

JANUARY 2018



**POLICY BRIEF ON MINNESOTA'S EARLY  
CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE PLANNING  
EFFORTS:  
AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE STATE OF MINNESOTA FROM THE B8  
WORKFORCE CORE TEAM**

# TRANSFORMING THE WORKFORCE FOR CHILDREN BIRTH THROUGH AGE 8: AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

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## The Science

Children are actively learning at birth. Every year we – scientists, policymakers and educators, learn more about how much growth occurs in a child’s earliest years and how vital that growth is for subsequent learning and healthy development. There is now widespread consensus that quality early childhood experiences for children birth through age 8 promote school readiness, reduce achievement gaps and contribute to long-term academic and social success. Conversely, stress and adverse experiences undermine learning and can impair healthy development.

One essential factor in providing young children with appropriate and stimulating early learning experiences is ensuring that those who care for and educate children are well-prepared. Unfortunately, the required qualifications for those in lead teaching positions have not kept pace with the rapid changes in family life and new understandings from research on how young children learn, grow, and develop. The science of child development indicates the high level of knowledge and competence that is needed by those who educate young children in order to obtain desired outcomes.

This level of competence needed to care for young children is the same as that of instructional staff in K-12 classrooms. Currently, requirements for those responsible for the care and education of young children differ according to the setting in which they work and have not kept up with the science of brain development. We know that children are better prepared for school when they have caregivers and educators who are highly qualified.<sup>1</sup> Yet with low wages there is little incentive to obtain higher levels of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Manning M., Garvis S., Fleming C., Wong T. W. G. *The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood care and learning environment*. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2017:1.

## The Crisis

Minnesota needs high-quality early childhood care and education to support children, working parents and the economic vitality of our state. But we have a crisis on our hands. We do not have enough qualified early childhood workers to take care of all of the children in Minnesota. Parents, usually women, are reluctant to enter the workforce when there isn't affordable, quality child care and employers struggle to find employees. Because we have primarily a private pay market for early childhood care, it is not feasible to ask parents to pay more.

It is a very difficult to encourage people to go into the early childhood field because the wages are abysmally low. Child care centers across the state report problems finding qualified staff with degrees and training in early childhood education. A recent report by the Minnesota Initiative Foundations includes comments from Center Directors about the challenges of finding staff that can be summed up by one center director who said: "In the 25 years I have been in this field, I have never had such a hard time finding staff."<sup>2</sup> The most recent survey of Minnesota teacher supply and demand found that only 8% of school districts thought it would be "easy" to hire early childhood teachers while 70% predicted it would be "very difficult."<sup>3</sup> Simply put, the vast majority of school preschool programs are going to struggle to find a teacher, let alone a highly qualified teacher. The wages for school preschool programs exceed those in child care centers so if school districts are having problems finding qualified staff, that means it will be exponentially more difficult for centers. Currently, only 25% of Minnesota's early childhood educators have a bachelor's degree or higher in a child-related field.<sup>4</sup> We have lost almost 30% of our licensed family providers between 2006 and 2015. There has been an increase in the number of child care centers but not enough to fill the gap and it is estimated that we need to increase growth in licensed care by 37% to meet the needs of families and employers in Minnesota.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Initiative Foundations, *Greater Minnesota's Child Care Center Wage & Rate Survey Results*, March 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Minnesota Department of Education, *2017 Report of Teacher Supply and Demand in Minnesota's Public Schools, Fiscal Year 2017*, Report to the Legislature.

<sup>4</sup> Valorose, J. and Chase, R., *Child Care Workforce in Minnesota: 2011 Statewide Study of Demographics, Training and Professional Development*, August 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Werner, M., *A Quiet Crisis: Minnesota's Child Care Shortage*, Center for Rural Policy and Development, September, 2016.

Several things are known about the current early childhood workforce in Minnesota:

- Providers and teachers are aging out and fewer individuals are entering the early childhood workforce.
- Currently the early childhood workforce, while more diverse than K-12 workforce, lacks diversity - between 88 and 95% of the workforce is white at a time when Minnesota's student demographics are changing<sup>6</sup>
- People in the field need additional skill in meeting the needs of children with diverse backgrounds and languages
- Attracting candidates to the field is challenging as people don't see it as a viable career given the low wages and lack of opportunity for career advancement. The median hourly wage for a child care worker in Minnesota is only \$10.81. <sup>7</sup>
- Those who do enter often have to rely to public income supports due to low wages. Child care workers in Minnesota participate in the Earned Income Tax Credit, Medicaid/CHIP, Food Stamps and TANF at a cost of \$43 million per year.<sup>8</sup>
- Due to low numbers of applicants and the prospect of low wages for their graduates, Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) are closing early childhood degree programs
- At times, students interested in the field are being counseled out of their choice by well-meaning advisors who make a case that they will not be able to pay back student loans following graduation or support their own families.

## State and National Momentum

There are a number of early childhood workforce initiatives taking place at both the national and state level to address this crisis and they are gaining momentum.

In 2015, the **Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the National Academies** released their report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*.<sup>9</sup> This report provides the latest scientific consensus around early childhood education and

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<sup>6</sup> Valorose, J. and Chase, R., Child Care Workforce in Minnesota: 2011 Statewide Study of Demographics, Training and Professional Development, August 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Whitebook, M., McLean, C., and Austin, L.J.E. (2016) *Early Childhood Workforce Index -2016*. Berkeley California: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

the critical relationship between the early childhood workforce and children’s health and well-being. It also starkly presents the current crisis in early childhood.

The **National Governor’s Association** provided grants to support states’ policy strategy to improve early care and education workforce. Minnesota received a small grant to work on issues surrounding compensation. This grant made it possible to bring together a taskforce of decision makers from a variety of state agencies such as employment and economic development, labor and industry, finance and human rights. As this group learned more about the problems facing early childhood workforce several themes emerged such as, “the care and education of young children is a public good and responsibility” and “communities needs quality care in order to allow families and businesses to thrive.” The grant resulted in recommendations being made to the Children’s Cabinet and Governor.

Research from the **Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California in Berkeley**, with support from the Joyce Foundation, is focused on articulating the gap between the resources in place and those that are needed in Minnesota to improve early childhood jobs and the quality of services without placing additional financial burden on young families.

The **Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota** has a goal to double the number of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota (currently approximately 2,200 or 4% of all teachers), and ensure that at least 20% of candidates preparing to teach are persons of color and American Indian.

Minnesota needs to keep the momentum going that has been created by this groundswell of activities.

## **Project History**

The national report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, was released in 2015. It provides the latest scientific consensus around early childhood education and the critical nexus between the early childhood workforce and children’s health and well-being. It contains 13 recommendations that are grounded in child development - the hard science about how children’s brains grow. The report acknowledges that changes will need to happen at local, state and national levels, will need to be carried out within and across different systems, and will require coordinated, strategic systems change in which stakeholders work collectively over the course of at least a decade of sustained work.

Following the release of the national report, Minnesota was asked to participate in the National Academies “Innovation to Incubation” initiative. The National Academies, with support from Minnesota’s McKnight Foundation, has provided technical assistance and brought states working on this together to learn from one another. Minnesota’s team was charged with creating a ten-year plan to implement the recommendations chosen from the *Transforming the Workforce* report.

While all 13 of the recommendations included in the report are important and interrelated, Minnesota is targeting five recommendations as a starting place.

## Creating Pathways

Minnesota's early childhood care and education system is a mixed-delivery approach made up of school-based programs such as Voluntary PreKindergarten, School Readiness, School Readiness Plus, Early Childhood Family Education and Early Childhood Special Education. It includes for profit and non-profit child care programs, family child care and Head Start. All program types are struggling to find qualified employees.

Teachers need to understand brain development, social and emotional growth, language development, cultural relevance and understanding and so much more. For children who are learning two languages, the skills of the teachers are even more important. The best way for teachers to gain this knowledge and competency is through higher education and student teaching, under the supervision of master teachers and practitioners.

Minnesota needs to ensure that all teachers have access to higher education and are supported as they earn higher credentials. We must have solid supports in place for the many people who could be great teachers for our children such as older students who are currently working in early childhood, bilingual students, people of color and first-generation students.

The higher education system for educating early childhood teachers needs to be accessible, coordinated, efficient and effective. Coursework needs to prepare all teachers to work with an increasingly racially and linguistically diverse Minnesota. Several steps are being taken to begin to better coordinate the higher education system. Minnesota's 2014 Legislature required Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to develop transfer pathways that prepares graduates from a two-year program to be a teacher in a child care program or go on to a four year institute of higher education to deepen their education and obtain a Bachelor's degree. Transfer pathways (TPT) will allow a student to transfer an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree in early childhood education to a parallel early childhood education bachelor degree program offered at a Minnesota State university. The TPT will simplify the transfer process for students and will increase retention and completion for both the associate degree level and the baccalaureate degree level.

Relationships are also being developed with secondary teachers of Family and Consumer Science classes. Many are interested in developing a "teacher cadet" program that would encourage high school students to pursue a career in education.

Minnesota's Institutes of Higher Education and the Department of Human Services (DHS) are working to align coursework, training and supports for the early childhood community with the Knowledge and

Competency Framework (KCF). The KCF outlines a set of expectations for early childhood staff working in all program types and can be used as a basis for learning objectives for credit bearing courses in teacher preparation programs and in-service training.

These efforts are a great start, but more work needs to be done. The work outlined in this report provides a plan for implementing national recommendations to transform the early childhood workforce in Minnesota.

## Minnesota's Goal and Vision

**GOAL:** To create a process for developing a pathway to a BA that is inclusive and culturally informed by diverse groups providing care and education to young children B-8.

**VISION:** A diverse, qualified, well-supported and fairly compensated workforce, inclusive of existing care and education professionals across settings, that respects and understands the background, cultures, and languages of the children in the system and that is engaged in continuous learning and professional growth.

## Five Recommendations from Transforming the Workforce Form Minnesota's Priority Areas

Minnesota B8 Workforce Core Team chose five of the 13 national recommendations and customized them to our context. These are the priority areas which we will focus our attention on at this time.

# Minnesota Priority Area One: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals



**Vision:** Minnesota has a unified, statewide early childhood higher education system.



**Strategy A:** Enhance and create early childhood courses and programs that equip graduates to provide high quality early learning experiences.

**Outcome A:** So that graduates have the theory and practice to have the knowledge and skills needed and are culturally competent in their work with children, families and colleagues.



**Strategy B:** Recruit, retain and support more and diverse faculty members.

**Outcome B:** So that faculty better reflect the demographics of our state.



**Strategy C:** Educate policy-makers, regulatory bodies and administrators of institutes of higher education about the importance of early childhood education.

**Outcome C:** So that policy and decision makers understand the connection between investment in higher education programs, economic development and future college student enrollment.



**Strategy D:** Provide supports for faculty to be deeply engaged in the early childhood community.

**Outcome D:** So that the expertise of higher education faculty can make a difference in local communities and improve capacity, quality and outcomes.



**Strategy E:** Ensure cross institution work that supports faculty professional learning and creates cohesive learning opportunities for students.

**Outcome E:** So that faculty are part of a peer community of practice that grows professional knowledge and competencies.



**Strategy F:** Collaborate to maximize opportunities and efficiencies within the higher education system.

**Outcome F:** So that students have more options and opportunities to move through the statewide higher education system without loss of time, credits or money.

Note: Priority Area One is based upon recommendation 5 from the national [Transforming the Workforce](#) report.

## Minnesota Priority Area Two: Strengthen practice-based requirements, including a supervised induction period, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.



**Vision: Early childhood students have access to high-quality field placements and for field placement staff to have access to resources and professional learning in every region of the state.**



**Strategy A:** Increase access to high quality field placements.

**Outcome A:** So students have opportunities to observe, practice and receive feedback from a qualified early childhood educator in a high quality environment and field placement sites are easily identifiable, interconnected and serve as model for others.



**Strategy B:** Increase tools, guidance and access to supervised induction period for new educators.

**Outcome B:** So that new employees have intentionally structured, job-embedded learning opportunities as they work toward autonomous practice.



**Strategy C:** Establish Early Childhood Resource Hubs.

**Outcome C:** So that early childhood programs would have access to materials, training and resources needed to provide quality programming to young children and high quality sites for field experiences.

Priority Area Two is based upon recommendation 3 from the national *Transforming the Workforce* report.

# Minnesota Priority Area Three:

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Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timeframes at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.



**Vision:** Minnesota has clear pathways with multiple entry points that allow individuals to join the early childhood workforce and continue improving their knowledge and skills through an established educational continuum.



**Strategy A:** Develop a professional learning system for people in the early childhood field.

**Outcome A:** So that individuals can identify where they are on a coherent career pathway and identify next steps for increasing their education.



**Strategy B:** Create alternative methods of demonstrating knowledge and competence that allows for both flexibility and accountability.

**Outcome B:** So that individuals have a variety of ways to demonstrate knowledge and competence.



**Strategy C:** Identify costs to the system and put funding mechanisms in place.

**Outcome C:** So that public and private funding sources are identified and leveraged to support critical system improvements.



**Strategy D:** Ensure programs included in the career pathway framework are designed to ensure access and success for all participants in the early childhood workforce.

**Outcome D:** So that all students interested in pursuing higher education in the field of early childhood can access supports to succeed in attaining their degree.



**Strategy E:** Offer financial supports to individuals seeking to obtain further credentials and degrees.

**Outcome E:** So that financial barriers are reduced or eliminated for those interested in pursuing recognized credentials and degrees in early childhood.



**Strategy F:** Intentionally diversify the workforce.

**Outcome F:** So that the workforce reflects the diversity of our communities and state.

**Note:** Priority area three is based upon recommendation 2 in the national [Transforming the Workforce](#) report.

# Minnesota Priority Area Four:

Build a better knowledge base to inform workforce development and professional learning services and systems.

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**Vision: Minnesota collects and uses early childhood workforce data to inform stakeholders and policy decisions.**



**Strategy A:** Require adults working or volunteering in DHS licensed early childhood programs to have individual memberships in DEVELOP and require DHS licensed programs to have registered organization accounts.

**Outcome A:** So that Minnesota has complete, accurate data to inform research efforts and policy decisions to improve efforts to transform Minnesota's early childhood workforce.



**Strategy B:** Ensure state data systems, including but not limited to DEVELOP, ECLDS, SLDS, Head Start and K12 teacher licensing systems are compatible and communicating with each other.

**Outcome B:** So that Minnesota can avoid duplication of entry, streamline access and ensure data representing state early childhood workforce data is as accurate as possible.



**Strategy C:** Connect workforce data to child outcomes to better understand the link between teacher qualifications and child success.

**Outcome C:** So that Minnesota can make informed decisions and allocate resources strategically.



**Strategy D:** Disseminate data, reports and findings related to Minnesota's early childhood workforce broadly with the public.

**Outcome D:** So that any and all interested parties can access accurate, up-to-date data about Minnesota's early childhood workforce and data can be used to mobilize resources and galvanize public support.

Priority Area Four is based upon recommendation 13 from the national [Transforming the Workforce](#) report.

## Minnesota Priority Area Five:

Support workforce development with coherent funding, oversight and policies. Collaboratively develop and periodically update coherent guidance that is foundational across roles and settings for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.

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**Vision:** Minnesota has an identified organization that is responsible for and has the ability to coordinate Minnesota's early childhood workforce related efforts and oversee the recommendations from this report as well as recommendations from other statewide early childhood workforce efforts.



**Strategy A:** Determine the best backbone organizational structure to oversee implementation of the recommendations in this report.

**Outcome A:** So that there is responsibility and accountability.



**Strategy B:** Seek authorization, policy changes and appropriate funding.

**Outcome A:** So that the work necessary to transform the workforce will get accomplished.

Priority Area Five is based upon recommendations 10 and 11 from the national [Transforming the Workforce](#) report.

## Next Steps

Minnesota's B8 Workforce Core Team, is looking at the current status of our early childhood workforce in our state and creating a vision for where we want to be 10 years from now. The priorities and strategies identified above are being reviewed and revised by multiple stakeholders and stakeholder groups throughout the state. Once input has been collected, the information will be analyzed and a final plan will be drafted and released to the public. The work to date has been funded by philanthropy and the commitment of dedicated individuals and organizations who are giving time to the effort.