

# Unifying Framework

for the

# Early Childhood Education Profession

Power to the Profession is a national collaboration to define the early childhood education profession, birth through age 8, across states and settings, by establishing a framework for career pathways, preparation, competencies, responsibilities, and compensation. The *Unifying Framework*—this document—is the result of this multi-year, profession-led effort. It is based on the recommendations from the series of eight Power to the Profession Decision Cycles; references the full Decision Cycle documents as sources; and demonstrates how they all come together to advance a unified, diverse, equitable, and effective early childhood education profession.

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## Overview of Recommendations

**Vision:** Each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce across all states and settings.

To achieve this vision, the Power to the Profession Task Force, in partnership with organizational stakeholders and thousands of individual educators, advocates, and allies, developed several primary recommendations to establish unity and clarity around the career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, accountability, supports, and compensation to define the early childhood education profession within the broader early childhood education field.

### Three Professional Designations, with Distinct Roles and Responsibilities

The early childhood education profession will include three distinct and meaningful designations—Early Childhood Educator (ECE) I, Early Childhood Educator (ECE) II, and Early Childhood Educator (ECE) III. Although these professionals will be prepared to work together in various configurations as part of a teaching team, each designation has an associated scope of practice, expected level of professional preparation, and expected level of mastery of the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.

To recognize these levels of mastery, all early childhood educators will hold a professional license to practice at the ECE I, II, or III designation based on: completing an accredited/recognized professional preparation program, completing field experiences, and passing an assessment(s) of competencies. Licensure assessments must have multiple measures, be affordable, and not reinforce cultural, gender, racial, or linguistic biases, and educators must have affordable, equitable, efficient, and high-quality paths to licensure.

### Aligned Professional Preparation Pathways and Specializations

Three primary professional preparation pathways—early childhood education certificate/credential programs, early childhood associate degree programs, and early childhood bachelor's degree/initial master's degree programs—will prepare early childhood educators for licensure at the ECE I, II, and III designations, respectively. At each of these designations, early childhood educators must have a general early childhood education foundation before specializing. Professional preparation programs are encouraged to collaborate with professional organizations, which will be responsible for developing, administering, and issuing specializations, and to create high-quality and accelerated pathways to those specializations, such as blended programs. Other qualifying professional preparation programs, particularly non-degree-awarding programs or programs in freestanding institutions, will also be incorporated.

### Professional Compensation

As early childhood educators are professionally prepared, so must they be professionally compensated. Compensation for early childhood educators will be comparable for those with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities, regardless of whether they work in a community-based center, elementary school, or family-based child care home. Compensation will include an adequate benefits package, increase commensurate with increased preparation and increased competency, and not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served. Public

school salaries will serve as the minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities.

## Supportive Infrastructure and Shared Accountability

**Professional preparation programs.** As public funding is increased and the necessary infrastructure is built, professional preparation programs will be held accountable for supporting the early childhood education profession to provide high-quality care and education across all states and settings, by earning accreditation or recognition, ensuring graduates are proficient in the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, and providing seamless pathways so that individuals may advance their preparation and role in the profession.

**Employers/Owners.** Within the context of recognizing the additional supports that owners and operators of family child care in particular will need to meet expectations, as public funding is increased and the necessary infrastructure is built, employers/owners will be accountable for providing comparable compensation, benefits, and working conditions that promote the well-being, autonomy, and effectiveness of employees, and support the implementation of the profession's standards.

**Professional governance.** An initial professional governance body (PGB) will immediately support implementation of the *Unifying Framework* and advance the long-term sustainability of the profession. The PGB will set the guidelines for the profession and ensure that a significant portion is comprised of individual early childhood educators, representing those who work in each setting, as well as public members who do not serve on behalf of organizations. The PGB will operate as a semi-autonomous body initially hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and subject to a comprehensive, substantial, and independent review within the first three years.

**States.** State governments and agencies will use increased and targeted funding, legislation, and smart regulation to advance these recommendations, particularly for members of the profession, professional preparation programs, and employers/owners. State governments and agencies will adopt the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, organize professional licensure, and adapt regulatory structures to support a professional workforce.

**Federal government.** The federal government will serve as the financing backbone for the early childhood education system, align regulations and legislation to the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework*, and protect and invest in early childhood education as a public good.

Both states and the federal government will engage with and be responsive to the public and to members of the profession and professional organizations (such as associations and unions) and address barriers to membership in such organizations.

Each of the policies and structures briefly outlined above and comprehensively described in the pages that follow, are designed to move us collectively toward the vision and goal at the heart of the Power to the Profession. It is time for significant and sustained public investments that will allow all children, birth through age 8, to benefit from high-quality early childhood education provided by well-prepared, diverse, supported, and compensated professionals. Let us move forward with this shared agenda that paves the way for a visionary future.

# Introduction: Why Investing in the Profession Is Investing in Children



*These are America's children.*



*The first years of their lives are the period of the most rapid brain development.*



*Children, their families, and society benefit from early childhood education in ways that are immediate and long-lasting.*



*But the extent of the benefits they reap depends on the depth of the quality of their experiences and education.*



*And the depth of that quality depends on the knowledge and skills of the early childhood educators providing it.*

These children are all the children in our country—more than 40 million of them, birth through age 8, rich in their racial, geographic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.

One of the best things our country can do to support and improve outcomes for these children and their families is to make significant, substantial, and sustained investments in high-quality early childhood education.

Because positive relationships are at the core of quality, investing specifically in early childhood educators is the best thing we can do to improve early childhood education.<sup>i</sup>

In other words, when we help educators, we help children and families. But when we underinvest in educators, we also undermine the quality of early childhood education programs, diminishing their short- and long-term benefits, decreasing the return on investment, and harming children and families. We also harm

## Why High-Quality ECE Matters

With a return on investment of up to 13%, and a contribution of \$163 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), the benefits of investing in high-quality early childhood education are clear and extensive—for children, adults, and society at large.<sup>ii</sup> A substantial research base confirms that when children participate in high-quality early childhood education, they are:

- ➔ more likely to experience improved cognitive and social outcomes;
- ➔ more likely to graduate from high school;
- ➔ less likely to require remedial education;
- ➔ less likely to commit crimes;
- ➔ less likely to be neglected or abused;
- ➔ less likely to be unemployed;
- ➔ less likely to require public assistance;
- ➔ less likely to become teen parents; and
- ➔ generally healthier and able to be more productive contributors to their local, state, and national economies.

educators themselves—primarily women, often from communities of color, whose poverty-level wages keep the burden of the cost of care to families from being even higher than it is now.

The question, therefore, is how to drive the significant and sustained public investments that will allow all children, birth through age 8, to benefit from high-quality early childhood education provided by well-prepared, diverse, supported, and compensated professionals.

## Launching Power to the Profession

In January 2017, a broad-based Task Force of leaders from 15 national organizations that represent members of the early childhood education field convened to help answer the question of how to drive increased public investment. Selected to have a seat on the Task Force because they represented a segment of the early childhood education field itself, these organizations systematically and sequentially worked to establish unity and clarity around the career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, accountability, supports, and compensation to define the early childhood education profession.

Working with a diverse range of stakeholders and the field at large, this child-focused effort was named Power to the Profession (P2P) for its commitment to elevating educators' voices in the decision-making processes, with the goal of driving public policy, investment, and systems change across all early learning sectors, settings, and states.

The changes P2P seeks are based on the knowledge that children will benefit from being supported by an early childhood education profession comprised of educators who have specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through professional preparation and deployed with varying depth and breadth across all states and settings. This will lead to educators who are valued for their highly skilled work and compensated across all settings. They will be supported by both a strong infrastructure and accountability, which will build and sustain the profession so that it reflects the diversity of the young children it serves and reduces the impact of structural barriers such as institutional racism, sexism, classism, elitism, and bias.

## Extensive Input from the Field

Through a series of “Decision Cycles” addressing the elements of this framework, the P2P Task Force listened closely and engaged consistently with a broad and diverse range of individuals and organizations within our field. The Task Force also benefited from the advice and guidance from other recognized professions, which have noted that if we do not define this profession, others will do it for us.

The P2P process has been built on multiple, iterative rounds of English and Spanish-language feedback, engaging more than 11,000 early childhood educators. Forty-seven states and territories have hosted events, including information sessions, conference keynotes, focus groups, and webinars. Our work has been especially informed by surveys completed by more than 6,300

### Professional Foundation

All established professions are built upon an interconnected and interdependent set of components, which include a shared purpose, common identity, and agreement on the unique responsibilities, characteristics, and ethics of their members. From this foundation, a profession can develop pathways for preparation, requirements for inclusion (entry or sustained membership), a clear scope of practice, differentiated roles within the profession, standards, and individual accountability. Equally important, a defined and unified profession can build a stronger case for public investments and support.<sup>iii</sup>



individuals, 42 written comments from partner organizations, and 175 focus groups reaching more than 3,400 individuals. Intentional outreach and engagement with educators from communities of color, educators who speak Spanish, and educators living in rural communities resulted in 21 focus and discussion groups reaching more than 440 individuals across 12 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

### Phased-In Implementation that Honors the Existing and Future Workforce

Based on this process, as well as extended and extensive discussion by the Task Force, this first-edition *Unifying Framework* summarizes the recommendations of the field for the establishment of a unified early childhood education profession serving children birth through age 8. Supported by additional resources to advance implementation across states and settings, this document identifies a vision with comprehensive recommendations and guidelines to ensure thoughtful, intentional, and inclusive implementation.

We recognize that, to date, when policymakers have increased accountability for educators by raising expectations and educational requirements, they have frequently done so without sufficiently attending to or funding necessary supports and increased compensation. Because of these policy and financing decisions, current and future educators have had to make decisions as well—including deciding to leave the field or not to enter it at all. This is the reality that has led directly to the current crisis faced by families who can neither find nor afford high-quality child care and early learning. Investing in the education and compensation of those working in early childhood education is the best supply-building strategy available to policymakers. As such, and as P2P turns toward implementation, our organizations are making the following commitments to the field to build a future that learns from our past.

- ➔ We will *not* advocate for increased educational requirements without advocating for funding to provide requisite supports and attendant compensation.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for new regulations or requirements for early childhood educators without advocating for increased funding and capacity supports so that programs, institutions, and educators across all settings can implement them.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for new regulations or requirements for early childhood educators without advocating to establish and implement realistic timelines that recognize the challenges faced by the existing workforce, across all settings.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for new regulations or requirements for early childhood educators without advocating for implementation plans and timelines that recognize the particular challenges that family child care and other community-based providers face, so as not to contribute to or worsen their widespread decline.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for policies that disproportionately and negatively impact educators from communities of color.
- ➔ We will *not* advocate for policies that advance the early childhood education profession without doing the work to mitigate unintended consequences and create meaningful pathways for advancement.

Implementation of the *Unifying Framework* will ultimately build a bridge from the present to the future. We must both honor and include our existing field of those working across early learning

settings,<sup>1</sup> recognizing their diversity, dedication, and experience to ensure that they are not summarily pushed out of the profession. We need policies that exempt some current educators (also known as “grandfathering” policies) as well as policies that offer flexible approaches to demonstrate competence. We must ensure that appropriate new education and qualification requirements are phased in over time, accompanied by additional public investments and extensive supports that fully address the serious challenges our workforce faces in accessing degrees and credentials. And we must rely on the tenets of implementation science<sup>iv</sup> to guide us and the power of the collective to stand firm together, speaking with a unified voice to policymakers on behalf of children, families, and early childhood educators.

## Where We Are Going: Our Audacious Vision for the Profession of Tomorrow

Our vision is that each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce.

To achieve this vision, which is grounded in the National Academy of Medicine’s seminal *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8* report,<sup>v</sup> we need to build toward a future structure for the early childhood education profession in which:

- Each and every child, birth through age 8, across all settings, is supported by early childhood educators who have recognized early childhood degrees and credentials;
- Early childhood educators at all professional designations (Early Childhood Educator I, II, and III) are valued, respected, and well compensated for the important roles they play;
- Educators with lead responsibilities across settings and age bands are prepared at the Early Childhood Educator III designation (earning a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education), at a minimum;
- Anyone who wants to become an early childhood educator, at any designation, has equitable access to affordable, high-quality professional preparation and development that supports them in developing the agreed-upon set of knowledge, skills, and competencies needed in any setting; and
- Early childhood educators at all designations are well compensated in accordance with the complex and demanding work they perform, as part of a system that recognizes the cost of quality and finances early childhood education as the public good that it is.

For this aspirational and equity-focused vision to come to life, the financing of high-quality early childhood education will have to change and grow. Local, state, and federal governments will each have to embrace significant increases in investment, recognizing the individual and societal benefits that accrue when families with children from birth through Grade 3 have equitable access to high-quality early learning settings with supported, skilled, and knowledgeable teachers.

In addition to increasing the overall amount of funding, we must also attend to how and where that funding is spent. Increasing investments in an inequitable system without addressing the underlying

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1 Early learning settings include programs serving children from birth through age 8. “Setting” refers to the locations in which early childhood education takes place—child care centers, child care homes, elementary schools, religious-based centers, and many others.

issues will still result in an inequitable system. Therefore, alongside our work to increase investments, we must also dismantle institutional and structural barriers that exist everywhere, from federal funding formulas to institutions of higher education, in order to avoid deepening or perpetuating existing divisions and inequities even as we work to eliminate them.

## Where We Are Now: The Difficult Realities Facing the Profession of Today

As a result of the nation’s failure to adequately invest in high-quality child care and early learning over the years, children are not getting what they need; families are paying more for child care than for housing, if and when they can find and access that care; and the workforce is paid so little that nearly half live in families that depend on public assistance.

This scarcity environment has resulted in a disjointed, misunderstood, and undervalued field shaped by deep-seated issues of inequity and inequality rooted in our nation’s social, political, economic, and educational structures.


**An incoherent and inconsistent system fails to recognize differences in preparation, skills, and experience.** Terms describing those who work with children birth through Grade 3, such as *provider, teacher, assistant, aide, lead teacher, child care worker, day care worker, educator, caregiver, pre-K teacher, elementary school teacher, primary teacher, and preschool teacher* are used across states and settings without clarity or coherence.

They carry no meaning for their respective (and differing) preparation, responsibilities, expectations, and compensation levels. While most states have career lattices or ladders that drive the career trajectories of a subset of the current early childhood workforce, their complexity can drive others away; ladders with many rungs, as multiple states have, are often too difficult for educators to successfully navigate. Further, even if individuals do manage to progress up the ladders, they often find themselves earning the same wages, with the same work responsibilities (or more), as they had on the lower rungs.

**A hodge-podge of professional preparation programs of uneven quality are not adequately preparing early childhood educators.** Many individuals working in early childhood education are working in states and settings where they are not required to meet even minimal educational qualifications.<sup>viii</sup> At the same time, federal and state early childhood systems have raised the levels of professional preparation required for certain settings and certain people. Yet there is a wide range of preparation programs with a wide range of quality that lead to varying state and national credentials. Most of the programs preparing these educators do not articulate into each other, within or across states. When it comes to training programs, some are credit-bearing, while most are not, and some, even when required for licensing or Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems (QRIS), articulate into nothing that an educator can build on. Even those that lead to state credentials and/or recognition within a career lattice are, unlike the Child Development Associate® credential, rarely aligned,

Lose-Lose Scenario

Parents cannot pay more.<sup>vi</sup> Educators cannot make less.<sup>vii</sup>

EARLY CHILD EDUCATORS	FAMILIES
<p>NEARLY <b>1/2</b></p> <p>live in families that rely on public assistance</p>	 <p>Pay more for child care for two children than for mortgages in 40 states</p>

stackable, available in different languages, or portable across sectors, settings, higher education, or states.

The lack of coherence results in little accountability for quality preparation, and it makes it difficult to measure the effectiveness of preparation programs, since they are preparing graduates for a multitude of unclear roles and practice expectations. In addition, the current variation in preparation and credentials allows for individuals to create specializations and professional niches without understanding the full birth through age 8 developmental continuum, which is core to the identity, responsibilities, and practice of the early childhood education profession.

**The system's chaos disproportionately harms candidates without power and privilege.** The lack of coherence and transparency in how educators are being prepared and what precisely they are being prepared for is a clear equity issue. The current reality further marginalizes those who do not have the power and privilege to easily access and navigate the complex and chaotic web of credentials or degrees. It has significant cost implications for educators who may spend money they are then unable to recoup, because they do not receive increased compensation after increasing their education. It disproportionately burdens educators who, much like the families with whom they work, are driven by circumstances to make educational choices based more on affordability and accessibility than quality.

**Educational requirements increase, compensation remains low, and the impact is disproportionately felt by women of color.** Despite research confirming that better-paid teachers provide better-quality care,<sup>xi</sup> and that educator shortages are driven by a lack of compensation, compensation remains too low for all. The poor compensation across the workforce is disproportionately experienced by women of color, who are clustered primarily in the lower-wage jobs within this already low-wage field, even as they join their colleagues in responding to the call for higher levels of preparation by investing time and money to pursue credentials and degrees.<sup>xii</sup> Restricted funding has limited the ability of employers to reward higher education levels with higher salaries. Yet requiring higher qualifications without higher compensation has meant that early childhood educators are keeping their end of the bargain by meeting higher quality standards and completing degrees, but still earning poverty-level wages at the end.<sup>xiii</sup>

## Same Job, Different Pay

All of these educators have a bachelor's degree. But even with the same education qualifications, their pay still varies depending on the setting in which they work.<sup>ix</sup>

Infant/toddler teacher

\$27,248

Head Start teacher

\$33,072

Community-based public pre-K

\$33,696

Public school pre-K teacher

\$42,848

Public school K-12 teacher

\$56,130

## \$3.60 an hour

A child care program accepts a 4-year old from a family paying with a child care subsidy. In 2019, the program can expect to receive, on average, only \$3.60 per hour from the state to care for and educate that child.<sup>x</sup>

**The math does not work.** Though compensation is too low for the average early childhood educator to live on, the total cost of salaries are too high for the average early childhood setting to afford; personnel costs account for the bulk of spending in many early childhood education programs, and it is deeply challenging for programs to compensate staff at a rate that approaches the value they provide. Revenues—whether from parent fees, federal child care subsidies, other forms of scholarship, or a combination of all three—are often insufficient to cover costs. For early childhood education programs that accept federal child care subsidies, in particular, the budgetary challenges can be insurmountable, though the same principle applies to programs that operate exclusively with parent fees.

The difficulties of raising compensation with limited revenue have resulted in a loss of choice for parents and educators because it means that educators with higher credentials are drawn to settings supported by public funding streams outside of child care subsidies, such as a public school sponsored preschool program, where there is significantly greater earning potential.

**Widespread decline of licensed and regulated family child care.** Low compensation affects all early childhood educators. But it is a particular challenge for educators operating family child care homes, many of whom are running small businesses in which they pay themselves last. The inability to balance the books is one of the factors that has led to steep drops in licensed and regulated family child care, reported in states from all across the nation, from California (30% decrease from 2008 to 2017) to Wisconsin (61% decrease from 2007 to 2016) to Vermont (27% decrease from December 2015 through June 2018).<sup>xiv</sup> Early childhood educators working in family child care report multiple reasons for the widespread closures, but they frequently focus on the challenges of inadequate funding that leads to low compensation. They have also struggled with the lack of resources provided to help them implement health and safety protections and quality enhancements required and/or promoted by state and federal governments.<sup>xv</sup>

**The profession follows; it does not lead.** As a whole, the early childhood education profession does not have the appropriate level of professional autonomy and self-governance. Our professional guidelines, accountability systems, and supports are siloed, inequitable, under-resourced, mostly optional, sometimes contradictory, and primarily driven by a mix of state and federal regulatory bodies in ways that can create an unduly burdensome system. Educators with the same qualifications are held to different standards, licensing, and certification requirements across settings and states, and few systems are in place for seamless articulation and career guidance. Further, the federal government plays an outsized role in setting and overseeing compliance with accountability expectations, particularly in comparison to how this process is managed in other professions, such as nursing, architecture, and speech language pathology.

**Yet none of these realities is set in stone.** There are bright spots across the country, in states and cities, in higher education systems, and in early learning settings where the early childhood workforce is being well-prepared and fairly compensated, and where meaningful quality assurance and supports measures are in place. We believe these bright spots are examples and provide inspiration for how the current realities experienced by the vast majority of the workforce at the moment can and must be changed through a combination of robust, comprehensive supports for the workforce; sufficient public investment in compensation; reasonable phase-in timelines; and exemption policies and aligned accountability and quality assurance that take into account the realities of the current workforce and their diverse work settings in order to bridge us from where we are now to a unified early childhood education profession for the future.

# Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Profession

In the following pages, the *Unifying Framework* will move through four sections: (1) defining the three roles and designations within the early childhood education profession; (2) describing the shared accountability for each sector; (3) outlining the skills, preparation, and compensation needed for the profession; and (4) describing the supports, structures, and governance needed to advance the profession. The content and recommendations for all of these sections are pulled from the full Decision Cycle documents. Each recommendation has been crafted through a lens of reducing the impact of structural barriers such as institutional racism, sexism, classism, elitism, and bias and ensuring that the profession reflects the diversity of the young children it serves.

## SECTION 1

### Defining the Early Childhood Education Profession

Supporting the learning and development of young children, in the context of their families and communities, requires complex, demanding, and valuable work that is performed by many individuals in many occupations, with many names, titles, and roles.

Within these occupations, and the broader field, the Task Force, in collaboration with the field, came to consensus on naming and defining the “early childhood education profession.” (See graphic on the following page for details on the profession and the field.) The collective determination was that this profession is made up in part of those who will be called “early childhood educators,” and that their responsibilities are to care for and promote the learning, development, and well-being of children birth through age 8 to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and development.

To successfully meet these responsibilities, and respond to the multiple influences shaping children’s learning and development, policymakers, systems leaders, and educators alike must attend not only to educator diversity but also to ensuring that all educators can build on the strengths of family and child diversity—defined by characteristics and identities, including race, ethnicity, language, culture, geography, social class, immigrant status, family structure, special needs, and learner characteristics.

#### Recommendation

The name of the profession is the early childhood education profession, comprised in part of those who will be called early childhood educators.

# The Early Childhood Education Profession within the Early Childhood Field

## Pedagogical or Instructional Administrators

Pedagogical or instructional administrators guiding the practice of early childhood educators will need to meet the guidelines established by the Professional Governance Board.

Currently, in some contexts, these individuals may be referred to as directors, assistant directors, principals, education managers, supervisors, mentors, or training and technical assistance providers.

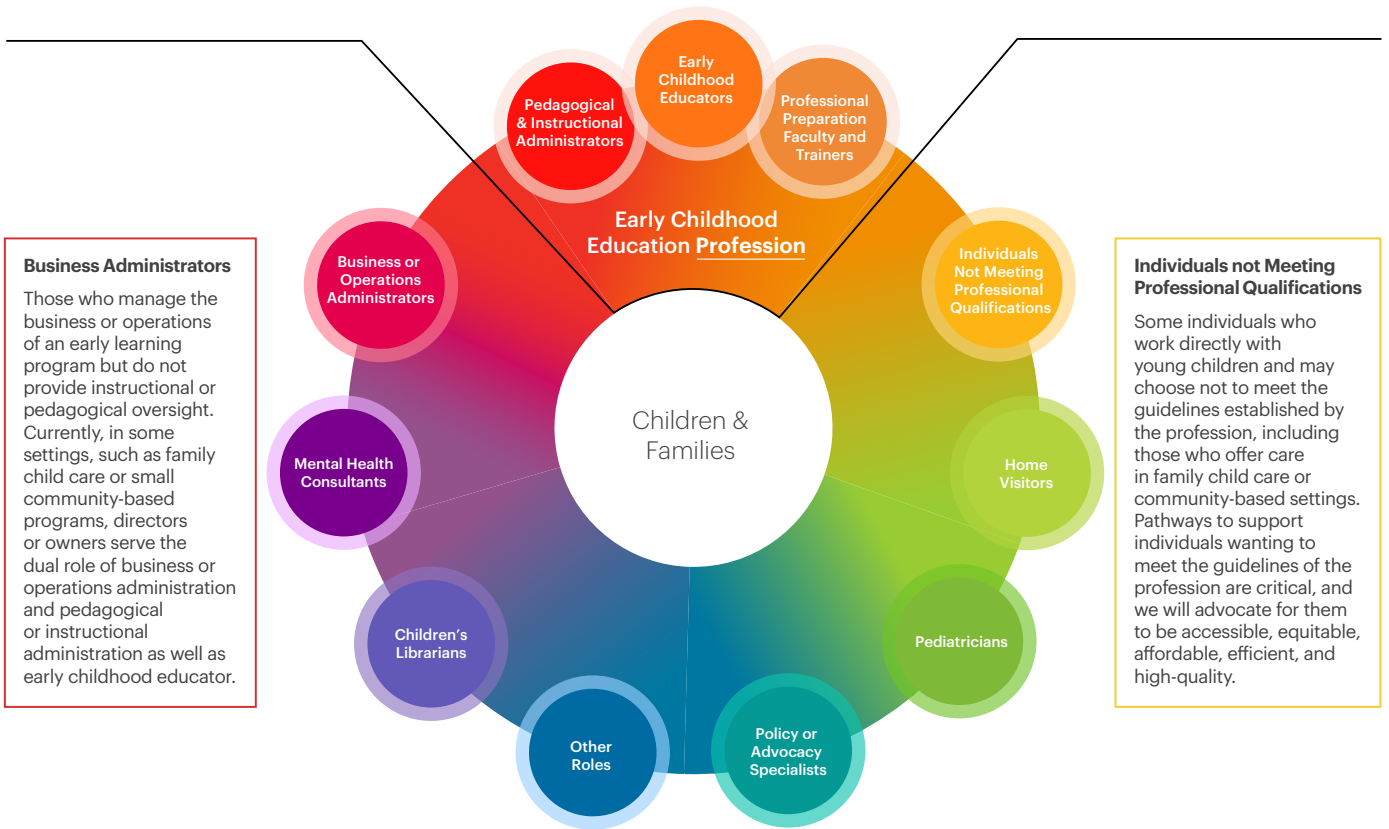
## Early Childhood Educators

Early childhood educators providing direct service to children birth through age 8 are responsible for meeting the guidelines of the early childhood education profession. They are the primary, but not singular, focus of the *Unifying Framework*.

## Professional Preparation Faculty and Trainers

A subset of higher education faculty and professional development staff (in the case of some ECE I programs) instructing, observing, and monitoring the practice of aspiring early childhood educators will also need to meet the guidelines established by the profession in future versions of the *Unifying Framework*.

Currently, in some contexts, these individuals may be referred to as teacher educators, clinical faculty, or professional development trainers/specialists. These are often the faculty responsible for teaching methods courses and supervising field experiences.



## Business Administrators

Those who manage the business or operations of an early learning program but do not provide instructional or pedagogical oversight. Currently, in some settings, such as family child care or small community-based programs, directors or owners serve the dual role of business or operations administration and pedagogical or instructional administration as well as early childhood educator.

## Individuals not Meeting Professional Qualifications

Some individuals who work directly with young children and may choose not to meet the guidelines established by the profession, including those who offer care in family child care or community-based settings. Pathways to support individuals wanting to meet the guidelines of the profession are critical, and we will advocate for them to be accessible, equitable, affordable, efficient, and high-quality.

## Other Roles

Members of professions and occupations within the early childhood field, including those named here, such as mental health consultants, pediatricians, and home visitors, as well others not named here, such as nurses, occupational therapists and social workers, often work closely with early childhood educators. They are not, however, part of the early childhood education profession because they are not held responsible for meeting the guidelines of that profession, just as early childhood educators aren't responsible for meeting the guidelines of their respective professions.

## Recommendation

Members of the early childhood education profession, a distinct profession in the early childhood field, will be prepared to be accountable for the following responsibilities:

1. Planning and implementing intentional, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that promote the social-emotional development, physical development, health, cognitive development, and general learning competencies of each child served;
2. Establishing and maintaining a safe, caring, inclusive, and healthy learning environment;
3. Observing, documenting, and assessing children's learning and development using guidelines established by the profession;
4. Developing reciprocal, culturally responsive relationships with families and communities;
5. Advocating for the needs of children and their families;
6. Advancing and advocating for an equitable, diverse, and effective early childhood education profession that is well-compensated; and
7. Engaging in reflective practice and continuous learning.

### Early childhood educators covered by the *Unifying Framework* recommendations

Anyone working with young children, birth through age 8, has the potential to be considered an early childhood educator if he or she is working in an early childhood education setting that is subject to state licensing and/or regulation or has been identified by the state as being license-exempt (versus being unlicensed). This includes those working in public and private centers, schools, and homes.

Our explicit and stated goal is that those working directly with young children, now and in the future, will have the resources and supports they need to meet the requirements for being an “early childhood educator,” as well as the resulting increased compensation. **However, even if they have equitable access to all of those supports and compensation increases, some individuals who work directly with young children, particularly in small centers and/or family child care homes, may choose to care for young children without meeting the guidelines of the early childhood education profession.** They will remain part of the early childhood education *field*, and we are committed to advocating for policies that will create accessible, equitable, and supportive pathways for them to move into the *profession*. These recommendations may have an impact on their scope of work, but **individuals who choose to operate outside of the profession are not the primary focus of our preparation and compensation expectations and recommendations.**

Additionally, many individuals, including mental health consultants, social workers, child psychologists, home visitors, and others, are part of our early childhood *field*, but since they may not be prepared for or held accountable for all of the responsibilities outlined, and may be prepared within an allied profession, they are not considered part of the early childhood education *profession*.

The early childhood education profession includes early childhood educators, higher education faculty, and pedagogical and instructional leaders in early learning settings. For reasons of scope, time, and sequence, however, this *Unifying Framework* is focused on defining a cohesive and coherent system for early childhood educators only. We recognize that this system will likely impact



expectations for *higher education faculty and others preparing early childhood educators, such as coaches, mentors, and technical assistance providers*. The Task Force anticipates that individuals in these instructional and pedagogical leadership roles must be prepared as early childhood educators before assuming leadership responsibilities. Our recommendations, however, are *not explicit* about which subset(s) of these groups must meet these recommendations and the additional recommendations that are specific to these groups.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the *name, definition, and responsibilities* of the early childhood education profession, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 1](#).

### Three Meaningful Designations

The science of early learning is as complex for children birth through age 3 as it is for children in preschool as it is for children in kindergarten through Grade 3. In addition, it is equally as possible to deliver high-quality early childhood education rooted in the science of early learning in family child care settings as it is in child care programs as it is in public schools.<sup>xvi</sup> Despite the science, however, the current early childhood education field is fragmented across multiple dimensions, including age band, setting, role, state, and funding stream. This *Unifying Framework* creates a structure that lessens that fragmentation and, where it continues to exist, makes it increasingly intentional and responsive to existing strengths, research, and requirements.

As such, within this first edition of the *Unifying Framework*, and with a focus on the “educator” circle, we recommend a structure in which the cacophony of labels and roles is reduced to three distinct and meaningful designations: Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I), Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II), and Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III).

**Unique roles and specific responsibilities.** Each designation, with names chosen in part because they can be incorporated and localized to support all settings, staffing, and supervisory structures, will have a unique role and be prepared for specific responsibilities. Establishing three different roles while keeping them together in the same professional structure will increase inclusivity and reduce stratification. This will help ensure that all individuals on an early childhood education team are explicitly valued, have a common identity, and are prepared to be effective in their specific practice.

Children and families benefit from the richness of a well-prepared, supported, and compensated profession that includes educators diverse in all ways—race and class, geography and culture, gender and language, educational background and family structure, and more. In addition, because positive relationships are at the core of quality, and young children do not distinguish between the roles of the adults who interact with them in a classroom or family child care setting, this structure holds all early childhood educators, regardless of role, accountable for supporting child development and learning.

## Supporting the Field and the Profession

Everyone working with and caring for young children should be valued and supported, whether they meet or do not meet the guidelines of the early childhood education profession. In some states, some individuals who provide care and education for children may be members of a union. Where and when union members engage in collective bargaining, they work together with an employer (be it state or local government, school district, or private employer) to address wages, benefits, standards, and terms and conditions of employment, both for individuals in the early childhood education profession and for those in the early childhood field.

## Recommendation

Establish three designations of early childhood educators—ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III—each with a distinct scope of practice.

**Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I):** *In birth through Grade 3 settings*, an ECE I can help develop and sustain high-quality child development and learning environments and can serve as an effective member of early childhood education teaching teams. An ECE I will complete a professional preparation program that meets a minimum of 120 clock hours.

**Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II):** *In birth through age 5 settings*, an ECE II can be responsible for developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environments with staffing and support models that provide frequent access to ECE IIIs for guidance. For example, ECE IIs working in larger community-based settings might have on-site supervisors, or those working in family child care homes or small centers might be a part of networks or have regular on-site technical assistance. However, in state- and district-funded preschool programs,<sup>2</sup> provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K–12 public school system, ECE IIs can serve only in the support educator role; ECE IIIs must serve in the lead educator role, as in K–Grade 3 settings, where an ECE II can help develop and sustain high-quality development and learning environments, can serve as an effective member of ECE teaching teams, and can guide the practice of ECE Is. An ECE II will complete an early childhood education associate degree program.

**Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III):** *In birth through Grade 3 settings*, an ECE III can be responsible for independently developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environments, can serve as an effective member of ECE teaching teams, and can guide the practice of ECE Is and IIs. An ECE III will complete an early childhood education bachelor’s degree program or an early childhood education master’s degree program for initial preparation.

These professionals will be prepared to work together in various configurations as part of a teaching team that provides support for individuals designed to help guide and inform practice. Each professional preparation program will be responsible for preparing candidates who know, understand, and can implement the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* as defined by the profession. See Section 3a for additional information on the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and Section 4a for additional information on professional preparation pathways, supports, and expectations.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the *early childhood education designations*, see Appendix A and the source document for [Decision Cycle 345+6](#).

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2 The Unifying Framework relies on the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to define “state- and district-funded preschool” based on NIEER’s annual State of Preschool Yearbook definition for “What qualifies as a state preschool program?” We expand the definition to include settings that are funded by a district, not by a state, but where the same qualifications otherwise apply.

## Shared Responsibilities and Supports: An Overview

One of the most significant results of shifting to a unified profession is that we are creating the space and the opportunity for the profession itself to take the lead in defining who early childhood educators are, what we do, what we will be held accountable for, and what supports we need to ensure our success.

As a profession, we welcome increased, clear, and consistent accountability tied to our definitions of professional competencies and resulting in increased compensation. We understand that we can only expect the significant increases in public financing that are needed to move the profession forward if we are willing to be accountable for their effective use. We also understand that we can only be held accountable if we have the necessary and sufficient supports, resources, and infrastructure.

These supports, resources, infrastructure, and accountability are interrelated and interdependent and operate within a broad system of professional preparation programs, employers/owners, professional organizations and governance bodies, and state and federal governments and agencies. This brief section provides an overview of the vision for and responsibilities of each of these entities, as well as for the early childhood education profession itself, defined in Section 1 above. The rest of the *Unifying Framework* is devoted to describing the responsibilities, structures, and supports for each part of the system that advances the early childhood education profession.

### Early Childhood Educators

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**Vision:** Early childhood educators are members of a prepared, diverse, effective, equitable, and well-compensated profession, and they are able to play a central role in defining and shaping that profession.

**Responsibilities:** Hold the necessary credentials to practice. Meet the standards and guidelines of the profession, and work within their designated scope of practice.

### Professional Preparation Programs

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**Vision:** There is wide and unbiased access to professional preparation pathways that allow prospective and current early childhood educators to efficiently complete their preparation credentials. Completers of programs are confident that they are prepared in the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and are ready to meet their expected scopes of practice.

**Responsibilities:** Attain accreditation or recognition from an early childhood accreditation or recognition body. Provide programs of study that are aligned to the *Professional Standards and Competencies*. Ensure program completers are prepared to meet the requirements to be licensed to practice.

## Employers/Owners (including self-employed and sole proprietors)

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**Vision:** Regardless of where they work, early childhood educators are fairly compensated, operate with professional autonomy, and are valued and supported in their workplace. Innovative models are developed to support early childhood educators who own, work in, and/or operate family child care settings, and those in small community-based centers, particularly for those individuals who may serve as both employer and educator.

**Responsibilities:** Hire and retain early childhood educators for roles aligned to the requirements of an ECE I, II, and III designation. Provide or receive compensation and conditions that support the well-being and effectiveness of early childhood educators. Ensure that workplace and employee practices are aligned to the *Professional Standards and Competencies*.

### Multiple Roles

While there is no one-size-fits-all term, the Task Force has chosen the combination of “Employers/Owners” to describe those who operate early learning programs across multiple settings, including centers, family child care homes, and public schools (both at the level of the building and at the district level). The term “Employers/Owners,” used throughout the *Unifying Framework*, recognizes and attempts to respond to the fact that early childhood educators working in family child care settings may also see themselves, and may refer to themselves as, family child care operators, small business owners, or sole proprietors, even as they are simultaneously working as early childhood educators. These individuals may or may not directly employ other individuals. While the majority of the recommendations have been constructed to work across all settings where there are either employers or owners, there are instances in the *Unifying Framework* where the Task Force’s recommendations for “employers” may need to be adapted further for those who operate as “owners without employees,” particularly in a family child care setting.

## Professional Governance Body

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**Vision:** The profession leads a cohesive and transparent system of supports, infrastructure, and accountability that results in a high-quality early childhood education workforce.

**Responsibilities:** Hold the standards, competencies, and guidelines of the profession. Set the parameters for quality assurance of individuals and professional preparation programs. Coordinate with state and federal bodies to promote alignment with the profession’s recommendations.

## State Governments and Agencies

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**Vision:** The public has access to a simple and transparent early childhood education system. Early childhood educators are not beholden to opaque and complex processes that impede their ability to be prepared for and to advance in their careers.

**Responsibilities:** Provide funding and set policies to support early childhood educators, professional preparation programs, and employers/owners in implementing the recommendations in the *Unifying Framework* through legislative, budgetary, and regulatory mechanisms. Protect the public from harm. Establish a state board to grant professional licenses. Engage with and be responsive to members of the profession and the public.

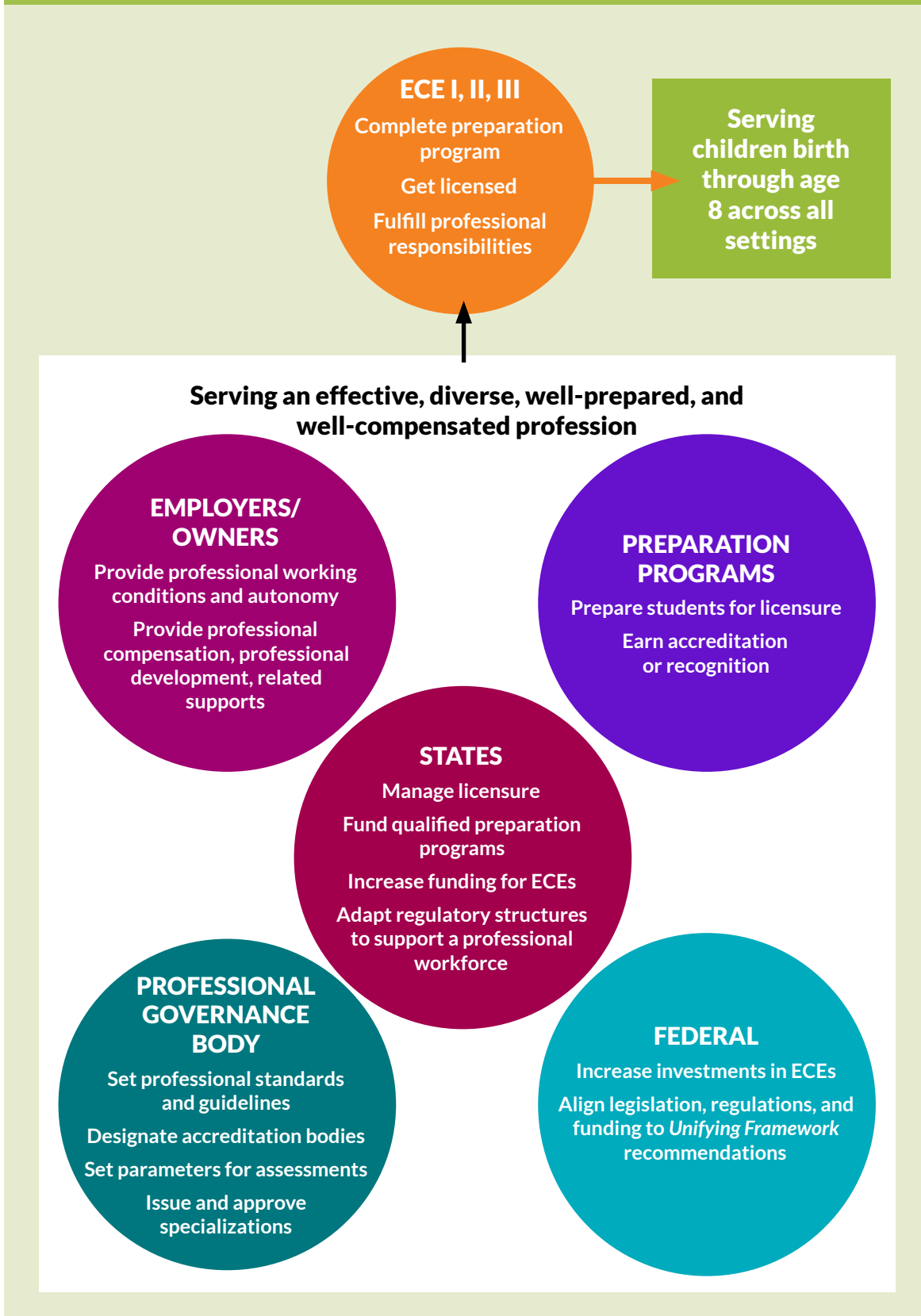
## Federal Government and Agencies

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**Vision:** The early childhood education system is funded and professionals are supported with financial and professional learning resources so that every young child has access to high-quality early childhood education and care. The federal government provides the financing backbone of the system.

**Responsibilities:** Focus early childhood legislation, regulations, and funding on implementing the *Unifying Framework* recommendations. Protect and invest in early childhood education as a public good. Engage with and be responsive to members of the profession and the public.

## ECE Ecosystem: Shared Accountability



# Expectations and Compensation for the Early Childhood Education Profession

## Section 3a: Professional Standards and Competencies

As highlighted in *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8*, standards and competencies influence the preparation and practice of the early childhood education profession as it exists today. There is, in fact, no shortage of competencies and standards—and therein lies a problem for the early childhood field, as these proliferate across states and settings with varying intentions, focus populations, and degrees of influence, thwarting the ability of institutions of higher education, employers, and policymakers to effectively prepare and support early childhood educators.

Yet there has not been one core body of standards and competencies that establishes what all early childhood educators working with children birth through age 8 must know and be able to do—until now.

Resulting from the multi-year process explained in the sidebar on page 21, the new, agreed-upon *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* represent these core domains of knowledge and practice, provide a baseline of expectations for mastery, and are designed to drive accountability for the profession that is influenced by and responsive to the expertise of the profession. The core domains, required of every early childhood educator, regardless of state or setting, are captured in these six standards:<sup>3</sup>

- ➔ Standard 1. Child Development and Learning in Context
- ➔ Standard 2. Family Partnerships and Community Connections
- ➔ Standard 3. Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment
- ➔ Standard 4. Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching
- ➔ Standard 5. Knowledge, Application, and Integration of Academic Discipline Content in the Early Childhood Curriculum
- ➔ Standard 6. Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator

**Leveling the standards.** Because the *Unifying Framework* has established three designations of early childhood educators within the profession, it is also critical to clearly establish the depth and breadth of the competencies required at these different designations. The leveling of the competencies so that they are aligned with the ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III scopes of practice aims to provide transparency and clarity—for families, educators, professional preparation providers, and policymakers—about what skills, knowledge, and expertise any given early childhood educator should possess and be able to demonstrate in any given role and what kinds of outcomes they can therefore be held accountable for achieving.

### Recommendation

The *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* will serve as the core standards for the profession.

3 Diversity, equity, inclusive practices, and technology do not have separate standards; rather, these important content areas are elevated and integrated in the context of each standard.

Because early childhood educators work in concert with the rest of the birth through Grade 12 teaching workforce, the *Professional Standards and Competencies* are aligned to the larger education field's understanding of effective teaching.<sup>4</sup> These agreed-upon standards and competencies are designed to promote standards—not standardization—and, as such, to allow states and preparation programs to develop additional items that are responsive to workforce needs, community context, and institutional mission. At the same time, and looking ahead to implementation, the *Professional Standards and Competencies* should be used to inform state and federal policy and to align critical professional and policy structures, including:

- ➔ state and national early childhood educator credentials and related qualification recommendations or requirements;
- ➔ educator licensing assessments;
- ➔ hiring and performance evaluations in early learning settings;
- ➔ professional development;
- ➔ national accreditation of early childhood professional preparation programs;
- ➔ state preparation program approval processes;
- ➔ articulation agreements between various levels and types of professional preparation and development programs; and
- ➔ financing of the early childhood educator workforce to build higher education capacity for preparing qualified, diverse, effective, and compensated educators.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the development of the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 2](#). For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the early childhood education designations, see Appendix A and the source document for [Decision Cycle 345+6](#). To review the full set of standards and competencies themselves, see the [Professional Standards and Competencies](#).

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4 As expressed through the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards.



## Developing the *Professional Standards and Competencies*

In 2017, the Power to the Profession Task Force began an extensive process to review the range of the field's existing standards and competencies and establish a process for arriving at a set of agreed-upon standards and competencies for the early childhood education profession, as defined in [Decision Cycle 1](#). This process included a deep look at seven national standards and competencies and, following a deliberative decision-making process, resulted in the Task Force recommendation that the *2010 NAEYC Standards for Initial and Advanced Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs* be explicitly positioned as the foundation for the standards and competencies of the unified early childhood education profession. These standards were selected as the foundation because they best met the Task Force's criteria for standards to set expectations for professionals working with children birth through age 8 across early learning settings.

At the same time, the Task Force set four specific conditions and expectations for the revision of the NAEYC professional preparation standards. These included an expectation that the standards would be reviewed in light of the most recent science, research, and evidence, with particular consideration to potential missing elements identified in the *Transforming the Workforce* report, including teaching subject-matter-specific content, addressing stress and adversity, fostering socio-emotional development, working with dual language learners, and integrating technology in curricula. The NAEYC Governing Board voted unanimously to accept the Task Force's recommendations and revise the existing position statement. To do so, and respond effectively to the expectations of

the Task Force, including the expectation that the revisions would occur in the context of an inclusive and collaborative process, a workgroup was convened in January 2018, comprised of the Early Learning Systems Committee of the NAEYC Governing Board, early childhood practitioners, researchers, faculty, and subject-matter experts, including individuals representing organizations whose competency documents were considered, referenced, and informed the revisions. The organizations included the following Task Force members: the Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood; the Council for Professional Recognition; and ZERO TO THREE.

In September 2018, the workgroup released the first public draft of the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, followed by an extensive public comment period and months of intensive work to release the second public draft for needed feedback and guidance from the field, higher education, and others. The second public draft of the competencies, which included a first draft of the leveling of the competencies to ECE I, II, and III, was open from May to July 2019.

This comment period was followed by extensive rewriting, supported by a group of experts drawn from ECE I, II, and III professional preparation programs, and resulted in a third public draft, focused solely on the leveling, which was open from October to November 2019. Ultimately, the leveled competencies, aligned to the ECE I, II, and III designations, are being released in conjunction with the full *Unifying Framework*.

### Section 3b: Professional Licensure

Once there is a core set of professional standards and competencies for the entire early childhood education profession, early childhood educators working in any setting will be able to be recognized as knowledgeable, prepared, and safe to practice by obtaining (and maintaining) a professional license to practice issued by a state entity.

In order for early childhood educators to meet this expectation, professional preparation programs, employers/owners, states, and the federal government must provide affordable, equitable, efficient, and high-quality pathways to licensure.

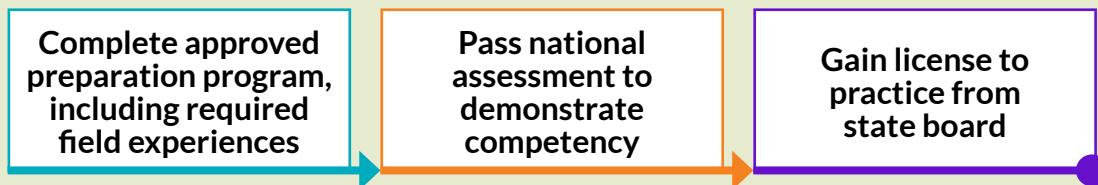
To obtain a license, early childhood educators will earn a credential from an accredited or recognized professional preparation program at the ECE I, II, or III designation; demonstrate evidence of field experiences; and pass an assessment of competencies. Licensure assessments must have multiple measures; be affordable; and not reinforce cultural, gender, racial, and linguistic biases. The content of the assessments must be aligned to the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and aligned to the appropriate depth and breadth for ECE I, II, and III as indicated in the leveling of the *Professional Standards and Competencies*.

In earning their license, early childhood educators will have access to preparation programs that operate as part of an organization or institution that is approved by a designated state government agency or entity AND has earned accreditation or recognition from an early childhood professional preparation accreditation or recognition body.

#### Recommendation

All early childhood educators will hold a professional license to practice.

#### Steps to Licensure



**Supports are essential.** To require this level of accountability, educators must have access to comprehensive supports and scholarships at ECE I, II, and III designations, including those that address the cost of tuition and fees; books and other course materials, including technology needs; transportation; child care; and housing.

In addition, educators need equitable access to accredited or recognized high-quality early childhood education professional preparation programs that are part of clearly articulated pathways that allow individuals to seamlessly advance in their preparation and role in the profession. Preparation programs must also offer flexibility along with innovative and/or evidence-based approaches that support individuals who are first-generation students, non-traditional students, dual language learners, and those who could benefit from developmental/remedial education or preparatory experiences to succeed in formal education.

In addition, educators must have access to release time to take courses and complete required field experiences, as well as conditions that support their well-being and the implementation of effective practice. This must include taking into consideration the additional burden of costs, time, and location of coursework for family child care and small business owners who may already be fulfilling multiple roles in their work settings.

For more on the supports for educators in the professional preparation systems, see Section 3a. For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to *professional licensure*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 7+8](#).

### Section 3c. Professional Compensation

As early childhood educators are professionally prepared, so must they be professionally compensated. Yet the deep need for increased investment to address educator compensation cannot come on the backs of families or early childhood educators themselves. While states must increase their own investments, the federal role can and must help ensure quality, equity, and equality across states, creating a groundswell of sustained public investment that is sufficient to support the following vision-oriented goals and recommendations.

#### Compensation will be comparable for early childhood educators with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities, regardless of the setting of their job.

Varied settings in early childhood education are a current reality, and we anticipate that they will be part of our future. Yet these differences in settings (and often funding streams) do not necessarily dictate differences in the nature of the work being done. As such, and as a matter of equity, early childhood educators with similar experience and qualifications will be comparably compensated regardless of whether they work in a community-based center, elementary school, or family-based child care home.

**Compensation will include the provision of an adequate benefits package.** All early childhood educators in any work setting should have access to benefits. Benefit packages provided for full-time work may be negotiated to meet individual needs, but their existence should be non-negotiable. Early childhood educators who are satisfied with their jobs and whose individual and family members' health are protected are more likely to convey positive feelings toward children, more able to give utmost attention to teaching and caring for children, and more likely to remain in their position for longer periods of time.<sup>xvii</sup>

#### Compensation will increase commensurate with increased preparation and increased competency.

The simplified structure of ECE I, II, and III establishes the foundation for a stable wage growth trajectory that parallels professional advancement. Entry-level early childhood educators will have multiple opportunities to grow in their careers over the long term, working directly with children, if that is where their talents are maximized.

**Compensation will not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served.** Historically, there has been a wage penalty affecting early childhood educators working with infants and toddlers, which disproportionately affects educators from communities of color.<sup>xviii</sup> Focusing only on comparable compensation for those working in pre-K settings with three year-olds and four year-olds will deepen this disproportionality. Compensation earned by individuals working with the youngest children

### Recommendation

Compensation for early childhood educators will be at least comparable to public school salaries and comparable across all settings, include an adequate benefits package, and increase commensurate with increased preparation and competency.

must be prioritized to reflect the vital importance and added value to society of their work. Thus, the standards, accountability, and levels within the early childhood education profession must be established to intentionally include these educators and reflect their current status and starting points.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to *compensation*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 345+6](#).

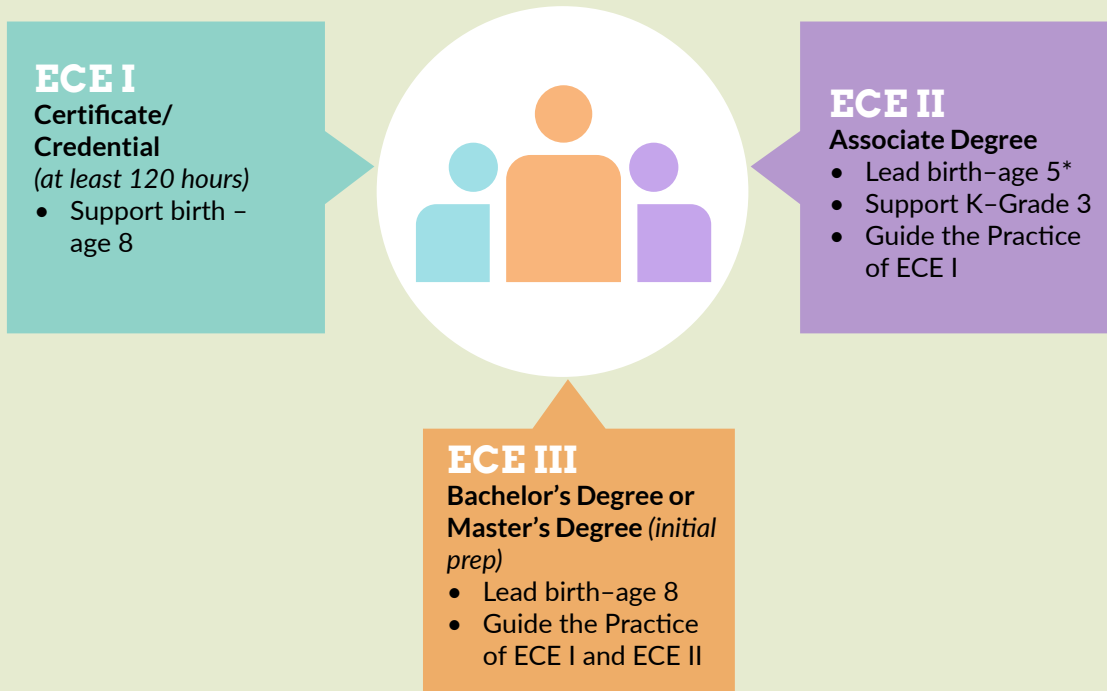
## What Is the Standard for Comparability?

Everyone working within the early childhood education field, regardless of their level of education or training, should earn no less than the amount needed to cover basic living standards. However, while there is an urgent need to increase the floor of compensation for everyone in the field to at least a basic self-sufficiency standard, the Task Force recommends that the early childhood education profession look to the public schools as the *minimum benchmark* for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities.

The movement to raise the minimum wage is an important opportunity for some educators in some states, and it can provide an impetus for states to make needed investments to increase subsidy payment rates to early childhood settings in response. **However, early childhood education, rooted as it is in science and research, is not a minimum-wage job, and a self-sufficiency standard must be considered the floor and not the ceiling.**

We also recognize that, while removing disparities within the early childhood education profession birth through age 8 is an important step forward, it is also an insufficient long-term goal. So we also recommend that early childhood educator salary and benefit packages ultimately be determined following a review for members of other professions who care for children in the same age range and for those who have similar functional responsibilities, such as nurses, school psychologists, children's librarians, speech and language pathologists, as well as program administrators in places such as hospitals and educational institutions.

## One Profession, Three Designations



*\*Because we support progression and not regression in state- and district-funded programs, where “state-funded” is defined by NIEER, provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K–12 public school system, ECE II graduates can serve only in the support educator role. ECE III graduates must serve in the lead educator role.*

Additional and innovative guidance, support, and supervisory models will need to be explored, developed, and evaluated, particularly for early childhood educators operating and/or working in family-based child care homes. Roles will continue to shift as public financing significantly increases to support all families with children in all settings and sectors.

Individuals serving in ECE I, II, and III roles may work as part of teaching teams and be prepared through programs of study in early childhood education that are aligned to the appropriate depth and breadth of the *Professional Standards and Competencies*. ECE I individuals must earn an industry-recognized national credential like the Child Development Associate® (CDA) national credential and other portable credentials. ECE II individuals must earn an early childhood education associate degree, and ECE III individuals must earn an early childhood education bachelor’s degree or initial master’s degree.

Compensation (including benefits) will increase with greater responsibility and deeper preparation. Compensation will be aligned with comparable roles in public K–12 settings. The deep need for increased investment (for compensation and more) cannot come on the backs of parents or educators. Additional state investment is necessary, but not sufficient. Increased federal support is essential.

## Resources, Structures, and Supports to Advance the Early Childhood Education Profession

Professional preparation programs, employers/owners, and state and federal governments and agencies play key roles in delivering on the part of the vision where early childhood educators are “well-prepared” and “well-compensated.” They also hold significant influence over whether the workforce as a whole is diverse and effective—two other characteristics of the vision for an early childhood education profession all children need to thrive. In this framework, we recommend a new configuration of mutual accountability for each of these system components, with a clear vision and streamlined responsibilities, in which the profession is responsive to the needs of the public and the government bodies are heavily influenced by recommendations from the profession.

At the same time, preparation programs and employers/owners depend on increased funding to meet their obligations and accountability expectations. Early childhood educators, as well as their allies and advocates, including parents, professional preparation programs, and employers/owners themselves, must demand increased investment from federal and state governments that are consistent with an understanding of early childhood education as a public good. These investments must support existing, fundamental early childhood education programs, even while they are adapted over time to reflect the *Unifying Framework’s* recommendations for the early childhood education profession.

Early childhood education also needs new, dedicated funding streams, which can be targeted toward the preparation and compensation of the workforce and which must supplement existing funding that supports young children and their families.

### Section 4a: Professional Preparation

Programs already exist that prepare educators in different ways to work with children in different age groups. In addition, expectations, assessment, content knowledge, and accountability requirements are different for educators working in public kindergarten through Grade 3 settings, thereby demanding the acquisition of additional skills and expertise.

The current public teaching profession has determined that these skills, by the nature of their depth and breadth, are typically best learned in the context of a high-quality bachelor’s degree program, with certification and/or licensure. Cities and states that have led the way in instituting and expanding public pre-K programs have likewise (and, the Task Force believes, rightly) determined that early childhood educators working in those settings should be held to the same bachelor’s degree standard as in K–Grade 3. The Task Force also believes that greater emphasis must be placed on ensuring that the degrees earned by those working in and across pre-K–Grade 3 settings meet the early childhood education profession’s guidelines, governance, and accountability standards.

While higher education is facing a multitude of challenges, community colleges have led the way in addressing some of the most explicit ones, including accessibility, affordability, and attainment. Their success, combined with policy movement toward debt-free education in community colleges,<sup>xix</sup> presents a key opportunity for the early childhood education profession. At the same time, we deeply embrace the value and importance of a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education for the opportunities it offers to gain deeper content knowledge across multiple disciplines, integrate disciplinary content and early childhood knowledge, access more field experiences, and gain

supervisory skills. We are committed to prioritizing an equity-oriented approach that increases the progressive attainment of credentials and degrees at all levels of the profession.

The Task Force recommends that this first-edition *Unifying Framework* builds toward a future structure for the early childhood education profession in which public financing and policies ensure that educators with lead responsibilities across all settings and age bands are prepared and compensated at the ECE III designation (earning a bachelor's degree in early childhood education), at a minimum. Leading the way, state- and district-funded preschool programs provided in mixed-delivery settings, which are explicitly aligned with the K–12 public school system, should both require educators with lead responsibilities to be ECE III graduates and provide supports to educators across settings to meet these requirements.

**Align preparation to roles.** In preschool settings that do not draw on state- and district-funded preschool funds, the first edition of this framework will not immediately require the same standard. Thus, an ECE II graduate in those cases can hold lead responsibilities, with staffing and support models that provide frequent access to ECE IIIs for on-site guidance, and with important support from ECE Is as well.

In addition, this framework recognizes the meaningful, valuable, and necessary places in our profession for educators who have acquired their competencies through such opportunities as a CDA credential or non-early childhood education degrees and trainings, as well as for those who have gained deep knowledge and expertise through experience.

**Three primary categories of professional preparation programs.** The Task Force recommends that the following categories of programs be supported as the primary ones for preparing early childhood educators across the three designations. All represent an organized early childhood education program of study, but with different requirements. It is critical that these programs receive the necessary resources to ensure they have the capacity to support equitable access and success in diverse settings, including family child care homes and small community-based settings. These programs, which will need to align their coursework, assessments, and program of studies with the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, must meet the quality expectations defined by the profession such as accreditation or recognition. They must also be designed to support articulation across preparation programs and to create multiple opportunities for current and future practitioners to demonstrate their knowledge and competencies.

**Early Childhood Education Certificate/Credential Programs (ECE I):** These programs are a minimum 120 clock hours. ECE I completers may meet the educational requirements for industry-recognized national credentials and other portable credentials.

**Early Childhood Education Associate Degree Programs (ECE II):** An associate degree is at least 60 credit hours of college-level coursework.

**Early Childhood Education Bachelor's Degree Programs (ECE III):** A bachelor's degree is at least 120 credit hours of college-level coursework OR Early Childhood Education Master's Degree Programs (initial preparation). Initial-level master's degree programs are designed for individuals with non-early childhood education bachelor's degrees.

## Recommendation

Within one ECE profession, recognize three primary types of professional preparation programs to prepare individuals for ECE I, II, and III designations.

Other qualifying professional preparation programs, particularly non-degree-awarding programs or programs in freestanding institutions, will also be incorporated, as needed, when this *Unifying Framework* is implemented. To be considered comparable to the primary set of professional preparation programs listed above, these programs will be held accountable for meeting the profession's guidelines and governance and accountability standards.

**Generalize, then specialize.** Every early childhood educator must have a general early childhood education foundation as articulated in the *Professional Standards and Competencies*. Then, educators at each of the three professional designation levels will be eligible and should be encouraged to specialize as a means of deepening their knowledge and practice and creating a professional niche. Professional preparation programs are encouraged to collaborate with professional organizations to create high-quality and accelerated pathways to specializations, such as blended programs.

### Recommendation

Early childhood educators must have a general early childhood education foundation before specializing.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the *primary professional preparation pathways and specializations*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 345+6](#).

**Expectations for accountability and needed resources and supports.** As public funding is increased, programs preparing members of the early childhood education profession must meet expectations for supporting early childhood educators including:

- ➔ Earning accreditation or recognition from an early childhood professional preparation accreditation or recognition body approved through the professional governance body;
- ➔ Ensuring that graduates can successfully demonstrate proficiency in the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, which may include completing licensure assessments that are developed for and recommended by the profession for ECE I, II, and III designations; and
- ➔ Advancing seamless articulation strategies that streamline pathways through postsecondary education, reduce duplication of coursework, and support multiple entry points into the pathways so that individuals may advance their preparation and role in the profession.

### Recommendation

As public funding, resources, and supports are increased, professional preparation programs must earn programmatic accreditation or recognition, ensure graduates are proficient in the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, and provide seamless pathways through postsecondary education.

Professional preparation programs will be able to meet these expectations as funding and other resources and supports are provided in three key areas:

- ➔ Supports for faculty and professional development specialists<sup>5</sup>
  - Each program has at least one full-time faculty or professional development specialist who oversees the early childhood education program.
  - All faculty or professional development specialists have qualifications aligned to the expectations set by early childhood professional preparation accreditation/recognition bodies;

5 "Professional development specialists" refers to those teaching in ECE I professional preparation programs.



are adequately compensated for the work that they do; and have access to relevant and ongoing professional development.

- Faculty-to-student ratios are comparable to other clinically based programs within an institution of higher education; likewise, professional development specialists must also have reasonable student ratios in the context of their classes, regardless of whether they are based at an institution of higher education.
- Faculty and professional development specialists reflect the diversity of the early childhood education students and/or U.S. demographics.

#### ➔ Institutional supports

- Adequate data systems and technology allow faculty and professional development specialists to monitor individuals' progress in the programs and analyze and report on students' performance data and other metrics.
- Partnerships with high-quality field experience sites are accessible to students (including students already working in early learning settings) and expose students to a range of high-quality settings, including center-based, school-based, Head Start, Early Head Start, and family child care.
- Dedicated resources and time for faculty and professional development specialists to support and maintain accreditation and other quality improvement efforts to meet P2P recommendations.

#### ➔ Supports for students

- Resources to provide targeted supports for students, including cohort models, and formal mentoring and advising programs, with particular attention to English language learners,<sup>6</sup> developmental education students, and first-generation students.
- Resources to recruit diverse students and ensure programs have sufficient numbers of students to offer courses.
- Resources to explore innovative and flexible models for delivering course content and ensuring students are prepared to successfully demonstrate competencies.

In addition, programs need investment, respect, and engagement from higher education leadership, including chancellors, presidents, provosts, deans, and boards of trustees.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the needed *infrastructure and accountability for professional preparation programs*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 7+8](#).

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6 While we use the term “dual language learner” or “multi-language learner” to describe children who may be learning more than one language at a time, we use the term “English language learner” here to describe adults who are already fluent in at least one language other than English, but who are often working to learn English.

## Section 4b: Employers/Owners

As public funding is increased, employers/owners must meet expectations for supporting early childhood educators, including:

- ➔ Providing employees with salaries and competitive benefits packages (e.g., paid leave, medical insurance, and retirement savings) that are comparable to the public K–12 education sector for similarly qualified employees;
- ➔ Implementing hiring, promotion, supervision, and evaluation practices that ensure educators can effectively meet their responsibility to provide high-quality early learning and care for young children; and
- ➔ Providing working conditions that promote the well-being of employees and support their implementation of the *Professional Standards and Competencies*. In many smaller businesses, the employer/owner might also be the sole employee/educator.

Employers/owners will be able to meet these expectations as funding and other resources and supports are provided in these key areas:

- ➔ Increased public funding to allow for recruiting and retaining early childhood educators across settings with the credentials outlined in the P2P recommendations.
- ➔ Funding and resources to increase the presence of diverse early childhood educators in administrative and leadership roles.
- ➔ Individuals in administrative roles and/or those evaluating the practice of early childhood educators who have acquired knowledge related to ECE I, II, and III scopes of practice in the course of executing their leadership responsibilities.
- ➔ Access to professional development that strengthens alignment of performance evaluations and other assessment tools with the guidelines of the profession and the responsibilities within the respective early childhood educator designations.
- ➔ Resources to implement innovative guidance and supervisory models, administrative supports (including shared administrative support models), and professional development models, particularly for early childhood educators working in family child care settings.
- ➔ Funding to create and use substitute pools so that employees can pursue professional preparation, including completing field experience requirements in settings other than their employer's.

## Recommendation

As public funding, resources, and supports are increased, employers/owners must provide salaries and benefits packages comparable to public school compensation and provide working conditions that promote the well-being and effectiveness of their staff.

## Self-Employed Professionals and Sole Proprietors

Some early childhood educators are self-employed, such as those working in family child care or small independent settings. In these cases, the early childhood educator serves as both the employer and the early childhood educator in ensuring the early learning setting is optimal for meeting the responsibilities of the profession. Family child care and self-employed early childhood educators may benefit from additional supports such as peer learning networks or innovations in supervision. These innovations and other revised and realigned structures and specializations will also be necessary to support educators working in family child care who are working non-traditional hours to support working families and serving children in mixed age groups, including those older than 8, often during out-of-school time hours.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the needed *infrastructure and accountability for employers*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 7+8](#).

## Section 4c: Professional Governance Body

Additional input beyond the scope and expertise of the current Task Force is needed to establish the early childhood education profession. In order to move the recommendations forward and support the implementation of the *Unifying Framework*, there must be a cohesive, profession-led governance structure. This will require leveraging the multiple professional organizations and individuals that contribute to the early childhood education profession and coordinating their intellectual capital and resources. The Task Force recommends the creation of a clearly delineated governance structure that supports professional autonomy and self-governance, while collaborating with federal and state governments on funding, legislation, and regulations.

**Specifically, we envision a new configuration of mutual accountability, with a clear vision and streamlined responsibilities, in which the profession is responsive to the needs of the public and the government bodies are heavily influenced by recommendations from the profession.**

The Task Force recognizes the urgency facing the early childhood education field, the momentum to advance the work, and the necessity to wisely leverage existing resources. We believe the profession will benefit most from an initial structure that can support a quick pivot to transparent action and implementation of the *Unifying Framework*. In order to advance the work of professional autonomy and self-governance, the Task Force recommends the following:

- ➔ Create an initial professional governance body (PGB) that will immediately support implementation of the *Unifying Framework* and advance the long-term sustainability of the profession.
- ➔ Form the initial PGB around five principles: (1) publicly accountable and rooted in the profession, (2) equally shared power, (3) transparency, (4) lean operations, and (5) leveraged resources.
- ➔ Ensure the initial PGB has clear responsibilities with broad organizational and individual representation that will allow it to be functionally independent and structurally sound. Ensure that a significant portion of the PGB is comprised of individual early childhood educators, representing those who work in each setting, including family child care, community- and school-based programs, and public members who do not serve on behalf of organizations. Public members could include researchers, related professions representatives, and parents.
- ➔ Initially host the PGB at the National Association for the Education of Young Children so the organization can provide the legal, financial, administrative, and programmatic infrastructure that will allow the PGB to operate immediately, efficiently, and, most important, with independent decision-making authority. Within the PGB's first three years, conduct a comprehensive, substantial, and independent review of this initial structure, including the connection to the host entity. Share this review broadly with stakeholders and the public.

### Recommendation

Create a semi-autonomous professional governance body (PGB) to support the implementation of the *Unifying Framework* and advance the long-term sustainability of the profession.

### Primary responsibilities of the professional governance

**body.** To serve the public good and provide leadership for the profession, the overarching responsibilities of the PGB will be to:

- ➔ Designate the professional guidelines such as the *Code of Ethics* and the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and ensure they are relevant to and apply to individuals working in all settings;
- ➔ Explore and set parameters for quality assurance of individuals and preparation programs, including exploring and setting parameters for the professional assessments required for ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III licensure and renewal and ensuring they are relevant to and apply to individuals for working in all settings; and
- ➔ Serve as a liaison and collaborator with state and federal agencies and regulatory bodies on behalf of the early childhood education profession, such as (1) creating exemption policies to address current workforce and state policies not aligned to the P2P recommendations until full alignment can be achieved and (2) advocating for states to have birth to age 8 licensure bands and licensure reciprocity.

The PGB will also set the parameters for professional preparation and accreditation recognition bodies, approve specializations for the early childhood education profession, and recommend the required guidance and support structures and autonomy for family child care providers.

Finally, the PGB will establish a process for further determining the competencies, qualifications, compensation, expectations, and supports required for early childhood education pedagogical and instructional administrators, advanced practitioners, higher education faculty, and professional development specialists. Going forward, the PGB will update the *Unifying Framework* as science, research, and practice evolve.

**Transitioning to the professional governance body.** As the Task Force concludes its work, it will initiate a process to transition to a new structure and develop the initial governing documents for the PGB. With input from the Task Force, the Task Force chair will appoint an ad-hoc transition committee comprised of key stakeholders in the early childhood education profession to identify the necessary steps and timeline for constituting the initial PGB, including establishing a funding structure, composition, and terms of service for the board. In addition, the transition committee will establish a process for selecting the inaugural board members that meets the core principles set forward by the Task Force, including equally shared power and transparency.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to the *professional governance body*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 7+8](#).

### Recommendation

The PGB will designate the profession's guidelines, set parameters for quality assurance of individuals and professional preparation programs, and serve as a liaison and collaborator with state and federal agencies and regulatory bodies.

## Section 4d. State and Federal Governments

States and the federal government also will play an important role in governance, but putting the profession in the lead will right-size the currently outsized role that public agencies have in influencing and regulating the profession.

State and federal bodies should work in partnership with the early childhood education profession with an eye toward streamlining existing state and federal quality standards, policies, and regulations, which, with the implementation of the *Unifying Framework*, may become less meaningful and more burdensome to the profession than they are now. Indeed, the Task Force does not intend for the recommendations in the *Unifying Framework* to be layered on top of existing state systems or the federal system; rather, our vision includes the unwinding, reorientation, and realignment of some existing systems, to free up funding and focus that can be redirected toward the factor that makes the biggest difference in driving access and quality: the workforce.

To that end, **states** will be responsible for:

- ➔ Ensuring public funding is available to enable compensation commensurate with education and early childhood education designations for all educators in all settings;
- ➔ Adequately funding comprehensive scholarships and other supports needed by prospective and current early childhood educators to attain and retain the credentials and state licenses outlined in the P2P recommendations;
- ➔ Ensuring state funding goes to professional preparation programs that have demonstrated alignment to preparing candidates in the *Professional Standards and Competencies* and to the appropriate ECE I, II, and III designations;
- ➔ Creating a simple and transparent early childhood education system with a commitment to advancing a multi-disciplinary approach across early childhood education regulatory bodies and systems, including program approval, licensure, career lattices, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems;
- ➔ Creating a board to administer state licenses, hold individuals accountable for working within their scope of practice, and address complaints about those who breach the profession's code of ethics;
- ➔ Adopting and, as needed, adapting the *Professional Standards and Competencies* as their early childhood education competencies;
- ➔ Approving all professional programs that prepare individuals for ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III roles;
- ➔ Participating in licensure reciprocity agreements with other states;
- ➔ Holding employers accountable for compensating early childhood educators commensurate with available public funding; and
- ➔ Creating and maintaining shared services models for family child care providers and other small early learning settings.

### Recommendation

State governments and agencies will adopt the *Professional Standards and Competencies*, administer early childhood education professional licenses, streamline regulations, and increase funding to support early childhood educators, professional preparation programs, and employers in meeting the expectations in the *Unifying Framework*.

### Recommendation

The federal government and agencies will serve as the financing backbone for the early childhood education system. Regulations and legislation will be aligned to the recommendations of the *Unifying Framework*.

Both states and the federal government will engage with and be responsive to the public and to members of the profession and professional organizations (such as associations and unions) and address barriers to membership in such organizations.

Strengthening educator voices will lead to stronger stakeholder engagement and better outcomes for children and families. As such, states should also take care to embed content-area expertise in their agencies and offices. Specifically, states should ensure that all state agencies and offices that support the birth through age 8 workforce across settings include individuals with prior experience as early childhood educators, professional preparation program faculty, and/or professional development specialists. The Task Force recommends that agencies include staff who have specialized knowledge across the birth through age 8 continuum, including infants/toddlers, early grades, and preschool, as well as those who have worked with children with special needs and who are dual language learners.

**The federal government** will serve as the financing backbone for the early childhood education system, protecting and investing in early childhood education as a public good. As such, it is responsible for:

- ➔ Providing necessary financing to address the true cost of quality, which includes adequate compensation for the profession, and to resolve inadequate supply and unmet demand failures in the child care market;
- ➔ Creating, supporting, passing, signing, implementing, and providing oversight for legislation that advances higher education quality and access, supports comprehensive scholarships and loan forgiveness for early childhood educators, and addresses accountability in higher education to leverage program accreditation;
- ➔ Investing in existing opportunities to fund compensation and promote compensation parity, while establishing new opportunities for funding directed toward compensation for the profession;
- ➔ Creating and updating definitions in statute and regulations that advance the understanding of the early childhood education profession as comprised of individuals who work with children from birth through age 8, who have specialized knowledge of the young child developmental period, and who hold skills and competencies to work with all young children, across all early learning settings;
- ➔ Promulgating regulations that advance the health, safety, and learning of young children, in all settings; and
- ➔ Providing technical assistance to states with diverse regulatory structures and systems to help states learn from one another.

For the full set of recommendations and rationale related to *state and federal bodies*, see the source document for [Decision Cycle 7+8](#).

## Conclusion: Implementation and Continuous Quality Improvement

At this moment in our field, the “child care crisis,” has gained significant attention. Many outside the early childhood field are stepping in and stepping up—families, businesses, elected officials, philanthropic organizations, faith leaders, military officials, health professionals, and more. We cannot afford to miss the moment.

As this internal field discussion phase of Power to the Profession comes to an end, it is time to shift attention to a more coordinated and comprehensive policy agenda and roadmap for improving quality and equity in early childhood education by prioritizing investments in early childhood educators. Investing in people is not cheap—but failing to invest in them comes with its own costs, including low-quality care, health and safety violations, disruptions in continuity, and excessive turnover, all of which harm children, families, businesses, and society.

The voice at the forefront of implementation must be the early childhood education profession. As federal, state, and local governments and agencies move forward to implement the *Unifying Framework* recommendations, they must engage regularly and meaningfully with the early childhood education profession, ensuring that early childhood educators who work with children every day have a central role in shaping the present and future of their profession. Workforce and professional organizations, such as associations and unions representing members of the profession, enable the frontline workforce to come together with the expertise and strength to advocate for their profession, mobilize public support, and win the resources and funding increases needed to fully enact these recommendations. To successfully professionalize the early childhood field, workforce and professional organizations must have a meaningful seat at the table with federal, state, and local governments and agencies so that the early childhood educator voice is represented and amplified.

As such, we will be advocating for policymakers to choose, with the money and the means available now and in the future, to invest directly in the education and compensation of the professionals

*The goal at the heart of the Power to the Profession initiative is ensuring that, regardless of setting, each and every child, birth through age 8, experiences the benefit of having a well-prepared, diverse, effective, and well-compensated pool of early childhood educators.*

serving children and families as much as in the structures and supports set up around them. This, in turn, will require policymakers to invest in existing opportunities to fund compensation. They also must establish new opportunities by leveraging early education financing systems and structures designed to deliver high-quality early learning in states and cities across the country.

A significant and substantial increased investment in early childhood education is well worth the cost. It is an investment in our nation’s essential infrastructure, as important as other public goods such as highways and clean drinking water. It is an investment in people, who are the most valuable resource our country has, and who represent the cornerstone of quality in early childhood education.

The goal at the heart of the Power to the Profession initiative is ensuring that, regardless of setting, each and every child, birth through age 8, experiences the benefit of having a well-prepared, diverse, effective, and well-compensated pool of early childhood educators. As such, the policies and structures we collectively recommend are designed to move us toward that goal.

In this first edition of the *Unifying Framework*, we are mobilizing the members of the early childhood field to establish the common language to move forward immediately with a shared agenda that paves the way for a visionary future. This goal is in keeping with the National Academy of Medicine's charge to establish pathways and multi-year timelines. Future iterations of the *Unifying Framework* will build on this foundation, evolving and improving as the profession and the field evolve and improve together.



## Acknowledgments

From its very first meeting, in January 2017, the Power to the Profession National Task Force has been gathering quarterly, for two days at a time, to work through the content of the Decision Cycles and come to consensus about how those who represent the current and future members of the early childhood education profession believe we should advance it. We are grateful to one another for sharing our collective time and expertise, for believing in the vision and importance of our work, and for sticking together through challenging conversations to come out stronger and more unified than ever.

None of this would have been possible without the support from many organizations and individuals, often working behind the scenes, with whom we would like to share our immense gratitude.

First, we would like to express our deepest thanks, admiration, and respect for the unmatched—and unmatchable—Karen Ponder, who has served as the wise, thoughtful, and patient chair of the Task Force since its inception. Her steady and unwavering leadership and commitment to this work has made all the difference.

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Education Coalition, Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, National Academy of Sciences, National Association of Counties, National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, National Association for Regulatory Administration, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Black Child Development Institute, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, National Governors Association, National Institute for Early Education Research, National League of Cities, National Women’s Law Center, National Workforce Registry Alliance, New America, Ounce of Prevention Fund, Save the Children, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center, Teach for America, TESOL International Association, Trust for Learning, and UnidosUS.

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Finally, to the thousands of early childhood educators and allies across the country who submitted comments, completed surveys, and participated in focus groups throughout this process, we want you to know you were heard. At each Task Force meeting, your feedback was shared and deeply considered. The Power to the Profession effort was established to lift up your voices, your experiences, and your expertise—and we could not have done this work without each and every one of you. We are counting on you to continue building, evolving, and improving on this work in the years, legislative sessions, and administrations to come. We know you will always bring power to this incredible profession.

## Appendix A: Unifying Framework for Preparation, Competencies, Responsibilities, and Compensation

	ECE I	ECE II	ECE III
Preparation	Certificate/Credential Program in Early Childhood Education	Associate Degree Program in Early Childhood Education	Bachelor's Degree Program in Early Childhood Education  Master's Degree Program in Early Childhood Education (initial prep)
Time and Duration	These programs are a minimum 120 clock hours.	Associate degree programs normally require at least two years but less than four years of <i>full-time</i> equivalent college work. An associate degree is at least 60 credit hours of college-level course work.	Bachelor's degree programs normally require at least four years but no more than five years of <i>full-time</i> equivalent college work. A bachelor's degree is at least 120 credit hours of college-level coursework.
Award Issued by Program at Completion	<i>Certificate or credential</i> issued by professional training programs, industry-recognized credentialing organizations, OR institutions of higher education*	<i>Degree</i> issued by institutions of higher education	<i>Degree</i> issued by institutions of higher education
Designation	Completers qualify to receive the ECE I designation.	Completers qualify to receive the ECE II designation.	Completers qualify to receive the ECE III designation.

\* Completers may meet the educational requirements for industry-recognized national credentials like the Child Development Associate® (CDA) national credential and other portable credentials.

	ECE I	ECE II	ECE III
Depth of Knowledge and Competence**	<p>Completers are prepared to work with young children, birth through age 8. Completers are introduced to the <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i>.</p> <p>Completers can apply their introductory knowledge and understanding of the <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i>.</p> <p>Along with the pedagogical knowledge and skills identified in the <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i>, completers have high school-level knowledge in core content areas of math, science, English, social studies/history, physical education, visual arts, and performing arts.</p>	<p>Graduates are prepared to work with young children, birth through age 8. Graduates know and understand the essential aspects of <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i> with a strong focus on young children in birth through age 5 settings.</p> <p>Graduates can apply their essential knowledge and understanding of the <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i> with a strong focus on young children in birth through age 5 settings.</p> <p>Along with the pedagogical knowledge and skills identified in the <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i>, graduates have introductory college-level knowledge of content areas (linguistics, literature, the arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) through dedicated general education courses.</p>	<p>Graduates are prepared to work with young children, birth through age 8. Graduates know and understand the essential aspects of <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i> with a strong focus on young children in birth through grade 3 settings.</p> <p>Graduates can apply their essential knowledge and understanding of <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i>, including age-appropriate content pedagogy, with a strong focus on young children in birth through grade 3 settings.</p> <p>Along with the pedagogical knowledge and skills identified in the <i>Professional Standards and Competencies</i>, graduates have essential college-level knowledge of content areas (linguistics, literature, the arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) through dedicated general education courses.</p>

\*\* "Introductory" connotes a foundational level of preparation; a person prepared at the introductory level will know and understand the basic aspects of each professional preparation standard, as agreed upon in the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*. This level of preparation will provide the foundation necessary for effective practice as well as the groundwork for mastery of more complex practices. "Essential," by comparison, connotes a step that builds on the introductory knowledge and understanding to establish a deeper knowledge and understanding of each standard's theories and practices.

	ECE I	ECE II	ECE III
Responsibilities	<p>Birth–Grade 3: Completers can help develop and sustain high-quality development and learning environments.</p> <p>Completers can serve as effective members of early childhood education teaching teams.</p>	<p>Birth–age 5 Settings:* Graduates can be responsible for developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environments with staffing models that provide frequent access to ECE IIIs for guidance.</p> <p>K*–Grade 3: Graduates can help develop and sustain high-quality development and learning environments.</p> <p>Graduates can serve as effective members of ECE teaching teams and can guide the practice of ECE I.</p> <p>*In state- and district-funded programs, where state funded is defined by NIEER, provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K-12 public school system, ECE II graduates can serve in the support educator role. ECE III graduates must serve in the lead educator role.</p>	<p>Birth–Grade 3:* Graduates can be responsible for developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environments.</p> <p>Graduates can serve as effective members of ECE teaching teams and can guide the practice of ECE I and II.</p> <p>*In state-funded preschool programs (as defined by NIEER), provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K–12 public school system, ECE III graduates must serve in the lead educator role.</p>
Compensation	<p>Compensation, including benefits, will be comparable for all ECE I professionals regardless of their job setting.</p> <p>The early childhood education profession should look to public school salary scales as the minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities.</p>	<p>Compensation, including benefits, will be comparable for all ECE II professionals regardless of their job setting.</p> <p>The early childhood education profession should look to public school salary scales as the minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities.</p>	<p>Compensation, including benefits, will be comparable for all ECE III professionals regardless of their job setting.</p> <p>The early childhood education profession should look to public school salary scales as the minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities.</p>



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# Unifying Framework

for the

Early Childhood  
Education Profession