

# **Taskforce to Analyze and Make Recommendations on Issues Relating to Early Childhood Workforce Development**

## **Executive Summary of Recommendations**

### **Task Force Charge:**

As indicated in Public Act No. 21-171, the Taskforce to Analyze and Make Recommendations on Issues Relating to Early Childhood Workforce Development was charged with the following:

*The task force shall examine:* (1) How to encourage equity-based practices in early childhood education preparation and professional development; (2) ways to address inequity in access to employment opportunities and compensation in the early childhood workforce; (3) the feasibility of creating a new co-authored license that would offer multiple levels of flexibility to address the range of ages, settings and roles in the early childhood field, including a professional continuum for assistants, lead teachers, generalists and specialists, such as early intervention, mental health, integrated special education and rehabilitation therapies; and (4) workforce demands in the state related to the need for early childhood educators providing child care services for infants and toddlers and children up to ages six, seven or eight.

*The task force shall make recommendations concerning:* (1) Legislation for educator preparation requirements in the early childhood field; (2) the creation of a new early childhood teacher license or credential jointly issued by the Office of Early Childhood and the Department of Education; (3) the development of a unifying framework for early childhood educator preparation, in accordance with the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Council for Exceptional Children - Division of Early Childhood, in order to offer definition of levels for competencies and compensation; (4) methods to increase compensation related to competency and degree attainment that will work across all sectors of the early care and education sector including subsidized and parent fee supported programs; and (5) workforce development and the creation of job opportunities in early childhood.

### **Members:**

- Appointed Co-chairs: Marsha Bryant (Capital Community College) and Jessica Powell (Southern Connecticut State University)
- Appointed Members:
  - Paige Bray (University of Hartford)
  - Beth Bye (Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood)
  - Merril Gay (CT Early Childhood Alliance)

- Georgia Goldburn (Hope Child Development Center)
- Stephen Hegedus (Southern Connecticut State University)
- Paquita Jarman-Smith (State Education Resource Center)
- Brian Klimkiewicz (State Department of Education)
- Karen Lott (Women's League Child Development Center)
- Jennie Shea (Capital Region Education Council)
- Consultants: Kaylan Ricciardi (State Department of Education)

### **Task Force Process:**

The task force officially commenced its work in August, 2022; twelve months after its originally intended start date due to a delay in finalizing appointments. The task force held monthly meetings in August, September, October, December, and January. At each of these meetings, guest presenters were invited to share their expertise on issues related to early childhood workforce development. The following presenters attended the monthly meetings:

- **Allyx Schiavone**, Executive Director of Friends Center for Children and Co-Founder of New Haven Children's Ideal Learning District (NHChILD)
- **Steve Marcelynas**, Director of The Office of Transfer and Articulation, CT State Colleges and Universities, Academic and Student Affairs
- **Mary Harrill**, Senior Director of Higher Education, National Association for the Education of Young Children
- **Lauren Hogan**, Director of Policy and Professional Advancement National Association for the Education of Young children
- **Maria Mavrides**, Clinical Lecturer, Hunter College
- **Fran Rabinowitz**, Executive Director of the CT Association of Public School Superintendents

Task force members worked together to co-construct subcommittees that would meet in between the monthly meetings to further analyze data and make recommendations. The the three subcommittees were:

- Compensation
- Pathways and Preparation
- LicensureEndorsement

### **Summary of Recommendations:**

The early childhood workforce provides one of the most indispensable services in our society; educating the next generation during what researchers describe as the most

critical phase of development. A robust early childhood system not only provides care for our children, but enables parents to work and our industries in Connecticut to thrive.

Investment in Connecticut's early childhood system is key to Connecticut's economic stability and growth. Currently, our state and its system is in crisis. The pipeline of early childhood educators is declining drastically. Early childhood educators continue to leave the field in what is a mass exodus, which was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the state's lack of data is a barrier to workforce development, preparation, and stability as well as to providing quality early care and education experiences for children across the state.

Most of Connecticut's early childhood educators in birth to five settings do not receive compensation, including salary or benefits, that are comparable to public K-12 educators. The average early childhood educator salary in CT is \$27,976, significantly below the state's median salary of \$45,000. This trend negatively impacts women, in particular, women of color, given that the early childhood workforce is comprised of a disproportionate number of women of color. Nationally, over 90% of the early childhood workforce are women, and over 40% are people of color. Consequently, many early childhood educators experience economic insecurity.

The true cost of childcare is far more than most families can afford and providers do not receive adequate funding to pay liveable wages to their teachers and staff. While Connecticut has provided temporary increases in funding in an attempt to mitigate the crisis, we urgently need to invest in an infrastructure that can recruit, support, and retain high-quality early childhood educators.

The recommendations below provide a framework for the State of Connecticut to become a national leader in building an early childhood system that works for all children, families, providers, and our communities. A thriving early childhood workforce relies on the integration and implementation of all four of the intentionally broad recommendations below, **with particular and urgent attention to compensation.**

The four categories of recommendations are interconnected, with each of them contingent upon legislation related to compensation. We offer these as a package of recommendations with priorities and contingencies built in. There are complexities in each recommendation to address a multi-faceted problem. At the core of this problem is a long legacy of an underpaid workforce and extreme pay inequities. Hence our first and core recommendation is related to compensation.

Based on our review and analysis, the following recommendations are offered to the Education Committee:

**1. Legislation related to compensation:**

- Establish a wage scale that accounts for employee role, position, , professional and/or academic credentials, work and/or life experience, and program quality and that aligns with K-12 compensation (i.e., parity with the K-12 system).
- Establish a package of compensation benefits such as healthcare, retirement, paid leave, professional development assistance, and tuition assistance) that creates parity with the K-12 system.
- Create a *Wage and Compensation Equity Fund* to serve providers that meet a revenue and operating cost threshold. This fund would provide operating support at scale to licensed childcare facilities for implementing the new wage scale and compensation package benefits.
- Increase existing state funded program and Care 4 Kids rates to compensate staff using the wage scale.
- Establish categorical qualification for the child care subsidy through the Care 4 Kids program for the children of professionals who work in early care and education.

**2. Legislation related to equitable access to early childhood educator preparation (contingent on the first recommendation):**

- Student loan forgiveness for all institutions of higher education early childhood preparation programs (both public and private programs who support the early childhood pipeline) with up to 5 years of service to the early childhood field, birth to kindergarten, in CT. Loan forgiveness would be a progressive benefit linked to years of service.
- Tuition replacement or reimbursement for all early childhood preparation pathways (public and private programs who support the pipeline) with either a commitment of up to 5 years of service or 5 years of completed service to the early childhood field, birth to kindergarten, in CT.
- Residency for educators at the associates and bachelors level to receive compensation and student-teaching internships in their current position at their place of employment. Consideration of college credit for work experience.

### **3. Creation of a new teacher license endorsement:**

- First step, legislative charge to SDE and OEC to do this shared work: SDE, in collaboration with OEC, shall convene stakeholders for the purpose of creating a tiered credential across all sectors serving children in the developmental ages Birth to age 8 (birth to grade 3) with consideration for data-informed preparation pathways and commensurate compensation (See sections 1 and 2 above). An initial work plan would be due to the legislature by January 1, 2024 and the final report by January 1, 2025.
- It is the recommendation of this task force that kindergarten remain with the current (#112 and #113) and future early childhood endorsements. Therefore, creation of a new state of CT endorsement/license distinct from the Elementary (grades 1-6) endorsement (#305), a Birth-Kindergarten or Grade 3 inter-agency endorsement/license that attends to all ages, grades, settings, levels, and pathways commensurate compensation is recommended.
- Establish a commission that includes all stakeholders for accountability and development that meets quarterly.

### **4. Data Collection:**

- Establish a data collection warehouse hosted and maintained by inter-agencies on the state of the early childhood workforce in CT.
- Data should be disaggregated by race, gender, degrees, position, and type/ownership.
- Provide an annual report to the commission and the legislative Education committee.