus helping to professionalize the profession. Prior to this action, PA used the Core Knowledge Competencies (CKC's) in addition to NAEYC Standards. This standards adoption action helps to clarify the professional standards for the system.

Pennsylvania invested in apprenticeships for early childhood education. The model is viewed by the stakeholder group as a strength for the field so that ECE educators can earn and learn at the same time. The innovation around this concept of workforce development layered with the basic model of teacher education, using apprentices, coaches, and mentors, was noted as a success for the state. There are several successful examples, regionally placed, where ECE apprenticeship has developed and is growing.¹⁶ The stakeholders also encouraged the development of other models like apprenticeship. They noted that more flexibility in programming was needed for success.

14. QRIS in Pennsylvania, Keystone STARS <https://www.pakeys.org/keystone-stars/>.

15. The Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE) replaced the Core Knowledge Competencies (CKC's) in the Spring of 2022. <https://www.pakeys.org/get-professional-development/professional-competencies/early-learning-professional-competencies/>.

16. Apprenticeship hubs in the Southwest, Northwest, Central, Northeast, and Southeast part of Pennsylvania; Carlow University, Keystone College, Northampton Community College, Westmoreland County Community College, Edinboro University, Shippensburg University, Delaware County Community College, Community College of Philadelphia, Arcadia University.



Opportunities for Success – Areas of Innovation and Change

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Although there are specific and real challenges facing the field of early childhood as many strive to help professionalize the field, address compensation, and stabilize the pipeline, there are sparks of celebration and innovation. The stakeholders honored that much has been accomplished and that Pennsylvania has many groundbreaking programs in place. Those in administrative positions in higher education and

community organizations pointed out that supporting ECE degree programs and the early childhood ecosystem clearly aligns specifically in their efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion across Pennsylvania. The programs that the Commonwealth developed are increasing accessibility and affordability of higher education programs for more Pennsylvanians.

Higher Education Consortium

Pennsylvania is home to the Higher Education Consortium for Early Childhood Education (HEC). This is a group of invested faculty from all areas of the Commonwealth who, initially brought together for a Federal apprenticeship application, continue to grow membership and commitment to the field and to the innovative programs needed in Pennsylvania. The HEC is a think

tank to brainstorm possibilities for the future of ECE in PA. The group developed a unified approach to further funding and investments for ECE students and is committed to putting the needs of the field above all else. It could be in this group that higher education finds new pathways for innovation and change for the field.

External Support

The field is guided by funding opportunities. These include tuition assistance with State and Federal dollars from the Professional Development Organizations (PDOs), Rising Stars Tuition Assistance (RSTA), and T.E.A.C.H. In some areas of the Commonwealth, foundation money also supplements the development of ECE programs and tuition assistance. The stakeholders agree that these funding mechanisms offer a great service and strength as Pennsylvania professionalizes the field. Without the investment of dollars

into program development and tuition assistance, those in early childhood would not have access to relevant programs with funded coursework. It is also important to note that the HEC works closely with funding organizations to respond to opportunities, provide needed services, create new pathways, and spark further innovation.

Community Colleges

The community college plays a significant role in the professionalization of the field in Pennsylvania. The curriculum in many of these institutions is soundly situated within early childhood teaching and pedagogy, making the relevant connection for workforce students.

Many faculty come from the field and connect directly with the experiences of the classroom environment. The community colleges, and the faculty who create innovative programs for the diverse workforce, are an important part of the path towards professionalism.

Articulation

In PA, an agreement for transfer and articulation (TAOC)¹⁷ exists between all public 2- and 4-year institutions, providing the framework for a seamless transition between an associate's and bachelor's degree program. Many IHEs say that it is really the personal relationship between the faculty and

their consistent communication that ensures a seamless program to program articulation so that students don't lose or obtain useless credits. This is a challenge but a glimmer of hope, as faculty collaborate to find the best path for students.

Innovation

In both 2- and 4-year institutions, immobile systems and faculty who may be resistant to change are viewed as barriers to the spark of hope that is occurring across the state.

Several leaders mentioned that is a challenge for higher education innovation as well as for the new generation of students. It was noted by these leaders that even with large grants, it is difficult to foster large campus buy in or develop programs for diverse students. Also, many departments of education are focused solely on pre-K–4th grade certification and struggle to shift to include early childhood as a robust program design.

This is not the case in every institution; the hope comes from those higher education institutions who are leading the pack where innovation and forward thinking develops new programming for the modern workforce

and could be the key to survival in the higher education market. Two examples follow:

■ **Carlow University** offers students access to the CDA and the BA degree through traditional tracks and through apprenticeship; Carlow's apprenticeship program, which was approved by the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Labor in 2019, will increase the quality of early childhood education centers and build high-retention and supportive pathways for teachers of color. The four year apprenticeship model is the first of its kind in the Commonwealth. From this effort, Carlow established The Center for 21st Century Innovation and Workforce Development. This center, which includes early childhood education, works to build and advance an interconnected 21st-century workforce development ecosystem that responds to the new reality of the COVID-19 digital landscape, systemic racial inequities, occupational segregation and displaced workers through

17. TAOC; PA Transfer and Articulation Center website can be found at <https://www.patrac.org/>. The system was designed to establish course equivalency standards; identifying a minimum of 30 hours of foundation courses for transfer at each of the 14 state systems and 14 community college institutions; resolving any conflict resulting from any of the above processes.

stackable trainings, certificates, credentials and credits that articulate into career and college pathways. Carlow is advancing relationships with community colleges in the region so that seamless articulation is a reality for students.¹⁸

■ **Keystone College** offers students the opportunity to complete the full pathway in ECE; the CDA credential, AA degree and BA degree program in both the non-certification and certification track. Innovation is at the heart of Keystone's core. The faculty are currently creating a new program called LEEP – Lean and Earn Education Program, which offers accelerated certification in early childhood. Keystone is also a hub/intermediary for ECE apprenticeship and

pre- apprenticeship programming in the Northeast region of the Commonwealth. Keystone College is resourceful in the way in which tuition is charged, applying cohort fees instead of per/student fees, reducing the amount of funding required and therefore increasing the number of students funding can reach. Keystone College developed a successful onboarding program for ECE students so that they are prepared to enter college coursework and find more success in their efforts. With a core of 10 bilingual faculty, two who are certified in English as a Second Language Instruction (ESL), Keystone offers bilingual instruction. Keystone also serves as a technology hub for the Northeast Region of the PASSHE PDO.¹⁹

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship models offer another glimmer of hope for the field of early childhood. In the Commonwealth, ECE apprenticeships began in the southeast region with three partners; Community College of Philadelphia, First Up, and 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund. Over the last several years, with the collaboration of the HEC and the funding of 1199C and

PDOs, regional hubs were established, and more registered apprenticeship programs are available.

Currently, IHEs and community organizations are looking for more flexibility in the apprenticeship model so that more students can participate.

Champions for Change

Pennsylvania has champions for early childhood education guiding and facilitating change and innovation every day. These champions are in every region of the state and within organizations that directly serve the early childhood workforce; however, there are also champions who head other types of institutions with connections to the field of ECE but are not directly linked to the work. These forward thinking and committed

individuals are examples of the possibilities in Pennsylvania. They are willing to share what they developed and what they learned in the process so that others may modify and replicate success for their communities.

18. Carlow University website; Center for 21st Century Innovation and Workforce Development <https://www.carlow.edu/about/workforce-development/>; Apprenticeship site: <https://www.carlow.edu/academic-programs/education-teaching-degrees/early-development-learning-major/>.

19. Keystone College website; <https://www.keystone.edu/academics/majors/education/early-childhood-education/> Apprenticeship site: <https://www.keystone.edu/academics/majors/education/apprenticeship-programs/>.



Recommendations and Next Steps

Foster Changes in Higher Education

The conversations among all stakeholders included points of consideration for institutions of higher education to consider. All call for programming in higher education to match the vision of high-quality early childhood education. While many IHE administrators and teacher education (TE) programs speak to the value of ECE and most IHE TE programs have curriculum specific to the PreK-4th grade ECE teacher certification track, they do not host curricula relevant to the work of the ECE 0–5-year-old workforce. IHE's must also make modifications to the format of educational opportunities for the workforce so that equity of educational

opportunity is achieved. The ECE workforce is not comprised of the “traditional” college student population, so innovative programming with targeted restructuring is necessary for the success of higher education connection to the professionalization of the 0–5-year old workforce. Higher education faculty in TE programs must view the workforce as educators as much as they do those in the PreK-12 grade system. Respect for and value of the critical work of the early childhood field will create bridges for opportunities between the field of ECE and those in higher education.

Utilize Investments for Continued Compensation

The stakeholders resolutely agreed that the field must be seen as a profession with appropriate compensation. They called for sustainable public investments for wages as a key priority. This act will help raise the economic level to a family supportive wage

of those working in ECE and help bolster the status of the degree pathway in higher education institutions. By doing so, this would create a marketplace that truly values the early childhood educator and increase quality for families and communities.

Develop a Shared Vision that Leads to Clear Policy

A profession is a field of work that has been successfully professionalized. If the state hopes to be successful in professionalizing the field of ECE, the stakeholders determined that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania needs to create and commit to a shared vision and mission for Early Childhood Education with clear policy that aligns to the workforce and their current needs. Consistently, changes and new policies are pushed out to the field. According to the stakeholders, there is

confusion and lack of understanding which causes the field itself to feel disorganized. One stakeholder noted that those in the field tell them they just wait on policy to change because it will – it never lasts very long. When referring to how the field is feeling about their work, another stakeholder used the word “hopeless.” To build a profession, a shared vision with clear policy and consistent messaging is central to this mission.

Engage Critical Stakeholders

It is essential that those knowledgeable about the field be part of the conversations related to policy, funding, and practice. The stakeholders suggested that some of the participants should be at the table with the legislators, policymakers, and other leaders as discussions are held and decisions are made involving children, families, and communities. With the wealth of knowledge and history

that this group has regarding children's development and learning, and the systems within Pennsylvania and nationally, they would bring strength to any conversation or debate and offer fresh ideas to new leaders. This would help to shift the profession as a whole and the status of the degree within higher education.

Create Shared Business Models

Several leaders referenced that some regions of the state are examining how to redesign the current method of payment for child care. Local government, businesses, and school districts are considering child care as part of a hiring package and subsidizing spots in local centers. Child care would become more stable with the guaranteed payment for slots; businesses would see the increase in recruitment and with more

committed employees; and families would feel the economic impact with the child care aid. Businesses could also help fund professional development to ensure the quality of the centers in which they purchase slots for potential employees, thus serving to professionalize the workforce. This is a model with significant potential for children, families, communities, and field.

Lead with the Science of Early Childhood

The science is clear on early childhood education. The stakeholders agree that the facts should continue to be the focus of the conversation. Higher education listens to science and expands practice through science, translating science into practice. Both early childhood education and higher education help to advance the individual as well as the society.²⁰

This speaks to those in the post-secondary world and the leaders who were interviewed relayed this sentiment in a variety of words. It is critical that the science of early childhood lead the way.

20. NAEYC, 2021. *Preparing a Profession: Perspectives of Higher Education Leaders on the Future of the ECE Workforce*, The National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, D.C., https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/higher-ed/final_higher_ed_leadership_report.pdf.

Partner with the HEC

The state is unique in that it has access to a think tank of individual faculty across the entire Commonwealth who are committed to the process of problem solving and innovation. The Higher Education Consortium should be involved and utilized at every level of ECE policy planning, funding management,

advocacy strategizing, and grant writing. These individuals know and understand the research and are open to listening to new ideas. The HEC's strategic plan is aligned with goals that will support the field fully, from funding, to advocacy, to growth. The state is stronger with the HEC in place.

Create Alternative Pathways to Professionalism

In the interviews of leaders across the Commonwealth, many noted that while education is important, the pathway to a credential and/or degree can be arduous and intimidating. This is especially true for a field that is overworked and underpaid. The daily stresses could potentially create unsurmountable barriers to completion of the CDA credential, AA or BA degree. Some asked why there aren't other ways for the workforce to have experience and/or prior learning applied to the Career Pathway and count for credit within higher educational institutions. Now that Pennsylvania has adopted the standards and competencies, it

is important to create multiple pathways to credentials, aligned with the competencies, that articulate to degrees.

It is also crucial that if credentials and degrees are to be required, then higher education institutions must make learning more accessible for the workforce. This means that many IHES may need to design whole new programs for those in the early childhood field. They also may need to redesign coursework, use online formats, host courses in the evenings and/or on weekends, or find some new and innovative pathways to course completion.

Stabilize Child Care for Economic Gains

The pandemic was not a focal point of these conversations or interviews; however, in a COVID-19 world, it was impossible to avoid. The economy needed child care to begin to recover. Child care became a cornerstone to rebuilding; yet, those in the field are still paid at the lowest rates and families cannot afford high quality care.

The Commonwealth is sitting on an opportunity. The stakeholders urge the new administration to address the challenges of the child care system. The ideas presented could help build an even stronger Pennsylvania workforce and economy. Pennsylvania could potentially provide high-quality child care to more children and families, and ensure that the status of early childhood educators is permanently reflected by investments in their compensation and education.

Conclusions

In Pennsylvania, child care is near a breaking point; however, the Commonwealth is full of promise with highly committed individuals, institutions, and organizations rallying with strong engagement around stabilizing the system. There are challenges in the current landscape; from compensation to confusing systems to capacity, there are necessary items to address. The pandemic lit a torch to an already fragile system and the stakeholders cautioned that the system urgently needs a resolution. Many of those interviewed and participating simply said that this must be the time, and it is simply the right thing to do for children, families, and the communities of Pennsylvania. The recommendations shared within this report lay the groundwork for changes and the development of other new ideas to impact early childhood education as many unite to professionalize the field, increase quality, and impact the system for all of Pennsylvania's families. The partners at First Up, the stakeholders and the participants hope that the recommendations for next steps offered in this report are a pathway towards meeting the needs of the profession in a way that helps prepare more highly skilled and



“Many...said that this must be the time, and it is simply the right thing to do for children, families, and the communities of Pennsylvania.”

educated teachers to teach and care for the youngest in Pennsylvania and prepare them for more positive life outcomes. If Pennsylvania steps up, this time, and addresses the historically grounded issues entrenched in early childhood education and the child care system, the Commonwealth could become the model for the rest of the nation.

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Stakeholders Group Members:

Jean Allison, PhD.

Early Childhood Education, Program
Coordinator and Associate Professor
Delaware County Community College

Tonia Breech, M.Ed.

Adjunct Professor
Lehigh Carbon Community College

Caroline Campana, M.Ed.

Director of Workforce and Professional
Development
First Up

Tara Dwyer, M.Ed.

PDO Manager on behalf of *Office of Child
Development and Early Learning (OCDEL)*

Christine Haley-Brinen, M.Ed.

Senior Early Learning Specialist
First Up

Robin Howell, M.Ed.

Adjunct Professor
Edinboro University

Kathryn K. Kashner, M.Ed.

Early Childhood Apprenticeship Coordinator
Northampton Community College

Liz Knouse, M.Ed.

Early Childhood Education Professional
Development Organization at the
*Pennsylvania State System of Higher
Education*

Dr. Frances Langan, Ph.D

Vice President of Institutional Advancement
Keystone College

Dr. Chris Lincoln, Ed.D

Director, Education Department
Northampton Community College

Dr. Betsy Manlove, Ph.D

Professor
Lock Haven University

Sharon McClafferty, MSW

Executive Director
*Early Childhood Education Professional
Development Organization at Public Health
Management Corporation*

Sue Polojac, M.Ed.

Director, Early Childhood Education
Apprenticeship HUB
Carlow University

Dr. Jennifer Pyles, Ph.D

Educational Specialist
Independent Educational Consultant

Dr. Amy Saia, Ph.D

Professor
Community College of Philadelphia

Dr. Brandi Slider, Ph.D

Program Director
Westmoreland County Community College

Acknowledgements (continued)

Interviews:

Dan Adamus

Chief Operating Officer
Northwest Institute for Research and
KeyStone Research Corporation
Erie, Pennsylvania

Frances Langan, Ed.D.

Vice President of Institutional Advancement
and Strategic Initiatives
Keystone College
La Plume, Pennsylvania

Sue Murkherjee, Ph.D.

Executive Director of Enrollment
Management, Information Technology, and
Special Projects
Cheney University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Annette Searfoss, Ph.D.

President & CEO
First Start Partnerships of Franklin County
Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

Leah Spangler, Ed.D.

Founding Executive Director/CEO
The Learning Lamp
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

John Sygielski, Ed.D

President
Harrisburg Area Community College
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania