

Testimony Regarding

S.B. 912: An Act Concerning Revisions to the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Educators

Nicole Updegrove
Education Committee
March 1, 2017

Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Education Committee,

My name is Nicole Updegrove. I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. We thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding S.B. 912, An Act Concerning Revisions to the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Educators.

We appreciate this bill's intended purpose: to help the state's early childhood workforce reach required credentials by the statutory deadline in 2020. However, we support an alternate solution: to accept as qualification bachelor's degrees in early childhood education from any regionally accredited institution, *whether in or outside of the state.*

Teachers with bachelor's degrees or more run higher quality classrooms, including richer language environments and more responsive teacher-child interactions.¹ However, numerous barriers reduce individuals' ability to attain degrees, including education costs, the time required, low compensation even after attaining degrees, and limited available educational pathways. For multiple years, bills in this committee and others have sought to balance the realities of educational barriers with the need for higher levels of education and early childhood expertise within the workforce that cares for and educates our youngest children (see Public Acts 11-54, 12-50, 14-39 and 15-134 for the evolving statutes).

Under current statute, by July 1, 2020, all teachers with primary classroom responsibility ("lead teachers") within early childhood education programs that accept state funds must attain either (a) a bachelor's degree with a concentration in early childhood education from an approved institution, or (b) a state teaching certificate with endorsement in early childhood education, which also requires a bachelor's degree.²

Connecticut needs a professional, well-educated early childhood workforce, but workers need a viable path to reach required credentials. Currently, the early childhood workforce is not on track to meet the 2020 requirement.

As of the end of 2016, only 75 percent of affected programs meet the July 2017 requirement that each classroom include at least one staff member with an early childhood associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or childhood development associate (CDA) credential. Only 35 percent of affected programs currently meet the July 2020 requirement that all lead teachers have an approved bachelor's degree.³

Not enough staff are in the process of attaining the required degrees.

Eighty-five percent of staff who qualify as credentialed do not have the requisite degrees; rather, they have been “grandfathered in” through prior work experience.⁴ Analysis of data from 2012 to 2015 shows that the share of lead teachers with bachelor’s degrees has only risen by about four percent per year. Moreover, few assistant teachers are progressing towards the required credentials to be lead teachers in 2020; between 2012 and 2015, the share of assistant teachers with bachelor’s or associate’s degrees did not substantially increase⁵ (see Appendix).

There is an apparent need to make the early childhood workforce requirements more attainable. However, the efforts to professionalize the workforce should not be diluted by permitting bachelor’s degrees from irrelevant fields to qualify.

Current law allows for a broad diversity of qualifying degrees: early childhood education, early childhood special education, child study, child development, and human growth and development. Under S.B. 912, teachers would be considered qualified if they possessed a bachelor’s degree in any field – ranging from art history to computer science – as long as they had earned just twelve credits in early childhood education.

In contrast, bachelor’s degrees require roughly 120 credits, of which typically at least 30 are related to an individual’s major. Goodwin College’s bachelor’s degree in Child Studies, for example, requires 57 credits in core major requirements.⁶ We assert that twelve credits are insufficient to develop expertise in early childhood.

Under current law, only five institutions of higher education are valid pathways to an approved credential. This is insufficient to meet the educational needs of our state’s large early childhood workforce.

Institutions of higher education must be regionally accredited and accredited by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or Office of Higher Education. In other words, *only colleges and universities in Connecticut are accepted*. As of 2015, the largest combined number of early childhood education bachelor’s degrees conferred by these institutions in a single year was 113,⁷ while the total number of classrooms requiring qualified teachers by 2020 is 1,679.⁸ Moreover, some teachers receiving bachelor’s degrees have left the field in pursuit of higher pay.

The credentialing process for workers with degrees earned in other states may disincentive early childhood workers from pursuing employment in Connecticut.

Under current law, qualifying institutions of higher education must be regionally accredited, which should be considered an adequate measure of quality. However, individuals with bachelor’s degrees from accredited institutions outside Connecticut must submit their transcripts, and, if any of their courses do not meet Connecticut’s early childhood education learning requirements, must submit a further portfolio of documentation before receiving the relevant credential. Reportedly, this process can take months.

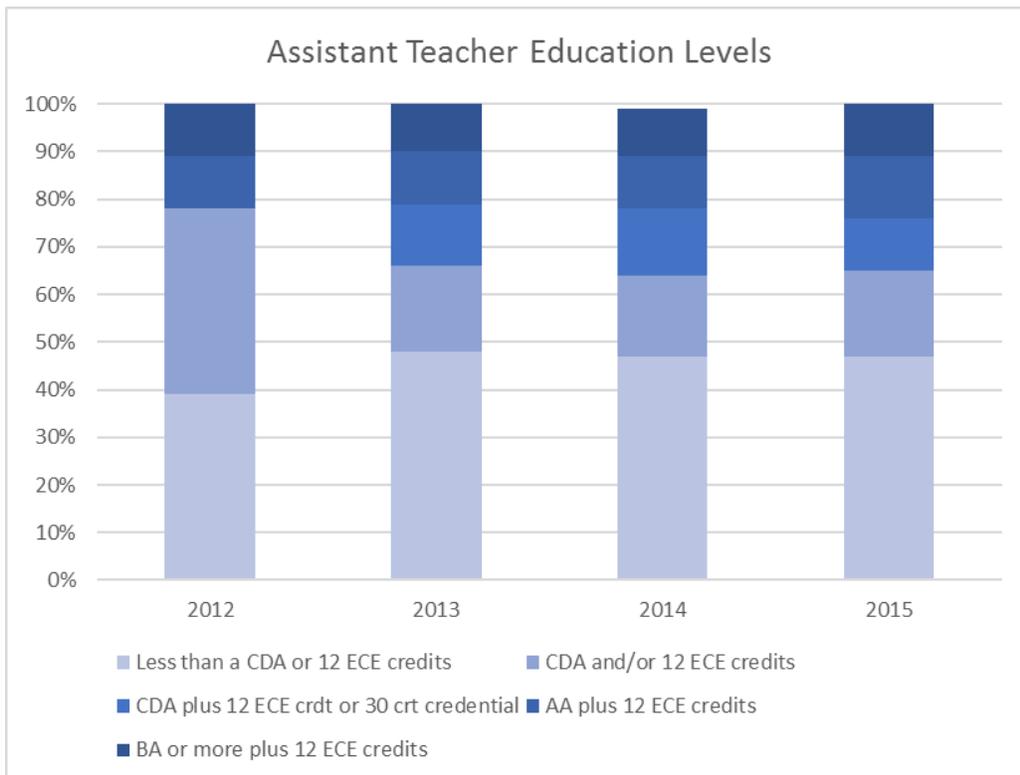
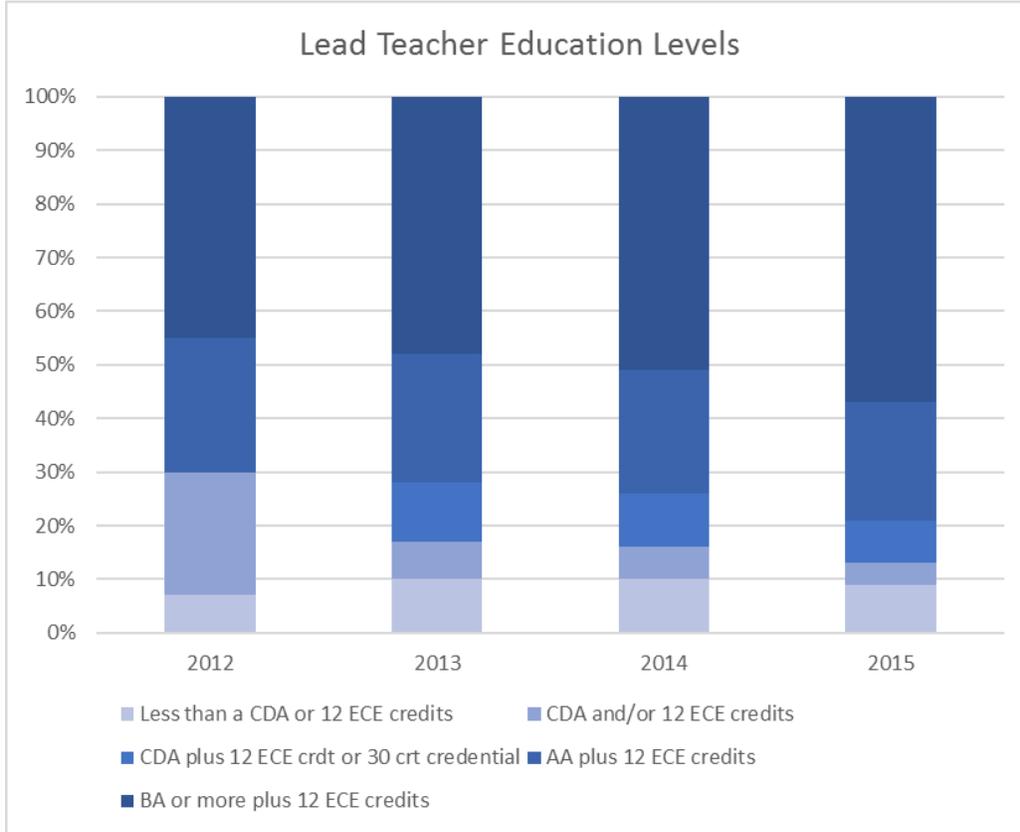
Rather than permitting staff to qualify after attaining any bachelor’s degree plus twelve early childhood education credits, **we support allowing programs to hire as teachers anyone with a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Child**

Study, Child Development or Human Growth and Development from any college in the United States accredited by its regional accrediting body.

This would eliminate the requirement that acceptable higher education institutions must be accredited by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or Office of Higher Education. We believe that the Office of Early Childhood should retain an individual review process to allow someone with a bachelor's degree in other specialties to prove through work experience and a portfolio review or additional course work, that they have the competencies to qualify them as a lead teacher.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and would be happy to answer any questions. I can be reached at nupdegrove@ctvoices.org or 203-498-4240, extension 107.

Appendix



¹ LaRue Allen and Bridget Kelly, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015), <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>; W. Steven Barnett, “Better Teachers, Better Preschools: Student Achievement Linked to Teacher Qualifications,” *NIEER Preschool Policy Matters*, no. 2 (March 2003), <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480818>.

² *Connecticut General Assembly Statute 10-16p*.

³ Office of Early Childhood, *Workforce Development*, Modified February 28, 2017, <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?a=4541&q=535848>.

⁴ Information provided through the Early Childhood Alliance on February 27, 2017.

⁵ CT Voices analysis of annual point-in-time data provided by Margaret Gustafson, Office of Early Childhood. Data is presented in our annual State of Early Childhood reports. The most recent report can be found at <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Early%20Childhood%202015%20-FINAL%20Corrected%202-6-17.pdf>. See Appendix for charts.

⁶ Goodwin College, *Bachelor's Degree in Child Study Classes*. <http://www.goodwin.edu/majors/early-childhood-education/bs-degree-curriculum>.

⁷ Office of Early Childhood, *A Plan to Assist Early Education State Funded Providers to Degree Attainment and Increased Compensation*, February 10, 2016, http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/OEC_Worforce_Report_Final_2.10.16.pdf.

⁸ Information provided through the Early Childhood Alliance on February 27, 2017.