

Professional Learning for Early Childhood Educators

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Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation

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Introduction & context

Science of child development and early learning makes clear the importance and complexity of working with young children from infancy through the early elementary years, or birth through age 8.

Strengthening the workforce to better reflect the science is challenging given this complex, and often decentralized, oversight and influence.

Professional practice

- Professionals need foundational and specific competencies.
- Professionals need to be able to support diverse populations.
- Professional learning systems need to develop and sustain professional competencies.
- Practice environments need to enable high-quality practice.
- Practice supports need to facilitate and sustain high-quality practice.
- Systems and policies need to align with the aims of high-quality practice.
- Professional practice, systems, and policies need to be adaptive.

- Recommendation 1: Strengthen competency-based qualification requirements for all care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.
- Recommendation 2: Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators² working with children from birth through age 8.

- Recommendation 3: Strengthen practice-based qualification requirements, including a supervised induction period, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.
- Recommendation 4: Build an interdisciplinary foundation in higher education for child development.
- Recommendation 5: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals.

- Recommendation 6: Support the consistent quality and coherence of professional learning supports during ongoing practice for professionals working with children from birth through age 8.
- Recommendation 7: Develop a new paradigm for evaluation and assessment of professional practice for those who work with children from birth through age 8.

- Recommendation 8: Ensure that policies and standards that shape the professional learning of care and education leaders (elementary school principals and directors in early care and education settings) encompass the foundational knowledge and competencies needed to support high-quality practices for child development and early learning in their organizations.

- Recommendation 9: Improve consistency and continuity for children from birth through age 8 by strengthening collaboration and communication among professionals and systems within the care and education sector and with closely related sectors, especially health and social services.
- Recommendation 10: Support workforce development with coherent funding, oversight, and policies.

- Recommendation 11: Collaboratively develop and periodically update coherent guidance that is foundational across roles and settings for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.
- Recommendation 12: Support comprehensive state- and local-level efforts to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.
- Recommendation 13: Build a better knowledge base to inform workforce development and professional learning services and systems.