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Early Childhood Educators Establish Professional Standards, Guidelines, and Accountability, Call for Significant Increases in Public Investment

WASHINGTON, DC, March 9 — For the first time ever, early childhood educators (ECEs) have collectively and clearly defined the standards, qualifications, roles, supports, and compensation for members of their profession working with children birth through age 8. They simultaneously call for significant increases in federal and state investments to ensure young children, families, businesses, and the economy are well-served by an effective, equitable, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated profession.

In an unprecedented show of unity, the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* (PowerToTheProfession.org) was developed over the last three years by a task force of 15 leading national organizations, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which facilitated this collective effort. Together, these organizations, which represent members of the early childhood field working across states, settings, and age bands, partnered with a diverse range of stakeholders and more than 11,000 individuals to produce the *Unifying Framework*.

The framework is clear that, as policymakers respond to the complex science of early learning by raising expectations and educational requirements for early childhood educators, the United States must simultaneously fund necessary supports, establish realistic timelines, and provide increased compensation that reflects the value, importance, and return on investment generated by early childhood educators' highly skilled work.

"Power to the Profession shows a commitment to elevating educators' voices toward a system that recognizes the cost of quality, invests in the education and compensation of the profession, and finances early childhood education as the public good that it is," said Karen Ponder, early childhood expert and chair of the National Task Force.

There are real challenges in our current system. 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 access that care; and the workforce is paid so little that nearly half live in families that depend on public assistance. To address these challenges, and provide clarity for the road ahead, the *Unifying Framework* offers recommendations in four key areas:

A clearly defined profession, with distinct roles and responsibilities

To respond to the existing cacophony of labels (from provider to worker to teacher) that vary within and across states, sectors, and settings, the profession will create three distinct and meaningful designations — Early Childhood Educator I, II, and III. Each designation has an associated scope of practice, expected level of professional preparation, and expected level of mastery of the newly revised and agreed-upon *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.

Aligned professional preparation, pathways, and licensure

To respond to the current structure of preparation programs that offer uneven quality with little accountability or alignment while disproportionately harming those without power or privilege, the profession will focus on three primary professional preparation pathways — early childhood education professional certificate/credential programs, associate degree programs, and bachelor's degree/initial master's degree programs. These programs will prepare participating ECEs for professional licensure, which individuals can obtain by earning a credential from an accredited or recognized professional preparation program; demonstrating evidence of field experiences; and passing an assessment of competencies. Assessments must have multiple measures; be affordable; and not reinforce cultural, gender, racial, or linguistic biases.

Professional compensation

To respond to the untenable situation of low compensation that is undermining quality and driving early childhood educators out of the field, the profession establishes recommendations in which compensation for early childhood educators with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities will be at least comparable to public school salaries and comparable across all settings; include an adequate benefits package; not be differentiated on the basis of ages of children served; and increase commensurate with increased preparation and competency.

Supportive infrastructure and shared accountability

In keeping with other established professions, the *Unifying Framework* lays out the expectations, responsibilities, structures, and supports for each part of the system that advances the profession, including preparation programs, employers/owners, professional organizations and governance bodies, and state and federal governments and agencies.

The National Power to the Profession Task Force was chaired by early childhood education expert Karen Ponder, and included leadership from: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; American Federation of Teachers; Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators; Child Care Aware of America; Council for Professional Recognition; Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children; Early Care and Education Consortium; National Association for Family Child Care; National Association for the Education of Young Children; National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators; National Association of Elementary School Principals; National Education Association; National Head Start Association; Service Employees International Union; and ZERO TO THREE. Quotes from select Task Force member organizations are below.

Copies of the *Unifying Framework* and extensive supporting materials are available at [PowerToTheProfession.org](https://www.power-to-the-profession.org).

POWER TO THE PROFESSION TASK FORCE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Rhian Evans Allvin, CEO, National Association for the Education of Young Children

“At NAEYC, we believe deeply in the vision of an early childhood education profession that exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society. We are grateful to each and every educator, organization, and stakeholder who joined the unprecedented and transformative journey of Power to the Profession. The resulting *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* will be our guide for the work ahead, as we advance toward the effective, equitable, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated profession we all need.”

Kelly Baker, Past President, National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators

“The National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE) has as its mission the preparation of equity-minded and inclusive teachers for young children, birth to age 8. As such, our members have a deep sense of commitment to and interest in Power to the Profession. We affirm that well-prepared teachers, who must also be well-compensated and educated, will be better equipped to facilitate educational experiences for *all* young children. NAECTE endorses the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*, as it has the potential to positively impact children, families, teachers, and our profession for many years to come.”

Louis A. Finney, Jr., President, National Association for Family Child Care

"We are thrilled to partner with such an amazing group and look forward to the positive impact Power to the Profession will have toward our amazing and caring early childhood educators working in family child care. We've done it, thank you, Power to the Profession!"

Lynette Fraga, Executive Director, Child Care Aware of America

“A critical action for a thriving future is to make significant, sustained investments in high-quality early childhood education to improve outcomes for every child. This unified framework not only defines who early childhood educators are as professionals, but also uplifts the field and commits to drive actionable and equitable positive change. Clearly articulating the important role of early childhood educators in the development of young children, while promoting ECE as a professional field of practice, raises public understanding of the importance of high-quality early childhood education and emphasizes that educators must receive the respect, compensation and support due them for their crucial work.”

Earl Franks, Executive Director, National Association of Elementary School Principals

“Early childhood education is an important part of the elementary school continuum and we need teachers and leaders who fully understand the developmental strengths and needs of children 0 to 8. The *Unifying Framework* is an important step forward in giving these professionals the preparation, responsibilities, and compensation they deserve.”

Lily Eskelsen García, President, National Education Association

“At the National Education Association, we know that early childhood education is one of the best investments our country can make, and we are proud to stand with our fellow organizational participants in Power to the Profession to endorse the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*. We support a vision for early childhood education that begins at birth and extends through age 8, and, together with our 3.2 million members, stand ready to advocate for the unity, support, compensation, and respect early childhood educators have earned as they help children, families, and our communities thrive.”

Lee Saunders, President, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

“Thousands of AFSCME child care providers have won better pay and improved training opportunities, while fighting for increased access to early childhood education — so that all children, no matter their zip code, have a fair chance to succeed. AFSCME is proud to be part of the Power to the Profession Initiative, to raise standards and compensation in this field that is so vital to America’s future.”

Matthew E. Melmed, Executive Director, ZERO TO THREE

“The Power to the Profession sets the vision for ensuring every early childhood educator has the skills and support necessary to create the system and services every baby, child and family needs.”

Debra Murphy, Immediate Past President, ACCESS

“ACCESS enthusiastically supports the audacious vision laid out in the Unifying Framework and is committed to advocating for and implementing the framework's recommendations. Our institutions are often the first access point for early childhood educators seeking postsecondary education. They and our faculty deserve the resources they need to be effective members of the early childhood education profession so that all young children have access to high quality early childhood education.”

Yasmina Vinci, Executive Director, National Head Start Association

“We are proud of the work that Power to the Profession has undertaken to unify the fragmented and complex early childhood field into a clear and consistent professional pathway. Throughout this process, we have been mindful of the unique aspects and strengths of the existing workforce and are hopeful that the framework will serve as a bridge from the present to the future, empowering the current workforce, shaping tomorrow's workforce, and ensuring quality early learning experiences for all children.”

Valora Washington, Chief Executive Officer, Council for Professional Recognition

“We are excited to be a partner in transforming the career pathways and opportunities of the early childhood educator's workforce. Additionally, we recognize the importance of supporting their goals and aspirations by providing the resources and support needed to enhance the lives of our youngest learners.”

Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers

“Early childhood educators, whether they work with infants and toddlers in home based programs and centers or preschoolers, kindergarteners, first and second graders in schools, need to be respected for the professionals they are. A part of being a profession is defining your profession before others, who do not know your calling or craft, do it for you. It has been an honor for the AFT, which represents over 90,000 early childhood educators, to join with national organizations and chart a course for what the early childhood profession can be.”