



POLICY BRIEF

Professional Development for Teachers of
Arizona's Young Children



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

Educated Teachers Benefit Young Children Most

When it comes to brain development, birth to 5 is prime time. Research shows that about 90% of a child's brain develops *before* she enters kindergarten, and a child's experiences in the early years lay the foundation for success, in school and in life. Parents and families are a child's first and best teachers. They play a critical role in the health, emotional well-being and learning of their child. But, many families need to work, and place their children with paid or volunteer caregivers during all or part of the day. In addition, many families who care for their children at home choose to supplement their child's learning with educational experiences outside of the home. Research demonstrates that when child care and other early learning programs are of high quality and developmentally appropriate, children score higher on school readiness measurements and do better in school. They also have better relationships with their peers and are more likely to graduate. But the quality of early care and education depends on the professionalism, education and skills of the teacher.ⁱ Research shows that professional development of teachers makes a difference,

in K-12 schools and in early care and education. Highly qualified early childhood teachers can significantly affect a child's cognitive outcomes, specifically early literacy and language development, letter knowledge, and writing skills.ⁱⁱ

Competitive wages are critical to the recruitment and retention of great early childhood teachers and care providers. Combined with benefits and opportunities for pay increases, they can reduce staff turnover rates. Turnover is not only a business challenge for providers; it is a learning challenge for children. Research shows that children are better prepared to learn when they have consistent relationships with teachers.ⁱⁱⁱ Large swings in teacher turnover make it difficult for children to form the secure attachments to consistent caregivers that are so critical to their learning and development. A national study found that teacher turnover is highest in child care centers with lower wages and lower levels of teacher education.^{iv} Early childhood teachers frequently leave pre-kindergarten positions for the higher pay that positions teaching kindergarten through 3rd grade students can provide.

A 2012 survey of Arizona child care providers found differences between degree attainment and type of child care providers. Thirty-one percent of teachers working in a Head Start program, 45% of



teachers working in a public preschool program, 23% of teachers working at public or private early childhood centers (excluding Head Start and public preschools), and 26% of all early childhood teachers combined had obtained a bachelor's degree. Median hourly teacher wages across different types of early childhood programs ranged between \$10.00 and \$16.00 an hour. Compared to wages in 2007^v, there has been about a \$1.00 increase in hourly median wage across different types of programs. The differences in pay and turnover among early childhood teachers in different types of schools are shown in Table 1 below.

significant coursework in early childhood education and an Early Childhood Education Certificate. Holders of an Early Childhood Certificate have a bachelor's degree, approved early childhood teacher preparation coursework that includes practicum hours, and a passing score on the Professional Knowledge Early Childhood exam.^{vii}

Head Start teachers in Arizona will also encounter new regulations. As of September 30, 2013, 50% of Head Start teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education or related coursework. Currently, all teachers in Early

Table 1: Education and Tenure of Early Childhood Education Teachers* in Arizona, 2012^{vi}

	Head Start Teachers	Public Preschool Teachers	Other Early Childhood Teachers**	ALL Teachers Combined
Median hourly wage	\$16.00	\$14.50	\$10.00	\$10.00
Percentage with bachelor's degree	31%	45%	23%	26%
On the job two years or less	13%	25%	30%	29%
On the job five years or more	71 %	56%	41%	45%

This policy brief outlines needs, challenges and solutions for increasing the professional development of early caregivers and teachers in Arizona. We define professional development to include both the education of future early childhood teachers and continuing or in-service training for existing early childhood professionals, including administrators, teachers and assistant teachers.

Minimum Education Requirements for Early Childhood Teachers

Both the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the federally funded Head Start program are moving toward stronger education requirements for early childhood teachers.

By July 1, 2012, all teachers serving children birth through kindergarten in programs administered by ADE will be required to hold a bachelor's degree or

Head Start programs (for children 3 and younger) must have at least a Child Development Associate credential and, by 2012, also must have training with a focus on infant and toddler development.^{viii}

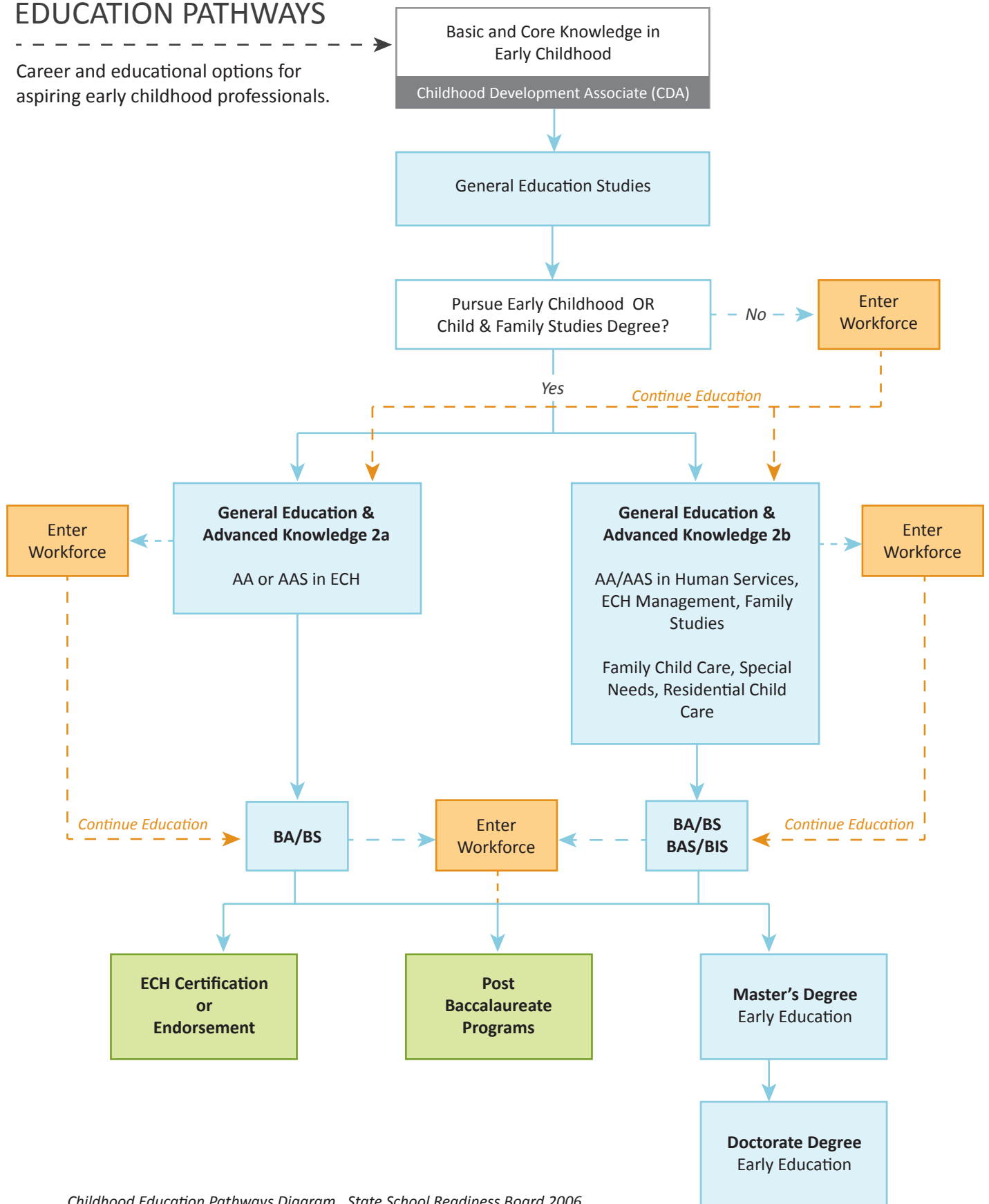
A state-licensed child care facility in Arizona currently requires teacher-caregivers to be at least 18 years old and have either a high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED) and six months of child care experience; a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential ; or, an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood studies. An assistant teacher-caregiver must be at least 16 years old and have employment or volunteer activity in a child care facility for a minimum of twelve months. Depending on their age, they must either have a high school diploma or GED or be currently enrolled in high school.^{ix}

*Assistant Teachers *not* included.

** Teachers from for-profit and non-profit centers, excluding Head Start and public school teachers

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Career and educational options for aspiring early childhood professionals.



Childhood Education Pathways Diagram. State School Readiness Board 2006. (Diagram is currently under revision)

Professional Development Needs and Challenges

Access to Professional Development Opportunities

Early childhood teachers can face numerous barriers to their professional development, including financial, time and transportation constraints, access to coursework, and access to consistent academic guidance.^x For example, the number and types of educational classes available to working professionals during evenings and weekends may be limited. Because women make up more than 94% of the child care workforce, early childhood teachers are often balancing home and work responsibilities with furthering education.^{xi} As mentioned earlier, child care workers receive low wages, lower than other female-dominated occupations, leaving early childhood teachers at risk for poverty themselves.^{xii}

These barriers are off-set, at least partially, by a workforce that is often eager to build their skills and serve their students better. “My teachers really embrace professional development and the chance to learn,” a Tucson child care center director said. “Most of the people are in this field because they really love it and don’t want to do anything else.”

Access to professional development is also not consistent among all types of care – in-home care providers often have less access to professional development and have lower documented levels of continuing education than their center-based counterparts.^{xiii}

The Value of Professional Development

Numerous studies demonstrate the importance of young children’s relationships with their teachers to their future success in school. High quality teacher-child interactions have been found to predict aca-

ademic skills, language skills, and social skills among young children.^{xiv} Yet, a review of various studies involving teachers of four-year-olds revealed that increasing teachers’ education levels alone does not significantly improve “classroom quality or maximize children’s academic gains.” Rather, specific, focused professional development activities, opportunities, and supports that emphasize high quality teacher-child interaction are needed.^{xv}

Other research documents the challenge of making teacher education opportunities widely available—such as through online learning—while maintaining a high standard of quality. Evidence exists that web-based systems of professional development that include consultation on specific interactions between children and teachers are much more effective than the web-based systems alone.^{xvi} In this sense, professional development opportunities that improve teacher-child interactions can increase school readiness.

The director of one southern Arizona child care center described the impact of her teachers’ increased professional development this way: “I see a lot of improvements in the classroom: I see more focus on the students; more child-related, hands-on activities. Before, a lot of the work I saw was more teacher-driven, memorization work—learning colors and shapes, that sort of thing. Now, they’re learning weights and measures. I see more child-led activities. I hear more music. I see more child art. You can see the children getting a better education.”

Professional development can also enhance teachers’ understanding of variations in cultural and ethnic traditions and values. Research suggests that professional development specifically related to diverse classroom settings affects providers’ attitudes and perceived confidence about embracing, appreciating and being sensitive to the needs and interests of children with varied cultural backgrounds and family configurations. Studies also reveal that a majority of early care providers find their training has not prepared them to care for and teach young children with atypical development and

other special needs.^{xvii} Early care provider training may lead to higher quality care that includes children who may need extra support and understanding due to physical, emotional and/or developmental challenges.^{xviii} Additionally, academic professionals have documented the lack of research on professional development approaches which could improve the cultural competence of early childhood teachers and caregivers, and have called for more strategic study.^{xix}

Uniformity and Standards in Professional Development

For Arizona early childhood education providers, the path to earning a degree or certificate often begins at a local community college and ends at a state university. Cooperation between community colleges and Arizona's three state universities –Arizona State University (ASU), Northern Arizona University (NAU), and University of Arizona (U of A) – is open and ongoing. Because of Vision 2020, an Arizona Board of Regents strategic community development plan, a number of notable partnerships recently have emerged between Arizona community colleges and Arizona universities. NAU has an articulation agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with Yavapai Community College; U of A has a similar agreement in place with Pima Community College, as does ASU with Central Arizona College. Articulation agreements promote the seamless transfer of course credits between the colleges and universities, making it easier to complete a degree. Arizona's Early Childhood Articulation Task Force has also dedicated many years to facilitating more MOUs and establishing official partnerships around shared curricula and course credit transfers.

While the numerous degree and certificate programs that exist in Arizona universities and community colleges must meet state standards, only one early childhood education program in the state, at NAU, is nationally accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and recognized by the National Association for the

Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Beyond formal teacher education, the *Arizona Early Learning Standards* also guide classroom curricula for three-to-five year-olds.^{xx} The *Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Care and Education: Birth through Kindergarten* address the importance of quality teacher-child interactions and instructional support and discuss how teachers can best interact with children this age.^{xxi}

Policy Cooperation

Both the National Governors Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children advocate state policies that increase integration of professional development requirements, improve quality of professional development, increase compensation parity, support research-based practices, and ensure greater access to professional development opportunities.^{xxii} Policy solutions for the professional development of early childhood caregivers and teachers don't necessarily require a notable portion of the state budget.

What are First Things First and other Arizona organizations doing?

While the challenges and needs of increasing professional development opportunities among Arizona's early childhood education workforce seem great, certain measures to strengthen and support teachers and caregivers are already in place.

Funding College Scholarships: First Things First (FTF) funds the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Arizona (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) program administered locally by the Association for Supportive Child Care. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Arizona offers college scholarships to individual child care center teachers, directors, and family child care providers. Scholars can receive support toward a Child Development Associate certificate or an associate degree at a community college. "Having a professional career has been a dream of mine," one recipient explained. "Now that the T.E.A.C.H. program has awarded me a scholarship, I am in the path to making my dream a reality. Taking courses in Early Childhood has helped me apply the skills I gained to be able to enhance the quality of care that I provide." In the 2011 Fall semester, First Things First supported 626 T.E.A.C.H. scholars/participants from 394 providers.^{xxiii}

Increasing Compensation: FTF has partnered with Valley of the Sun United Way to launch Professional REWARD\$. Professional REWARD\$ was designed to help retain qualified teachers to care for and educate Arizona's youngest children. The program offers financial incentives (ranging from \$300 to \$2,000 based on the recipient's education level) to early care and education professionals for progressive education, educational attainment and commitment to continuous employment. The program is wide-reaching, drawing over 1,200 applicants from all over Arizona between July and December of 2011.^{xxiv}

Greater Professional Certification: the Arizona Department of Economic Security and FTF are partners in the Professional Career Pathways Program (PCPP). PCPP supports home-based care providers in their pursuit of the CDA credential, and center-based caregivers for coursework towards the CDA, as well as a community college certificate. PCPP scholarships are prioritized for regulated child-care homes.

Communities as Resources in Early Childhood Teacher Education (CREATE): Helios Education Foundation has granted the University of Arizona \$1.5 million over five years to support a new curriculum for college students who want to specialize in preschool or K-3 education, and workshops to help current teachers get new ideas for engaging young children and their families in reading and stories.

Professional Development Data: Tracking standards of professional development, for both recipients and providers, is necessary for a complete understanding of our state's progress. In Arizona, a voluntary statewide professional development registry was established in 2004. The Statewide Child Care and Early Education Development System, or S*CCEEDS, reviewed, listed, and promoted training for caregivers and provided tracking of caregiver educational attainment for almost 10,000 early care workers. Community-based training and education was offered at no cost to participants, and could lead to college credit and certifications. Unfortunately, the registry was discontinued in March of 2009, due to state budget cuts.

Next Steps

In the early years of a child's life, high quality relationships with adults – both parents and teachers – establish a solid foundation for success in school and life. A primary challenge for Arizona's early childhood workforce is to build strong teacher-child relationships. This challenge is magnified by the high expectations parents, communities and policymakers place on early education and teaching. Teachers and caregivers need more opportunities and much more support to meet these expectations. Specifically, Arizona needs:

- greater collaboration and integration of professional requirements and among systems of higher education;
- greater application of research showing the importance of professional development in fostering strong teacher-child relationships and how strong relationships can contribute to positive child outcomes;
- financial support to further the education of aspiring early childhood professionals, including coordinated and adequately funded efforts to address barriers often encountered by individuals entering the early childhood workforce, such as college advisement specifically geared to students in early childhood programs, or targeted tutoring to help students complete degree requirements (e.g. math and writing courses);
- incentives to retain high quality early childhood teachers;
- an integrated data collection, evaluation, and knowledge building system to track progress of early childhood teachers and aspiring early childhood professionals, leading to an improved early childhood system of services in Arizona.

Professional development of early childhood teachers notably increases school readiness and cognitive outcomes for young children. In the words of one early childhood teacher who received support through FTF and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Arizona program:



“

My knowledge and confidence has grown so much! I am trying new activities and see a difference in my classroom and with the children. The parents have noticed that the quality of what I do is so much better.”

Endnotes

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- xvii Skills: Results From Seven Studies of Preschool Programs. *Child Development*, Vol. 78 (2), pp. 558-580.
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- xix Chang et al. (2005). Early Childhood Teacher Preparation in Special Education at 2 and 4-year Institutions of Higher Education. *Journal of Early Intervention*, Vol. 27 (2), pp. 110-124.
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- xxi Ibid
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- xxiii First Things First (2012) Grantee Data Submission Reports
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