

# The State of the Early Education Workforce: *Removing Barriers to Access and Advancement*



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# Bessie Tarrt Wilson Initiative for Children

The Bessie Tarrt Wilson Initiative for Children (BTWIC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 2002, enhances the lives of children and families through advocacy and early education policy reform initiatives. BTWIC strengthens early education and care for children in greatest need through research, communication, and policy implementation. BTWIC's work leads to systemic change by focusing on critical policy issues that impact the early education experiences of children from poor and low-income families in Massachusetts.

The 2006 report, *Keeping the Promise: A Study of the Massachusetts Child Care Voucher System*, led to the following accomplishments:

- Improved continuity of care for children through the extension of the voucher certification period from 6 months to 1 year
- Improved access to care for families with limited English proficiency by ensuring that translated materials and live translation services are available
- Reduced administrative burdens for families and agencies through the elimination of the requirement to provide the same documentation to multiple state agencies.

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It is our motto that “high school graduation begins with high quality early care and education,” and this is particularly true for children from low-income backgrounds. The Bessie Tarrt Wilson Initiative for Children is committed to identifying and implementing strategies that improve young children's chances for success in preschool and throughout life.

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# Glossary

- BTWIC ..... Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children
- CCPLF..... Child Care Provider Loan Forgiveness Demonstration Program
- CDA..... Child Development Associate Credentials
- CPC..... Community Partnerships for Children
- DEEC..... Department of Early Education and Care
- EEC..... Early Education and Care (refers to the field as a whole)
- ESOL..... English as a Second or Other Language
- FCC..... Family Child Care
- IHE..... Institute of Higher Learning
- NAEYC..... National Association for the Education of Young Children
- R&R ..... Child Care Resource and Referral Agency

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# Introduction

*There's a saying that most people have heard before: It's easier to get it right the first time than to fix it later on. This saying lends itself well to early education and care. Our children are the best capital the country has, and providing high quality education and care is the most important gift we can give to the children of our nation.*

Numerous scientific studies from the last decade have managed to change public perception about the importance of early education and care. Parents no longer wonder whether the experiences their children have in early childhood affect cognitive development. Experiences that are focused on educating and enriching a growing mind lead to better educational outcomes throughout elementary and secondary school and into adulthood.

The research helps us understand the importance of educating our children, and the cost to society when high quality education is not provided before elementary school begins. The human brain does its most significant growing during the years leading to elementary school. This growth includes not only learning languages and other cognitive abilities, but also interaction with other people, the development of self-confidence, and the ability to manage stress.<sup>1</sup> “All aspects of adult human capital, from work force skills to cooperative and lawful behavior, builds on capacities that are developed during childhood, beginning at birth.”<sup>2</sup> Children take their first steps to becoming people during their infancy. Furthermore, children exposed to new words during early childhood have a significantly larger vocabulary than those without such exposure during this time.<sup>3</sup> The learning achievement gap grows during secondary school, as children who did not receive any early education have

more problems grasping the complex concepts taught in high school.<sup>4</sup>

The challenges for Massachusetts are to raise the quality of all early education and care and to provide an innovative, exceptional early education experience. While Massachusetts is in the top twenty states for early education, too many of the state's children do not enter school with the skills they need to succeed.<sup>5</sup> This study will look closely at the issues facing the field and examine how these issues affect both children and early childhood educators. Research conducted by the Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children will provide further insight into well-known problems and serve as the basis for recommendations.

*“We can make a difference.”*

Town Meeting Attendee, Springfield

The early education and care workforce is critical to the quality of education and care for all Massachusetts children. Organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have used the research on learning achievement gaps from lack of early education to call for increased educational requirements for early childhood educators. As awareness of the importance of early education increases, it is likely that state governments and families will join these

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1 *The science of early childhood development: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do.* (2007). Cambridge, MA: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.developingchild.net>

2 See footnote 1. *The science of early childhood development.*

3 Greeley, S., Britton, K., & Sherman, L. (2008). *Thrive in five: Boston's school readiness roadmap.* Retrieved October 2, 2009 from [http://www.thrivein5boston.org/pdf/TN5\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.thrivein5boston.org/pdf/TN5_Full_Report.pdf)

4 See footnote 1. *The science of early childhood development.*

5 Kendall, R. (2009, March). *We CAN do better: 2009 update, NACCRRA's ranking of state child care center regulations and oversight.* Arlington, VA: NACCRRA

*“Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that comprise the foundation of human development. Furthermore, the emotional health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important prerequisites for success in school and later in the workplace and community.”*

*The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do*

organizations in demanding higher education degrees for those in the field.

Massachusetts’s success in providing early education and care relies heavily on the education level, training, and professional satisfaction of early childhood educators. They are up to the challenge – they want to earn college degrees and they want to provide the best possible care to the children they watch over. However, educators in the early education and care field face serious challenges as they try to finance their education, navigate the education system, and survive on the compensation rates. We must address these challenges if we are to provide the early education and care our children deserve.

A long history of being undervalued and underpaid has created a workforce with low morale and high turnover rates. Between 2003 and 2006, the turnover rate increased nearly 4% in education services throughout the country.<sup>6</sup> The high turnover rate sometimes leads to early childhood educators moving up within the field. This is normal within any field and generally seen as a positive. However, more often than not, the high turnover is due to people leaving the field completely, thereby leaving a gap in the number of trained early childhood educators in the field. Compensation is not commensurate with the level of work expected of early childhood educators. Pay rates often do not reflect the cost of living, especially in urban areas. The Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard, created by the Crittenton Women’s Union, measures the amount of income needed to thrive without relying on state or federal assistance. Annual wages for

self-sufficiency need to be at least \$25,874 for a single adult.<sup>7</sup> For a family of three (one adult, two children), the annual wages required jumps to \$58,133.<sup>8</sup> Yet wages for early childhood educators in the state average \$22,910 annually.<sup>9</sup>

So what do all these numbers mean? What is it like to be an early childhood educator? It means worrying constantly about how you will pay your electricity bill. It means struggling to provide your children with healthy meals when your wallet is empty and you are exhausted from the workday. It means standing in line to get government assistance every month, despite working full time. It means being told that your job might depend on years of college, a commitment that you cannot afford

*“Critical to sustaining high-quality [early education and care] for young children are ...the features of [the workplace] that enable [providers] to excel in their work and remain in their jobs, notably small ratios, small groups, and adequate compensation.”*

*From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, National Research Council (2000)

6 Latest BLS employee turnover rates for year ending August, 2006. (2006, October 11). Kailua, HI: Nobscot Corporation. Retrieved October 2, 2009 from <http://nobscot.com/survey/index.cfm>

7 *The quest for economic independence in the Commonwealth: 2006 self-sufficiency standard for Boston*. 2006. Boston, MA: Crittenton Women’s Union. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.liveworkthrive.org/docs/fess2006/2006%20FESS%20Boston.pdf>

8 See footnote 7. *The quest for economic independence in the Commonwealth*.

9 US Department of Labor. *Occupational employment statistics, Bureau of Labor statistics*. Retrieved August, 14, 2009, from <http://data.bls.gov/oes/datatype.do>

and do not have the time for. It means juggling serious issues everyday and feeling as though you will never get ahead.

The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children envisions a workforce of early childhood educators and caregivers who strive to provide the best possible experience to all children, including low-income children and those in the child care voucher system. We see a workforce rewarded with the compensation, benefits, and respect

*“No recognition stings.”*

Town Meeting Attendee, Boston

befitting educators. Of the utmost importance, we see opportunities for education and degree achievement available to all in the field.

BTWIC acts as a direct connection and facilitator between the early education and care field and the state. Our ability to create an open dialogue between the field, state and federal programs, and parents helps support the ultimate goal of providing high quality care to young children. With the arrival of a new commissioner for the Department of Early Education and Care, there is a renewed opportunity to open such a dialogue.

This report from the Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children looks at the interrelated issues of degree attainment, financing early education, communication, and public perception of the field. It will begin with a discussion of the research methodology and the findings from BTWIC’s research and will conclude with formal recommendations for workforce development in each of the following areas – higher education, compensation and benefits, and communication.

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# Research and Methodology

*BTWIC's previous publication and study on the voucher system utilized town meetings as a way to gather information from the field. Based on the previous success of this data collection method, BTWIC returned to town meetings for data collection for this study on workforce development. Town meetings provide a variety of professional perspectives and allow us to continue our targeted and intentional connection to those in the field.*

BTWIC held seven town meetings during the first half of 2009. Town meetings were held in New Bedford, Boston, Springfield, Cape Cod, Worcester, Lowell, and Lawrence, in that order. The meetings were designed to bring together early education and care educators, administrators, and parents to receive an update on the state of the field and to discuss professional development, compensation and benefits, education requirements, and communication in the field. BTWIC wanted to provide a forum that allowed participants to speak openly about issues, but that also allowed them to brainstorm and develop solutions. This was a way to give them a voice and a stake in the development of the field. Meeting attendees were asked to listen to a brief presentation of research on the current state of the field, including pay rate comparisons and our assumptions of the challenges faced by early childhood educators who want to pursue higher education. We asked attendees to comment on the validity of our assumptions, then break into groups to discuss the following topics: college degrees and professional development, increased compensation (salary and benefits), and loan forgiveness/scholarship funds (supports for college degree attainment).

Massachusetts is one of the most diverse states in the country, and town meeting attendees mirrored the diversity of the field. Nearly one-quarter of family child care providers and center-based staff are not Caucasian.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the racial diversity of attendees, there were attendees from center-based care, family child care, Head Start, and public schools, all in a variety of positions within the field, including administrators, lead teachers,

teachers assistants, paraprofessionals, and advocates. Parents also attended. A total of 603 members of the early education and care (EEC) field and parents attended the town meetings.

*Town Meetings were held in:*

<b>New Bedford</b>	<b>Boston</b>	<b>Springfield</b>	<b>Cape Cod</b>
<b>Worcester</b>	<b>Lowell</b>	<b>Lawrence</b>	

To expand upon the group conversations, BTWIC collected questionnaires from town meeting attendees along with direct quotes from the meetings. The questionnaires were anonymous and asked participants to identify specific barriers to degree attainment, benefits, and compensation as well as to provide information on which sector of the early education and care field they work in, current level of education, current salary, and desire to remain in the field. Town meeting attendees were encouraged to write in additional information to further explain their situations. An additional “mini-meeting” in Boston allowed BTWIC to collect 468 questionnaires.

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<sup>10</sup> Marshall, N., & Dennehy, J.. (2005). *Massachusetts capacity study research brief: Characteristics of the current early education and care workforce serving 3-5 Year-olds*. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley Centers for Women.

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## Findings

*The major findings of this study confirmed the widely held assumptions held by those who advocate for the field – early childhood educators are overworked, underpaid, and feel stresses that affect their ability to perform their job functions. This research is especially compelling because it comes directly from the field. It provides a candid view of the reality of being an early childhood educator, from a range of positions, sectors of the field, and locales within the state.*

Our findings are as follow:

1. Compensation is the largest stressor for the field and the principal barrier to accessing higher education.
  - The salary increase that generally comes after earning a baccalaureate degree is minimal. In some cases in Cape Cod, it was reported as being only a few cents. This salary increase may slightly alleviate the financial strain those in the field feel, but rarely cures it.
  - At all seven town meetings, lack of money was consistently listed as the number one barrier to higher education. 54.1%, significantly more than half of those questioned, believe they cannot afford to attend any college including community colleges.
  - Increasing tuition costs at institutions of higher education (IHE) throughout the state makes it difficult for early childhood educators to afford to attend. Between 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, tuition and fees increased by 3% at four-year IHEs and 4% at two-year IHEs.<sup>11</sup>
  - 12.4% of questionnaire respondents cite low pay as the main reason for wanting to leave the field.
  - While 21.2% of questionnaire respondents currently hold a second job, many others expressed the desire and financial need for additional income. However, they are constrained by the long hours required at their current job. 3.2% of questionnaire respondents are so overwhelmed by the long hours required in the field that they wish to move into a different field.
- Many early childhood educators cannot afford the benefits offered through their centers. Only about half of those surveyed (49.8%) have health benefits. 28% of those questioned do not have health or retirement benefits through work, and 19.4% are only able to afford benefits through their significant other.
- Self-sufficiency is not a reality for early childhood educators. 32.1% of questionnaire respondents receive government assistance in the form of food stamps, Women, Infants, and Children supplements (WIC), or free/reduced price lunches for their children. An additional 13.2% have to borrow money from friends and family to survive.
- Often a small pay raise will leave early childhood educators unable to access needed government assistance. Town meeting participants in New Bedford cannot afford the private rate for child care at the local college's daycare, yet their compensation is just high enough to make them ineligible for the subsidized rate.
- Early education and care administrators struggle with providing adequate compensation for their staff. It is difficult for them to find the balance

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<sup>11</sup> Baum, S., & Ma, J. (2007). Trends in higher education series: Trends in college pricing. New York: The College Board. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from [http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/about/news\\_info/trends/trends\\_pricing\\_07.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf)

between charging parents what they can afford and bringing in enough revenue to pay appropriate wages.

- Early education and care administrators report that the costs for space and providing health insurance continue to increase. As a result, they are laying off more staff and decreasing hours. They feel that they do not have any other options— they must layoff staff or decrease hours in order to continue running their businesses.
  - Early childhood educators throughout the state shared a sentiment of not being paid what they are worth.
  - The lack of appropriate compensation causes personal and professional stress, embarrassment, and low morale. These outcomes all affect children who rely on continuous care from happy early childhood educators.
2. Early childhood educators have trouble accessing higher education for a variety of reasons.
- The incentives to obtain a degree attainment are not strong enough to encourage early childhood educators to go to college. As mentioned in the compensation findings, minor salary increases or promotions often do not match the level of effort and financial commitment that degree attainment requires.
  - Early childhood educators are wary of committing to a college program while working full-time and raising a family. 23.3% of questionnaire respondents see lack of time as the biggest barrier to attending college.
- “I have to keep three jobs.”*  
Town Meeting Attendee, Lawrence
- Nearly 10% of questionnaire respondents cannot access child care for their children so that they may attend school.
  - There is no defined structure (i.e., career lattice) that demonstrates potential career paths and the corresponding level of education needed. Without this, early childhood educators fail to see the benefits of degree attainment.
- Town meeting attendees cited feeling “confused” and “overwhelmed” by the college system. The majority are nontraditional learners (e.g., they have been out of school for many years, are adult learners, or have limited English proficiency), and need help managing the different aspects of attending college. Boston, Springfield, New Bedford, Worcester, and Lowell town meeting attendees stated the need for college counseling. Lawrence town meeting attendees discussed the need for a mentor program with counselors that understand the field-specific burdens of being an early childhood educator. Overall, 21.2% need counseling support to succeed in navigating the college system.
  - Early childhood educators feel that their years of experience are ignored when it comes to degree attainment. Every town meeting included a long discussion on the frustration of not being able to transfer work experience into college credits. Questionnaire respondents averaged nearly 12 years in the field, and have gained valuable experience in those years.
  - Professional development and educational conferences also are a source of frustration for early childhood educators. 73.3% have taken more than one workshop or training sessions in the past year, and 61% have attended an education conference in the same time span. Yet, early childhood educators do not see these educational experiences as counting towards a college degree program.
  - There are not enough supports within the field for attaining degrees. Less than 13% of questionnaire respondents receive tuition benefits (monetary aid) to attend institutions of higher education.
  - 59.2% of questionnaire respondents need scholarships to afford to attend an institute of higher education.
  - Early childhood educators don’t have a reliable way to keep track of the college courses they have already taken. 58.3% of questionnaire respondents have taken more than one college course within the last year; yet, many are not currently matriculated in a program. BTWIC encountered numerous personal accounts of early childhood educators throughout the state who have years of courses under their belts, but no way to keep track of all

the credits and, therefore, no way of knowing what courses to take next.

- Within the field, different groups need different issues addressed for higher education achievement:
  - Early childhood educators in center-based care cite cost and time as the biggest barriers to pursuing higher education (66.7 and 26.2 percent respectively).
  - Early childhood educators in family child care named cost and language as the biggest barriers (42.5 and 39.6 percent respectively).
  - Discussions at all town meetings mentioned the lack of higher education opportunities online and a desire to access online courses.
3. Communication within the field, at all levels, is lacking.
- In Boston, early childhood educators feel a lack of support from supervisors. This feeling is exacerbated by the lack of communication between supervisors and early childhood educators.
  - At all town meetings, early childhood educators specifically noted their lack of involvement in their administrator’s decision-making process for benefits, such as health provider choice. They felt something as simple as informational meetings between the staff and administrators would be helpful in solving communication issues.
  - Early education and care administrators feel that they do not receive timely communications from the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC), while early childhood educators feel they do not receive enough information from their directors.
  - Early childhood educators found informational literature from the Department of Early Education and Care “difficult to understand” and “unclear.”
  - Information about available funding, including the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Fund and regulations, is difficult for early childhood educators to access.
  - Family Child Care (FCC) educators were the most vulnerable in terms of not receiving information about the field from the state. FCC is the most

isolated (due to each FCC home being stand-alone and most are not part of a system) and least organized. These factors make it difficult for the DEEC to reach FCC educators as a group to share information.

- The licensing packet from the Department of Early Education and Care is not informative enough, according to town meeting participants.
  - 38.7% of questionnaire respondents feel that the field should embark on an advocacy campaign that provides public awareness about the responsibilities involved with early education and care and the compensation rates.
4. Early childhood educators are overworked.
- Lead teachers often find themselves managing administrative tasks, including paperwork for children. Many find the time needed for this takes away from time spent with children.
  - In New Bedford, town meeting participants listed staff meetings, CPR trainings, and other professional development courses as being “overwhelming.”
  - 3.2 percent of those surveyed at town meetings indicated they want to leave the field because of the long hours involved.
  - Given the long hours and paperwork required, many early childhood educators felt that pursuing a degree would diminish their home and personal lives. Many have young children at home and need to cover babysitting and childcare fees if they go back to school.

Perhaps the most compelling finding from all this data is that the challenges and frustrations are the same for all early childhood educators, across the board. The same issues exist throughout the state, throughout the different types of early education and care provided, and exist regardless of position. The overwhelming consistencies create an excellent opportunity for the state to address these issues and make a positive impact that will reach the entire field.

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## Stories from the Field

One woman reported that when their family had two incomes, “working in child care was a breeze.” After her divorce, her situation changed. She had to support herself and her child and spent \$2,500 a month more than her salary through credit cards. Now she has to cut back on everything to pay off her credit card debt. She often works 8:00 am to 8:30 pm. It is her 31st year as an early educator. “At some point as you go along, you are locked in. I don’t have the experience or education...to move. I’m 58 years old and I’m still working on a B.A.” She earned an associate’s degree in 1975 and has gone to seven different colleges since then.

On Cape Cod, a single mom of two children related her story of working a second job after her hours at the center. Though she works full time, she cannot make ends meet. She has to go to the local food pantry to get food because she is not able to feed her family on what she makes in the two jobs.

An Early childhood educator in New Bedford shared that the center has been offering college level courses for a number of years; she has taken advantage of them, but never matriculated in a college. After 8 years of taking courses, she just found out that many have been duplicate courses and they do not add to the requirements of the degree.

A town meeting attendee in Boston lost 10 hours of employment due to recent layoffs. She now has a second job at CVS and is working evenings and weekends. She is too overworked and has dropped out of college classes. She has very limited time with her own family; she has three school-age children.

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# Recommendations

*The Bessie Tarrt Wilson Initiative for Children has developed a set of recommendations to address the issues of education, compensation, communication, and public education/awareness. Each recommendation is phrased as an overarching goal, followed by detailed measures to achieve each goal.*

Many issues were considered in the development of these recommendations, including the current economic climate in Massachusetts. BTWIC understands that major change cannot occur without monetary costs. Our recommendations are designed to create a foundation for long-term change once the economy recovers. But change cannot wait; to that end, many of the recommendations can be implemented immediately.

## Higher Education

- 1 Implement a simple credentialing system to encourage early childhood educators to attain degrees. Request that implementation occurs within the Department of Early Education and Care and the Executive Office of Education.

The state must be commended for its efforts around this task. The Workforce Development Task Force for the Department of Early Education and Care called for the creation of a career lattice/credentialing system in 2006 that provides “multiple points of entry, opportunities for lateral movement (across settings, age groups, programs), as well as progression from entry levels to advanced professional levels.”<sup>12</sup> In 2008, the Massachusetts Early Education and Care and Out-of-School-Time Workforce Development Task Force established the Credentialing and Career Lattice Committee to begin the design of a functional career lattice for the state. The committee has since created a draft career lattice. It is tied to a unique

credentialing system of “education + experience + evaluation.”<sup>13</sup>

BTWIC urges that this credentialing system become a priority for the DEEC and the Executive Office of Education. Early childhood educators are frustrated with the lack of organization in the field. They want a system that includes the strengths of the public school system – clearly defined job titles, a career path, an easily understood plan for advancement, and compensation tied to educational achievement and experience. The system should include significant input from family child care educators and the inclusion of compensation linked to progress through the system.

- 1.1 Strengthen the transfer of prior learning into degree credits by creating clearer guidelines, based on the core competencies developed by the Early Education and Care and Out-of-School-Time Workforce Development Task Force. Credit for prior learning should include Child Development Associate credentials (CDA) and prior work experience.

“Nurturing is not taught in college classes”– a Lowell town meeting speaker echoed the sentiment heard in other meetings. Many in the field have years of experience; the average questionnaire respondent had been in the field for more than 11 years and some had been in the field for four decades. The experience gained

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12 *Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care workforce development plan.* (2006, January 3). Boston, MA: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from [http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/Workforce\\_Development\\_Plan\\_2006.pdf](http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/Workforce_Development_Plan_2006.pdf)

13 *Steps forward: Recommendations of the 2007-2008 Massachusetts early education and care and out-of-school-time workforce development task force.* (2008, July). Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/EEC%20OST%20WDTTaskForceFINAL.pdf>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

during these years is valuable and needs to be recognized.

Models for transferring work experience already exist in a number of institutions of higher education, including UMass Boston's College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) and Cambridge College. Both CPCS and Cambridge College allow incoming students to create a portfolio that demonstrates prior learning.

We do not suggest that all work hours become transferable to college credits. Early childhood educators should provide proof that their work experience can take the place of a formal class. However, every IHE that offers degree courses in the EEC field should have a system in place to allow individuals to demonstrate knowledge they have gained through work experience.

The Department of Early Education and Care and the Early Education and Care and Out-of-School-Time Workforce Development Task Force have done excellent work around the creation of core competencies, a group of knowledge areas that are needed to facilitate child learning and development. The core competencies should be used as a guideline for which prior work experiences will be accepted.

### 1.2 Create a formal system of University and Career Path Navigation Advisement.

The early education and care field is made up of workers who would be returning to school after years or even decades out of formal education. They are adult learners and nontraditional learners who need additional supports to succeed in a college setting. A response to this need is an advisement system that not only helps these students understand the pathway to a degree, but also provides support in managing other aspects of their lives that impact their academic achievement. Career planning, building professional relationships, managing family life and academics are all issues that should be addressed through the proposed University and Career Path Navigation Advisement.

The advisement program should not be housed in individual institutions of higher education. It should be managed by the Department of Early Education and Care to ensure that the advisors are familiar with the early education and care field and the challenges early childhood educators face. The advising system should be made available through an appointment-only system that includes evening and weekend hours.

University and Career Path Navigation Advisors should

be bilingual, with preference given to candidates who are multilingual. Advisors will need at least a four-year degree from an IHE, with preference given to those with experience in the college preparatory field.

### 1.3 Create an "Early Educators Career Passport" book for early childhood educators that explains and documents their pathway towards a degree.

#### Core Competencies Areas

(created by the Core Competencies Committee)

1. Understanding the growth and development of children and youth
2. Guiding and interacting with children and youth
3. Partnering with families and communities

As the Department of Early Education and Care works to complete its computer-based registry program, this will serve as an interim solution, addressing an immediate need.

The Early Educators Career Passport should include easily understood information about courses taken and credits achieved. This will serve as a log, helping students communicate with college advisors about which credits they have achieved and next steps. Additionally, it should track professional development and workshops that may be taken as a first step towards higher education. The passport book will be easier to understand and more accessible than formal transcripts, but will not replace them. Rather, it will be a supplement designed to help early childhood educators understand the pathway to a degree and each step in the journey.

#### All IHEs attended

All courses completed, with course number and a brief description

#### Next Steps

Short and long-term goals for degree attainment

The passport book will physically resemble an actual passport. It will have three separate sections for work experience relevant to pursuing a degree, trainings, and college courses. Each section will have space for early childhood educators to write in and to update the book. Work experience and trainings will be signed off on by administrators. College courses will be listed by name and number, and will include a very brief description of

what was covered in the course to help students and their advisors identify equivalent courses in new schools. It will be the responsibility of the early childhood educators to update this book, giving them an active role in understanding the college degree system.

- 1.4 Explore existing barriers to financing college education, including loan default and loan forgiveness and expand existing successful models to include the EEC field.

During the discussion period at every town meeting, all groups mentioned loan forgiveness as a funding strategy they were not only willing, but also were eager to use. There are numerous loan forgiveness programs for teachers, nurses, and other health practitioners who make commitments to serve in public service positions. These programs are successful and enable many to pursue degrees when they could not otherwise afford to do so. These programs can serve as models for the early education and care field.

Massachusetts offers a unique loan forgiveness program for nurse practitioners through the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers and Neighborhood Health Plan. The Massachusetts Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Loan Repayment Program offers repayment of up to \$45,000 for a three-year commitment to a community health center, after the applicant has completed training.<sup>14</sup>

The federal Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program repays 60 percent of loans after two years of service at a critical shortage facility, with an opportunity to receive repayment for an additional 15 percent after a third year of service.<sup>15</sup> It is available to applicants who have a BA or AA degree and are permanent residents of the US, two components that would very useful to include in an early education and care loan forgiveness program, since the field often employs immigrants.<sup>16</sup>

Another existing program is the federal Child Care Provider Loan Forgiveness Demonstration Program (CCPLF). CCPLF allows for 100 percent loan forgiveness after five years of full-time consecutive service. The loan forgiveness schedule is 20 percent after two years of service, another 20 percent after the third year of service, and 30 percent after the fourth and fifth years of service.<sup>17</sup>

While this program does provide assistance to those in the field, the length of commitment may not be realistic when low compensation for early childhood educators is taken into account. Also, to qualify, applicants must have a repayment record of ten years without default before loan forgiveness even takes effect. This translates to years of struggling with student loans before receiving the financial help that is desperately needed by applicants. Allowing participants to apply for loan forgiveness after the first two years could both reduce the debt for early childhood educators and provide additional motivation to stay in the field.

All three loan forgiveness programs mentioned above are only available to those who have not defaulted on student loans. Given the rates of loan defaults in the nation, loan default may be a major barrier to financing higher education, and needs to be addressed concurrently with loan forgiveness. The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children, in collaboration with other early education and care advocacy groups, plans to further examine the issue of loan default and to find realistic solutions to this barrier.

- 1.5 Support the Department of Early Education and Care's efforts to increase usage of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Fund by publicizing the fund and streamlining paperwork requirements.

While the majority of town meeting attendees were aware of the fund's existence, they did not know how to access information about it, including the application. Those without computers rely on word-of-mouth to receive information, hardly a reliable source for details and accuracy.

Methods for publicizing the fund are discussed in greater detail in the communication section. In addition to publicizing the fund, efforts to streamline the paper requirements and offer additional translation services have been called for.

### Compensation

- 2 Identify ways to increase compensation and provide benefits commensurate with education and professional responsibilities.

18 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2008. 25-2011 Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education. 2008. <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/current/oes252011.htm>. and The 2009 HHS Poverty Guidelines, United States Department of Health & Human Services, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/09poverty.shtml>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of compensation has been called the “elephant in the room” by many and for good reason. Early childhood educators are among the lowest paid workers in the United States and have been for decades. Nationally, preschool teachers working in center-based programs earn an average hourly wage of \$11.48 – not much more than the 2009 federal poverty level of \$22,050 annually for a family of four.<sup>18</sup> In comparison, preschool teachers working in elementary schools earn an average hourly wage of \$18.18, which is 1.6 times higher than that earned by preschool teachers in centers.

*“I haven’t had a raise in 6 years.”*

Town Meeting Attendee, Cape Cod

These same patterns are evident in Massachusetts. Preschool teachers earn an average of \$14.76, including teachers working in centers and in the schools. However, preschool teachers working in centers earn about one-third of the salaries of public school preschool teachers. Even when we compare only preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees, we find that preschool teachers working in centers earn less than half the salary earned by the lowest paid public school preschool teacher.<sup>19</sup>

Compensation affects every aspect of an early childhood educator’s life. It is important to note the connection between low compensation and the high number of questionnaire respondents (54.1%) who believe they cannot afford to pursue higher education.

- 2.1 Contribute to a three-part dialogue initiated by the Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children in the upcoming year to discuss early education and care financing systems. The final result of the dialogue will be a blueprint for finance reform of Massachusetts’s mixed delivery system, inclusive of all families receiving child care. Beginning with a task force

**What would it cost to have the early education system we want?**

comprised of early childhood education financing experts and state legislators and followed by a conference including

early childhood educators and workforce, the dialogue will culminate in the release of a blueprint for financing early education and care in Massachusetts.

The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children will continue to research the issue of finance reform and compensation in greater detail during the next year with the goal of providing a comprehensive assessment of the financing system and its weaknesses, followed by the creation of a blueprint for developing an implementable and sustainable system for financing early education.

The first step in this effort is to assemble a short-term task force to discuss the state of the current financing system and the issue of compensation parity. In the 2008 NAEYC report entitled *Workforce Designs: A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems*, compensation parity is defined as “compensation (that) is equal or equivalent to other similar fields and that the status of the work and individual’s education, experience and responsibilities are recognized and rewarded appropriately.” The task force will consist of out-of-state experts, advocates, state legislators, and staff from the Department of Early Education and Care.

The next step is the hosting of a conference that will bring together key players in early education and care, including those in the field, to strategize and create an applicable plan for addressing the compensation crisis facing the field.

While numerous conferences focused on early education and care have mentioned compensation as a peripheral issue, there has not been a focused discussion on this topic within the Commonwealth; yet, the field and the state government can no longer discuss impactful improvements for all without dealing with compensation.

The conference will engage out-of-state experts and those who have implemented successful models in the sharing of their experiences and suggestions. Facilitated discussion groups will discuss the models mentioned and identify solutions that may work in the Commonwealth. Innovative financing strategies, such as corporate sponsorship of child care centers, will also be discussed.

The final step is for the Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children to collect information from the task force and conference and release a final report that will serve as a blueprint for the state to begin to build a successful

<sup>19</sup> Nancy L. Marshall & Julie Dennehy. *Massachusetts Capacity Study Research Brief: Characteristics of the Current Early Education and Care Workforce Serving 3-5 Year-olds*. 2005. Wellesley Centers for Women.

financing system for early education and care. It will take into account existing financial constraints while anticipating the future finances for the state.

## Communication

- 3 Improve overall communication between the field and the Department of Early Education and Care, as well as strengthen communication between administrators and early childhood educators' workforce.

The issue of communication came up frequently in town meetings; in fact, it was mentioned in every town meeting. The Department of Early Education and Care has valuable information about programs to support the early education and care field, yet a common phrase at all town meetings was "I didn't know about that." Communication issues were frequently associated with the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Fund. Early childhood educators do not have accurate information about the fund – who is eligible, how to apply, exactly what costs are covered, etc. In contrast, early childhood education administrators often cited miscommunication and lacking communication from the DEEC as the largest issue they face. However, it should be noted that early childhood educators also felt that their bosses do not share information with them often enough. Therefore, all forms of communication between all levels of the field are lacking.

- 3.1 Conduct a review of and evaluate current communication systems in the early education and care workforce to identify and solve problems such as consistency, ease of understanding, translation, and breadth of issues.

*"You have to be motivated to look for information."*

Town Meeting Attendee, Lowell

The Department of Early Education and Care does not currently have a communications or outreach manager. Partnering with an outside group to analyze

communication systems and identify specific areas where communication is failing is a low-cost way to provide improvements in the short-term while the DEEC builds a formal communication system that is efficient and successful.

The review of current communication systems should span at least six months and should look at direct mailings, electronic communications, and website updates. It should also include regular informal meetings with early childhood educators to establish what information they are receiving, what is not clear, and which topics are not being communicated often enough. Regular reporting, either monthly or biweekly, should be given to the Department of Early Education and Care and a plan to address issues with both short-term and long-term goals should be created between the department and the outside group, if any, engaged in this project.

- 3.2 Provide computer training and related translation services to enhance computer literacy in the early education and care field through contracts with Community Partnerships for Children programs (CPCs) and Resource & Referral agencies (R&Rs).

In 2009, the application for the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Fund was available online only. While the DEEC's effort to reduce paper waste and increase electronic communication is commendable, many in the early education and care field need to be trained to be computer literate before the government moves to a mostly electronic communication system.

Early childhood educators are a culturally diverse group, made up from low-income households and immigrants (particularly in Boston and surrounding towns). Education levels, computer literacy, and English proficiency vary greatly within the field. So issues of education, such as computer literacy, and translation services for ESOL learners will come up again and again. In the town meetings, the most diverse cities – Springfield, Boston, and New Bedford – listed computer training and access as useful methods in reducing barriers to accessing higher education supports and

20 Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. LearningWorks. Retrieved on September 17, 2009, from <http://www.bostonabcd.org/programs/career-development/learning-works/>

21 Child Care Choices of Boston. Professional Development. Retrieved September 17, 2009, from <http://www.childcarechoicesofboston.org/providers/documents/Summer09Calendarfinalprintversion.pdf>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

communications.

There are CPCs and R&Rs in the state that already manage computer literacy training and ESOL for early childhood educators. Action for Boston Community Development offers multiple programs that include computer training.<sup>20</sup> Child Care Choices of Boston offers computer literacy training in Spanish.<sup>21</sup> The Commonwealth should take advantage of these existing models and expand them.

- 3.3 Increase and strengthen use of consistent electronic communication to individuals in the field and early education and care centers to provide information about the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Fund, health benefits through MassHealth and Commonwealth Care Connector, existing discounts to education supply stores, and state and federal tax breaks.

This step, specifically requested by town meeting attendees, may be seen as a mid-term goal to follow the implementation of computer training to bring early childhood educators to a baseline level of computer proficiency. However, it has value as a short-term goal that can be implemented immediately and refined as the DEEC moves forward in strengthening overall communication.

- 3.4 Update the Department of Early Education and Care website so it is more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

The state's investment in technology will continue to grow as the world moves toward electronic communication as the standard for sharing information. The DEEC website is the most important informational hub for the early childhood educators and parents, providing directories of child care centers, resource & referral agencies, voucher rate information, and much more. The issue is that the vast well of information is so deep that it needs to be organized very clearly.

The Department of Early Education and Care need not look far for an example of a navigable website. The official website for Massachusetts ([mass.gov](http://mass.gov)) is a strong

example of a website that balances text with easy to understand graphics and links. The prominent links categorized by user (resident, business, government, and visitor) at the top of the website are especially helpful in navigating the site.

### Public Education Campaign

- 4 Launch a public relations campaign to increase public understanding of the role and responsibilities of the early education and care profession.

*“We need to do a better job of educating the government on what we actually do.”*

Town Meeting Attendee, Springfield

As our research shows, early childhood educators feel that they are not valued in the public eye. Compensation rates and use of labels such as “day care worker” and “babysitter” reveal the basis for these perceived slights. Despite the field employing approximately 11,690 Massachusetts residents, there is not enough public awareness of what early childhood educators provide for the children they oversee.<sup>22</sup> It is important to change public perception because this perception influences everything from voucher rate payment to compensation and benefits. The early education and care field needs to be supported by the public.

The Department of Early Education and Care has acknowledged the need for communications to the public. Their February 2009 Strategic Plan lists “create and implement an external and internal communications strategy that advocates for and conveys the value of early education and care to all stakeholders and the general public” as a part of Three Year Strategic Direction.<sup>23</sup>

Changing public perception is not an easy task; it will require communication from the DEEC, the state government, and most of all, time. The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children suggests the following components of a media campaign be used:

22 *Occupational employment statistics*, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Washington, DC:: US Department of Labor. Retrieved August 14, 2009, from <http://data.bls.gov/oes/datatype.do>

23 *Department of Early Education and Care strategic plan: Putting children and families first.* (2009, February). Boston, MA: Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/StrategicPlanFormatted.pdf>

#### 4.1 Develop an earned media campaign that targets free print, broadcast, and electronic media.

In addition to media advertisements, components of a public education campaign should include visits to centers, family child care provider's homes, and prekindergarten classes from leaders in the field and state representatives. These visits should be communicated to appropriate media sources for publicity.

Within the Commonwealth, Thrive in Five has been able to launch a successful information and communication campaign. The program utilized radio, airing shows on parenting issues and school readiness on three local stations.<sup>24</sup> The "Early Words Campaign," part of the *Thrive in Five* program, successfully used TV and radio PSAs to communicate with parents about verbal interaction with their young children.<sup>25</sup>

West Virginia's KIDS COUNT fund has seen enormous success with Kids First Communities, its awareness and advocacy campaign for a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The campaign included email and newsletters, endorsements from community leaders and organizations, a letter-writing campaign, and an early childhood educator celebration day (Take a Flower to Childcare Day). Within a year, more than 2,000 community members joined the email "action alert" system and sent more than 300 letters to the governor in support of a QRIS. The success of the program is due to its organization – draft letters to legislators, campaign posters, and other promotional and informational pieces were all easily accessed on their website. Clear instructions on how to participate in "Take a Flower to Childcare Day" were also accessible via the website.

#### 4.2 Encourage the Department of Early Education and Care to partner with a corporation, foundation, or other entity like the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley to secure funding to develop and launch a paid advertising campaign that utilizes communication vehicles such as billboards, mass transit, and television and radio advertisements

As a government organization, the Department of Early Education and Care is eligible for donated radio and television airtime, as well as donated billboard space. Clear Channel Outdoor, for example, has a history of donating billboards for PSAs. Local news stations should also be asked to provide coverage of this public education campaign.

Once the Department of Early Education and Care has utilized free and donated media options, the next important step is an intentional campaign that reaches specific segments of the population with targeted messages. For instance, parents will need messaging that assures them that increases in salary for early childhood educators does not equal increased costs for childcare. Media targeted at small business owners and state-based corporations will need to emphasize the economic benefits of well-educated children as a future workforce and secure childcare for their existing staff.

It is critically important to influence change from the bottom up as well as from the top down. Educating the public on the importance of early education and care and the educators in the field will benefit the entire state.

24 *Boston's progress toward universal school readiness: Year one report.* (2009, May). Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.thrivein5boston.org/pdf/Thrive%20in%205%20Year%201%20Report.pdf>

25 See footnote 24. Boston's progress toward universal school readiness.

26 The West Virginia Kids Count Fund. Retrieved September 17, 2009, from [www.wvkidscountfund.org/kids-first.php](http://www.wvkidscountfund.org/kids-first.php)

27 See footnote 26. The West Virginia Kids Count Fund.

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## A Final Word

*Standing in the middle of a tunnel, it can be hard to see the light at the end, or remember the reason for entering. The Department of Early Education and Care and state government have made notable inroads to improving the early education and care field. Now is the time to continue forward, despite the current challenges. It is important for all involved to remember that this long tunnel will lead to the outcome we all desire – the best opportunities possible for all children, from day one.*





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