

A Portrait of Minnesota Early Childhood Preparation Programs: Key Findings, Gaps and Opportunities

Report Brief

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Characteristics of Minnesota Early Childhood Preparation Programs:

- Eighty-four programs across 34 IHE (most at two-year IHE);
- Close to 3,000 students enrolled (representing less than one percent of statewide enrollment);
- Most students earned an associate's degree or less;
- IHE employed about two faculty at each two-year IHE and 12 at four-year IHE
- Both two- and four-year IHE had multiple systems in place to support learning (e.g., online courses, nontraditional schedules, advising).

Five ways to use findings:

- Improve collaboration between two- and four-year Institutes of Higher Education in preparing early childhood personnel
- Increase student enrollment in effective early childhood preparation programs
- Coordinate efforts between early childhood and care programs
- Develop statewide professional development and career advancement plans
- Propose legislation to continue to build a high quality early childhood system in Minnesota

For more information, visit

The Early Childhood Personnel Preparation Project was a statewide study of the capacity and effectiveness of Minnesota's two- and four-year Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) in preparing early childhood educators and care providers. The project's goal was to support the development of early childhood educators throughout Minnesota and to fulfill one of the core responsibilities of Minnesota's previous Early Childhood Advisory Council, as mandated by former Governor Tim Pawlenty in September, 2008.

Minnesota was among the first few states to undertake a statewide assessment of early childhood preparation programs, with the intention of both defining effectiveness and identifying gaps for further study. In addition, the project can serve as a model for other states and further study within Minnesota for assessing the capacity and effectiveness of IHE.

This project was a collaborative effort that brought together multiple state agencies, early childhood professionals and faculty from both two- and four-year IHE. A 10-member advisory group was formed in September, 2011 to help develop an evaluation framework, coordinate efforts to connect with IHE, review initial findings and provide feedback. The evaluation framework set parameters for the study and identified existing data sources available for review. Two questions were identified:

1. *What is the capacity of IHE to prepare early childhood educators and care providers (e.g., programs, enrollment, admission requirements, financial factors, articulation agreements between IHE and degrees awarded)?*
2. *What systems are in place at each IHE to ensure effectiveness (e.g., support services offered, field experience opportunities and staffing)?*

Data sources included student records maintained by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE), academic college catalogs, IHE websites, interviews with faculty and articulation agreements.

Capacity of IHE in Preparing Early Childhood Educators and Care Providers

Programs. Approximately one-fourth of Minnesota IHE programs offered a degree in early childhood education. Students can choose from 84 early childhood-related programs across the 34 two- and four-year IHE. The majority of programs were at a two-year IHE with options for an associate's degree or certificate, while one-fifth were at a four-year IHE and offered a bachelor's degree. Additionally, most early childhood programs were offered at a public IHE rather than a private IHE.

Enrollment. Of all Minnesota students enrolled in fall of 2010, about one percent of those declared their major in an early childhood program, which represents close to 3,000 students, most of whom enrolled in a two-year IHE. Most students enrolled in a two-year IHE were in a "Child Care and Support Services Management" program while most in four-year IHE were in a "Kindergarten/Preschool Education and Teaching" program. The large majority of students were identified as female and Caucasian. Some demographic differences were noted between two- and four-year IHE. More students of color enrolled in a two-year IHE than in a four-year IHE; this increase was reflected in the number of African American and American Indian students enrolled in two-year IHE.

Admission Requirements. Most IHE required an application fee that ranged from \$15 to \$55, a high school diploma or GED and submission of high school transcripts. Some two-year IHE did not specify the requirement of a high school diploma or GED, but rather the “ability to benefit” in the program. More requirements for admission were often included for four-year IHE, such as college entrance exams, specific high school courses and/or a personal statement.

Financial Factors. The average cost of in-state tuition ranged from \$7,500 to complete a two-year program to \$54,000 for a four-year program. About two-thirds of IHE also had competitive scholarship opportunities available for students in the department. In Minnesota, an investment in an early childhood degree yielded a median hourly wage of \$9.94 as a “childcare worker” and an hourly wage of \$13.61 for a “preschool teacher.”¹

Articulation Agreements. Articulation agreements are in place in order to provide transparency for students transferring credits from one specific academic program to another. Close to half of Minnesota IHE that offered early childhood programs had articulation agreements in place. Information recorded in agreements varied significantly on the details provided (e.g., what credits or courses were accepted, admission and graduation requirements and length of term for the agreement). Some IHE updated their agreements to follow the standardized template recently provided by the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities (MnSCU) system while others have not yet updated their agreements. Students in two-year IHE often have written agreements with one to two other four-year IHE, while a few receiving four-year IHE had agreements in place with five to six different two-year IHE.

Degree Awarded. More than 500 students were awarded an early childhood education degree in the spring of 2010. Most often, students who enrolled in an early childhood program received an associate’s degree, certificate or diploma, while less than one-third obtained a bachelor’s degree.

Effectiveness of IHE in Preparing Early Childhood Educators and Care Providers

Support Services. All IHE early childhood programs offered multiple support services to students, including advising, online/hybrid course options and nontraditional schedules. IHE programs were less likely to offer mentoring, career planning and placement and learning communities. A few IHE had early childhood courses in a language other than English.

Field Experience. The largest difference between two- and four-year IHE programs was in the type and quantity of field experience opportunities. More two-year IHE included experiential learning and on-the-job development opportunities than at four-year IHE. Four-year IHE, however, had more opportunities for students to engage in field experiences (credits for practicum and student teaching).

Staffing System. The staffing system educating early childhood personnel represented fewer than 300 faculty in Minnesota. Over one-third of faculty were employed full-time while the remaining two-thirds were part-time or appointed as adjunct. Most two-year IHE have two faculty employed in the early childhood department, while most four-year IHE have 12 faculty. For the most part, faculty at both two- and four-year IHE have master’s degrees. Two-year IHE, however, included more faculty with a bachelor’s or associate’s degree, while four-year IHE have more faculty with doctoral degrees. The majority of faculty at both two- and four-year IHE were female, Caucasian, between the ages of 31 and 50 and fluent in English only.

Types of IHE

IHE Type	Public	Private	Total
2-year	21	1	22
4-year	8	4	12
Total	29	5	34

Elements Identified as Critical in Helping Students Succeed

Support services:

- Non traditional schedules, online/hybrid courses, learning communities, on-the-job learning²
- Mentoring, advising, career planning³
- Public transparency and articulation agreements⁴

Higher expectations:

- Multiple and frequent field experience opportunities, readiness for the program, better paying wages⁴

Staffing system:

- IHE properly staffed with full-time faculty³
- Quality of faculty and diversity⁴

Policy Question

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment across the nation is projected to increase 20.4 percent for “childcare workers” and 24.9 percent for “preschool teachers” from 2010 to 2020.⁵ The United States Government Accountability Office outlined educational requirements or standards set by various entities for early childhood educators and care providers, including the increase of the number of educators with a bachelor’s degree.⁶

Meanwhile, less than one-third of the degrees earned in early childhood education were bachelor’s degrees. Whether the supply of bachelor degree-earning students will meet future demand—and whether expected wages

Gaps

Findings from this study painted an early portrait of Minnesota IHE in preparing early childhood personnel and care providers. This study relied heavily on existing data sources rather than applying new tools to capture data. In the analysis, five gaps were identified:

1. **Age of Data.** At the time of publication the most recent enrollment and completion data were reported for 2010, making the results nearly two years old.
2. **Accuracy.** OHE relied on self-reported data from each IHE on students who declared their major in an early childhood program. Consequently, this may not represent students in the program who have not yet declared a major.
3. **Participation Rates.** Most IHE with an early child program participated in an interview (response rate of 85 percent); however, some did not, which impacts the numbers represented in this report. Furthermore, many of the IHE did not collect specific faculty demographics (i.e., gender, race or age); as a result, the statistics on faculty demographics include a smaller subset and is less representative (response rate of 56 percent).
4. **Transparency.** A number of data sources were reviewed for the study, including academic college catalogues, department websites and articulation agreements posted on Minnesota Transfer. However, the breadth of information available varied significantly from one IHE to another. Subsequently, some IHE may have support systems in place that were not readily identifiable and therefore not included in this brief. This also may hold true for articulation agreements, in that some IHE may have revised their agreements but have not yet submitted the information for posting on Minnesota Transfer. In addition, transfers can take place without a formal agreement in place with a receiving IHE.
5. **Focus.** Six specific “classification of instructional programs” (CIP) codes were used to identify early childhood-related programs. Some IHE may have an early childhood related program that was coded under another CIP; those programs are not reflected in these findings.

It is important to note that this study was not meant to measure program quality (e.g., quality of field experience opportunities, student teaching experiences, mentoring interactions) or the effectiveness of classroom teachers (e.g., placement and retention in the workforce, instructional practices).

Opportunities

Opportunities to improve the capacity and effectiveness of Minnesota IHE in preparing early childhood educators and care providers include examination of data collection processes and systems. Below are opportunities for improving data collection processes:

- Investigate the application of CIP codes used to classify programs. Perform a crosswalk to determine how CIP codes are being used across IHE. Promote the consistent use of CIP codes across documents such as college catalogues, articulation agreements and enrollment data submitted to the OHE.
- Work with online IHE to create a system for submitting student enrollment and degree-earned data for Minnesota students only, rather than for national data.
- Work with the OHE and IHE to standardize how institutions report transfer credits and create a common unit of measurement.
- Examine results of enrollment data against workforce needs (implement a longitudinal study to track at least one cohort of students enrolled in IHE who declared a major to degree earned and placement in workforce).
- Encourage IHE to update their articulation agreements using the template provided by MnSCU, even if agreements have not yet expired.
- Examine the impact of demographic characteristics on the degrees earned by students.

Below are opportunities to examine current systems:

- Consider the balance between two-year and four-year programs of study. If the goal is to increase Minnesota's early childhood educators in preschool setting with at least a Bachelor's degree, then more four-year IHE early childhood programs need to be in place to educate students and articulation agreements required for all two-year IHE.
- Examine the capacity of IHE to employ full-time with part-time and adjunct faculty. Students may benefit from an increase in permanent faculty (rather than contingent labor), more faculty perspectives and faculty demographics that reflect the student population being taught.
- Use findings to determine what critical elements IHE faculty want to initiate or further develop to support student learning and success in the early childhood program.
- Consider the primary audience of articulation agreements and use language appropriate for the audience of students interested in transferring credits (currently the content is quite technical).
- Motivate non-MnSCU IHE to invest in producing articulation agreements (hold discussions with private IHE and other non-MnSCU IHE to find out what barriers exist and how an adoption and use of articulation agreements can benefit IHE).
- Identify how other educational awards, like certificates and diplomas, can transfer to other programs. These educational awards represented more than 40 percent of awards available to students in early childhood.

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Lynn Gehrke, Concordia University
Kathleen Hedberg, Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College
Oth Lo, Rasmussen College
Kelly McKown, Saint Paul College
Wendy Nielsen, Resources for Child Caring
June Reineke, Winona State University
Steve Reuter, Minnesota State University Mankato
Jeanette Rydberg, Central Lakes College
Dan Wielinski, Metropolitan State University
Stacey York, Rochester Community and Technical College

State Agency Partners:

Debbie Hewitt and Amanda Varley, Early Learning Services, Minnesota Department of Education;
Mary Vanderwert, Minnesota Head Start Collaboration Project, Minnesota Department of Education
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Resources

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Author



9868 Lyndale Ave S
Minneapolis MN 55420
www.acetinc.com

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